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'MUSEUM OF INNOCENCE': FROM PHYSICAL TO ETERNAL LOVE

Dr. OMKAR ROY
LNMU, Darbhanga
Email: royomkar@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Nobel Prize winning writer Orhan Pamuk's *The Museum of Innocence* (2008) is an immortal love story. It recounts to the account of a youthful, high society Turkish man who, after the sad finish of a destined relationship, makes a museum in Istanbul devoted to the relationship. It is the story of Kemal, a young man from a wealthy upper- middle class Turkish family, who falls in love with his distant cousin, Fusun. When Fusun ends their relationship, the distraught Kemal spends several years collecting the objects Fusun has touched, in a bid to alleviate the pain of his unsuccessful love. He eventually establishes The Museum using these objects of obsession in the fond memory of Fusun. The novel is structured around in-text 'displays' of the items which are exhibited in Kemal's museum.

Keywords: museum, love, Istanbul, postmodernism, meta-fiction, etc.

Since the late eighteenth century, the museum has assumed a key role in the manner the social orders recall the past. However, contemporary authors rush to bring up that the past is a long way from being static. Since the mid-twentieth century, authors took postmodern ways to deal with the investigation of history which have prompted developing uncertainty and incredulity about individuals' capacity to speak to it. In ongoing decades, the past has progressively come to be comprehended not as a discrete, comprehensible, and organized element, yet rather as a heterogeneous, non-direct content. Nobel Prize winning writer Orhan Pamuk's *The Museum of Innocence* (2008) is the main portion in a bigger social venture that incorporates the first 2008 novel, a genuine museum in Istanbul (in like manner called the Museum of Innocence, and opened in 2012), and a narrative film about the project. The 2008 novel recounts to the account of a youthful, high society Turkish man who, after the sad finish of a destined relationship, makes an exhibition hall in Istanbul devoted to the relationship. It is a prime contextual investigation for a similar assessment of galleries and books, given its topic, just as Pamuk's enthusiasm for national memory and the manners by which the past can be controlled so as to take into account political agendas. Pamuk's novel, similar to every postmodern novel about exhibition halls, draws in with improvements in the fields of both musicology and history, and therefore it is a helpful apparatus in testing a structure for the near investigation of books and museums. This system draws on the significant advancements in both musicology and scholarly hypothesis, concentrating especially on the manners by which both the exhibition hall and the novel speak to and examine memory, and taking into account an investigation of the historical center's unobtrusive and unquenchable intrigue for contemporary authors. The definition of the term Museum has undergone radical change in the last decade from being a public display of material objects and educating the general public to a center of dislocated fragments:

> Museums or things or processes museum like, may be said to occur whenever viewers (or their equivalent) are guided, not always willingly, among artifacts, samples, labels, captions, stereotypes, light, categories, drawings, feathers, skulls, visual murmurs, and … other goers.[1]

The museums as we see today developed as a concept in 18th century, but its roots can be traced back to ancient civilizations. In order to foster the idea of nationalism and promote establishment, museum displays the naturalized concept of nation and its emergence through the course of history. Andersons' book *Imagined Communities*[2] traces the origins of nationalism which emerged in the late 18th century throughout Europe. The prime reason for this was the decline in monolithic religious institutions and other large cultural institutions. Anderson says that nations are imagined communities, presupposing a level of connectedness between individuals despite the fact that most people who belong to this 'imagined community' will never in reality meet one another. *The Museum of Innocence* tells the story of Kemal, a young man from a wealthy upper-middle class Turkish family, who falls in love with his distant cousin, Fusun. When Fusun ends their relationship, the distraught Kemal spends several years collecting the objects Fusun has touched, in a bid to alleviate the pain of his unsuccessful love. He eventually establishes The Museum of Innocence using these objects, and the novel is structured around in-text 'displays' of the items which are exhibited in Kemal's museum. Within the novel, this literary Museum of Innocence allows Pamuk to critique the function that museums traditionally play in society, drawing attention to subjective experience over the political and historical narratives traditionally on display in the museum.

Pamuk is familiar with these metanarratives: in his catalogue of the real-life Museum of Innocence in Istanbul, Pamuk outlines a 'Modest Manifesto for Museums'.[3] He writes that

> We don't need more museums that try to construct the historical narratives of a society, community, team, nation … We all know that the ordinary, everyday stories of individuals are richer, more humane, and much more joyful.[4]

Pamuk's comments highlight his concern with subjective experience as a powerful way of subverting metanarratives. Pamuk notes that, despite the political backdrop of *The Museum of Innocence*, which includes the 1980 military coup which overthrew the government but he wanted to write a love story, and that he did not explore the politics of the period in-depth because, as he says, 'My story didn't demand it'.[5] Instead, *The Museum of Innocence* tells a love story from a first-person point of view, refusing to construct a primarily politico-historical narrative and instead focusing on personal experience. Pamuk's protagonist, Kemal, epitomizes this concern for the personal over the political. Motivated by love for Fusun, Kemal creates a literary museum which de-emphasizes narratives of nation and modernization, instead celebrating the importance of subjective experience.

