Humanities Institute
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The Secret Face (1991)

Ömer Kavur

OVERVIEW

The Secret Face's scenario has been written by Orhan Pamuk based on a chapter of his own book *The Black Book* (*Kara Kitap*). Pamuk's style of storytelling, which normally uses the medium of language, is evident in the film. The traces of literary arts are especially felt in the dialogues. It is also possible to see some qualities of *The Black Book* while watching the film, considered to be an example of a postmodern novel: Fractures in time and space, characters who come into the narrative and leave without any obvious reason, unfinished events. The film is divided into four chapters:

The City of Cities: The city which the photographer goes to in order to study and works as a nightclub photographer, Istanbul.

The City of the Dead: The town where the family of the photographer lives and where his father dies.

The City of the Downtrodden: The town where the photographer buys the video tape and where he waits for her for a long time.

The City of the Hearts: The town with the clock tower that the woman talks about while she tells her life story and where she left behind her sadness

These chapters serve as stops in the protagonist's questing yet each of them also stands as stories on their own.

Ömer Kavur loves stories about being on the road and voyages, and themes of searching and inner journeys. *The Secret Face* is among his films such as *Desperate Road* (*Amansız Yol*), *Night Journey* (*Gece Yolculuğu*), and *Journey on the Hour Hand* (*Akrebin Yolculuğu*) where he engages in these leitmotifs.

The film has been screened and awarded in national and international film festivals.

CINEMATIC STORYTELLING

The Secret Face is one of Kavur's most powerful films in terms of cinematography. In addition to its narrative of search and pursuit, the film asks the audience's patience and interpretation with occasionally long winded dialogues and abstract concepts that it wrestles with. For all that difficulty, the cinematographer Erdal Kahraman's lighting, camera movement and framing choices makes the film a pleasure to watch.

Just like many of Kavur's other films, *The Secret Face* is remarkable in terms of casting and directing. Fikret Kuşkan, Zuhal Olcay, and many other supporting actors make undeniable contributions to the film.

CHARACTERS

Photographer	A University student in his twnties.
The Woman	A well-to-do family's daughter, in her thirties.
The First Clockmaker	A watch repairman, in his forties.
The Second Clockmaker	Another watch repairman, in his forties.

SYNOPSIS

A university student who makes money by taking photographs in places like nightclubs and tawdry music halls starts to bring his photos to an affluent woman on her demand. For two years the woman searches for a meaningful face in these photographs and when she finds that face she disappears with them. The photographer has fallen in love with the woman. Until the end of the film he searches for her with profound feelings of restlessness, depression and longing. He finds the woman in the town with the clocktower. The woman also had feelings for the young photographer, she loved him but when she found the face she had been looking for, she had embarked on a different journey following people's

stories. The woman says to the young photographer that the dream he is after is not her. For the first time since the beginning of the film, the photographer finds peace.

THE PLOT

The City of Cities.

Nightclub Photographer. The photographer is looking at the camera and talking about his life and what became of him. He had wanted to study in a university in Istanbul, he had come here against his father's wishes, and he had tried to make a living by taking photographs in gaudy music halls. One day an affluent woman invites him to her home and asks him to show all the pictures he had taken. She would pay handsomely for his efforts. Every night, the photographer prints the photos on cards and takes them to the woman in the morning. This goes on for about two years. The woman says that she has been looking for a face with meaning.

A Meaningful Face. While the woman is browsing through the photos, the photographer sits in an armchair and looks through the woman's photo album. On a shelf above the fireplace, there is a photo of a little girl and her father, next to a car. The woman sees a man in one of the photographs and asks if there is another picture of him. The photographer finds another one in his bag. The woman asks him to find the man, and says that it feels like she has known him forever. On the way out, the woman entreats the photographer to "Ask him about the thing he desires the most in life".

The Razor. The photographer goes to a tavern. The old waiter is shaving his face with a razor. The photographer is surprised that the man is using a razor. The waiter tells him that when he shaves with one, his own face emerges from beneath the foam. The photographer shows him the man in the photos. The waiter does not know the man but tells him that the man next to him in the photo is a bus driver working for the municipality.

The Clocks. The photographer finds the bus driver. When most of the passengers get off, he approaches the driver and shows him the photo, says that the man in the photo has left his wallet behind and asks for his address. The man in the photo is a clockmaker. His shop is on a street with old buildings. He enters the shop and gives the clockmaker his watch. The clockmaker replaces a part and restores the watch. During this, the photographer studies the old clocks in the shop, all different from each other. "Does one have to work in such a place to find peace?" he asks. The clockmaker answers: "The secret is not in the place, it is inside the clocks". The photographer asks the question that the woman requested: "What is the thing in life that you want the most to happen?". The clockmaker answers:

> "I would like to tell people about clocks, the intricate mechanism, the terrible coils, the darkness of the gears…Now, no one even knows what a clock is. Maybe that is why people are so despondent. Maybe that is why they cannot even tell their own stories. The life behind the hour and minute hands, they don't even feel it."

