

**“Innocent Objects:” Fetishism and Melancholia  
in Orhan Pamuk’s *The Museum of Innocence***

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*In this article, I place Orhan Pamuk’s novel The Museum of Innocence into dialogue with Sigmund Freud’s theory of the fetish. As Gerhard Neumann argues, the fetish provides the basic pattern for the modern subject and its experience of self and the world while performing the impossibility of narrating this experience. In a similar vein, the fetishized objects described in the novel and put on display in Pamuk’s actual museum in Istanbul complicate the narrator’s account of a lost love relationship. The fetish objects create an intertwinement of coalescing and contradicting narratives that point to “black melancholia” as a deeply ambiguous feeling in the collective memory of Istanbul and its people.*

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“This is what I observed while traveling the world,” Orhan Pamuk writes toward the end of his novel *The Museum of Innocence*: “There are two types of collectors: 1. The proud Ones, those pleased to show their collections to the world (they predominate in the West). 2. The Bashful Ones, who hide away all they have accumulated (an unmodern disposition)” (503). The proud Ones, he continues, regard the museum as “a natural ultimate destination for their collections,” the bashful Ones collect purely for the sake of collecting and their collections “point not to a bit of useful information but rather to a wound the bashful collector bares” (504). At the end of the novel the reader will have no difficulties in placing its narrator into the second category. After all, Kemal starts his collection of objects that formerly belonged to his distant cousin Füsün, with whom he has had a brief yet passionate love affair, not as a “reputable act that contributes to learning or knowledge” (Ibid.). He is rather continuously driven by

the search for an answer, a consolation, even a “palliative for a pain,” or “simply a dark compulsion” (Ibid.). Looking for comfort, Kemal obsessively amasses objects that evoke his relationship with Füsün in 1970s Istanbul. By doing so, *The Museum of Innocence* not only describes her personal possessions, but also creates a monument for Istanbul’s society at a specific historic time. Through the particular historical moment in which the novel is situated—the transition of Istanbul’s society after more than six centuries of the Ottoman Empire into modernity, with its increasing European influence and the rise of the Turkish bourgeoisie—its protagonists find themselves in a situation of exacerbated ambiguity that pervades their lives. They constantly try to reconcile and negotiate traditions and moral values with the increasing Westernization of their society while mourning the loss of the Ottoman Empire and the vibrant role Istanbul played within its history. While this conflict is openly debated and reflected upon by Kemal’s friends and family at many times throughout the narrative, it is also expressed through the main protagonist’s increasing obsession with Füsün’s belongings, which resembles the symptoms of Sigmund Freud’s notion of the fetish.

By applying Freud’s theory to Pamuk’s novel, this article will illustrate how the semiotic structure of the fetish embodies ambiguous narratives, which lends itself to representing accounts that elude the very possibility of univocal story telling. The fetish objects in *The Museum of Innocence* encapsulate experiences of loss and the melancholic mourning over this loss while containing the ambiguity that registers the individual’s experience of alienation within a rapidly changing society. They create a network of meta-narratives that complicate the protagonists’ account of their reality. The object-relations in the novel incorporate the tensions between tradition and modernity, as well as between different genders and classes, pointing both to the difficulties of narrating one’s experience of life and love in general, and to the alienation through the encounter with the “Other” in modernity in particular. In his article on fetishization and ambivalence of semiotic and narrative structures (“Fetischisierung: Zur Ambivalenz semiotischer und narrativer Strukturen”) Gerhard Neumann argues

that this ambiguity—according to Freud’s theory inherent in the castration anxiety as the origin of the fetish—reflects on a structural level the experience of the modern subject, which is estranged from itself, as well as from the world and the objects surrounding the self (62). Like the novel’s protagonists, who are torn between the values and traditions of the Ottoman Empire and the modernity of the Western world, the fetish emerges between the denial and the acknowledgment of the castration anxiety and oscillates between these two contrary points. The fetish objects in the novel—above all Füsün’s earring and the network of coalescing and contradicting narratives it creates and incorporates—both point to and cover up the wound of the protagonists’ psychological trauma, and become the site where their melancholic mourning is performed and exacerbated at the same time. This melancholic “illness,” however, is a cultural phenomenon, which Pamuk describes in his book *Istanbul* as the collective melancholia—*hüzün*—of a society with a deeply “ambiguous way of looking at life” (91). In 2012 Pamuk opened up a museum in Istanbul displaying the very artifacts he meticulously describes in the novel, and hence extending their reach beyond the fictitious account. The meta-narrative structure of the fetish objects hence produces inter-textual references, which present the mourning over one’s loss and the melancholic response as an inherently ambiguous feeling, and bear witness to the wounds of their “bashful” collectors.