The items that Kemal collects become what Susan Stewart defines as 'souvenirs', objects which have been removed from their original context of use-value and instead valued for the way that they relate to personal experience.[6] As Stewart argues, 'the souvenir moves history into private time', and in *The Museum of Innocence* Pamuk emphasizes this move from history into private time as a way of constructing 'little narratives'.[7] The objects that Kemal collects, and eventually displays in the literary Museum of Innocence, are frequently commodities which reflect Turkey's modernising and secularising policies throughout the twentieth century, including Parisian perfume, advertising materials for Meltem, 'Turkey's first domestic fruit soda', and designer European brands such as the 'Jenny Colon' handbag that Kemal purchases from Fusun the first time they meet. Displayed in the literary Museum of Innocence, these objects could be exhibited in such a way as to construct a narrative about the Turkish state's modernizing policies, and the interrelated history of European influence on behaviour of Turkish people in the period. As Charles Saumarez Smith notes, one of the core assumptions of the museum is that the meaning of displayed objects is not arbitrary but fixed, reflecting a narrative about the wider society.[8] Yet for Kemal, collecting objects and, in the process, converting them into souvenirs, disturbs this museal assumption about object meanings. In the literary Museum of Innocence, items such as the Turkish cigarettes Fusun used to smoke do not reflect, for example, the Turkish interest in imitating

American and European brand names, but are instead used primarily to recount a personal narrative. For Kemal, 'the stubs, reddened by her lovely lipstick, bore the unique impress of her lips at some moment whose memory was laden with anguish or bliss, making these stubs artefacts of singular intimacy'.[9] As souvenirs, the cigarette stubs have been emptied of their use- value, since they cannot be smoked again; their value now resides solely in their ability to trigger memory for Kemal, to hint at moments of singular intimacy.

Pamuk's concern with the tension between historical narratives and personal memory is also illustrated in the way that Kemal not only collects souvenirs of his time with Fusun but in the way he reappropriates other items with potential historical significance.

Divesting objects such as the cigarettes, the painkiller advertisement, and the designer handbag of their original function, and displaying instead Kemal's souvenirs in the museum, presents a profound challenge to metanarratives about the past, which construct history as singular, linear, and universal. But a souvenir's value lies in its ability to supplement personal narratives about the past. In addition to its significance in constructing personal, subjective narratives, the nature of the souvenir disrupts traditional understandings of history and temporality. In writing about souvenirs, Pearce argues that 'The spiral is backwards and inwards as the original experience becomes increasingly distant, and contact with it can only be satisfied by building up a myth of contact and presence'.[11] Pearce's reference to the 'spiral' nature of souvenir-memories recalls Pamuk's assertion, in *The Innocence of Objects*, that far from being a straight line that connects discrete moments. But time is in fact a spiral, a spiral which, in Kemal's case, centres on a single point, his love for Fusun. Pearce's comment suggests that the souvenir's spiral approach to time is regressive and restrictive, as lived experiences are increasingly tailored to fit a specific narrative, albeit one created by the subject. Yet in Pamuk's case, the souvenir has a different function: its spiral nature presents a challenge to the strict linearity of what he calls 'official' time. While watching television during his visits to Fusun's family, Kemal rejects the strict linearity of 'official' time which belongs to the state, and which is broadcasted on official television channels and radio. Instead, watching television and hence becoming exposed to 'official' time leads to an awareness that our messy and disordered domestic lives existed outside the official realm. Kemal's love story, taking place as it does firmly in the domestic realm, and recorded through the display of items stolen from Fuisun's home, therefore has the potential to challenge 'official' time. As Kevin Walsh argues, the idea of time as linear, defined by constant progress, was an idea that flourished during the upheavals of the industrial period, as a result, this idea of time was reflected in museum narratives about modern nations progressing towards ever-more developed civilisation.[12] The idea of time as a spiral, of the potential for the 'messy and disordered' domestic realm and ordinary lived experiences to disturbthis strict notion of linearity, therefore disrupts the 'official' time of the museum and, consequently, the modern nation. Instead, while setting out his plans for the literary Museum of Innocence, Kemal insists that visitors must be able to see the entire collection at once, noting that 'In poetically well-built museums, formed from the heart's compulsions, we are consoled … by losing all sense of Time'.[13] Displaying souvenirs in the museum, and allowing visitors to see all of the displays at once, challenges the idea of a strict linear narrative, for instance, the narrative of a nation progressing towards ever-greater civilization and instead focuses on the importance of subjective experience, the sense that a visitor is experiencing 'the heart's compulsions'.