The photographer leaves the shop but turns back and takes a photo of the man. Just as he is about to release the shutter, the clockmaker raises his hand in front of his hand and stops him.

Searching together. The photographer returns home, prints the clockmaker's photo and takes it to the woman. The woman asks him to recount what the clockmaker told him. While the photographer is talking, the woman disappears into another room. The photographer follows after her. The woman asks him to take her to the photographer: "We have looked for him for two years. Now take me to him". The photographer tells her that he is not the man he is looking for.

The pursuit. The woman is driving the car. Sitting next to her, the photographer looks at the İslamic charm amulet hanging on the rearview mirror. The woman's father had hung it there for protection because he had known that she would look for a face 20 years later. The photographer tells her that he had received a letter from home, that his father is sick. The woman, as if she heard nothing, goes on talking about faces. They stop near the shop. The woman is anxious, she lights a cigarette. After some time, the clockmaker closes up shop and leaves. The woman approaches the clockmaker with the car. They look at each other, the man keeps on walking. The woman follows after him with the car but the man disappears from view walking up the stairs.

The disappearing father. It has started to rain. On the way back, the woman tearfully tells the photographer about her father: That he disappeared from their lives frequently, that she looked for him in their home and felt afraid, that when she made a mistake and she was not perfect, her father got angry and left. They stop by the side of a road. The photographer is at a loss. He tries to console her,

saying “Please don’t cry”. The woman says that she is thirsty. The photographer buys water from a grocer but the woman is gone.

The disappearing woman. Lying on his bed, the photographer is thinking about a room filled with clocks and the sounds of ticks and tocks. He gets up, takes a few of the nightclub photos with him and goes to the woman’s house. The house is vacant. Junk dealers are taking out the last remaining pieces of objects. The photographs that he gave to the woman are scattered on the floor.

The disappearing clockmaker. He goes to the clockmaker’s shop. On the closed shutters a “For Rent” sign is hung.

The telegraph. Sitting at home, the photographer is repeating some phrases the woman had told on different occasions. The doorbell rings. The mailman brings a telegraph: “Your father is dead, come home”.

The City of the Dead

The knife. He gets in a bus and goes to the town where his family lives. They have laid his father on an old fashioned couch, covered him up to his neck with a white sheet and placed a knife on him. His eyes are open. Sitting on a chair next to the couch, the photographer is looking at his father. He reaches over to close his eyes but he cannot bring himself to touch.

The photograph. He has breakfast with his mother and big brother. His mother talks about how much there is to do and tells the photographer “You should stay here now”. They bury his father. His brother tells him that their father had an affair with the village school’s teacher. They go to their father’s dairy farm. In a box, there are a few belongings of his father. The photographer chooses and takes the pocket watch with him. In another box, a photograph of his mother. Her eyes are scratched over. On the way back home, they pass near the school and stop to spy on the teacher. The teacher sees them too.

The big brother. The photographer and his brother walk around the riverbank. His brother talks about faces: “You look at a face, you get carried away by a dream. But as sudden as the blink of an eye, the dream disappears. The dream is now in your mind. But it has to be with you all the time, not in your mind. Or else you burn”.

The pouch of gold. Their mother brings her two sons down into their home’s cellar. She pulls out a board from the stairs. She asks her older son to take out the box inside. They unlock the box with the key they brought from the dairy farm. There is a pouch filled with gold coins. Their mother tells them that they are going to buy a plot of land from their relatives and build a shop there. She gives the task of purchasing the land to the photographer.

The video tape. On the way to his relatives, the photographer sees the woman and the clockmaker on a television in a roadside stopover. The people in the resting place are watching these images from the video tape. When the tape stops a man comes over and takes it. The photographer asks the man to sell him the tape. The man says that it is entrusted to him and he has to take the tape to its owner. The photographer gets in the man’s van.

The City of the Downtrodden

Everything gets even stranger. They are driving on a dark road. In a dark street of a town they stop. Three men are drinking raki on a table set up inside an old workshop. The driver gives the tape to one of the men and conveys the photographer’s request. The man who now has the video tape wants to talk inside the workshop. Him and the photographer get inside. The man says that prior to the woman coming to his shop, he has seen her in his dreams.

