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Foregrounding Cultural Memory as a Mode of Narrative in *The Museum of Innocence*

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Abstract:

Societies, civilizations, and nations have historically relied on their histories and cultural memories the most in order to form, transmit, and maintain their identities. Collective memory, the past passed down through many generations of a specific group of people, is a vital part of every community's history. It is via shared memories that individuals feel a sense of belonging to a broader society or culture. Like any other part of human experience, the past is neither faultless nor cultural or collective memory. Literature not only reflects the current political and social climate, but it also searches the historical records for information about the past and attempts to reinterpret or portray that history in a way that is unique to each place, providing fresh perspectives on the past. The political necessity of the newly formed Republic of Turkey in 1923 has refocused cultural memory and historical reconstruction in Turkey. Creating and disseminating a practical past was the original goal of Turkey's state institutions. A unified Turkish identity, a critique of state-sponsored organicist history as a tool of political manipulation, and a reimagining of the past to challenge the dominant collective memory and present an alternate narrative.

Keywords: Cultural Memories, Identities, History, Political, Institution, Collective Memory, Narrative.

Introduction

The Museum of Innocence is a literary work published in 2008, written by the distinguished Turkish author Orhan Pamuk, who has been awarded the Nobel Prize." The story takes place in Istanbul, Turkey's cosmopolitan city, during the 1970s and 80s. It revolves around Kemal, a wealthy individual who develops romantic feelings for his cousin, Fusun. In order to create the unique emotional atmosphere of the work, Pamuk referred to excerpts from Turkish cinema and music from the mid-twentieth century. The author attributes the inspiration for the book's storyline to Milan's Bagatti Valsecchi Museum. The narrative largely explores the sentiment of nostalgia that arises when a certain way of life gradually fades away with the relentless passage of time. The novel was serialized in *The New Yorker*, translated into other languages, and received widespread literary praise. The work explores fundamental issues such as identity, female independence, the conservation and alteration of memory, the disparities between Eastern and Western cultures and customs, and Turkey's intricate ideologies around love and marriage.

The novel starts two months after Kemal pops the question to Sibel, a stunning young woman. He runs into Fusun, a clerk at a handbag store, while he buys wedding gifts for Sibel. They immediately hit it off and figured out methods to meet secretly for the following few months. Eventually, Fusun confesses her love to Kemal, and the two of them have sexual relations. In retrospect, he considers that day the happiest of his life. However, he chooses to join in on the pretence that he is supposed to go on with his engagement to Sibel rather than confess to Fusun that he feels the same way about her. Fusun follows him for some time in the hopes that he will reconsider. She appears at his engagement celebration before abruptly departing without offering an explanation or saying goodbye.

Members of Istanbul's affluent bourgeoisie, like Kemal, tend to be disdainful of those who appear too "Turkish," and the ladies in their group often get blond dye jobs. Although she began having sexual relations with him "when she was sure that there would in the end be a wedding," his fiancée Sibel still considers herself a modern young lady and identifies as having had sex before. His family's export business uses the office couch; the employees know and

snicker. There are not many other young people in their world, so the ones who do have sex must understand them and applaud their courage.

In this way, the author and the character perceive a melancholy aura from every corner of Istanbul. That makes the book a contemporary analogue to Pamuk's masterwork *My Name Is Red*, which takes place in a city in the 16th century; it is also undeniably more densely written than *Snow*. Yes, it has its flaws. While Kemal's feelings for Füsün are intense, she is somewhat mysterious, and most of his pals are only names rather than fleshed-out individuals. Even the novel might have used a lower length. While it may appear that the story is not well-structured, picking out a certain meal or longing scene can be challenging. One eagerly anticipates delving into the habit of letting *The Museum of Innocence* story burrow into them because of the length that it justifies.

Collective Memory and Cultural Identity

According to Jan Assman's article "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," cultural memory is a repository of information from the past that gives a group its distinctiveness and cohesion. Prerequisites for its transmission in society's culturally institutionalized heritage include the objectivation and crystallization of memory, which includes texts, images, and rituals of the collectively shared past.

