Turkish Literature in Comparative Perspective

The "Autobiographical Space" in Orhan Pamuk's Works

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> Künstlerische Produktion, die in dem Impuls wider die Verhärtung des Lebens nicht sich beirren läßt, die wahrhaft naive also, wird zu dem, was nach den Spielregeln der konventionellen Welt unnaiv heißt und freilich so viel von Naivetät in sich aufbewahrt, wie im Verhalten der Kunst ein dem Realitätsprinzip nicht Willfähriges überlebt, etwas vom Kind, ein nach den Normen der Welt Infantiles (Adorno 1998: 500).
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> Car les vrais paradis sont les paradis qu'on a perdus (Proust 1927: 13).

Introduction

This paper plays with the idea of the imagined "autobiographical space" of Orhan Pamuk and how it has influenced his work. In order to define my use of "autobiographical space," I will refer to Philippe Lejeune, who produced the classical definition of the term. With due regard to his definition, I will modify his approach by interpreting it in a more literal sense, as a *real* space, and thus will connect the local environment of the artist's childhood with his later works. In order to do this, I will consult Theodor W. Adorno's *Ästhetische Theorie* (1970), which emphasizes the importance of childhood for artistic creativity, and will briefly highlight some of the autobiographical aspects which are found in the works of Marcel Proust. Following this, it will be possible to demonstrate that all three authors, Pamuk, Adorno, and Proust, incorporated their childhood experiences into their later works and thus extended their early "autobiographical space" into their future-life as a source for creativity.

Later, I will examine how my theory applies to Pamuk's and Adorno's works by focusing mainly on Adorno's essay "Amorbach" (1967) and Pamuk's autobiographical short story "Pencereden Bakmak" (Looking Out of the Window, 1999). On the basis of these two texts, I will examine various aspects of these "autobiographical spaces" of Adorno, and in particular, of Pamuk.

Definition of the term "autobiographical space"

In *Le Pacte Autobiographique*, Philippe Lejeune defines the term "espace autobiographique" as the space derived from the interaction of the totality of an author's work. Thus, in addition to an autobiographical story in a strict sense–that is, a story where the congruency of the author's and the protagonist's names are given–the entire work of an author has to be taken into account, including novels, letters, diaries, etc. (see Lejeune 1975: 165-190)

In the case of Orhan Pamuk, we can state that his work in its entirety has yet to be completed. Therefore, I will not adhere to Lejeune's broad definition, but rather take the term in a more literal sense, and concentrate on Pamuk's early childhood as portrayed in the story *Pencereden Bakmak*; in addition, I will incorporate into my analysis Pamuk's essays from *Öteki Renkler* (The Other Colors, 1999), and a recent interview by the author. [1]

For the purpose of this article, I will define "autobiographical space" as a space derived from childhood–a place that is directly linked to, and associated with, the author's childhood. For Pamuk, I will define this space as the district of Nişantaşı, a modern, Western-oriented, central part of Istanbul. Pamuk is quite familiar with this space since this is where his parental home is located, where he spent the formative period of his childhood, and where he currently resides. And it is Nişantaşı of the 1950s that serves as the main setting in his autobiographical short story, "Pencereden Bakmak." Certainly, Nişantaşı is a recurring location in his other works too, playing a central part in *Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları* (Cevdet and His Sons, 1982) and *Kara Kitap* (The Black Book, 1990). Furthermore, Nişantaşı, as a background, appears in *Yeni Hayat* (The New Life, 1994), *Kar* (Snow, 2002), and *Sessiz Ev* (The House of Silence, 1983). The same holds true for the familial and childhood aspects; not only in "Pencereden Bakmak," but in most of Pamuk's novels we find similar structures, especially in *Kara Kitap* and *Benim Adım Kırmızı* (My Name is Red, 1998).

It is clear that some aspects of Orhan Pamuk's writings can be traced back to the "autobiographical space" of his childhood. This space is attributed to his ability to discover the "virtual space," which I define as being the inner space which results from the outside-"autobiographical space." Only the author himself has access to this space, which serves as a source for creativity and establishes the aesthetical distance needed to produce art, or to produce the "fictitious space." It is within this space that his novels are set, and the only space we as the readers have access to. Thus, the "fictitious space"–here as observed in "Pencereden Bakmak," while still in a Lejeune-like manner in an interaction of *all* texts by the author–serves as the basis for the whole theory of an "autobiographical space."