The dream. They enter the clockmaker’s shop with a toy baby and figurines in its display window. The clockmaker talks about his dream:

> “In my dream, I’m in a bazaar. There is everything here. Whatever you want. The best food, clothes, silk fabrics, anything and everything. Just then I see, a shop where they sell lives. You choose any life you want. The face of that soul becomes your own face. Now you can be happy. Just as I’m about to choose the face I want, a woman appeared to me. I realized that she was an angel. She said: “The clockmaker, did you think it through? You can’t turn back from this road”. I got scared. I woke up sweating bullets. At noon that day, I saw that very woman in front of me. Here, at the shop. I was tongue tied.”

The woman has asked the clockmaker to repair a clock because it has lost its soul and left behind a hefty sum of money for his troubles. She has also left him the video tape and asked him to watch it and make sure that other people watch it too. She said that by watching the tape they would remember their dreams and they would find the thing they lost in their faces. The clockmaker had watched the tape but he could not understand anything. He has also failed to repair the clock. the woman would be back for the clock and the tape. He says that the tape has been entrusted to him and if he wants it, it would cost him a lot of money. The photographer shows him the gold coins, the clockmaker wants nine of them. The photographer buys the tape.

The storytellers of sorrow. The photographer rents a room from the hotel across the street from the clockmaker and there he watches the tape. On the tape, the woman talks about her father, her childhood and the things that her father told. In the morning, he buys a newspaper and returns to his room. He moves the table and the chair in the room so that he can see the clockmaker from his window. He would wait until the woman came back. While he watches the video tape over and over, he memorizes the woman's words; he repeats what she says simultaneously:

> "When it snows in the morning, when I wake up from my dreams as that adult woman, when I move to the city under a clocktower…that was how the storytellers of sorrow and I started looking for each other. We look at each other's faces as if they are maps, we put our souls on the table as if they are stories."

At the end of the woman's speech, the camera recording the tape pans down. In front of her sits the first clockmaker.

The clock. The photographer has been collecting the faces of people he cuts out from newspaper and just like the woman, he observes the faces with a magnifying glass. Looking out the window, he sees the clockmaker walk towards the hotel with the clock in his hands. He turns on the television and plays the tape. The clockmaker has repaired the woman's clock; he brings it to the photographer to show.

The horse. They walk around and visit some friends of the clockmaker. In a spacious warehouse they drink raki, chat, and play cards. Two butchers arrive with a horse. Behind a curtain they cut the horse down. The photographer watches the shadows of the butchers and the horse playing on the curtain's surface with growing hatred and disgust. He closes his ears with his hands to keep out the horse's voice. The others go on playing cards. One of the butchers walks out from behind the curtain and cleans his knife on his apron. The clock has broken down again.

Four months and fourteen days. The photographer has waited for the woman in that town for four months and fourteen days and he has spent all the gold. From the window, he sees the clockmaker walking towards the hotel. A knock on the door, it is the cleaning lady who comes to take out the trash. In the lobby, the clockmaker and the owner of the clock are sitting and looking at the clock. The woman gets angry at the clockmaker for not repairing the clock. She asks about the videotape. The clockmaker tells her about the photographer. Then the woman gets in her car, a driver on the wheels, and the clockmaker sits next to her. When the car turns around and stops in front of the clockmaker's shop, the photographer sees them. The woman gets out of the car and just as they are about to enter the shop, she turns around and looks toward the hotel. The photographer is at the window, he knocks on the window and breaks it. When the woman sees this, he gets back in the car. The clockmaker tries to stop her from leaving, telling her that the photographer has been waiting for her for months. The photographer runs down the stairs but he cannot catch up to the car. He finds a piece of paper on the ground. It is a candy wrapper that the man in the car threw. The image of a clocktower is printed on the paper. The clockmaker tries to stop the photographer from going to that tower.

The City of Hearts

The Clocktower. The photographer arrives at the town where the clocktower the woman mentioned is located. While walking around town, he learns that the tower is visible from every single street. In one of the streets he sees the woman's car parked in front of a house. He gets in and turns on the radio. Not long after, the woman gets out of a house and walks in the opposite direction. The photographer gets out of the car and follows after her. From another street, the first clockmaker appears. He gives the woman a big box. Staying out of view, the photographer follows them. The woman opens the box, she looks at what is inside and smiles. Just then a truck drives into the street. Both of them disappear from view. He looks for them around the streets but fails. The woman's car is also gone. In the evening, he first drinks at a tavern and falls asleep in a coffeehouse.