Kemal, a young and wealthy businessman from a prestigious family in Istanbul, is on the verge of getting married to his fiancée Sibel, a beautiful and educated young woman from a rich family and “the perfect match according to everyone,” when he finds himself obsessively falling for his distant cousin Füsün, a “sales girl” from the lower class (*Museum of Innocence* 4). Although Kemal manages to hide the brief love affair from his fiancée, he cannot disguise his incurable melancholia after Füsün ends the affair. Due to this “illness” Kemal loses not only all interest in life, work, and his friends, but eventually also Sibel, who breaks off the engagement after his confession and her realization that he will not be able to forget Füsün. Consumed by his obsession, Kemal starts to visit Füsün and her husband, whom her family has chosen for her, and begins to steal

objects from her. In the following eight years—until Füsün's suicide—, he secretly collects mundane objects like matches, cigarette butts and hairpins. At the end of the novel, thirty years after Füsün's death, Kemal announces his plans to display these items in a museum to the narrator, who turns out to be Pamuk himself. Today, visitors can encounter Füsün's belongings—and other fictional objects described in the novel—in a museum in Istanbul, and in the accompanying catalogue, "The Innocence of Objects."

Can Kemal's obsession with Füsün's objects be classified as fetishism? In "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" ("Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie") Freud describes fetishism as a phenomenon in which the normal sexual object is replaced by a different object that is connected to its origin, yet is fully capable of serving as a sexual object. There is no doubt that Kemal's fixation with the objects that formerly belonged to Füsün—a glass paperweight, hair pins, a ruler, are only some of the many examples of his collection—are of sexual nature:

Eighteen minutes later I was in the Merhamet Apartments, lying on our bed, finding such relief as I could from the new objects recovered from the empty apartment. Sure enough, these things that Füsün had touched, these objects that had made her who she was—as I caressed them, and gazed at them, and stroked them against my shoulders, my bare chest, and my abdomen—released their analgesic and soothed my soul. (*The Museum of Innocence* 185)

Mundane objects are bestowed with value through their connection with Füsün and temporarily serve as a remedy for Kemal's pain over the loss of their love affair. The objects become increasingly important during the time when Füsün is not available to him. The artifacts thus indeed serve as a substitute for his primary object of desire—Füsün. However, the things never replace Füsün to the point where Kemal prefers the relationship to them to the actual sexual encounter with her. Following Freud's logic his fetishism is therefore not necessarily of pathological nature:

A certain degree of fetishism is thus habitually present in normal love, especially in those stages of it in which the normal sexual aim seems unattainable or its fulfillment prevented ... The situation only becomes pathological when the longing for the fetish ... actually *takes the place* of the normal aim, and, further, when the fetish becomes detached from a particular individual and becomes the *sole* sexual object. ("Three Essays" 154)<sup>1</sup>

Kemal's obsession with the objects reminiscent of Füsün remains inseparably linked to his desire for Füsün and her belongings seem to serve mostly as objects of desire during her absence. Yet, Kemal's relationship with Füsün's things is not only a source of pleasure and a brief alleviation of his pain, but also aggravates the pain he feels after the break-up:

On the one hand, I had a longing for any object that reminded me of Füsün; on the other hand, even as my pain abated under therapy, I longed to run away from this house and these objects that had both healed me and reminded me of my affliction, holding out the ever elusive hope that I was beginning to recover. (*Museum of Innocence* 163)

The fetish objects cause antagonistic feelings in him and are as much the source as the remedy of Kemal's "illness." This ambiguity attached to the artifacts determines the narrative from the beginning and creates confusion for the protagonists as well as for the reader. The novel opens with the description of Kemal and Füsün making love a month after they first met—a moment Kemal later describes as the "happiest moment in his life" (3). After this sexual encounter, Füsün notices that she has lost her earring during the act:

When we met the next day, Füsün told me she had lost one of her earrings. Actually, not long after she had left the preceding afternoon, I'd spotted it nestled in the blue sheets, her initial dangling at its tip, and I was about to put it aside when, by a strange compulsion, I slipped it into my pocket. So now I said, "I have it here, darling," as I reached into the right-hand pocket of my jacket hanging on the back of a chair. "Oh it's gone!" For a moment, I glimpsed a bad omen, a hint of malign fate, but then I

remembered that I'd put on a different jacket that morning, because of the warm weather. "It must be in the pocket of my other jacket." (*The Museum of Innocence* 4)

However, Kemal cannot find her lost earring in his pocket, and the object remains lost, much to Füsün's chagrin, for many months. It finally appears in a jewelry box of Kemal's mother, where the housekeeper finds it after the death of Kemal's father together with an old photograph of the young girl with whom the latter had an affair many years ago. The earring's evasiveness and the strange powers it seems to possess conjure up a "hint of malign fate," which at the end of the novel proves to be fulfilled. Kemal decides to take the discovery—as well as the strange coincidence that the girl reminds him of Füsün—as a sign to contact Füsün through a friend. This time she agrees to invite Kemal for dinner. During this visit, Kemal leaves the earring in the bathroom next to the mirror for her to find it there later. However, when Kemal interrogates her about the earring, Füsün insists that she has never found it in the bathroom and accuses Kemal of lying to her—only to wear it eight years later on the night of their sexual reunion after her divorce from Feridun.

