

Research Paper

A FREUDIAN EXPLORATION OF ORHAN PAMUK'S *THE MUSEUM OF INNOCENCE*

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This paper attempted to inspect the complex depths of human mind as presented in Orhan Pamuk's *The Museum of Innocence*, despite being an apparent simple romance. It sought the help of some Freudian concepts and methods of psychoanalysis, for answering some significant questions the novel's reader may possibly encounter. The psychoanalytic perspective discovered how, in the novel, the protagonist's mind creates a world of its own, much different from the real world and how he can be happy forever, even though his life seems a failure.

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INTRODUCTION

In the latter half of the twentieth century there has been a revolutionary increase in the popularity of non-western, non-English literature. Poetry and fiction written from the so far unacknowledged parts of the world were emerging and acquiring worldwide acceptance. African literature, Latin American non-English fiction, and Turkish literature are examples. These literatures were widely translated into English after which they gained fame all around the world. Turkish writer, Orhan Pamuk is one such writer who got worldwide acceptance after his novels got translated into English and a lot of other languages.

Orhan Pamuk is one of Turkey's most prominent novelists, and author of the famous novels: *The White Castle*, *The Black Book*, *The New Life*, *My Name is Red*, *Snow* and *The Museum of Innocence*. *The Museum of Innocence* (2009) is a novel that continuously refers to the influence of the West (Europe and America) on Istanbul's culture, through both the idea of museums and the film industry, which becomes a large part of the novel. Being indeed an extraordinary romance which has a strong emotional appeal, Pamuk's craft in presenting each minute detail of the romantic narrative, his keen observation concerning love life and the slightest details

of mundane routines that remain unnoticed, and his gripping, systematic and poised style of narration adds to the realism of the novel. It overtly presents the clash between two cultures, the western and the orthodox Turkish. The discourse about the cultural backdrop of the setting synchronized in Kemal's narration with his romance puts forward a serious discussion on the merging of cultures.

The novel tells the story of Kemal and his lifelong love for Füsün, a girl with whom Kemal has a secret relationship in the beginning of the novel, which he considers the happiest time of his life. Füsün goes away and marries another man, for she finds Kemal not serious in taking a decision whether to marry her or Sibel, his fiancée. But Kemal later realizes that he cannot live without Füsün and he leaves Sibel. What follows is Kemal's long yet desperate struggle to marry Füsün. His most frequent visits for years to Füsün's house where she lives with her husband and her parents, just to see her and to be with her. Kemal had already developed a habit of taking consolation in things associated with Füsün when she is away (say, things she has touched, things in Merhamet apartment where they had made love). Thus in

every visit to Füsün's house he pilfers things that he see around as monuments of his moments with Füsün. Towards the end of the novel she leaves her husband and agrees to marry Kemal. But before their marriage, Füsün dies in a car accident. Kemal too is injured but recovers finally to make Füsün's house a museum showing hundreds of things he has collected including the red Chevrolet in which she died. The museum for Kemal is a monument of his love: The Museum of Innocence.

However at a deeper level we find the novel enfolding complex realms of human psyche. The objective of this paper is thus to inspect the psychoanalytical aspects of the novel and explore through the deep intricacies of human mind presented in profusion in every detail by Pamuk's narrative genius, to discover how his mind creates an imaginary world before the protagonist.

Freudian Exploration

Orhan Pamuk's *The Museum of Innocence*, though appears nothing more than a tragic romance, unfolds within it a realm of psychic complexities. Therefore, though covertly, the work demands a psychoanalytic reading. An exploration of the novel through the lens of Freudian concepts may give a new insight into our understanding of it.

Kemal, being the son of a rich businessman leads a sort of licentious life in the first phase of his life. He was educated in America and is familiar with the carefree nature of their culture. It is on account of this acquaintance that he is drawn by his own instincts to maintain a seemingly immoral relationship with Füsün, despite being engaged to Sibel.

