Innocent Memories: Reading the Museum in Orhan Pamuk’s *The Museum of Innocence*¹

Sarah Rengel

The museum emerged in the eighteenth century as a powerful tool for the establishment and promotion of national identity and memory through the construction of narratives about the history of the nation. The fact that museums create narratives has prompted scholars to treat the museum as a text, opening up the possibility of ‘reading’ the museum alongside other texts. In developing a framework for such a study, postmodern theory plays an important role, given the current view that history itself is a text. Orhan Pamuk’s novel *The Museum of Innocence* is an example of such a framework in action. Using the museum as setting (a ‘literary museum’), and structuring his novel in such a way as to mimic and parody traditional museum strategies of display (the ‘novel-as-museum’), Pamuk can critique universalising narratives about the nation and human civilisation, and instead embrace the heterogeneity of personal identity and personal memory.

Patricia embraces me on the station platform. ‘The past is what you leave behind in life, Ruby,’ she says … ‘Nonsense, Patricia,’ I tell her as I climb on board my train. ‘The past’s what you take with you.’²

Since the late eighteenth century, the museum has played a key role in the way that societies remember the past. Yet, as contemporary novelists such as Kate Atkinson are quick to point out, the past is far from being static; indeed, since the mid-twentieth century, postmodern approaches to the study of history have led to growing doubt and scepticism about human beings’ ability to represent it. In recent decades, the past has increasingly come to be understood not as a discrete, knowable, and orderly entity, but rather as a heterogeneous, non-linear text. The past is understood, as Kate Atkinson writes in her novel *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, as ‘what you take with you’³—a construct that is constantly reshaped in the present and subject to competing individual, national, and global agendas.

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, given their overlapping concerns with historical narratives, that both museum and contemporary authors have been influenced by these developments in postmodernist historiography. The museum has proved a rich source of inspiration for contemporary writers concerned with the way that individuals shape and understand the past. Authors such as Atkinson, A.S. Byatt,

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³ Atkinson, p. 381.
and China Miéville have all drawn upon the museum, or its close relative—the archive—for literary inspiration, using it as a setting, as well as mimicking the techniques that museums use to tell stories about the past. However, some contemporary authors have gone still further; Nobel-prize-winning novelist Orhan Pamuk’s *The Museum of Innocence* (2008) is the first instalment in a larger cultural project that includes the original 2008 novel, a real-life museum in Istanbul (likewise called the Museum of Innocence, and opened in 2012), and a documentary film about the project. The 2008 novel tells the story of a young, upper-class Turkish man who, after the tragic end of a doomed love-affair, creates a museum in Istanbul dedicated to the relationship. It is a prime case study for a comparative examination of museums and novels, given its subject-matter, as well as Pamuk’s interest in national memory and the ways in which the past can be manipulated in order to cater to political agendas. Pamuk’s novel, like all postmodern novels about museums, engages with developments in the fields of both museology and history, and as a result it is a useful tool in testing a framework for the comparative study of novels and museums. This framework draws on the major developments in both museology and literary theory, focusing particularly on the ways in which both the museum and the novel represent and discuss memory, and allowing for an exploration of the museum’s subtle and insatiable appeal for contemporary novelists.

**The Museum in Western Society**

The museum is generally defined by its function as a public body concerned with collecting and displaying material objects and educating the general public. In 1984, for instance, the Museums Association agreed to a definition of the museum as ‘an institution which collects, documents, preserves, exhibits and interprets material evidence and associated information for the public benefit’. However, over the past few decades, scholars in the field of Museum Studies have considered the possibility of expanding the traditional definition of the museum. James A. Boon, for instance, draws on the melancholy and, indeed, illusory experience of visiting museums, which he sees as ‘a locus of dislocated fragments’, to formulate a more porous, elusive definition of the museum:

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4 See, for instance, Byatt’s 1990 novel *Possession*, which deals with museums, archives, and how we reconstruct visions of the past, and Miéville’s *Kraken*, set in London’s Natural History Museum.