The following brief conversation between Füsün and Kemal are the last words they exchange the next morning in the car before she intentionally drives the vehicle against a tree at full speed and instantly dies at the site of the accident:

"You didn't even notice the earring," she said.

"What earring?"

She'd started the car up again, and we lurched forward.

"Not so fast!" I said. "What earring?"

"The one on my ear..." she moaned, like someone just coming out of anesthesia.

Dangling from her right ear was her lost earring. Had she been wearing it while we were making love? Could I have missed such a thing?

(*The Museum of Innocence* 363)

The tragic “hint of malign fate” Kemal felt when he noticed the earring was not in his pocket thus proves to be true at the end of the narrative, and the earring becomes the first object in Kemal’s collection of fetish artifacts connected to Füsün. Both the museum in Istanbul and its accompanying catalogue “The Innocence of Objects” display only one earring and the whereabouts of its counterpart remains obscure beyond Füsün’s death, despite Kemal’s attempts to clarify the situation in a conversation with her mother:

“Aunt Nesibe, years ago I told you that I’d left one of these earrings by the mirror in the bathroom, the very first time I visited this house. I even asked you, ‘Have you seen them?’”

“I have no idea my son. Don’t delve into these things and make me cry. I remember that she wanted to surprise you by putting on a certain pair of earrings in Paris — she had said something like that, but I never knew what earrings she meant.” (*Museum of Innocence* 495)

Throughout the novel it remains unclear whether or not Füsün has ever found the earring, or if her mother has taken the *corpus delicti* that discloses the fact that her daughter was sexually active before her marriage. The ambiguous structure of the earring displays the attempt to reconcile two antagonistic claims that are mutually exclusive. Füsün refuses to acknowledge the circumstances of the loss and return of the piece of jewelry, since the loss of her virginity before marriage— at first a source of pride for her and her “Western” and “modern” beliefs—soon turn out to be the cause for humiliation, social disgrace, and a loveless traditionally “arranged marriage.” On the one hand, Füsün regards herself, and her westernized friends and family regard her, as a “modern woman” who can separate sex and love, and who wants to experience sexual activities before and outside of marriage. On the other hand, she soon comes to regret her naiveté to the point where she refuses to acknowledge having ever slept with Kemal. Kemal, however, fails to integrate the affair into his life as a striving business man and spirals deeper into a melancholic depression, in which he finds himself incapable of performing his societal role both within Istanbul’s professional world and the private realm of his engagement. At the same time he insists on his

commitment toward his fiancé and constantly reiterates his love and deep emotional devotion to her and their future life, despite his mourning over the loss of his affair with Füsün. The ambiguity of coalescing and contradicting narratives as represented in the earring is sustained beyond the fictionality of the novel: the museum in Istanbul only displays one earring in its collection.

The protagonists' mechanisms of denial and acknowledgment captured in the materiality of the earring mirror the fundamental structure of the fetish as a theory of signs. In his essay on fetishism, Freud asks why the fetish determines the sexual object-choice of some people. For Freud, the fetish is a penis-substitute, or more precisely a substitute for the mother's phallus, which the little boy once believed in and does not wish to forego: "[T]he fetish is a substitute for the woman's (the mother's) penis that the little boy once believed in and—for reasons familiar to us—does not want to give up" (152-53).<sup>2</sup> According to this phallogocentric logic, the boy refuses to accept the fact that the woman has no penis:

What happened, therefore, was that the little boy refused to take cognizance of the fact of his having perceived that a woman does not possess a penis. No, that could not be true: for if a woman had been castrated, then his own possession of a penis was in danger; and against that there rose in rebellion the portion of his narcissism which Nature has, as a precaution, attached to that particular organ. ("Fetishism" 153)<sup>3</sup>

A process of denial of the perception of loss is inscribed into the psychosexual development of the male child. There is a conflict between an unwelcome perception and the opposite wish. The fetish thus serves to restore the mother's imaginary phallus. However, this process requires a substantial denial of perception, which is subsequently reflected in the treatment of the fetish and determines the relationship between fetish object and self:

Affection and hostility in the treatment of the fetish—which run parallel with the disavowal and the acknowledgment of castration—are mixed in unequal proportions in different cases, so that the one or the other is more clearly recognizable ... His action contains in itself the two mutually



incompatible assertions: 'the woman has still got a penis' and 'my father has castrated the woman.' ("Fetishism" 157)<sup>4</sup>

In Freud's theory, the fetish is thus an inherently ambiguous sign, which both denies and bears witness to the threat of castration to different degrees: "In very subtle instances both the disavowal and the affirmation of the castration have found their way into the construction of the fetish itself" (156).<sup>5</sup> The shock of castration as the experience of crises within the socialization of the infant compels the paradoxical unity of denial and acknowledgment of its reality perception, and the fetish serves as a "screen memory" that covers up the allegedly mutilated female genital and its traumatizing effect:

