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**AUTHOR AS AN AGENT OF CHARACTER: THE ELEMENTS OF METAFICTION IN ORHAN
PAMUK'S *THE MUSEUM OF INNOCENCE***

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ABSTRACT

Fictional narratives have undergone radical transformations with the advent of postmodern strategies in literary representations. Narrative reflexivity, an important aspect of metafiction, is a common element used by many of the postmodern writers. Through internal commentaries and direct interaction with readers, authors often maintain a rapport with readers. It helps writers to make objective commentaries about characters and actions. This technical strategies can be seen extensively in many of the novels of the Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk. The paper attempts to analyse the technical innovations employed by Orhan Pamuk in his work *The Museum of Innocence*. In this novel, the author functions as an agent of the central character who seeks the capacity of the writer to write a novel on his behalf. The novelist appears in the novel with his original self and makes many commentaries about his own personal life. The novel also attempts to create a sense of actuality with the obvious references to the museum which the author has established in Istanbul. Readers are invited to visit this museum and a ticket is also enclosed in the novel. This self-conscious reference to the very process of creativity marks one of the most significant aspects of postmodern fictional techniques and Pamuk has successfully used this narrative device in this novel.

Key words: Pamuk, metafiction, Museum of Innocence

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Blurring the Boundary between Fact and Fiction: A Postmodern Eye View

Ever since the application of postmodern principles in literature came into being, the basic strategies regarding literary composition has been undergoing radical transformations. Many postmodern theoreticians as well as creative writers have accelerated the modernist project of undermining traditional narrative focalisation. To achieve a unique style for the manipulation of realism, postmodern writers adopt various narrative techniques like magical realism, reflexivity, Intertextuality, flash back and flash forward narratives, counter narratives, embedded narratives, metafiction or metanarratives etc. Moreover, many writers have packaged the entire narrative stuff, with several deviations, twists and turns, in such a way as to give ample space for multiple interpretations for readers. In that sense readers also face many challenges to decipher meanings out of the

available words on the page. Many postmodern writers like Italo Calvino, Umberto Eco, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Salman Rushdie, Orhan Pamuk etc. have successfully employed these narrative strategies.

Among many other narrative techniques employed by postmodern writers, metafiction is a popular and widely used narrative strategy. Metafiction would attempt to emphasise the purpose of fiction and often authors would communicate with readers. It also follows several strategies like the personal commentary of authors about characters, author's involvement with the personal matters of characters etc. The definition given by Patricia Waugh about the nature of metafiction in her work *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction* is:

Fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality... Metafiction explore[s] a theory of writing fiction through the practice of writing fiction (Waugh 2).

Thus writers offer a different aesthetic experience for readers by establishing an internal intimacy with them. Many writers have used the elements of metafiction in varied forms. The Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk adopts the elements of metafiction in a simple and candid way in many of his novels like *Snow*, *My Name is Red*, *The Museum of Innocence* etc. The paper attempts to analyse the elements of metafiction employed by Orhan Pamuk in one of his latest works *The Museum of Innocence*.

Pamuk and Metafiction

Orhan Pamuk, with his own distinctive meta-fictional devices, always attempts to blur the division between fact and fiction. The elements of fact and fantasy recurrently converge together in Pamuk in such a way as to give a puzzling confusion to readers. The strategy is devised to lead readers to believe that the events in his novels have actually happened. The writer often has achieved it through the incorporation of the author's own commentaries, the voices of historical personalities and actual historical events in his works. In most of the novels, Pamuk himself appears as one of the characters who comment about other characters and also about plot line. In *Snow*, Pamuk appears as the narrator who is a friend of the central character Ka and the authorial intervention occurs on many occasions all along the story line. His commentary gives ample scope for readers to discern many of his personal matter. As Sibel Erol puts it, he even goes to the extent of mentioning his next literary venture, "Pamuk even gives away the title of his next book, *The Museum of Innocence*, when *Snow's* narrator Orhan talks of the book he is currently writing" (Erol 409). In *My Name is Red* also the author appears bearing his own name to comment about the nature of storytelling. This strategy recurs in *The Museum of Innocence* in which he organically maintains a rapport with readers. Unlike many other postmodern writers, Pamuk employs a simple and lucid form of metafiction which helps readers to make out the circumstances of the works composition.