Fighting the sorrow. A man sits at his table in the morning. He breaks down his Turkish bagel into two and offers one to the photographer. The man sees the photographer's condition, he says "If you don't wage war with sorrow, it will haunt you for the rest of your life. Like a horrible sickness, it would swallow you up once you surrender" and he gulps down his tea and leaves with his desk clock in a hurry. The photographer hesitates for a moment but then runs after the man. The man enters a house. The driver of the woman's car goes out from the house for a while and after checking the street for a while, goes back in and closes the door after him.

The storytellers. The photographer knocks on the door. The man opens the door. The photographer says: "I have come to open up my heart. I have a story for the clocks." The man invites him in. Inside a big room, people with various clocks in their hands are sitting around. The photographer climbs up the second story. In one of the rooms, the first clockmaker is talking and someone else is recording him with a camera. When the clockmaker finishes talking, someone else replaces him. He has a desk clock with him, he starts his talk by saying "I have loved my daughter the most in my life" and the camera records him too. In another room, people are sitting at separate desks, with their clocks on the table, telling their stories. The man who offered the Turkish bagel is also there. When he sees the photographer, he smiles and gives his place up. He asks where his clock is and the photographer shows him his father's pocket watch. The man who opens the door takes the photographer to another room. From the door of one of the rooms, the clockmaker and photographer see each other.

The story of the photographer. The photographer is sitting in front of a camera and talking. The story he tells is a summary of all that we have seen, all that the photographer has experienced. He says that he has fallen in love with the woman. The woman has entered the room without being seen and she has been listening to the photographer. Hearing what he tells, she leaves the room. The photographer follows after her. The woman asks him to leave. Reluctantly, the photographer leaves the house.

The tower. The photographer goes to the clocktower. He stops the tower's clock and sleeps on the bed there. In the morning, he wakes up to the sound of the clock. The woman has arrived and started up the clock again. The photographer tells her that he loves her over and over. He is crestfallen and hopeless. The woman has thought about the photographer many times, she has noticed his love but she has finally found the face she has been looking for. "Believe me, I'm not the dream you're searching for" she says. The photographer is crying. The woman tries to comfort him then she drives away.

The thief of dreams. The photographer is walking on a road outside the town. He meets a junk dealer and his son. The man tells him about the story of the thief of dreams.

THEMES

Searching. The Secret Face's main theme is searching for something. From abstract pursuits of a soul, peace, or a vision underlined in the memories, dreams, and stories of the characters, to looking for the woman embodied in the journeys, the photographs, and the places, looking for the clocktower, and looking for a meaningful face, there is a plethora of quests in the film. As the film's protagonist photographer searches for the woman, his story intersects with many characters and figures. His pursuit is accompanied by mysterious coincidences (seeing the woman on a television screen in an intercity highway bus stop), occasionally absurd situations (a butchered horse), and figures from daily life (shopkeeper, cleaning woman, waiter). His search takes the photographer to four different places which involves the roads, the journeys and the places in his story searching. In the beginning, the woman looks for a face with meaning. After finding it in the first clockmaker, she starts looking for storytellers of sadness. The storytellers look for peace, the souls they have lost. All these searches are also inner journeys and they are painful.

Sorrow. In the film, there are people we watch and listen to as they tell their stories, as well as sad people that we just see. From their stories, we understand why they are sad. The woman is sad because of her father. As she talks about her childhood and her constantly disappearing father, she gets tears in her eyes. The photographer is not sad at the beginning. He falls for the woman and starts looking for her. He wants to reach her and solve her mystery. As his waiting and search extends, his sorrow builds up. The sadness of those we know nothing about, we just guess based on things we witness in our lives. People are sad because they cannot find what they lost, they cannot reach for their dreams or the people of their dreams, they cannot realize themselves, and because they waste their lives looking for a dream or a hope. In the film, it is often said that clocks are broken down because they have lost their souls. In *The Secret Face*, clocks are metaphors for human lives. People who waste their lives in pursuit of their dreams, hopes or losses in turn lose their souls and peace of mind. The sorrow is victorious.

