

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53032/tcl.2017.2.5.77>***Amor do passado as an artifact: A blend of Ekphrasis in Orhan Pamuk's *The Museum of Innocence******Muralidharan Anjali**Pandalam, Pathanamthitta
Kerala, India**Abstract**

Ekphrasis has been a popular topic in recent years among scholars of both classical and later literature. The latter have been particularly interested in the modern definition of ekphrasis as a description of artwork and the development of global definitions and theories. By citing Pandora stories from the works of Hesiod, we can illustrate the nature and character of ancient ekphrasis in ways that call into question modern theories and demonstrate the vibrancy and complexity of modern literature. Orhan Pamuk knows all the tricks of the European modern and post modern age. He is both a best-selling author and an avant-garde writer who has the ability to see into the soul of everyday objects. The Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk encapsulates his novel *The Museum of Innocence* (2008) in the frame work of ekphrasis where he brings a Museum into reality after publishing his novel. The meaning of the title *Amor do passado* suggests past love. In this novel, "collecting" is a central trope, in which not only the protagonist Kemal is collecting the objects for cherishing his memories for his lady love, the author Pamuk himself is in search of the objects that gets readily fixed into his own which later formed the foundation for the novel.

Keywords- *Ekphrasis, Collection, Artifact, Mythology*

Pandora's Box is an artifact in Greek mythology taken from the fairy tale of Pandora's creation. The story of Pandora's myth in the work *Works and Days* by Hesoid best illustrates the nature of ekphrasis:

Only Hope was left within her unbreakable house, she remained under the lip of the jar, and did not fly away. Before [she could], Pandora replaced the lid of the jar. [Hesoid, *Works and Days*, 96-9]

Ekphrasis, after all, is a literary representation of art or artifact. It is a technique which begins with the Homeric description of Achilles' shield in Book Eighteen of the *Iliad* and continues thereafter as a convention of poetry, especially of epic poetry. Ekphrastic language

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is extremely detailed and hyper-expressive; it is so visual in nature that ekphrastic passages seem like images within a text rather than verbal compositions.

Murray Krieger begins his book with, as an epigraph, a statement by Leo Spitzer about Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn*:

It is first of all a description of an urn—that is, it belongs to the genre, known to Occidental literature from Homer and Theocritus to the Parnassians and Rilke, of the *ekphrasis*, the poetic description of a pictorial or sculptural work of art, which description implies, in the words of Théophile Gautier, “une transposition d’art,” the reproduction, through the medium of words, of sensuously perceptible *objets d’art* (“*ut pictura poesis*”).

James A.W. Heffernan, in his book *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, goes even further. He discusses the shortcomings of earlier definitions, specifically arguing, for example, that Krieger's view of ekphrasis is far too broad. He himself offers that “ekphrasis is the verbal representation of visual representation.” Most importantly, he argues that the technique as a genre is gendered—that it is, in fact, feminine; for him, “...ekphrasis is dynamic and obstetric; it typically delivers from the pregnant moment of visual art its embryonic narrative impulse, and thus makes explicit the story that visual art tells only by implication.”

Like Hesiod, many authors before and since have been concerned with portraying how a myth, pictorial or sculptural works forms the basis of their literary work. The Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk encapsulates his novel *The Museum of Innocence* (2008) in the frame work of ekphrasis where he brings a museum into a reality concept after publishing his novel. Literature can thus play an important role in transmitting narratives of the past, and also in challenging them; rather than attempting to present objective views of the past, it can draw upon personal memories to offer a subjective and selective narrative.

In *The Museum of Innocence* (2008), his first novel since winning the Nobel Prize, Orhan Pamuk strolls into this minefield with serene confidence, his own enterprise courting the same unease as that of his protagonist, Kemal Basmaci. Kemal, a wealthy Istanbul playboy, spends a decade swarming round his gorgeous young cousin and then, after certain tragic events, devotes the rest of his life to creating a museum in her memory, stocking it with nutcrackers, china dogs, 4,213 cigarette stubs and various other trifles recovered from their moments together.

One of the trickier subjects in fiction is that of the unfortunate suitor, smitten with love, locked in a lifelong obsession with a woman he can neither leave nor have. Yet, for all the pitfalls of that soupy scenario, great literature has come of it. Scott Fitzgerald wrote memorably of just such a man in *The Great Gatsby*; Mario Vargas Llosa in *The Bad Girl*;

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Gabriel García Márquez in *Love in the Time of Cholera* and William Styron in *Sophie's Choice*.

Although the events of the novel in *The Museum of Innocence* (2008) begin in 1975, its flashbacks and memories make it possible for the reader to trace life in Istanbul as far back as 1950. *The Museum of Innocence* is both a novel and a museum. The book was published in 2008; and Pamuk's museum opened in the spring of 2012. The book is set in Istanbul between 1975 and the present day, is the love story of Kemal, the son of a rich family, and his distant relative Füsun. The novel explores issues of East and West, sexuality, love and life through the juxtaposition of the protagonist from a modern family and a girl from a conservative environment.

The Museum of Innocence (2008) employs a broad spectrum of aesthetic techniques. By apprehending to the personal memories and the love for Füsun the protagonist, Kemal collects seemingly random everyday objects from Füsun's home and at the end of the novel turns them into a museum. In other terms, perhaps for the first time in the history of museology, a literary work has been derived from a museum collection. Kemal emerges from this book as a worthy heir of the colossi of shattered love, with the rudiments of Bluebeard, Miss Havisham, Humbert Humbert, even Citizen Kane in his make-up.