Narrativity, a formal sequence of beginning, middle, and end, makes the historical text more like a fictional one for the plot is constructed in both, and since history and fiction are complimentary, the two blend in such a way that all the historical and literary discourse turns out to be historical fiction as well as fictional history. According to Paul Ricoeur, the goal of both real and fictional narratives is to build and spread the narrative identity of social groupings through telling stories about the past. Furthermore, historical accounts and fictional works act as vehicles for transmitting and preserving particular social groups' collective memories and historical consciousness: books, both real and imagined, function as repositories of collective memory and identity. Collective memory, or cultural memory, refers to the stories of a people's past that they share and enjoy. Regarding history, Halbwachs and Assmann argue that collective social structures—such as nations, tribes, and language systems—are necessary for its preservation. Collective memory is defined by Maurice Halbwachs as the whole of all the memories that individuals collectively remember and share. The social group provides the means to rebuild them. According to Halbwachs, this is why we have social and collective memory frameworks; our thoughts can only engage in memory-making to the extent that they

embed themselves in these frameworks. Cultural memory and history are both products of human construction. Thus, cultural memory is also a reconstruction, as no pure history or recollection exists. Accordingly, academicians are interested in numerous historical interpretations that centre the relationships between events and their alleged causes and effects. To discuss events from the past that are universally remembered by historians, it is important to note that these events are not only recounted from many angles but also remembered and passed down through generations through a process known as collective memory.

Considering the characteristics of distinct populations' cultural identities, we test the degree to which the various cultures' explanatory details coexist. Throughout history, people from different cultures or social groups have built this cohabitation of numerous knowledge. Considering that discussing knowledge touches on the essence of culture, we are left to ponder, from an ethical and emic standpoint, the nature of the relationship between knowledge and cultures. In order to analyze the cultural patterns of a society or community with an eye on these ethical and ethical approaches, one needs to be alert. Investigating different cultures through the lens of one's cultural traditions, a practice known as ethnocentrism, might cause one to draw biased conclusions. As a result of this distorted perception and analysis of a society's data, incomplete results are produced. This is because while examining non-Western cultural signals closely, one can observe that each culture's patterns differ. This is because cultural patterns are integral to one's own entity.

Methodology and Discussion

In addition to preserving the group's identity, cultural memory is more closely associated with the human experience than official history. It is consequently necessary for literature to confront the problems of history and cultural memory and express collective identity, which would otherwise be lost. As a result, literary tales re-inscribe cultural memory by evaluating history and collective identity through the medium of narratives, a concept that Paul Ricoeur refers to as narrative identity. Literature serves as a place of memory that remembers cultural memory and identity in a manner significantly superior to the official historical narratives and discourses constructed. This is because, as mentioned in the thesis, fiction possesses its logic and can reveal secret inner lives, conflicts, grey areas, and ambiguities.

In contrast, history or nonfiction might provide us with data and facts that are not always factual. In addition, it provides resistance to the changes being made to collective

memory and cultural identity and assists in remembering identity through the use of narrative form. Every culture can maintain its identity through the medium of literary narrative. Using Orhan Pamuk's writings, a researcher has analyzed the parts of collective memory that pertain to rebuilding and resistance.

After his engagement, Kemal continued to feel devastated for a full year. Despite his best efforts, he cannot escape the profound and tragic loss of his connection with Sibel, no matter how much he clings to their relationship. He attempts to meet Fusun, but she declines. When she is not around, he becomes emotionally attached to anything that reminds him of their sexual encounters. Unsurprisingly, he and Sibel's romance dries up and fizzles away. Finally, one of Kemal's letters gets a response from Fusun. Now that she is married, she informs him that she and her husband and their parents live together. On the condition that they act as long-lost relatives who have only recently become friendly, she also agrees to meet him. She treats him civilly but with animosity when he visits her family's home, suggesting that she still carries the hurt of their split. Despite Kemal's best efforts, she turns him down, choosing the stability of her current life above her past love. Symbolically reclaiming her, Kemal takes things from her house on each visit when he says he loves her. The death of Fusun's father causes her to lose interest in her husband. After the split, Fusun once more thinks of Kemal as a potential suitor. While they are on their honeymoon across Europe, he takes her back to their passionate courtship. The unfortunate car accident that Fusun was involved in occurred just after their final night of honeymoon, which was the most intimate night of their lives together. Kemal, distraught, recalls all the things he had accumulated in Fusun's memory during the previous ten years. Each of them symbolises a distinct blissful experience that he longs to relive. By the book's conclusion, Kemal had turned Fusun's abandoned home into the namesake "museum of innocence," filling it with mementoes from their romance and other cultural relics from Turkey. The tragic ending of the Museum of Innocence is paradoxically universal since it suggests that everyone wants a piece of their stolen history.