5 The real-life museum is located in the Çukurcuma district of Istanbul, and retells the events of the novel as if they were real. Pamuk also released a catalogue of the museum’s contents, *The Innocence of Objects*, in 2012. The documentary, *Innocence of Memories*, which retells the story of the museum’s creation, was released in 2015.

6 Pamuk has a long history of engaging with these issues. He has openly criticised Turkey’s ‘intolerant political culture’, and in 2005-2006 was put on trial for ‘insulting Turkishness’ due to his discussion of the Armenian Genocide, which took place during and after the First World War, an event that the Turkish government still refuses to recognise (O. Pamuk, ‘On the Museum of Innocence: Caressing the World With Words’, *New Perspectives Quarterly*, vol. 30, no. 4, 2013, pp. 26-27. Available from: EBSCOhost, [accessed 20 July 2016]; G. Farred, ‘“To Dig a Well With a Needle”: Orhan Pamuk’s Poem of Comparative Globalization’, *The Global South*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2007, p. 87. Available from: JSTOR, [accessed 27 July 2016]).

Museums, then, or things or processes museumlike, may be said to occur whenever viewers (or their equivalent) are guided, not always willingly, among artefacts, samples, labels, captions, stereotypes, light, categories, drawings, feathers, skulls, visual murmurs, and ... other goers.\(^8\)

Boon’s conception of the museum—so different to the clear and orderly one provided by a body like the Museums Association, which is concerned with the realities of museum practice—hints at the way that the museum can function as a metaphor, motif, or structure for a range of different experiences: the city as museum, the human mind as museum, and, crucially, the novel-as-museum. That the experience of the museum takes place as much on a mental level as it does on a visual level is illustrated by the kinds of things visitors might encounter in the museum: immaterial things such as ‘stereotypes’ and ‘categories’ have their place as much as ‘light’, ‘drawings’, and ‘visual murmurs’. Such a definition of the museum opens up the evocative and intangible aspects of museum visits, highlighting their heterogeneous nature, made up as they are of so many disparate objects, sensations, and experiences.

That visitors/viewers in Boon’s formulation are ‘guided’ through a collection of fragmentary and heterogeneous exhibits hints at another key aspect of museums: they usually transmit some kind of narrative, frequently one which must be narrated by either museum guides or other supporting materials. Indeed, the museum itself has increasingly been considered as a text, as Michael Belcher notes: the museum’s ‘mixture of objects, text, and other interpretive aids has often been likened to a three-dimensional essay or book, whose prime function is to inform and educate’.\(^9\) This educative function is particularly important, because museums are usually understood as institutions which are concerned with the transmission of history: as Susan Pearce argues, museums create a kind of ‘illustrated narrative’ about the past by assembling various objects together and inviting visitors to move from one to the other in a structured way.\(^10\) The fact that museums can be understood as texts suggests that they can therefore be read alongside other texts, such as novels. ‘Displaying’ artefacts and objects through descriptive passages, novels can begin to mimic the strategies employed by museums to construct narratives about the past. The author, moreover, begins to function as a kind of curator and/or tour guide, selecting the objects which they wish to highlight for their readers/visitors. As Kevin Walsh notes, ‘In a museum display, the object itself is without meaning. Its meaning is conferred by the “writer”, that is, the curator, the archaeologist, the historian’.\(^11\) Comparing the role of the author with that of the curator highlights the ways in which histories in museums are constructed rather than natural, and the interaction between museums and literature is thus tied to contemporary debates about texts, histories, their construction, and their consumption.


\(^9\) Belcher, p. 63.