One would expect that the organs or objects chosen as substitutes for the absent female phallus would be such as appear as symbols of the penis in other connections as well. This may happen often enough, but is certainly not a deciding factor. It seems rather that when the fetish is instituted some process occurs which reminds one of the stopping of memory in traumatic amnesia. (155)<sup>6</sup>

The price for this coping mechanism, however, is the denial of reality, which is inevitably linked to the formation of fetishism: "Thus a piece of reality which was undoubtedly important had been disavowed by the ego, just as the unwelcome fact of women's castration is disavowed in fetishists" (156).<sup>7</sup>

As a deeply paradoxical sign, the fetish can not only be deployed as an instrument for cultural analysis, but also offers specific insight in the interpretation and production of literary narratives. Gerhard Neumann argues for the benefits of Freud's theory for narrative structures: "The fetish ... pretends to be a story while claiming at the same time through its object-status that this story cannot be told." (75).<sup>8</sup> Beyond its place within psychoanalytic theory the fetish is a fundamentally paradoxical symbol, which lends itself in a specific way to representation and interpretation within cultural analysis in modernity: "Fetishism apparently becomes a central concept of analysis for the modern subject and its position within culture in general; namely through the specific way it represents object-relations" (Neumann 64).<sup>9</sup> Freud's notion of the castration anxiety as the

formative experience, and the fetish object as a coping mechanism that both thwarts the trauma and affirms it in the individual's psyche, can be productive in understanding the structure of the subject and its relationship to reality and perception: "He [Freud] is concerned with identifying a structure of the id in its relation to the world; the division within the id, understood as the friction between two contrary psychological positions, which exist side by side, and not in a dialectical or complementary relationship to each other" (Neumann 65-66).<sup>10</sup> On a meta-narrative level the fetish thus incorporates the ambiguity that is deeply inscribed in the experience of the modern subject and its alienation from the world around it. It complicates the notion of story telling and performs the inevitable "conflict between object and narration" (Ibid.):

With that, however, the fetish does not work, as one used to claim, as *pars pro toto*, or rhetorically speaking as synecdoche, but in Alfred Binet's understanding as a fundamentally paradoxical sign, which insists on its material presence, while at the same time displaying and therefore performing the 'barrier' of symbolization, of abstraction, or generalization, from which it derives a sequence of meta-narratives. (Neumann 64)<sup>11</sup>

The psychoanalytical framework of the fetish is therefore a useful instrument for the understanding of texts, especially for those that concern themselves with the individual's condition and experience in modernity (Neumann 65). Through the individual's relationships to objects, meanings can be produced that contradict the protagonist's and the narrator's account of events and that point to the impossibility of encapsulating one's experience in a univocal story. As Neumann argues with respect to the origin of the fetish: "I recognize in it a basic pattern of the modern experience of the world and the self, a form of the insurmountable conflict between object and narration" (66).<sup>12</sup> As the objects in *The Museum of Innocence*—and their material extension into the physical reality of the exhibition on display in the museum—refuse to be appropriated by the protagonist's narratives, they create a network of meta-narratives, which complicate the protagonists' account of both the personal loss of a beloved woman and the cultural loss of the Ottoman Empire.

The coalescing and contradicting narratives coincide on the site of the fetish, which not only incorporates sexual, but also class and cultural differences. Neumann illustrates the history of the fetish and the appropriation of the word and its concept from Portuguese colonialism to Freud's psychoanalytical theory:

As the etymology of the word “fetish”—port. *fetiço*, artificially made, lat. *factitious*—shows, the concept, which emerged in the context of Portuguese colonialism, serves to mark the border between one's Own and the Foreign within the perception of exotic cultures. From here the concept will later, like in Freud, be transferred to the ‘split’ perception of the other as the foreign sex. The problem of perception between cultures is thus projected onto the problem between the sexes. (66)<sup>13</sup>

The history of the fetish illustrates how it is fundamentally at work in constructing perceptions of and borders between one's “Own” and the “Other.” Freud's psychoanalytical framework for the fetish is exposed as what Anne McClintock in *Imperial Leather* calls “a fetishistic nostalgia for a single, male myth of origins and a fetishistic disavowal of difference” (McClintock 183). The following text passage in *The Museum of Innocence* overtly draws attention to the connection between the phallus and Füsün's belongings. Freud's connection between the penis and the fetish is here mocked, and the fetish objects are presented as incorporations of more complex narratives of differences and origin:

Twenty minutes later, as I lay in our bed at the Merhamet Apartments ... I thought about the ruler. I had used such a ruler as a child ... I put the end marked “30 centimeters” into my mouth, keeping it there for the longest time, despite the bitter aftertaste. For two hours I lay in bed, playing around with the ruler, trying to recast the hours it spent in her hands, which introduced a relief, a happiness almost akin to seeing her. (163)

Kemal's collection entails mundane belongings of Füsün's, as well as various things from her family's household, such as porcelain nicknack on the TV. Subsequently, the collection Kemal assembles—and therefore the objects that are not only described in the novel, but now exhibited in the museum in