For a social or cultural group to remember and propagate its actual collective identity, the theoretical framework of this study rests on the premise that literature has the responsibility to reevaluate history and revive the otherwise forgotten or altered cultural memory. Literary narratives offer alternative imaginative interpretations of cultural memory and identity. The theories of history, collective memory, cultural memory, cultural sites of memory, and narrativity put forth by Halbwachs, Assmann, Pierre Nora, Paul Ricoeur, and Hayden White, respectively, have all come to the same conclusion: history is inherently subjective, incomplete,

doubtful, and politically motivated. Using fictional alternate narratives on history and narrative identity, the quest motif has been discovered to be crucial in questioning the accepted history and pointing out grey areas.

Notably, the story makes substantial symbolic use of reading and writing. Reading or writing becomes more than it seems at first glance, and all the characters in the narrative are somehow linked with it. By reading and writing, the officially recorded histories can have their silence and opacity shattered. In doing so, it represents the effort required to educate oneself by investigating and analysing historical and political discourses in quest of facts, lies, gaps, or alternative interpretations.

Orhan Pamuk takes a postmodern approach to storytelling in their efforts at fictional representation and historicisation of historical events and fictitious characters. In order to achieve this goal, the researchers will be showcasing Orhan Pamuk's writings through *The Museum of Innocence* reinvents cultural memory through different memory sites, both real and imagined. Text, monuments, archives, historical figures, myths, and folktales are all examples of these memory places. Their reimagining of the past occurs through the lieux de mémoire, or places of memory, which are the context of memories. Postmodern narrative theory challenges the logocentric and homogenised understanding of history and identity through fictionalising historical events. The fictional works of Pamuk recreate Ottoman history and culture, highlighting its best and worst features, and they insist on accepting the past and its legacy without judgment. Thus, the two authors have depicted the culturally rich cosmopolitan traditions and the shadowy aspects of the Ottoman era, illuminating both the cultural magnificence and the religious fundamentalist obscurantism accompanying it.

Many literary traditions in Turkey have been impacted by the region's political and cultural shifts, including the secularist nationalist Tanzimat school, the Social Realist school, and, more recently, the postmodern school. Whether it is the fundamentalist Islamic nationalism of neo-Ottoman political authorities or the secular nationalism of Kemalists, it is the postmodern writers who have spoken out against the erasure of Ottoman history, culture, and identity. Authors like Orhan Pamuk, writing in Turkey after Atatürk and in the present day, have spoken out against how the government uses cultural memory and identity for its political ends.

The significance of literature in maintaining and passing on cultural memory is crucial to the identity creation of any culture, and researchers in this area highlight the socio-cultural

and academic value of this fact. Scientists have long stressed remembering our history and how some stories and ideas have been purposefully twisted or erased from popular memory. In addition, the researchers here stress the importance of taking an impartial stance towards competing narratives and identities, arguing that only by viewing cultural and religious diversity through a democratic and cosmopolitan lens can any society hope to become more inclusive, peaceful, positive, and progressive. Because it paves the way for future studies in history, communal identity, memory locations, narrative, and its role in sociopolitical and narrative discourses that impact public opinion and viewpoints, this research article is also important from an academic standpoint.

Conclusion

Pamuk is more concerned with depicting human nature, making love an inevitable theme in his writing. The characters' metamorphosis is portrayed through the chronicling of the pluralities, nuances, and complex realities as seen through the eyes of a contemporary hero. His expression of love is very modern, very 21st century. There has been a strict adherence to the canon of writing throughout this century. The moral code and philosophy of his period are reflected in it. He does not conform to the conventional balance. His works serve to reaffirm his grasp of the complexities of love. The heroines written by Pamuk captivate readers. He demonstrates their character's strength. She commands attention with her unique personality and rules the world according to her own rules. They question the validity of established social standards. The course of his protagonists' adventure is the progression from darkness to light or ignorance to revelation.