‘Writing’ History in the Museum

While the origins of the museum can be traced back to the ancient world, it emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a powerful tool for the establishment and promotion of national identity through the construction of narratives about the history of the human race. Tony Bennett notes that the rise of nation-states in this period coincided with the development in museums of the idea of a universal history of human civilisation. As a result, museum displays naturalised the concept of nation and presented the nation-state in question as the end-product of thousands of years of human evolution, the pinnacle of this human ‘civilisation’. While nationhood and nationality are seen as natural parts of everyday life today, as Benedict Anderson has shown, the concept of nationalism first emerged in Europe in the late eighteenth century in response to the declining influence of monolithic religious institutions and other large cultural systems which had previously structured individuals’ experience of reality. Anderson notes 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’s relationship with nationalism is important to note because it highlights the fact that museums, like all public institutions, are deeply involved in politics and ideology. Their development, concurrent with that of the modern concept of nation, means that they have traditionally been associated with a narrative which tends towards universalising, writing out individual experience and ambiguity in order to present an unbroken narrative about nationhood and belonging to this ‘imagined community’. Indeed, for Pierre Nora, the archive, and by extension the museum, is a lieu de mémoire (‘memory site’) where cultural and national memory is crystallised. Such lieux de mémoire arise, according to Nora, when memories of the past are no longer ‘living presences in our lives’: when the naturally vital, polyphonous, ‘living’ memories of a society have been absorbed by history. Nora’s discussion of lieux de mémoire reveals the way that the polyphonous nature of collective memory can be stifled when it is transformed into official history and enshrined in monuments such as the museum.

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12 Paula Findlen notes that the first institution which could be regarded as a kind of ‘proto-museum’ was founded c. 280 BCE in Alexandria, and consisted of a large collection of objects which was available for scholars working in the adjoining library to consult (P. Findlen, ‘The Museum: Its Classical Etymology and Renaissance Genealogy’, in B. M. Carbonell [ed.], Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts, Malden, Oxford and Carlton, Blackwell, 2004, p. 25.). Most scholars agree that the Renaissance ‘cabinets of curiosity’ were the precursors to modern museums (see, for instance, E. Hooper-Greenhill, Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge, London and New York, Routledge, 2003, p. 72.).


14 Bennett, pp.76-77.


16 Anderson, p. 6.


18 Nora, p. 7.
However, as Kevin Walsh notes, in the modern and postmodern periods the unbroken narratives of traditional history have come under increasing scrutiny.\(^{19}\) A greater focus on personal histories, on the preservation of individual mementoes such as photographs, has emerged, and as a result the monolithic histories narrated by nineteenth-century museums are regarded as increasingly problematic.\(^{20}\) These developments have led to a change in museum practice, including a greater focus on social histories and the histories of previously marginalised groups.\(^{21}\) Novels about museums pick up on these developments: they engage with the problem of historiography, considering the limits of traditional, linear histories, such as those narrated by museums, and incorporate postmodern ideas about subjectivity and personal memory into their structures.

**Fragments of Time: Postmodern Histories**

In his novel *If on a winter’s night a traveller* (1979), now considered a classic postmodernist text, Italo Calvino writes that ‘the dimension of time has been shattered, we cannot love or think except in fragments of time’.\(^{22}\) The idea of experiencing ‘fragments of time’ rather than feeling part of a continuous, linear history illustrates the postmodern scepticism about writing the past. While the academic study of history since the nineteenth century has been based on the assumption that the past could, theoretically, be known and understood if enough documentary evidence is compiled, the postmodern approach to history is one of epistemological uncertainty. In the twentieth century, history has increasingly come to be seen as a text, a human construct which is separate from the real, lived past. Linda Hutcheon argues that this view of ‘history as text’ does not deny the existence of the past or the events that took place, but rather highlights the fact that ‘its accessibility to us now is entirely conditioned by textuality. We cannot know the past except through its texts’.\(^{23}\) This focus on the textuality of history highlights a postmodern concern about the way that histories are constructed, and the way in which they use historical evidence to create narratives about the past. This is particularly important when it comes to museums, which have, as Pearce notes, come to be understood as ‘active creators of the natural and human past’.\(^{24}\) As a result, the museum’s claims to truth and universality have

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\(^{19}\) Walsh, p. 66.