At first he is never daunted by the consciousness of reality. Merhamet apartment where he meets Füsün itself appears as another world, totally aloof from reality. It appears to be a place that is totally alien from the real world. It is a place where only pleasure persists. Hence it is clearly representative of a zone in the protagonist's psyche which is very little disturbed by the external reality. It stands for a portion of the human mind which seeks pleasure and accepts pleasure alone. His mind remains calm and thoughtless throughout his first meetings with Füsün. Whenever there arises a question of what will happen next or what are the consequences of his action, his mind tries to get away from it and tries to forget everything relying deeply on pleasures. By diverting Füsün's attention whenever this question is posed by her, he is seen diverting himself from reality. There is a strong disapproval on the part of Kemal to acknowledge the seriousness of the reality around him. This forces us to think of Freud's concept of pleasure principle. Freud has explained:

We consider these to be the older, primary psychic processes, remnants of a phase of the development in which they were the only kind. The highest tendency obeyed by these primary processes is easy to identify, we call it the pleasure-unpleasure principle (or the pleasure principle for short). These processes strive to gain pleasure; our psychic activity draws back from any action that might arouse *unpleasure*. (The Penguin Freud Reader 415)

The pleasure principle is what controls Kemal in his actions, forbidding him from thinking reasonably, denying him the intellect to analyse the external reality and forcing him to believe that 'everything will continue forever as it is'. He goes on as if nothing unnatural is happening.

It is only when the engagement is at hand, that he gets a glimpse of the confrontation with reality. Füsün confesses her love for him and asks, "What's going to happen now?" (Pamuk 72) Kemal also understands that he too cannot part with her and senses the seriousness of the affair. But his response towards the question is an escape into their pleasures that in which he always takes refuge in. But eventually as the engagement gets closer and as Füsün implicitly demands him to choose between her and Sibel, he starts thinking over the matter. This, psychoanalytically, is the necessary interruption of the reality principle, as Freud calls it;

. . . the psychic apparatus had(s) to resolve to form an idea of the real circumstances in the outside world and to endeavour actually to change them. With this, a new principle of psychic activity was initiated; now ideas were formed no longer of what was pleasant, but of what was real, even if this happened to be unpleasant. This inception of reality principle proved to be a momentous step. (The Penguin Freud Reader 415)

But such an endeavour to change the circumstances using his reason fails in Kemal's case. He could well have evaluated the degree of passion and love he felt for Füsün, and could have decided earlier to break off with Sibel. But owing either to his cowardice to displease his family and to lose the family's honour, or to his failure to find out what his heart wants, Kemal fails to take a strong decision. A state of delirium that the pleasure principle forces him into also accounts for this state. As Kemal's narration says;

I sometimes caught myself thinking that I would be able to continue seeing Füsün after the engagement. This heaven, in which everything would go on as before, slowly evolved from a fantasy (let's call it a dream) into a reasonable

hypothesis. If she and I could be this passionate, this generous, making love, then she could not possibly leave me, or so I reckoned. In fact, this was my heart talking, not my reason. (Pamuk 100)

This is clearly a fantasy induced by the pleasure principle. And moving forward through Kemal's autobiographical narration, one sees more of such fantasizing. Looking at the novel as a whole, one understands that such fantasies are what later shape his life. Multiple hallucinations appear in Kemal's story. During his desperate wait for Füsün to come to Merhamet Apartments, such a fantasy that she will come is what helps him escape the agony of waiting. Imagining what he would do first when she comes and dividing the time into bundles are all part of the mind's aids in forcing him to believe that she will certainly come. On the other hand the same fantasy, combined with cowardice to reveal before others his love for Füsün, is what initially prevents him from going to her house to see her. Later on fantasies become an integral part of his thought processes with the evident manifestations of his taking consolation in objects and memories associated with these.