Pamuk creates his characters from real people, just like the other great authors. He has a remarkable talent for studying the people he encounters on his travels and in his region. Fascinatingly, the characters exhibit a wide range of human emotions. Like Eliot, Chaucer, James, and Hemingway, Pamuk has based his characters on real people and events. While acknowledging that women have had it tough throughout history, Pamuk notes that it has been particularly difficult for them during the Ottoman Empire and the modern era. By elevating their standing, providing them with authority, and offering the assistance they seek, Pamuk strives to do them justice in his literature. In the book's first chapter, Orhan Pamuk presents a nuanced and emotionally charged representation of economic and identity problems, social inequalities, and other related issues. The story revolves around the people and culture of

Istanbul as they undergo a cultural shift. Both personal and socio-political factors impact the people's lives.

The Museum of Innocence explores love inhibitions, cultural Turkey's lack of free speech, and the heated discussion of personal responsibility. Kemal, a wealthy man, becomes fixated on his twice-removed cousin, and their love tale unfolds. The book and the museum were inspired by Pamuk's visit to the Bagatti Valsecchi Museum in Milan, Italy. This is one of his lengthiest love novels, and it is about Kemal's fixation on Fusun. Rather than being a typical love narrative, it focuses on the events that follow the hero's romantic discovery. Even though Kemal did not realise it till after Fusun left, his time with her was the happiest moment of his life.

One disastrous aspect of Pamuk's literary universe is the transformation of cultural, emotional, and ideal identities. As Pamuk noted, the miniature museums devoted to a particular artist (in this case, Fusun) are bound together by a profound sadness. The depiction is literary and beautiful because the protagonists opt for artistic expression as a means of self-expression. Just like the fleeting nature of human existence, the museum lacks any permanent artefacts despite the investments made to keep them safe. Since these small, unremarkable museums gave Kemal a sense of immortality, the author and Kemal consider this museum significant. In connection with this work, the author has established a museum. He has erected a structure, The Museum of Innocence, in honour of Kemal's cherished Fusun. Everything that Fusun touched that Kemal retrieved is there. The posters, earrings, and other artefacts that would be displayed in the museum were genuinely acquired by Pamuk from movie theatre lobbies. He devoted nearly a decade to amassing these items.

A physical Museum of Innocence, founded by Pamuk, is located in the Çukurcuma district of Beyoğlu, Istanbul. Along with the objects' associations with Kemal's beloved Fusun, the Museum describes everyday life in Istanbul in the second half of the twentieth century. In 2012, it was designated as a permanent exhibition. At this museum, Pamuk displays actual artefacts from his book. Box 54, "Time," is located in the museum's centre stairway, and the entrance hall's floor is etched with Aristotelian theories of time. There, you may see the objects on display that transform time into space, such as the saltshaker and cigarette butt. The structure is five stories tall. In their various cabinets, you can find artefacts about each book chapter. The arrangement of the boxes mirrors that of the chapters. One exception to the symmetrical display is box 68, which is labelled 4213 Cigarette Stubs and is on display at the entry.

This collection dates back to the period in which the novel takes place and shows the material possessions of affluent Istanbulites, highlighting once again the effects of Westernisation on the city. Artefacts from the story of two urbanites who fall madly in love are on display at the museum. Because it connects the two conflicts, Pamuk's externalisation of love is very important here. The book mentions that the museum will provide free admission to everyone who purchases a copy of the novel. From the 1970s to the early 2000s, this museum captures insight into the life of Istanbul's upper middle class. Over a thousand artefacts tell us stories of the people who used, saw, touched, collected, and imagined them in the museum's exhibits. Items at the museum are displayed in cabinets after they have been painstakingly arranged in boxes.

The Museum of Innocence explores themes of innocence and guilt, history and technology. The book delves into the complex dynamics of East-West collaboration and conflict. In a near-hallucinatory environment that introduces ambiguity and situates his work in harmony with the metropolitan society of any era, Pamuk crafts an enchanting and engaging story. The interaction between sensuality and erotic fixation is how some commentators see it. The story shows how everyday things can become enigmatic when they come together in a group decided by unrequited (Sufi) love. Thus, our hero Kemal becomes the unknowing pir—sage—of an eccentric mystical cult while he pursues his love quest with Fusun.

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