\(^{20}\) Walsh, p. 66.

\(^{21}\) A prime example of this new museal approach is the Museum of Broken Relationships in Zagreb, Croatia, which displays everyday objects donated by the public–teddy bears, garden gnomes, books–alongside stories by the objects’ owners, detailing the heartbreaks and other ‘broken relationships’ that the objects represent. The museum encourages visitors to appreciate the importance of subjective experience rather than seeking to narrate a universalising story about a nation or culture. Kylie Message provides a useful overview of the way that new museums use postmodern techniques such as montage and bricolage to challenge traditional museal practice, particularly in the context of marginalised groups such as First Nations peoples in countries like Australia and New Zealand (K. Message, *New Museums and the Making of Culture*, Oxford and New York, Berg, 2006).


\(^{24}\) Pearce, p. 258.
come under serious criticism, given that the histories they recount are, like all texts, constructs.

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault noted that in the past, the writing of history sought to erase discontinuity by compiling as much documentary evidence as possible to create a continuous historical narrative. In contrast, contemporary scepticism about the reliability of documentary evidence is leading away from ‘total history’, from unifying and unified narratives, and towards ‘general history’, which acknowledged the existence of multiple histories which interact with one another. The move away from a unified historical narrative is in keeping with Jean-François Lyotard’s definition of ‘the postmodern condition’ as one that is sceptical of metanarratives or ‘grand narratives’, which are totalising and universalising, and instead towards ‘little narrative[s]’. As both Pearce and Eileen Hooper-Greenhill note, the narratives that museums traditionally construct are metanarratives, either about the nation, ‘Mankind’ and his intellectual and technological development, or about the nature of knowledge itself, including humanity’s ability to know and understand the natural world and the world of the past. However, since the mid-twentieth century there has been a marked change in the kinds of museums being established, with fewer large, ‘universal’ museums opening, and instead a focus on museums which specialise in smaller, more specific and/or localised histories. This trend reflects a growing interest in Lyotard’s ‘little narratives’, and a re-evaluation of the definition of the museum itself. This concern with the kinds of narratives that museums tell, and the way that they represent history, overlaps with contemporary novelists’ engagement with issues of representation, authority, and subjective experience. The museum in literature therefore becomes a useful structure for examining postmodern preoccupations with history and experience.

**Literary Museums and Novel-as-Museum: A Comparative Approach**

How does the museum, then, function in literary texts? While texts interact with the museum as a concept in myriad ways, it is possible to draw a distinction between the two main ways that writers engage with the museum: the ‘literary museum’ and the ‘novel-as-museum’. Novels such as Orhan Pamuk’s *The Museum of Innocence* introduce characters who visit museums and interact with museum exhibits. The museums featured in the texts can be conceptualised as literary museums. Discussing characters’ visits to these museums allows authors to engage with the museum as an institution, critiquing its methods and the way in which it constructs narratives about the past. Literary museums have inspired a range of fictional treatments, and they are frequently imagined as surreal spaces. In Vladimir Nabokov’s short story ‘The Visit to the Museum’ (1963), for instance, the protagonist finds himself progressing through a

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maze of increasingly random and unreal objects; the narrator tells us that ‘the expanse and motley only gave me a feeling of oppressiveness and imprecision … I was impatient to leave the unnecessarily spreading museum’. The narrator’s experience of this museum as ‘oppressive’, in which he is constantly being bombarded with objects without the opportunity to reflect on their meanings or to study them at his leisure, can be seen as a critique of the ‘oppressive’ way traditional museums craft narratives about the past. However, as Alice Jedličková argues, the museum in Nabokov’s story could also be seen as a mirror of the human mind, its disorganised nature mirroring the processes of thought, which are not always strictly linear and organised. Nabokov’s story highlights the way literary museums can be used to explore questions of personal identity and agency, as well as critiquing the traditional role of the museum in society.