Freud discusses fantasizing in his formulations on the two principles of psyche:

A general tendency of our psychic apparatus, which can be traced back to the economic principle of conserving expenditure, seems to manifest itself in the tenacity with which we cling to existing sources of pleasure and the difficulty we have in giving these up. At the inception of the reality principle, one kind of thought activity split away, remaining exempt from reality-testing and continuing to obey only the pleasure principle. This is *fantasizing*, which begins with children's play, then later, as daydreaming, ceases to rely on actual objects. (The Penguin Freud Reader 416)

Kemal clings to the height of pleasure that he once experienced. And he is never willing to lose it. And as this becomes impossible according to the new circumstances, he starts entertaining fantasies or hallucinations which help partially to satisfy his desires. The objects in Merhamet apartments, since each one has either been touched by Füsün or, along with the impressions they made in Kemal's memory, have the potential to partly recreate the experiences, systematically with each of their contributions forming a new perception equivalent. This is a complex phenomenon which can be explained by the working of reality principle.

The increased significance of external reality

heightened in turn the significance of the sense organs directed towards that outside world, and also of the consciousness attached to these, which now learnt how to discern sensory qualities in addition to the qualities of periodically scanning the outside world in order to assimilate its data in advance, should an urgent inner need arise. This activity seeks out sensory impressions rather than waiting for them to occur. Probably at the same time, a system of retention was set up with the task of storing the result of this periodic activity of consciousness, an element of what we call memory. (The Penguin Freud reader 415)

This makes clear the process through which certain objects and scenes correspond to human experiences. Merhamet apartments, the bed, the whole lot of objects that surrounded it during the experiences that are so dear to him, thus are imprinted on his memory with a close association with the perceptions during those moments. This is why he is able to relive the experiences by caressing the objects. Parts of Kemal's memory, provided with the suitable objects that act as inductive symbols, recreate the perceptions and emotions ultimately to induce a psychological experience that gives a considerable satisfaction. It is presented almost like an invalid finding curative consolation in some therapeutic object:

Beside my head was the side table on which she had left her watch so carefully the first few times we made love. For a week, I had been aware that in the ashtray now resting there was the butt of a cigarette Füsün had stubbed out. At one moment I picked it up, breathing its scent of smoke and ash, and placing it between my lips. I was about to light it (imagining perhaps for a moment that by loving her so, I had become her), but I realized that if I did so there would be nothing left of the relic. Instead I picked it up and rubbed the end that had once touched her lips against my cheeks, my forehead, my neck, and the recesses under my eyes, sparkling with the promise of happiness, and scenes from heaven; I remembered the tenderness my mother had shown me as a child, . . . (Pamuk 156)

Kemal's conscious mind which is enlightened by this new awareness of the potential of certain objects, eventually develops in him a habit of picking up objects from surroundings in order to 're-experience' the occasion. This is a neurotic symptom which later expands to pilfering almost every object that is associated with Füsün; we hear of his huge collection of cigarettes that Füsün smoked for eight years (4,213 in number), china dogs in her parental home, and a whole variety of, what he thinks monumental objects. This act of collecting is driven by a fantasy that to possess those objects

associated with Füsün is to possess some elements of Füsün, i.e. the object of desire, herself. As Kemal's narrative puts it:

I may not have "won" the woman I loved so obsessively, but it cheered me to have broken off a piece of her, however small. (Pamuk 372)

This is a way to instantaneous wish fulfilment. In a normal individual this is objected by the influence of reality principle where the rationality dismisses the development of such thoughts.

According to Freud, the psychic functioning is similar to that of a metonymy. As in the dreams, an object is signified by a completely different object, which has very little connection to the former object.

The dream imagination *lacks a conceptual language*: what it has to say it has to paint visibly, and since it is not weakened by the presence of concepts, it paints it with all the richness and power of the thing seen. But clear though this language is, its visual nature also makes it rambling, awkward, clumsy. Its clarity is especially impeded because it is reluctant to express an object by its own image and prefers a *different image* as long as this is capable of expressing the aspect of the object the imagination wants to present. (Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* 71)

Mind in general, through fantasizing, creates such symbolization on the visible objects, a perfect presentation of which could be seen in the novel. Each of the objects in Kemal's collection is associated metonymically to Füsün. Some objects acquire such an association merely because they have once been touched or looked at by her. Furthermore, Kemal's psychic complexity leads him to adopting such a metonymy in everything that he sees- including, objects, places, and houses.