Having first gathered the objects, Pamuk then fitted them into the framework of a piece of literary fiction, and finally exhibited them in a real museum. The result is an archaeological narrative: in objects, images, and sounds--of fifty years of everyday life in Istanbul. The novel paved way for the verbal representation of a museum in the form a literary text and this explicitly throws light upon the basis for ekphrasis which defines the notion of verbal representation of a visual art.

For eight years, Kemal steals objects from Füsun's home and replaces them with new ones, and once the new objects are filled with memories, he steals them again. Filling his house with these items, he relives the moments that gave him joy, sadness or shame (Ertuna, 108). Thus begins what would become the Museum of Innocence.

It was knowing that all these things, saturated with memories of people who had once walked the streets of Istanbul, and lived in its houses, and were now mostly dead, would eventually disappear without ever having been brought together in a museum, or sorted, or set within a frame. [Orhan Pamuk, *The Museum of Innocence* (2008)]

Kemal begins by acquiring as many objects that are perpetuated with Füsun's memory, such as cups, cigarette butts, china dogs, hair clips and a quince. He stores his artifacts in the Mehmet Apartments, a flat that is owned by his family, a well-guarded place where he can create his own personal archive, driven by the desire to capture a sense of Füsun. The objects

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he collects also function as concentrated reminders of the lost world of Istanbul circa 1970, as “vessels of a lost past:”

These postcards of the Istanbul Hilton were acquired some twenty years after the events I describe; I picked up some of them while strolling through small museums and flea markets in this city and elsewhere in Europe [...] I was reminded not just of the evening of my engagement party, but of my entire childhood. (Pamuk, *The Museum of Innocence* 103)

For all of its many layers, however, this is a book wholly centered on love. Like Kemal's instinct to embezzle Füsün's trifles, the human impulse is to grasp at love, as if it could be a concrete thing held by fingers. As Nietzsche once said, "There's always a drop of madness in any love, but there's also a drop of reason in any madness." Kemal's love drives him to acts of momentary ludicrousness, but it is on that tiny plunder that his very sanity depends.

Orhan Pamuk's choice of names is also interesting, in the etymological sense the name Kemal comes from the Arabic word 'kamal' which means 'perfection' and the meaning of the name Füsün is 'enchantment.' Kemal's collection of objects is a thought that occurred out of his passion towards Füsün. He intends to control his thoughts about her via the creation of a perfect enchanted museum where he can always cherish the memories of his beloved lady love. It can transcend the time and can live for ages in the same way as Pamuk had created a museum and redirected it towards the conception of a literary work.

Kemal is recollecting the novel's events as the custodian of a museum devoted to embalming his lust. His memoir acts both as an explanatory account of the museum's evolution and as a catalogue of its holdings. He pilfers whatever he can during his encounters with Füsün; the memorabilia at the Museum of Innocence include earrings, ticket stubs and olive pits, as well as 4,213 cigarette butts. *The Museum of Innocence* (2008) works better as a fictional counterpart to Pamuk's recent memoir, *Istanbul: Memories of a City*, than as a pretender to Nabokov or a follow-up to *Snow*.

Pamuk extends a scrambled relationship between Turkey and the West. He conforms to the ideals of Istanbul (East) as shared melancholy, possessing the hues of black-and-white images of crumbling buildings and phantom minarets, as a city of maze-like streets seen from high windows and balconies, and also as a place of first loves and last rites. Pamuk is often seen as a mediator between East and West, by putting the Western ideals of the characters in this novel within the framework of the historical place of Istanbul (East).

Pamuk states that individual histories lend themselves much better to portraying the depths of our humanity and this seems to be Kemal's aim as well. Although he uses the same techniques as “state-museums,” his content and form are different. *The Museum of Innocence* (2008) is a fiction of meta-memory; it combines personally engaged memories with critically contemplative perspectives on the functioning of memory. By mimicking a real museum

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Kemal gives new meanings to the objects, resulting in the loss of the original aura and the construction of a mere fantasy world.

In literature, memory, its workings, contents and fragility are coded into an aesthetic form (Erll, 2). In case of *The Museum of Innocence* (2008) the aesthetic form at hand is the museum in which the narrator becomes the curator of memory. In this novel, “collecting” is a central trope, in which not only the protagonist Kemal is collecting the objects of his past love (Amor do passado), but the author himself is in search of the objects that gets readily fixed into his own which later formed the foundation for the novel. ‘Collecting’ is seen as a common core of both the protagonist as well as the author himself.

The Museum of Innocence (2008) critically evaluates the institutionalized museums by offering more personal museums concerned with minor histories. In creating a museum-like novel, or a novel as museum, this fiction of meta-memory explore and expose the limitations and possibilities of each form and presents a new combined form. As a result, it becomes clear that neither mediated artifact nor text can offer us a complete narrative, but that each form can work to support and complement each other to form a complete art.

Ekphrastic language is hyper-expressive; it is so visual in nature that ekphrastic passages seem like images within a text rather than verbal compositions. In the course of the use of language, the text reveals the system of museum, as well as the system of personal archives. Through experimenting with a new form, the novel as museum, the texts offers an experiential retracing of memory and history, which allows for a transformation of our perception of the novel as well as the museum.

Appropriately the book ends with the pain of self-examination and a new creation. The madness of Kemal’s love had led him to create a museum of innocence which symbolizes universal love and a visual representation of art. Simultaneously, the author has derived a literary work from a museum collection. Thus it throws light upon the idea of ekphrasis which is a work of art about another work of art in different medium and most probably it’s also a memory collection tale. And so for the length of a novel there occurs a transcendent blending between what Pamuk apparently sees as the too inner-directed West and the too outer-directed Middle East. For an instant, the twain meets.

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