In addition to adopting the museum as a setting, authors also engage with the museum by explicitly modelling their texts on the strategies of display found in museums. Yin Xing dubs The Museum of Innocence ‘a novel as museum’ because of the way that Pamuk ‘archives’ and then presents items and documents relating to the history of Istanbul in the novel. A similar study has already been carried out by Kayla Krueger McKinney, who considers the way Victorian authors frequently mirrored the evolving institutions of the history and natural history museums as an ideological manoeuvre intended to highlight acceptable behaviour. In discussing Charles Dickens’ The Old Curiosity Shop (1841), for instance, she argues that the character of Little Nell is ‘displayed’ amidst the various items in the curiosity shop, becoming a museum-like object which symbolises innocence and purity. The idea of the novel-as-museum is also explored by Vivian Nun Halloran, whose work on postmodern Caribbean novelists focuses on the way that authors use in-text ‘displays’ of objects, documents, and images to highlight the ‘constructed, fragmented, and necessarily imperfect nature of our knowledge of the past’. The weaving of historical facts with tales about fictional characters allows readers to act as ‘witnesses to the past’, as in a real-life museum, but also to simultaneously remain aware of the endless process of construction and reconstruction that the writing of history involves.

Both Halloran and McKinney’s studies deal with the museum as a structure that influences the way that novels are read; however, the novels they consider are not explicitly set in or around museums—in other words, while they can be understood as novels-as-museums, they do not feature literary museums. Literary museums, and the novel-as-museum, when unified in one novel, allow for a consideration of both the thematic and the structural impact of museums on literary production. The Museum of

33 Halloran, p. 20.
Innocence, in combining literary museums with structural and literary techniques that are inspired by the museum, here becomes a model for exploring the ways in which contemporary authors interact with the museum in their novels.

Museum Manifestos: Pamuk’s Literary Museum

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, Füsun. When Füsun ends their relationship, the distraught Kemal spends several years collecting the objects Füsun 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’.34 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.35

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, 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’.36 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, epitomises this concern for the personal over the political. Motivated by love for Füsun, Kemal creates a literary museum which de-emphasises narratives of nation and modernisation, 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.37 As Stewart argues, ‘the souvenir moves history into private time’, and in The Museum of Innocence Pamuk emphasises this move from history into private time as a way of constructing

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35 Pamuk, The Innocence of Objects, p.55.
‘little narratives’. 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 Füsun 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 modernising policies, and the interrelated history of European influence on consumer behaviour 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. 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 Füsun 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’. 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 Füsun but in the way he reappropriates other items with potential historical significance. In one of the displays in both the fictional and the real-life Museum of Innocence, an ‘Anatomical Chart of Love Pains’ is used to illustrate Kemal’s visceral experience of the agonies of unrequited love:

This depiction of the internal organs of the human body is taken from an advertisement for Paradison, a painkiller on display in the window of every pharmacy in Istanbul at the time, and I use it here to illustrate to the museum visitor where the agony of love first appeared, where it became most pronounced, and how far it spread.

Pamuk hints, here, at the wider historical context which this object could be used to represent, before co-opting the anatomical chart as a way of illustrating his protagonist’s extreme state of mind. The tone of the display, despite its depiction of pain and unhappiness, is playful; there is an irony to reusing a poster originally advertising painkillers to depict the subjective experience of emotional agony. Unlike items such as the cigarette butts, which are objective trash converted by the lovelorn

38 Stewart, p.138.
Kemal into subjective treasure, the anatomical chart, like the Parisian perfume and designer European goods Kemal collects, could be seen as a genuine historical artefact. As such, the anatomical chart parodies traditional displays in institutions such as medical and natural history museums. Its historical significance is not lost on the reader; Pamuk introduces it as representative of the time period (‘on display … in Istanbul at the time’) but then de-emphasises this aspect of the object, instead overlaying it with a personal narrative. This act of reappropriation thus functions as a clear signal of Pamuk’s interest in displaying subjective experiences over nationalistic metanarratives in the literary museum.