In Kemal's case the hold of the pleasure principle is so strong and in this respect he has fallen victim to a kind of neurosis. It is proven as Freud says in *The Interpretation of dreams*:

Every neurosis has as its result and, probably therefore as its purpose, a forcing of the patient out of the real life, an alienating of him from reality. (533-625).

Why Kemal becomes so attached towards Füsün? This is a question of great importance as far as the novel is concerned, for had he remained happy with his relationship with Sibel, the whole of his life would have been different. What makes Füsün special? The main difference between Füsün and Sibel is that they belong to different classes in the society. Sibel belongs to a rich family just as Kemal does. But Füsün belongs to a lower middle class family. This is one reason for Kemal's

attachment to Füsün, for we come to know that his father too had a similar relationship with a poor woman, which reveals a hereditary tendency to unite with the other half of the society. The second reason can be traced back from the goat sacrifice episode described when Kemal had met Füsün for the first time in their childhood. Freud in his book on the history of infantile neurosis argues that all neurosis can be traced back to the patient's childhood experiences. Though here Kemal describes this childhood experience ordinarily as if it has nothing special to do with his affection towards Füsün, as he says:

As I joined the crowd of relations, I forgot all about little Füsün. (Pamuk 42)

It is evident from his descriptions that he is struck by the little girl's innocence. This, perhaps, remained dormant in his unconscious psyche. A feeling of kinship which later got transformed into affection, once he met her again at the shop years later, and into love ever after.

Moreover, there seems to be a third reason too. For, the peculiarity of the relationship between Kemal and Füsün is that it is not acceptable to the society, or at least to the family as far as its honour is concerned. The relationship with Sibel is allowed by everyone and there is no possible obstacle to it. But this is not the case with Füsün. Initially the family's honour is sure to be lost would the society come to know of the relationship. So the satisfaction of the sexual desire is heightened because of the presence of this obstacle. This heightened expression of satisfaction is what we see in the episode which Kemal calls the happiest moment of his life, and is obviously the strongest force that draws Kemal's libidinal instincts towards Füsün for the rest of his life. Later, Füsün's reluctance to leave Feridun and accept him and his relentless waiting for her to change her mind accounts greatly for the intensification of the desire in Kemal. Freud's statement in *Contributions to The Psychology of Erotic Life* gives scientific base for this notion:

It is easy to establish that the psychological value of the need for love immediately declines once satisfaction becomes a matter of comfort. An obstacle is required if the libido is to be heightened, . . . (The Penguin Freud Reader 410)

After the engagement, when Füsün stops coming to Merhamet apartments, the reality that she would not come to Merhamet apartments anymore becomes unbearable for Kemal. Thus he turns away from reality, and as a result he loses his ability to think practically. It is only almost a month after the engagement that he goes to Füsün's house. And the same phenomenon compels him to hope that it is possible for him to forget her and lead a normal life. His neurosis becomes all the more complex when he starts mistaking others for Füsün.

Perhaps the presence of a bond with Sibel as his fiancée had also accounted for this, for once he breaks the engagement with her he appears to be thinking more practically and cleverly.

Such fantasizing about the object of desire, entertained continuously, only serves to strengthen the intensity of the desire, for it, as a matter of fact, serves rather as a means of repression of the persistent desire. Once he meets Füsün again and comes to know that she has married another man, rather than getting shocked by the awareness or trying to abandon the desire he had so far been entertaining, he allows the desire to have a partial fulfillment, through enjoying the vision of the object of desire, i.e. Füsün. It does not seem to matter for him whether she is married or unmarried instead he appears to be perfectly happy in being near to her. This is as a result of the hallucinatory world that his neurosis and the intoxication of *raki* (an intoxicating drink commonly used by Turkish people) together forms. The one year long period of waiting, along with the various fantasies has made the repression of his desire so powerful that it acquires a power to draw a veil over the external reality.