The literary Museum of Innocence is a collection created through the acquisition and display of souvenirs in order to construct a deeply subjective narrative; nevertheless, Pamuk's novel does not seek to erase the historical context in which it is written entirely. Rather, in constructing the novel itself as a museum, Pamuk engages with the past, but does so in a way which is critical rather than innocent. Although the literary museum is a deeply personal monument to Kemal's obsession with Fusun, the novel as museum allows the political context in which the narrative is set to permeate the action of the story. References to political violence during the period, including the 1980 military coup, are scattered throughout the text, but these references are short and unpredictable, often consisting of only a line or two. While the novel as museum thus appears to contradict the focus on a personal, rather than a political narrative, which is

displayed in the construction of the literary museum, political events as described in the novel as museum are in fact coloured by subjective experience, thus challenging the notion of a single, authoritative version of history.

The Museum of Innocence's awareness of history as text informs the construction of Pamuk's novel-as-museum. As Pamuk has frequently stated, the idea to write the novel and open a real-life museum based on it was, from the beginning, conceived as a parallel project; Pamuk notes that he began collecting objects more than ten years before he finished writing the novel, and that these objects played a key role in the construction of the novel's story.[14] In shaping a fictional story out of real-world objects, Pamuk therefore engages in a critique of museum narratives, exposing the way that museums construct narratives artificially out of the objects made available to them. The fictional nature of the story at the heart of *The Museum of Innocence* suggests that, just as Pamuk was able to construct a fictional narrative out of real objects, so the claims that museum narratives make to truth and universality are equally suspect. Pamuk's approach shares common features with a museum like the Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles, which tells the stories of fictional people and events as if they were real, and as a result unsettles visitor expectations and questions the role and function of the museum in public life. Indeed, this particular museum proved an inspiration for Pamuk while he was writing the novel, and it is one of the 5,723 museums that Kemal visits towards the end of his life. As Susan A. Crane notes in her discussion about the unsettling experience of visiting the Museum of Jurassic Technology,

Although the novel is told from a first-person point of view, Pamuk uses postmodern literary techniques to cast doubt on his narrative, further questioning the ability of museums to create objective accounts of the past. The first metafictional presence in the text is the appearance of the author in a scene at Kemal's engagement party, when 'Orhan Pamuk' dances with Fusun at the party.[15] The intrusion of an author into his own story is a postmodern technique used to enhance the sense of ontological instability. readers aware of the history of the novel's writing, including the real objects that inspired the fictional story, Pamuk's presence in his own work enhances ontological issues already evident in the construction of the fiction itself. Furthermore, the novel begins with a map of Çukurkuma, the Istanbul neighbourhood where both the fictional and the real Museums of Innocence are located; although the inclusion of maps is by no means an unusual choice in fictional works, in this case, it points to the material existence ofthe real-life museum. This effect is also heightened by the inclusion of a free ticket to the Museum of Innocence for readers of the novel and an index of characters at the end of the book, a feature usually reserved for nonfictional works. While the character of Orhan Pamuk disappears soon after his initial introduction, the illusion of Kemal's first-person narrative is again shattered at the very end of the novel, when the reader discovers that Orhan Pamuk has been writing Kemal's story all along: the character of Orhan Pamuk tells Kemal, 'In the book … I am speaking in your voice', a fact which irritates Kemal. This revelation has the potential to shatter the illusion of the unique subject that is free from the moulding power of other discourses, ideologies, and voices. Furthermore, it disturbs the seemingly unique 'voice' of the Museum exhibition. The novel-as-museum is dominated by Kemal's voice; as Xing notes, he functions as a kind of museum guide, telling the stories associated with each object to his readers/visitors. Yet the interruption of the author–or rather, the author as character in the text–undermines this voice, simultaneously critiquing the way that, as Spencer R. Crew and James E. Sims say, museum metanarratives are frequently told in a single voice, one which is tied to power structures within society and which suppresses the multiple voices in which museum exhibitions naturally wish to speak. Pamuk's presence in the text, and his adoption of Kemal's voice, leads to further ontological confusion; Pamuk notes that readers of the novel frequently ask him whether its events are based on his life, to which he responds: 'No, I am not my hero Kemal. But it would be impossible for me to ever convince readers of my novel that I am not Kemal'.[17] Pamuk adds that he wanted readers to see the story as fictional, and yet simultaneously wanted them to believe that the events were real, adding, 'And I did not feel at all like a hypocrite or a trickster for harbouring such contradictory desires. … the art of the novel draws its power from the absence of a perfect consensus between writer and reader on the understanding of fiction'.[18]

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