The Museum of Innocence

The most romantic of all Pamuk's novels, *The Museum of Innocence*, realistically depicts the socio-cultural and familial life of Istanbul society from the early nineteen seventies to the early twenty first century. It touches upon the subtle features and nuances of Istanbul aristocratic life-style, it's gradually changing outlook, the process of westernisation in domestic and public sphere and the enigma of being in between tradition and modernity. Moreover, Pamuk has devised an actual museum also based on the objects mentioned in the novel. He started collecting several objects for the museum right from 1990s and in his own words, "I wanted to collect and exhibit the "real" objects of a fictional story in a museum and to write a novel based on these objects" (4). The museum started becoming available for visitors in 2012 and several items on display are real-life objects connected with his personal as well as social life. Thus a blurring of facts and fiction is achieved in such a way as to give a new dimension for literary composition.

Even if the novel is basically on love and the individual and social complexities produced by love, it also attempts to make a critique of Istanbul bourgeois society. It highlights a Turkish trauma regarding the adoption of western cultural values. The story centres on Kemal Basmacı, a well-off upper class business man of thirty, and Fuzun, a lower-class shop-girl of eighteen who is also a distant cousin of Kemal. Kemal enjoys all the privileges of being part of a wealthy, westernised and modern family which has amassed wealth through

export business ever since the middle of twentieth century. He has inherited the business firm started by his father and is currently running it successfully. Like many of his upper-class friends in Istanbul, Kemal possesses a westernized disposition, which he acquired as part of his western education. The presentation of the novel is in the form of a first person narrative. The protagonist Kemal narrates the events that took place in his life towards the end of twentieth century. The entire novel is presented through a series of flash backs and flash forwards with which Kemal connects his past life with his present one.

When the novel begins, Kemal is engaged to a wealthy upper class girl named Sibel. However, he falls in love with a beautiful distant cousin named Fuzun under some unexpected circumstance. They meet secretly in one of his apartments and indulge in making love for two months. The affair rocks Kemal's accustomed way of life and he becomes completely obsessed with Fuzun. It results in the breaking of his engagement with Sibel and Fuzun also estranges him owing to his secret premarital sexual relationship with Sibel. By the time he manages to meet Fuzun again, she got married to an aspiring film maker. Nonetheless, Kemal continues his visits to her household. As years pass by, his obsession with Fuzun also increases. He regularly pays a visit to her family until she got divorced from her husband. After a long wait for nine years, Kemal and Fuzun agree to marry even if he could not completely extinguish her anger for him. They plan to make a trip all across Europe. On the way Fuzun got killed because of an accident and Kemal is severely wounded. Later on, he decides to live in her memory and sets up a museum displaying all the objects related to her. He then commissions one of his old acquaintances, Orhan Pamuk, to write a novel based on the events happened in his life. Thus Orhan Pamuk is deputed as an agent to retell the entire story and Pamuk impersonates Kemal to narrate the incidents in his life.

Author as an Agent in the Novel

The novel offers a first person voice right from the beginning itself and it is through this omnipresent voice that the past and present events are available to readers. Pamuk has configured the plot in such way as to give an impression that the central character Kemal has actually existed and the author is merely functioning as an agent who is speaking to readers on behalf of Kemal. It seems to be a fact that Pamuk has taken extreme care to provide clarity to readers by deliberately putting several occasions for the narrator to interact with readers. This is evident when the narrator describes Kemal's sexual intercourse with Fuzun. The voice or the author warns the possible readers like the teachers of religious schools to skip those pages if they "are beginning to get nervous" (38). The narrator is also careful to value readers' sentiments recurrently while describing events, which again indicates that readers should be prevented from being immersed in the disastrous events in the novel, "for a novel need not be full of sorrow just because its heroes are suffering" (139). It also helps readers to keep a critical distance from such descriptions, a process preventing naturalisation. In this way, while providing a sense of actuality for the story, Pamuk also tries to put readers aesthetically distant.

The author also wants readers to visit the actual museum he has established in Istanbul and he is conscious of what the visitors would think about him while they surf across the museum. He wants to communicate his pain not only to readers but also to the possible visitors. It is evident when he describes his mental pain while setting up the museum "But neither the reader nor the visitor should on any account think that I could forget my pain even for an instant" (209). Since the actual museum exists in Istanbul, readers will be confused and they are forced to take the narrator's story for its face value. Moreover, a ticket is also available in the text, with which readers can visit the museum. The narrator further emphasises that the museum would be a promising place for potential lovers, "The Museum of Innocence will be forever open to lovers who can't find another place to kiss in Istanbul" (712). Here the difference between fact and fiction blurs so much so that readers would be puzzled over the actuality of the narrated events.