The continuing effects of auto-eroticism makes it possible for the easier, instantaneous satisfaction of fantasizing about the sexual object (or object of desire) to be retained for so long in place of real satisfaction, which involves making efforts and tolerating delays. Repression remains all powerful in the realm of fantasy. (The Penguin Freud reader 417)

From then on the desire is, in a way, taking satisfaction in being with Füsün. With the hope that she will leave Feridun and marry him, Kemal is perfectly happy to be with her in the evenings at her house.

During his dinners for eight years at Füsün's house, the different channels which his libidinal drives find satisfaction through are worth noting. Füsün's movements, her gestures, smiles, compassionate glances, sitting beside her with their bodies in touch (which, as he describes, gave him a height of pleasure so that he was about to faint), everything appears to be giving Kemal a high degree of satisfaction. This can be explained by what Freud calls the sublimation of libidinal drives. According to this the primal sexual drive is a compound of different partial drives. Thus it is possible for the partial drives to merge together so as to derive a satisfaction even when there is no circumstance for the actual or complete satisfaction of the primal libido. This is a phenomenon made possible by the repressive mechanism that facilitates alteration and displacement of drives. Freud explains sublimation as follows:

What was called the sexual drive was a compound of many things, and could break down again into its partial drives. Each partial drive was unalterably characterized by its source, namely the region or zone in the body from

which it drew its excitation. Apart from that a goal could be distinguished in it. The goal was always the discharge of satisfaction, but it could undergo a transformation from activity to passivity. The object was less firmly attached to the drive than one might at first have imagined; it was easily exchanged for another The individual drives could remain independent of one another or in a way that is still impossible to imagine-combine with one another, merge in order to work together. They could also support one another, transfer their libido investment to one another, so that the greatest significance seemed to be the drive-fate of sublimation, in which object and goal were switched, so that the originally sexual drive now finds satisfaction in an accomplishment that is no longer sexual, but socially or ethically more highly valued. (The Penguin Freud Reader 128)

The same sublimation can be observed towards the end of Kemal's life. Having left alone by Füsün's death, Kemal strives to find out a meaning for his life. Having spent most of his life thinking of Füsün and waiting for the union with her, he now comes to terms with the reality, to acknowledge his odd behaviour. Since Füsün is physically no more, it is absurd to continue his old fantasies of thinking of her. Thus in his attempt to give his life a purpose he turns towards reflecting on the greatness of his love for her. To exhibit this greatness to the world, he finds the construction of a museum as the perfect means. Thus the libido here undergoes a transformation so that even though the object of desire is no more, it is sublimated to the accomplishment of a non-sexual, socially and ethically more valuable act of monumentalizing Kemal's love-life.

The concept of fetishism is another that explains Kemal's behaviour. Fetishism is the substitution of the sexual object by some body part, inappropriate for sexual purposes or an inanimate object which bears an assignable relation to the sexual object. Jonathan Lear, a professor of University of Chicago explains Freud's view on 'fetish' in his book *Freud*:

We tend to 'overvalue' those we are attracted to: we tend to think our lovers are prettier, smarter, wittier than they in fact are. And this overvaluing extends to things associated with them: we may become fascinated with the way they dress, the way they cut their hair and so on. (Lear 76)

Fetishism, say in lovers' case, has a stage where the fetish detaches itself from the person (lover) and becomes the sole sexual object. As Lear quotes Freud:

The situation only becomes pathological when the longing for the fetish passes beyond the point of being merely a necessary condition

attached to the sexual object, and actually takes the place of the normal sexual aim, and further, when the fetish becomes detached from a particular individual and becomes the sole sexual object. These are, indeed, the conditions under which mere variations of the sexual drive pass over into pathological aberrations. (Lear 127)

Hence in Kemal we see the obsession for the objects and memories associated with Füsün becoming a fetish for him. This is why even though Füsün is no more; the obsession towards the objects persists. This is why he remains happy throughout his life even after Füsün's death. The construction of a museum with those objects, therefore, not only becomes a fruit of the fetish but something that relieves his troubled conscious mind by giving a meaning to his life.