Disappearing fathers. The relationships of the woman and the photographer with their fathers is problematic. The stories that the woman tells about her childhood and her father are actually very traumatic. Her father used to frequently disappear from her life which has left deep wounds. She has grown up as a kid believing that in order for her father to say, she had to be perfect. Whatever happy moments they had between them have been left incomplete because of her father's disappearances. While the photographer has an unsupportive father who does not accept his dream of living and studying in Istanbul. Later on the photographer learns that his father had an affair with another woman.While the photographer is in Istanbul, both the woman and the first clockmaker disappear from the city. Soon after he receives the news that his father is dead. As a memento, he takes his father's pocket watch. He decides to stay in the small town that his family is in and not return to Istanbul. Symbolically, carrying his father's pocket watch indicates that his father has taken over the photographer's life. The woman has been searching for a meaningful face in the photographs. Maybe she has been looking for a face resembling her father, a meaningful face who can replace him. When she describes her father's face, we think that her description is remarkably similar to the first clockmaker.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

The photographer A young man in his twenties. He comes to Istanbul to enroll in a university. When his father refuses to support him financially, he starts to make a living taking photographs of the clientele in gaudy music halls and nightclubs. The photographer falls in love with the woman and then loses her which quickly turns him into a melancholic character.

Melancholy. Melancholy is described as a feeling of deep sorrow and sadness when the loss of the object of love cannot be properly mourned. The melancholic person tries to fuse their identity with the object of love. The photographer starts to search for the woman after her disappearance. During this lengthy pursuit, we see that he repeats the sentences that the woman used to tell her own story as if he is talking about himself. Another scene which shows that he has identified with the woman is his own face reflecting on the television screen which shows the woman's face. His desire to find the woman starts to determine the photographer's relationship with the world. In order to acquire the video tape and wait for the woman he spends all the gold belonging to his family trusted to him by his mother. And finally, he breaks down in tears as he confesses his love to the woman. He seems to accept his hopelessness and sorrow.

The woman In her thirties, affluent. She is an emotional person.

Emotional. Looking at the faces of people in the photographs, she wonders about their stories, she tries to find the meaning in their faces. Once she finds the first clockmaker, she disappears with him. Talking about her childhood, the woman cries over her father who frequently abandoned his family for unknown reasons, who, in her own words, disappears and according to her, she is the one responsible for the loss of his father. When the photographer cries in front of her saying "I love you" she describes her interest in him in a soft, understanding and emotional way. All these demonstrate that the woman acts according to her feelings rather than her intellect and that she is an emotional being who never stops remembering and retelling her father, her childhood even though it is painful for her.

The first clockmaker A clockmaker in his forties. He seems a little bit reserved, serious, calm, laid-back and he also seems a little bit proud. Yet his most apparent quality is acting like a man who has solved life's secrets.

The man who knows everything. The photographer, thinking that the first clockmaker is someone who is at peace, asks him: "Does one have to work in such a place to find peace?". The clockmaker answers: "The secret is not in the place, it is in the clocks…Now, no one even knows what a clock is. Maybe that is why people are so despondent. Maybe that is why they cannot even tell their own stories. The life behind the hour and minute hands, they don't even feel it." He is both an accomplished clock master and also he seems to have grasped the reasons behind people's sorrow. The photographer has felt that his clock is troubled, "It bothered me" he says. The clockmaker interprets the photographer's remarks thus: "If everyone could feel to such an extent the world would have become another realm." These words belong to someone who not only knows what life should be but who also knows the errors of humans, someone who has solved secrets no one could, someone who looks down on people a little bit.

The second clockmaker A clockmaker in his forties. He is sociable, talkative, opportunist and somewhat angry.

Opportunist. The woman has entrusted the video tape to the second clockmaker and has asked him to show the video to others. Later she would return and get the tape back. But the second clockmaker, once he learns about the photographer's gold, sells the video tape for nine gold coins and therefore betrays the trust of the woman.

Angry. The second clockmaker is angry at affluent people with money. He talks about this: "If you have money you're always prideful". "Because I'm not prideful, I talk when I lose". "Prideful people wait, because they have something they have always wanted." He considers having money and power very important, which is why he knows nothing about the souls of clocks and he does not repair the clock left behind by the woman.

The woman: "There is everything in this face, fear, love, sorrow…its a map"

The first clockmaker: "I would've liked to tell people about the secrets of clocks"

The photographer: “He is nothing like your kind”.

The woman: “I used to say, I can’t bear it father, when you disappear,“.

The woman: “How was his smile?”

Fotoğrafçı: “Sorrowful”.

The woman and the first clockmaker.

The brother: “You look at a face, you get carried away by a dream”.

The second clockmaker: “Because I’m not prideful, I talk when I lose”.

The woman and the photographer: “That was how the storytellers of sorrow and I started looking for each other.”

The photographer waits for the woman in his room for four months and fourteen days.

The dream that the photographer has been searching for has finally arrived.

The clocktower visible from every street.

The photographer tells his story of searching for the camera.

The storytellers of sorrow.

The woman: “I’m not the dream you’re searching for”.

The tree which the photographer peacefully looks at.