The direct communication with readers is visible when the narrator lets readers to speculate his own disposition. When he avoids Sibel without showing any empathy for her sufferings, he allows readers to brand him to be pitiless, "let readers judge me as heartless" (211). In the museum he stuffs four thousand two hundred and thirteen cigarette stubs used by Fuzun in order to express how meticulous he has been in

collecting even the apparently insignificant items used by her. When he says this, he is also conscious of setting a bad model for the future generations to be emulated. He admits that he is deliberately withdrawing from giving further colouring to it, "as I have no wish to set a poor example for future generations, let me not dwell lovingly on those seductive details" (540). Moreover, the author also functions as a reminder for readers on many occasions. For example, when Fuzun informs Kemal that she did not have any physical relationship with her husband Feridun during the past eight years and she is a virgin if they forget the two months of their love making, the narrator secretly informs readers the exact period of their physical intimacy in parenthesis, "(Actually, dear reader, it was a month and a half, less two days)" (626).

As part of the narrative strategy, the narrator introduces Orhan Pamuk himself in the initial part of the novel while Kemal is having his engagement party in a hotel. Pamuk's involvement with Kemal is emphasised here and the narrator informs readers to check what Orhan had experienced from Fuzun's presence while dancing with Fuzun in the final chapter of the novel named 'Happiness'. Here Pamuk is directly addressing readers, "HELLO, THIS IS ORHAN PAMUK! With Kemal Bey's permission I shall begin by describing my dance with Fuzun:" (708). Readers are also informed of the circumstances which led to the composition of the novel in this chapter. Having explained all the incidents in his life, the narrator expresses his wish to write a novel based on his life. Since he is incapable of rendering experience in to words, he needs to find a suitable person for the purpose, "who could do this for me?" (703). This anxiety leads him to think of Orhan Pamuk whose father was a business associate of his father. Moreover, he also thinks that Pamuk has gained considerable popularity as a successful writer, "This is how I came to seek out the esteemed Orhan Pamuk, who has narrated the story in my name, and with my approval" (703).

It is at this point that readers understand the fact that it was in fact Orhan Pamuk who has been narrating events on Kemal's behalf. Their conversation also clarifies several other things related to the narrative. During their conversation, Orhan also informs Kemal the intention of using first person singular for narrating the story which, he might have thought, would help him to establish a rapport with readers. Kemal expresses his doubt whether Orhan was ever in love with anybody and is also disturbed by the idea of this impersonation:

Though I had no doubt that it would remain my story, and that he would treat it respectfully, the idea of his speaking in my voice was disturbing. It seemed a failure of courage, a sort of weakness on my part. While I thought it perfectly normal to tell the story to visitors myself, pointing out relevant objects along the way, for Orhan Bey to put himself in my place, for him to make his own voice heard in place of mine- this annoyed me (707).

Nonetheless, he allows Orhan to use his voice to serve the purpose. It also occurs to him that Orhan will invariably be truthful to his life, "I left it to him to finish my story" (708). The author here is an external agent invited or adopted by the central character to represent him. The agent then assumes the role of protagonist whose thoughts and emotions are forwarded to readers.

Orhan wants to meet many people mentioned in Kemal's story so that he can collect many first-hand information from them and later on he reveals Kemal's reluctance to accept this proposal, "In fact, Kemal Bey did not like my seeking out the people mentioned in the story, but he tolerated my novelist's ways" (715). Later on, Orhan meets several persons who are related to Kemal and Fuzun for getting clarifications for the story. Among many others, he meets Fuzun's husband Feridun. He asks Orhan if he could use the first sentence of Orhan's novel *The New Life* (717) and Orhan gladly allows him. He also visits all places related to Kemal's story including the Merhamet apartment and inspected all the objects collected by Kemal to set the museum. After getting all the necessary information related to the story, Orhan promises Kemal that the book will be finished after setting the museum. The only demand put forward by Kemal is to let him write the last words of the novel. Orhan agrees with him and ends the novel with the last words, "Let everyone know, I lived a very happy life" (728).

The final chapter of the novel is thus a discourse on the composition of the novel itself. The author is plainly offering the very nature and presentation of the novel and the central character, who is forced to seek

help from the author in order to narrate the events happened in his life. As Irmak Ertuna rightly puts, readers also come to know of the real identity of the narrator at this stage:

The ultimate blow to Kemal's ego- the culminating moment when his subjective position dissolves- comes when he commissions the author Orhan Pamuk to write a novel about his love story. At this point, the reader learns that the story is not in fact narrated by Kemal himself, but by his delegate who has assumed his voice (Ertuna-109).

Pamuk has ingeniously devised this plan in order to convert the fictional elements to factual ones. Moreover, the actual museum in Istanbul also provides readers sufficient space to speculate that the events have actually been taken place. This self-conscious incorporation of the very process of the composition of a work marks one of the most important aspects of postmodern fictional strategies.

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