For Kemal, Füsün has never been a physical reality but a complex psychological figure constituted by a multitude of connected images or rather an imagery where objects, scenes, scents, sounds, and tactile experiences converge, and by a wide array of perceptual elements (emotions, feelings). Such a Füsün lasts as long as Kemal's psyche exists. Such a Füsün should be better sought inside Kemal's museum than in the actual individual, Füsün. Through the museum such a Füsün tends to be immortalized rather than being an illusory reality within Kemal's psyche. Earlier he was in need of the real Füsün to perfectly connect with the psychological figure of Füsün and he could remain happy in that as his words express:

Happiness means being close to the one you love, that's all. (Pamuk 256)

But now that the real Füsün is no more he is able to have a direct connection with the other.

For an external eye Kemal's story is a tragic romance where the protagonist's whole life is apparently spoiled by his obsessive love. But a reader who identifies with Kemal can easily understand that Kemal emerges triumphant towards the end of his life. His last words to the reader is,

"Let everyone know, I lived a very happy life". (Pamuk 532)

Even though Kemal's apparent life goal of living long a happy married life with Füsün was never attained in reality, it came true in the imaginative or psychological realm as he continues to live in the museum of innocence with the complex Füsün figure ever-present in his psyche. Hence the neurosis ultimately leads him to the awareness that wish fulfilment need not necessarily occur in actuality or in the material realm in order to get the

satisfaction. It is possible that a certain psychological illusion fulfils a desire, and that one remains happy attaining wish fulfilment in the imaginative realm. Like Jonathan Lear mentions, neurosis leads him positively to spiritual realms of thought.

One can get good at being neurotic, that is, one can develop a skill, mastery or even creativity in being neurotic. It becomes difficult to recognize a structure of repetition precisely because there are so many variations on a theme, such people seem to display an ironic excellence, or virtue, in being neurotic. (152)

On the other hand, if we consider the conclusion of Kemal to be yet another fantasy the theory that fantasizing is a mode of repression fails to hold. And at the eve of his life Kemal evidently has no particular wish to be fulfilled so that the argument that he is fantasizing proves itself to be inappropriate (a fantasy as a partial wish fulfilment). Moreover, Kemal's statement sounds more like an assertion than a word of consolation. So it is more than a mere fantasy. But then, why Kemal, looking back, feels that he had lived a very happy life is a mystery. Here as Freudian thoughts of libido and wish fulfilment find its limitations failing to explain how complete satisfaction became possible without the actual fulfilment of the wish.

CONCLUSION

The novel is a perfect example of how one's unconscious mind manipulates the destiny of his life. The pleasure principle and the constituent libidinal instincts, which continuously seek fulfilment, together form a composite to make the psyche a complex realm. The hurdles before the protagonist which deny the easy fulfilment of his libidinal instincts lead his mind to fantasizing. Fantasies create before him a pseudo-reality so that the world and its constituents become metonymic in nature. Kemal's libido gradually undergoes sublimation and frees itself from the actual object of desire – Füsün - and concentrates on the fetish, that is the set of objects associated with her. The process of sublimation completes with the positive culmination, the construction of the Museum of Innocence.

The protagonist's mind constructs a fantastic world before him through complex signification, so that his version of the world becomes much different from the real world. This imaginary world is what helps him emerge happy towards the end. Because it is a world of signification, it has little connection with the physical reality. Kemal's version of Füsün 'lives' in his museum as long as his mind exists. This is why he emerges happy and victorious.

Provided with this example, one is forced to contemplate on the constructs of human mind by which world becomes different for every individual. Hence the text becomes significantly thought provoking.

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