Istanbul—seemingly create a nostalgic monument for the mundane world of an ordinary Turkish household:

As I would come to know later, the china dog that I noticed upon first walking into the family’s apartment on Kuyulu Bostan Street in Nişantaşı had, before television came to Turkey, sat atop the radio around which the family gathered every evening. (513)

This passage suggests that Kemal’s selection and the objects he steals from Füsün’s apartment are of sentimental value, collected to commemorate Turkey’s past. However, as Kemal later learns, the porcelain dog is by no means idiosyncratic to the 1970s home décor for families in Istanbul in Turkey, but rather a universal phenomenon across cultural boundaries:

This is how I came to notice that in most of the world’s homes there was a china dog sitting on top of the television set. Why was it that millions of families all over the world had felt the same need? ... As in so many houses I saw in Tabriz, Tehran, the cities of the Balkans, in the East, in Lahore and even Bombay, at the Keskin’s house, the dog was set on a handmade lace doily. (Ibid.)

The narratives encapsulated in the fetish objects are hence highly intricate and often of contradictory nature. As the example of the porcelain dogs illustrates, the fetish ambiguously symbolizes both the icons of one’s own culture and the “Other,” while alluding to the complications involved in culturally situating them. This ambiguity is further exacerbated through the fact that Füsün’s family represents Istanbul’s lower class—a social milieu that is utterly foreign to Kemal. Her objects, which “had made her who she was,” are markers for her upbringing (*The Museum of Innocence* 185). In that regard, her belongings indeed represent the “Other,” which—Jean Pouillon argues—is always at work in the formation of the fetish (201). As the fetish oscillates between one’s perceptions of “Own” and the “Other,” it becomes the site where the notion of a “proper origin” is deconstructed and replaced by a network of contradicting and coalescing layers of narratives:

The fetish is the structural answer to the question “How does one tell the un-tellable of the experience of the Foreign;” a Foreign that is one’s Own, of the Other that is the Sexual; of the Other that represents the exotic cultural. (Neumann 66)<sup>14</sup>

The confrontation with the “Other” for Kemal is not only the result of the increasing influence of a foreign culture. In the context of class differences, the mechanisms of the fetish also reflect Kemal’s attempt to appropriate a foreign culture within his own society. The fetish incorporates the intersections of these differences, and embodies the contradictions involved in the individual’s attempt to create meaning. In a similar vein, and despite their sexual and social differences, Kemal’s fascination with Füsün stems from a feeling of uncanny similarity between them:

For a moment — and perhaps because I knew we were related, however slightly — her body, with its long limbs, fine bones, and fragile shoulders, reminded me of my own. Had I been a girl, had I been twelve years younger, this is what my body would look like. (17)

Kemal’s interest in Füsün as the object of his libido is therefore also marked by narcissistic drives, and the regressive desire to return to his own childhood. His attraction to her stems from the resemblance to himself—or more precisely to his own younger self—that Kemal believes he sees in her. His obsessive sexual desire for Füsün and the fetishization of her objects, thus inherently recapitulates the structure of narcissism, while further exacerbating the ambiguous perceptions of “Own” and “Otherness,” performed through notions of sexual differences, of past and present, and of the family as one’s origin.

Furthermore, in *The Museum of Innocence* these conflicts are exacerbated precisely through Kemal’s identification with his father. According to Freud, a strong identification with the father figure would be required to overcome this narcissistic libido structure and to develop a super-ego that serves as an internalized conscientious authority. However, since the father is identified as the source of the mother’s alleged castration and the potential castration of the self, he poses a threat to the narcissistic self at the same time (“Fetishism” 156).

Trapped between tradition and modernity and identifying with their parents as representatives of a more traditional value system, one that neither fully functions nor is completely overcome, the protagonists are in a fundamentally paradoxical situation. Thus, in order to maintain the father as a positive figure of identification, the *I* needs to uphold the castration narrative, while at the same time reject its reality, which situates the relationship to the father at the heart of the ambiguities and ambivalences of the castration threat as formative moment. Freud himself was aware of this contradiction, when he claims that the ambivalent treatment of the fetish that unites both contempt and idealization of the object is connected to a strong identification with the father (“Fetishism” 155). While the story around Füsün’s lost and returned earring is already ambiguous, it is further complicated through *another* pair of earrings that Kemal’s father once gave his own mistress. He later passes this pair on to Kemal, who hands them over to Füsün. The second pair of earrings subsequently adds another layer of ambiguity to the network of meta-narratives the fetish objects create. Not only is the reader led to believe that Kemal’s mother hid Füsün’s lost earring in her jewelry box because she mistook it for the *corpus delicti* of her husband’s unfaithfulness and extra-marital affair, which she has known about and as a traditional Turkish wife has accepted. It also remains obscure whether or not the “certain pair of earrings” Füsün wanted to wear after her reunion with Kemal are her own formerly lost earrings, or the ones Kemal’s father used to give his own mistress. The earring allows the reader to draw at least two possible conclusions. The assumption that Füsün is wearing her own earrings traces its lineage back to the day when they first made love—“the happiest day” in Kemal’s life. This reading opens up the possibility of understanding the situation at least partly as a romantic gesture that commemorates the beginning of their love story, while effacing its painful repercussions and suggesting a “new start” for their relationship. However, if one understands the “certain pair of earrings” as the ones that formerly belonged to Kemal’s father, her choice of accessory on that day might allude to the fact that she acknowledged her status as Kemal’s mistress. Both readings are further complicated through Füsün’s suicide shortly after she draws Kemal’s attention to