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. As both Stewart and Pearce argue, 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’. 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’ as Aristotelian thinking suggests, time is in fact a spiral—a spiral which, in Kemal’s case, centres on a single point, his love for Füsun. 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 Füsun’s family, Kemal rejects the strict linearity of ‘official’ time—time which belongs to the state, and which is broadcast 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

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43 Interestingly, Duygu Tekgül points out in a discussion of the real-life Museum of Innocence in Istanbul that the arrangement of the cigarette butts—they are displayed pinned to a board and meticulously labelled and dated—parodies displays of insects such as butterflies in traditional natural history museums, revealing a common thread of postmodern irony and pastiche running through both the literary and the real-life museums (D. Tekgül, ‘Fact, fiction and value in the Museum of Innocence’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2016, p. 393. Available from: Sage Premier, [accessed 20 July 2016]).
45 Stewart, p. 135; Pearce, p. 72.
46 Pearce, p. 72.
48 This spiral pattern is prominent throughout the real-life Museum of Innocence; a mosaic on the floor of the entrance hall can be seen from all three floors of the building, and Pamuk writes in *The Innocence of Objects* that Kemal was ‘very excited to discover a similar kind of spiral pattern in Füsun’s earring displayed in the first box [in the Museum]’ (Pamuk, *The Innocence of Objects*, p. 253.). The spiral thus recurs throughout the novel’s various intertexts and becomes an important symbol of the Museum’s approach to time and memory.
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 Füsun’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 modernising nations progressing towards ever-more developed civilisation. The idea of time as a spiral, of the potential for the ‘messy and disordered’ domestic realm and ordinary lived experiences to disturb this strict notion of linearity, therefore disrupts the ‘official’ time of the museum and, consequently, the modernising 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 [sic] museums, formed from the heart’s compulsions, we are consoled … by losing all sense of Time’. 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 ‘civilisation’—and instead focuses on the importance of subjective experience, the sense that a visitor is experiencing ‘the heart’s compulsions’.

The Novel-As-Museum: Displacing Authenticity

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 Füsun, 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 novel itself is structured rather like a museum, with each chapter corresponding to a display-box in the literary Museum of Innocence. The chapters are numbered like museum displays. Chapters frequently either begin or end with Kemal describing an object on display in the literary museum, as he does with the ‘Anatomical Chart of Love Pains’, and then describing the memories that are attached to the object, turning Kemal into a kind of tour guide through the novel-as-museum itself. The importance of personal memory is emphasised, and even historical events

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50 Walsh, pp. 11-12.
51 Pamuk, *The Museum of Innocence*, pp. 712-713.
52 Pamuk, *The Museum of Innocence*, pp. 712-713.
are coloured by characters’ memories. The aftermath of Turkey’s 1980 military coup, for instance, is filtered through Kemal’s own experiences: travelling home one night, he is stopped by a military patrol and the quince grater he stole from Füsün’s house is confiscated, a loss which Kemal dwells on with much more intensity than the fact of the military takeover of the government.53 Pamuk ‘displays’ a domestic item—the grater—in the novel-as-museum, attaching to it the memory of both a personal experience (Kemal stealing it because it reminds him of Füsün making quince jelly) and a historical event (the military takeover). The depiction of political events in the novel-as-museum is coloured by personal experience; the subjective nature of their retelling illustrates the impossibility of ever truly reporting events in an unbiased way, given that all histories are constructed by human subjects. As Hutcheon notes, postmodern approaches to history do not deny that past events happened, only that their meaning is constructed in the present.54 In the same way, Pamuk does not entirely erase the historical context of his novel, but he does question who, if anybody, has the right to speak about it with authority by highlighting the way that individuals experience and narrate those events.

