

## Book Review: Orhan Pamuk's *The Museum of Innocence*

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Orhan Pamuk, a welcoming Turkish Noble Laureate (2006) for our new generation, opts for experimentation and originality in his writings. By using different forms, styles, mood and persona from novel to novel and by assigning new ideas in them, he makes his works creative and original (*The Paris Review*, 2015). Competing with these challenging notions, he also employs some innovative writing strategies in his book, *The Museum of Innocence*. Comprising of eighty three chapters, the novel narrates the romantic love story of Kemal and Fusun in first person point of view. The author creates this story from the real objects of an actual museum. In one of his talks at Verona (2012), Pamuk mentions that to write this novel he first bought a house in Istanbul and arranged therein a personal museum by assembling some real objects of an imaginary beloved. Then, he originated from these objects the target story of innocence. The praxis of this creative idea makes the novel interesting and enjoyable for its readers while technically, this writing style points out that the novel covers some aspects of postmodernism too.

Writing a review of such an amazing novel seems difficult. This is Pamuk's intriguing original, imaginative and artistic literary piece. Most of the reviewers of the book assure that the story has no plot but Pamuk (2014) acknowledges that he always draws a plot-structure for his novels and never let his characters to hold over the plot. The target novel opens in 1970-1985's Istanbul and represents a map of Istanbul's upper class society, their life styles with their mores and morals, etc. Its opening chapters (from 1-23) serve as an introductory part of the main story. Herein the protagonist and narrator, thirty years old wealthy Kemal, narrates the story of his romantic affair with eighteen years old poor but beautiful Fusun and of his engagement with the rich and mature Sibel. Keeping up relations with Sibel, he urges to ever continue his intrigue with Fusun.

The next twenty four chapters (from 24-47) work as the middle of the story. In them, Kemal narrates his miserable life without Fusun for she silently left him right after the day of his engagement with Sibel. The succeeding chapter, entitled *Confession*, functions as the climax of the story in which Kemal speaks about his madness. Fusun's absence makes his life empty and meaningless. He realizes that *the djinn of his love has escaped Aladdin's lamp and is prodding him, telling him that he could no longer keep this*

*secret to himself*. So, he discloses the secrets of his obsession to Sibel. Disturbed from Kemal's mystical illness and by envisaging their future imperfect life, heartbroken Sibel abandons Kemal forever. Then in the next thirty chapters (from 48-78), Kemal narrates the story of re-entry of Ms. Fusun in his life as Mrs. Fusedun, a wife of a local film producer. Despite her marriage, Kemal keeps visiting Fusun's house for seven years and ten months. During these 409 weeks, he gets supper for 1593 times at her home. He financially helps the couple in the production of their new film. Subsequently, the fate favours Kemal as Fusun takes divorce from Fusedun. She unites with him (Kemal) and they plan to start their new life.

The following two chapters (79-80) are the examples of falling action of the story wherein Kemal reminiscences his last two days and nights of happiness with Fusun. Just after the moment of occasional happiness, Fusun dies during car driving and Kemal loses his consciousness for a few days. Their love affair ends with a tragedy that leads Kemal to arrange a museum to honor their innocent love by amassing Fusun's beautiful earrings, bracelets, hairpins, handkerchiefs, and cigarette bucks etc.

The last two chapters 81-82 devote to the writing style of the novel. Technically the narrative style seems postmodern in which Kemal esteems to Orhan Bay, one of the fictional characters and the narrator of this novel, for narrating his (Kemal's) story in his (Kemal's) own voice. Then, Orhan Bay interrupts in the novel to eulogize Fusun's beauty who once allured him also. However, to picturize here the accurate story of Kemal's infatuation, Orhan acknowledges to visiting Kemal's museum and conducting several interviews with Kemal and his other relatives. Finally, the narrator (in the voice of Kemal) ends the novel with the sentence:

“Let everyone know, I lived a very happy life.”