the piece of jewelery she is wearing. While this experience is performed through and reflected by the fetish earring and the different narratives that coincide and intersect on its site, the latter also points to a critical reflection on Freud's theory. The castration anxiety at the heart of psychosexual development of the (male) child therefore places the subject in a fundamentally ambiguous situation, which the identification with the father only exacerbates. The traumatizing effect the fetish entails has its origin therefore not in the sight of the mutilated female genitals and the castration threat it suggests, but rather in the ambivalences and ambiguities of differences and appropriation, which are at the heart of the individual's development, as well as in the impossibility of encapsulating this experience in a univocal narrative with a single origin.

Similarly, the "black melancholia," under which Kemal suffers and that leads him to lose every interest not only in his business, but also in his family, friends, and life itself, is—contrary to his own narrative—not just part of the mourning process over the loss of his mistress. According to Freud, the symptoms of mourning and melancholy are similar. However, the important distinction between these sentiments lies in the narcissistic libido of the *I*, which is characteristic of melancholia ("Mourning and Melancholia" 251). Melancholia thus points toward the loss of the ego. It is therefore rather the manifestation of the loss of the self, which is negotiated in the paradoxical union of self-loathing and narcissism, which finds its expression in the fetish as a coping mechanism:

Melancholia, therefore, borrows some of its features from mourning, and the others from the process of regression from narcissistic object-choice to narcissism. It is on the one hand, like mourning, a reaction to the real loss of a loved object; but over and above this, it is marked by a determinant which is absent in normal mourning or which, if it is present, transforms the latter into pathological mourning. The loss of a love-object is an excellent opportunity for the ambivalence in love-relationships to make itself effective and come into the open. (250-251)<sup>15</sup>

As Freud points out, the pathological symptoms with which the melancholic exceeds the process of mourning are inherently ambivalent. Kemal's "illness" is

thus indeed a reflection of the ambiguity of his experience, performed through and acted out through the fetish object relations he displays. Freud continues: “As we have seen, however . . . , melancholia contains something more than normal mourning. In melancholia the relation to the object is no simple one; it is complicated by the conflict due to ambivalence” (256).<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, as Freud points out, melancholia as a pathological and inherently ambiguous reaction is only an exacerbation of the ambivalences of any experience of love. Thus, reminiscent of the structure of the fetish, which is to some extent always at work in erotic relationships, melancholia only points to the inherent experience of love and life itself as a deeply ambivalent and ambiguous conflict. The period of transition in which the protagonists find themselves only exacerbates the sentiments of disorientation and loss which constitutes Kemal’s crisis of identity, and his melancholic response to the experience of a loss of self (“Ich Verlust”). The fetish becomes a manner of speaking, which both denies the traumatizing events and bears witness to them. Robert J. Stoller describes the fetish as “a story masquerading as an object” (155). The stories behind the objects in the *Museum of Innocence*—and, as they blur the boundaries between fiction and reality, in “The Innocence of Objects”—point to a kaleidoscope of contradicting narratives, and subsequently question the notion of “ideal purity”—as Geoffrey Bennington puts it—at the heart of the events. Beyond its historic specifics, *The Museum of Innocence* illustrates how experience is always mediated through stories—sometimes masquerading as fetish objects—and that there is no single origin of this experience. The fetish can serve as a coping mechanism as it represses the perceived loss of identity: “The idea that there will not be a phallic identity anymore threatens the subject’s sense of identity, and is temporarily suppressed by the fetish” (Neumann 70).<sup>17</sup> The traumatizing effect of the loss of this “purity” and the threat it poses to one’s identity is expressed not only through Kemal’s melancholic regression in the novel, but find its “völkerpsychologische Parallele” in Istanbul’s “communal feeling” of melancholy, the so-called *hüzün* (*Fetischismus* 330; *Istanbul* 107):



It is *hüzün*, which ordains that no love will end peacefully. Just as in the old black-and-white films — even in the most affecting and authentic love stories — if the setting is Istanbul, it is clear from the start that *hüzün* the boy has carried with him since birth will lead the story into melodrama.