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.55 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.56 As Susan A. Crane notes in her discussion about the unsettling experience of visiting the Museum of Jurassic Technology,

Even those who are willing to conceive of history as a production … would be uncomfortable with the idea that history can be entirely made up, produced as a curiosity for a quasi museum [sic].57

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55 Pamuk, The Innocence of Objects, p. 11.
The Museum of Innocence likewise thrives on the challenging and disturbing idea that pseudohistories can be developed and displayed in the museum with such ease, upsetting society’s traditional understanding of the distinctions between ‘truth’ and ‘fiction’, ‘invention’ and ‘fact’. As Claire Robins notes in her discussion of the real-life Museum of Innocence, ‘Visiting a museum that commemorates the lives of people whose existence takes place solely in the pages of a novel guarantees that there is no ‘authentic’ content in the traditional sense’, with the consequent ontological confusion leading to an unsettling visitor experience. This effect is further enhanced by The Innocence of Objects, the museum’s catalogue, in which Pamuk frequently discusses the characters of the novel as if they were real. Similarly, Innocence of Memories, the semi-fictional documentary about the Museum of Innocence, is narrated by Ayla, a character from the novel, who discusses the events of the novel as if they truly happened. The numerous intertexts of the novel therefore enhance this unsettling sense of blurring between reality and fiction. The novel, too, draws attention to the displacement of authenticity, staging pseudohistory as genuine through its use of a seemingly realist style which frequently gives way to irony, parody, and metafiction, and resulting in a disturbing array of slippages between reality and fiction.

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 Füsun at the party. As Brian McHale notes, the intrusion of an author into their own story is a postmodern technique used to enhance the sense of ontological instability. For 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 of the 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

58 Claire Robins also provides a compelling analysis of Pamuk’s real-life Museum of Innocence, comparing it with an exhibition set up in Istanbul in 2005 entitled A Tribute to Safiye Behar, which told the story of a fictional Turkish feminist, again as if she were a real person (C. Robins, ‘After-Image: The museum seen through fiction’s lens’, Photographies, vol. 7, no. 2, 2014, pp. 158-160. Available from: Taylor & Francis, [accessed 23 July 2016]).
60 Innocence of Memories, dir. Grant Gee, Soda Pictures, 2015, [DVD].
63 Pamuk, The Museum of Innocence, p. 713.
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.\textsuperscript{64} 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.\textsuperscript{65} 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 note, 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.\textsuperscript{66} 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’.\textsuperscript{67} 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’.\textsuperscript{68} The metafictional aspects of the story thus introduce an element of uncertainty, forcing readers to question the interplay between truth and fiction within the text, and highlighting the at-times contradictory nature of the narrative.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Involved as Pamuk is in debates about the museum’s function and role in society, his novel demonstrates that however problematic the museum as an institution may be, museums in various forms remain necessary; not only so that we might explore the past (subjectively, confusingly, incompletely), but also so that we might recognise ourselves within the museum, and become aware of the way that we interact with the museum and its narratives. The novel’s critique of the artificial way that museum narratives are constructed emphasises the importance of ‘little histories’, including personal histories, which overlap and interact, but which never claim to present the totality of human experience or lay claim to any kind of ‘universal truth’. Despite its problematic tendency to universalising, the museum in Pamuk’s project reflects the function of the museum in contemporary society. It remains a vital force, and

\textsuperscript{64} Pamuk, \textit{The Museum of Innocence}, p. 707.
\textsuperscript{65} Xing, p. 204.
\textsuperscript{68} Pamuk, \textit{The Naive and the Sentimental Novelist}, p. 35.
continues to be an object of fascination and inspiration. Although its role in the twenty-first century has yet to be determined, novels that engage with the museum as a concept suggest a new future for this ancient institution: one that is as complicated and contradictory, as heterogenous and polyphonous, as the novels that take it as their inspiration.