2001—2002, 2003—2008

Love is the central theme of the present novel. There are five unmarried couples namely Kemal and Fusun, Kemal and Sibel, Ceida and her anonymous boyfriend, Kemal's father and his younger mistress, young enough to his daughter, and Sibel with her nameless boyfriend. Almost all these lovers, except Ceida, get loss in love. Fusun dies in an accident, Sibel leaves Kemal, and his father's mistress dies because of cancer. The love of Kemal is an obsessive love. In love, his mind observes melancholy, jealousy, anger, illusions, and delusions, etc. Moreover, the narrative moves without any artificial music, rhythm, or songs. While Pamuk relates love

with real objects of museum as Kemal gets solace by watching hairpins, cigarettes, and hand kerchief of Fusun.

However, the novel also deals with the theme of modernism and conventionalism in Turkey. Here Pamuk remarks on the arrival of European fashion in Turkey. In 1970 pre-marital relations were considered shameful for Turkish girls. But the most fashionable educated girls started to abandon this traditional concept. Sibel came from Europe and brought with her the western ideas. Being modern and feminist, she willingly accepts the premarital relations with Kemal. Similarly Ceida gives birth to a baby boy before her marriage. Through these characters Pamuk clarifies that Turkey has become modern in regard to sexual liberation of women.

Pamuk's art of characterization of the novel is supreme. Here most of the characters belong to upper class except the family of Fusun. Being dynamic, these characters grow and change with the flow of story. Kemal is introduced as a passionate lover. His obsession increases day after day but in the end he develops into an optimistic thinker. Fusun, the poor shop-girl, becomes a film star. Fusun, Sibel, and Ceida's characters represent Europeanism in Turkey. Moreover, Pamuk here creates a character of fictional narrator, Orhan Bay. The creation of this fictional writer and narrator proves that Pamuk follows postmodern art of characterization.

Pamuk's writing style of this novel is inspiring and appealing for his readers. He describes the frivolities and lavishly life style of Turkish upper class people and their mania to westernize themselves without extremism, not like a radical moralist whose didactic style makes the reader bore. Instead of making the readers somewhat psycho-patients, Pamuk invites them to attain his moral message by considering the dilemma of Kemal themselves. The technique proves the novel as "art for art sake" as well as "art for morality".

The intermingling art of telling love story with the objects of museum makes the reader curious. By this the reader's mind shifts into the visitor. In the fictional story of obsessed love, there starts another fiction (or perhaps reality) about the museum (either fictional or real). Herein the self-reflexive fictional scenes, the exploration of technical aspects of fictional writing through the characters of Kemal and Orhan Bay along with the examination of its effects on the reader makes the novel a metafiction. The narrator here directs the reader about what to think, what to believe and what he himself did to produce self-reflexivity in this novel. The narrative style becomes

postmodern in approach.

Moreover, Pamuk uses here another postmodern aspect namely pastiche technique to create a unique aesthetic rhythm. He cuts up several pieces of newspapers, advertisements and letters and then pastes them to display his real feelings artistically. For example, the narrator Kemal describes the agony of his love and deepest pain of his body by referring an advertisement of Paradinson, a painkiller, displays in the windows of every pharmacy in Istanbul. Similarly, he introduces Ceida Hanim by first displaying the news clip i.e., "the aim of her life is a happy marriage with the ideal man of her life." And the Italian song, "it's love, it's love, the reason of everything in the universe". The technique catches the attention of readers and invites them to be artistic and playful with Pamuk.

The novel serves as a guide of the real museum that Pamuk himself has opened in Istanbul and obliges the readers to visit the museum to have consensus with Kemal and Pamuk's belief that museums are made to experience, not to stroll around. It also provides to its readers a free fictional ticket to visit the actual museum. Here, the narrator mentions: *let those who have read the book enjoy free admission to the museum when they visit for the first time*. After reading this novel, the readers may start writing for *Innocence*, the fictional museum magazine which is prognosticated by fictional Pamuk to be start soon after the publication of this novel. Swaying between fictional to real and real to fictional world, the novel clarifies that Pamuk deserves the Noble Prize for his literary writings, indeed!