(*Istanbul* 106)

The phenomenon of *hüzün*, the Turkish word for melancholy, can be understood as a collective crisis that marks all of Istanbul's residents. This "black passion" cannot be reduced to a melancholic reminiscence of the past, but represents a deeply ambiguous structure of relating to it (92):

But the fastest flight from the *hüzün* of the ruins is to ignore all historical monuments and and pay no attention to the names of the buildings or their architectural particularities. For many Istanbul residents, poverty and ignorance have served them well to this end. History becomes a word with no meaning ... But it catches up with them: By neglecting the past and severing their connection with it, the *hüzün* they feel in their mean and hollow efforts is all the greater. *Hüzün* rises out of the pain they feel for everything that has been lost, but it is also what compels them to invent new defeats and new ways to express their impoverishment.

(*Istanbul* 103)

*Hüzün*, however, is not simply the individual's melancholic response to its environment as a deeply ambiguous sentiment, but it blurs the borders between the personal and the collective: "[I]t seems to me that that *hüzün* does not come from the hero's broken, painful story or from his failure to win the hand of the woman he loves; rather, it is almost as if the *hüzün* that infuses the city's sights and streets and famous views has seeped into the hero's heart to break his will" (107). The fetish hence marks a crisis in social meaning, both on a personal and on a collective level:

Far from being merely phallic substitutes, fetishes can be seen as the displacement onto an object (or person) of contradictions that the individual cannot resolve at a personal level ... By displacing power onto the fetish, then manipulating the fetish, the individual gains symbolic

control over what might otherwise be terrifying ambiguities ... Fetishes are haunted by both personal and historical memory and may be seen to be structured by recurring, though not necessarily universal features: a social contradiction experienced at an intensely personal level; the displacement of the contradiction onto an object or person, which becomes the embodiment of the crisis in value; the investment of intense passion ... and the repetitious recurrence ... in the scene of personal or historical memory. (184-185)

In this context, Kemal's love of both Füsün and Sibel is truly doomed from the beginning, and serves only as a catalyst for the main protagonist's increasing melancholic illness and an inevitable and inexplicable sense of loss.

The "wound" of the "bashful collector," which Pamuk describes in his novel, points to these "terrifying ambiguities" (*The Museum of Innocence* 503). Just as Kemal's collection can be read as an attempt to "gain symbolic power," Orhan Pamuk has built a monument for Istanbul's "historical memory" which is held in contradiction. As fetishes, the objects on display not only represent the intermittent repression of this lost identity, but also bear witness to "the failure of resolution" of the personal and historical contradictions (McClintock 184). In this context, the reader can understand the shame of the "bashful" collector, whose collection reveals more than his story can tell us. If the fetish is a story "masquerading as an object," as Stoller puts it, then both *The Museum of Innocence* and its material extension in the showcases of the museum and the catalogue "The Innocence of Objects" teach us that a multiplicity of narratives are always at the heart of our personal and collective histories. Orhan Pamuk unmask the stories in the objects. He presents the reader of his novel and the visitor of his museum with the coalescing, overlapping, and mutually contradicting stories—both fictional and factual—that perform the inability of a return to a lost origin while at the same time establishing a monument to these stories. In that regard, Pamuk restores the innocence of objects, while dismantling the impurity of the events they embody.

<sup>1</sup> “Ein gewisser Grad von solchem Fetischismus ist daher dem normalen Lieben regelmäßig eigen, besonders in jenen Stadien der Verliebtheit, in welchen das normale Sexualziel unerreichbar oder dessen Erfüllung aufgehoben erscheint ... Der pathologische Fall tritt erst ein, wenn das Streben nach dem Fetisch ... sich an die Stelle des normalen Zieles setzt, ferner wenn sich der Fetisch von der bestimmten Person löst, zum alleinigen Sexualobjekt wird” (*Drei Abhandlungen* 35).

<sup>2</sup> “[D]er Fetisch ist der Ersatz für den Phallus des Weibes (der Mutter), an den das Knäblein geglaubt hat und auf den es—wir wissen warum—nicht verzichten will” (“Fetischismus” 330).

<sup>3</sup> “Der Hergang war also der, daß der Knabe sich geweigert hat, die Tatsache seiner Wahrnehmung, daß das Weib keinen Penis besitzt, zur Kenntnis zu nehmen. Nein, das kann nicht wahr sein, denn wenn das Weib kastriert ist, ist ein eigener Penisbesitz bedroht, und dagegen sträubt sich das Stück Narzißmus, mit dem die Natur vorsorglich gerade dieses Organ ausgestattet hat” (“Fetischismus” 334).

<sup>4</sup> “Die Zärtlichkeit und die Feindseligkeit in der Behandlung des Fetisch, die der Verleugnung und der Anerkennung der Kastration gleichlaufen, vermengen sich bei verschiedenen Fällen in ungleichem Maße, so daß das eine oder das andere deutlicher kenntlich wird ... Seine Handlung vereinigt in sich die beiden miteinander unverträglichen Behauptungen: das Weib hat seinen Penis behalten und der Vater hat das Weib kastriert” (“Fetischismus” 334).

<sup>5</sup> “In ganz raffinierten Fällen ist es der Fetisch selbst, in dessen Aufbau sowohl die Verleugnung als auch die Behauptung der Kastration Eingang gefunden hat” (“Fetischismus” 334).

<sup>6</sup> “Es liegt nahe zu erwarten, daß zum Ersatz des vermißten weiblichen Phallus solche Organe oder Objekte gewählt werden, die auch sonst als Symbole den Penis vertreten. Das mag oft genug stattfinden, ist aber gewiß nicht entscheidend. Bei der Einsetzung des Fetisch scheint vielmehr ein Vorgang eingehalten zu werden, der an das Haltmachen der Erinnerung bei traumatischer Amnesie gemahnt. Auch hier bleibt das Interesse wie unterwegs stehen, wird etwa der letzte Eindruck vor dem unheimlichen, traumatischen als Fetisch festgehalten” (“Fetischismus” 332).

<sup>7</sup> “Da war also ein gewiß bedeutsames Stück der Realität vom Ich verleugnet worden, ähnlich wie beim Fetischisten die unliebsame Tatsache der Kastration des Weibes” (“Fetischismus” 332).

<sup>8</sup> “Der Fetisch ... gibt sich für eine Geschichte aus und prätendiert zugleich durch seine Dingqualität, dass diese Geschichte nicht erzählt werden kann.” (All of the English translations of Neumann’s text are my own).

<sup>9</sup> “Offenbar wird der Fetischismus zu einem zentralen Konzept der Analyse des modernen Subjekts und seiner Stellung in der Kultur überhaupt; und zwar durch die besondere Art der durch ihn repräsentierten Objektbeziehungen.”

<sup>10</sup> “Und es geht ihm [Freud] schließlich um die Herausarbeitung einer Struktur des Ich in seinem Verhältnis zur Realität; also der Ich-Spaltung, verstanden als die Reibung zweier entgegengesetzter psychischer Haltungen, die

nebeneinander, ohne dialektische oder komplementäre Beziehungen untereinander, bestehen.”

<sup>11</sup> “Damit funktioniert aber der Fetisch nicht, wie man behauptet hat, als *pars pro toto*, also rhetorisch gesprochen als Synekdoche, sondern, im Sinne Alfred Binets, als ein fundamental paradoxes Zeichen, das auf seiner materialen Präsenz insistiert und dabei zugleich die ‘Sperre’ der Symbolisierung, der Abstraktion oder Generalisierung ‘ausstellt,’ also ‘vorzeigt,’ und daraus eine Sequenz von Meta-Narrativen ableitet.”

<sup>12</sup> “Ich erkenne darin ein Grundmuster moderner Welt- und Selbst-Erfahrung, eine Modellierung des unüberwindlichen Konflikts zwischen Objekt und Narration.”

<sup>13</sup> “Wie die Etymologie des Wortes “Fetisch” — port. *fetiço*, künstlich Zurechtgemachtes, lat. *factitius* — ausweist, dient der im Feld des portugiesischen Kolonialismus auftauchende Begriff zur Markierung der Grenzstelle zwischen dem Eigenen und dem Fremden bei der Wahrnehmung exotischer Kulturen. Von hier wird der Begriff später, wie Freud es tut, auf die ‘gespaltene’ Wahrnehmung des anderen als des fremden Geschlechts übertragen. Das Problem der Wahrnehmung zwischen Kulturen wird so auf das Problem der Wahrnehmung zwischen den Geschlechtern projiziert.”

<sup>14</sup> “Der Fetisch ist die strukturelle Antwort auf die Frage “Wie erzählt man das Unerzählbare der Erfahrung des Fremden;” eines Fremden, das das Eigene ist; des Anderen, das das Sexuelle ist; des Anderen, welchen das exotisch Kulturelle darstellt.”

<sup>15</sup> “Die Melancholie entlehnt also einen Teil ihrer Charaktere der Trauer, den anderen Teil dem Vorgang der Regression von der narzißtischen Objektwahl zum Narzißmus. Sie ist einerseits wie die Trauer Reaktion auf den realen Verlust des Liebesobjekts, aber sie ist überdies mit einer Bedingung behaftet, welche der normalen Trauer abgeht oder dieselbe, wo sie hinzutritt, in eine pathologische verwandelt. Der Verlust des Liebesobjekts ist ein ausgezeichnete Anlaß, um die Ambivalenz der Liebesbeziehungen zum Ausdruck zu bringen” (“Trauer und Melancholie” 180-181).

<sup>16</sup> “Die Melancholie hat aber, wie wir gehört haben, etwas mehr zum Inhalt als die normale Trauer. Das Verhältnis zum Objekt ist bei ihr kein einfaches, es wird durch einen Ambivalenzkonflikt kompliziert” (“Trauer und Melancholie” 186-187).

<sup>17</sup> “Die das Subjektgefühl bedrohende Vorstellung, dass es niemals mehr eine phallische Identität geben wird, wird durch den Fetisch intermittierend verdrängt.”

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