In order to demonstrate how the connection between a certain space and childhood is later on transformed into an inner or "virtual space," I will refer to three artists: Marcel Proust, born in 1871 in Auteuil in France, Theodor W. Adorno, born in 1903 in Frankfurt am Main in Germany, and Orhan Pamuk, born in 1952 in Istanbul. Where their lives differ in many aspects, with them

[1] It should be noted that Orhan Pamuk's childhood-memoir *İstanbul. Hatıralar ve Şehir / Istanbul. Memories of a City* (2003) was not yet published when this article was written. Looking back, it can be stated that since İstanbul focuses partly on related issues as described in Öteki Renkler, the passages and interpretations referred to in this article would have been rather underlined by an earlier reading of *İstanbul* than confronted.

growing up at different times, in different countries, and under different conditions, they are similar in one sense: the experience of a sheltered childhood which would eventually influence their works.[2]

Adorno's Ästhetische Theorie *and how aesthetical behavior and childhood are interlinked*

In his unfinished work, *Die Ästhetische Theorie*, Adorno states that art and happiness are linked to infancy. Thus, only the child is capable of perceiving beauty without reflection; even though, at a later stage, reflection is also necessary to create and perceive art. Adorno uses this definition for aesthetical behavior in general: According to him, aesthetical behavior is defined by a receptive childlike attitude, an inexplicable moment of the awareness of beauty which comes with the arbitrariness of the mind. Though Adorno considers *archaische Rudimente* (archaic rudiments; see Adorno 1998: 109) as a condition for the awareness of beauty, he is in total agreement with Kant and Hegel that consciousness is indispensable. In art, both aspects stand side by side: non-rational, childlike attitudes interfere with rationalism and produce a symbiosis that can be mediated to the rational-minded subject.

Furthermore, coming back to the child aspect, there are, according to Adorno, certain events in life that can only be experienced through being a child, only at one place and this place will bear a certain meaning throughout one's whole life. Likewise, the experience of happiness, Adorno states in *Ohne Leitbild - Parva Aesthetica*, can only be made at one particular place, even if afterwards it proves to have not been unique.[3] This experience will never be replaced by any future happiness, because according to Adorno, it remains linked to its time and space where it was originally experienced. In relation to this, Adorno assesses Proust's major work as an autobiography that everyone could identify with as if it was his own:

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2 I believe that if we take into consideration the re-defining of the classical understanding of the term *Weltliteratur* (world literature), there is no reason why one should shy away from comparing a Turkish work to a French or German one. I agree with Damrosch that the leading characteristic of world literature today is its variability. Accordingly, world literature can be defined as, firstly, being an elliptical refraction of national literatures, secondly, a writing that gains in translation, and, thirdly, rather as a form of reading than a set canon of texts, or, in other words, as "a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time" (see Domrosch 2003: 281). For a useful definition of the term see also: Bachmann-Medick 2004.

3 Adorno 1967: 23 states: "Dennoch läßt einzig an einem bestimmten Ort die Erfahrung des Glücks sich machen, die des Unaustauschbaren, selbst wenn nachträglich sich erweist, daß es nicht einzig war."

The autobiography of everyone[4]

Indeed, Proust's fictitious village of Combray, modeled on the real village of Illiers, opens a space for all readers, as he entices them to dive into his narrations. Proust is able not only to evoke the reader's own fantasy but also his own memory. In his works, one of many passages that demonstrate this is the well known example of the taste of a Madeleine after being dipped into a cup of lime-blossom tea, which caused the narrator to recall his childhood memories, and finally, together with related sensations, would become *A la recherche du temps perdu* (or, at least, this is what the narrator wants us to believe). Even though this claim cannot be made for any work or any writer, it shows what role childhood can play in an author's work, and how it can be directly connected to and inseparable from a particular space. In this case, it is at Proust/narrator's aunt's house in Illiers/Combray where he first sensed the taste of the tea and the pastry.

Adorno's "autobiographical space" of Amorbach as an introduction to Pamuk's "autobiographical space" of Nişantaşı

In Adorno's case, Amorbach can be considered as his "autobiographical space," a small town, 80 kilometers from Frankfurt, where he spent important parts of his childhood with his family. According to Adorno, this place had such power that it would accompany him for a lifetime, even when he lived far away, as he did while in exile.

As mentioned above, Adorno stated that one could only realize one's childhood as an adult, as one is capable of reflection. In other words, citing Adorno once more, you have to become old to be aware of your childhood and childhood dreams. The dilemma stems from the fact that if only an adult can realize one's childhood dreams, it will always be too late to experience the happy and joyous event when it actually takes place.[5] This quote evokes another discovery by Proust, that the true paradises are the paradises which one has lost. However, for Proust, in regaining a lost paradise by recalling it lays a creative momentum resulting from this momentary conflation of a past and a present moment.[6]

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4 "Behielt er (Proust, C.D.) irgendwo recht, dann in dem Anspruch, daß sein Buch die Autobiographie eines jeden einzelnen sein müsse" (Adorno 1967: 161).

5 "Man muß altern, damit die Kindheit, und die Träume, die sie hinterließ, sich verwirklichen, zu spät" (Adorno 1967: 164-165).

6 Proust 1927: 13 and: "Or cette cause, je la devinais en comparant entre elles ces diverses impressions bienheureuses et qui avaient entre elles ceci de commun que je les éprouvais à la fois dans le moment actuel et dans un moment éloigné où le bruit de la cuiller sur l'assiette, l'inégalité des dalles, le goût de la madeleine allaient jusqu'à faire empiéter le passé sur le présent, à me faire hésiter à savoir dans lequel des deux je me trouvais; aux vrais, l'être qui alors goûtait en moi cette impression la goûtait en ce qu'elle avait de commun dans un jour ancien et maintenant, dans ce qu'elle avait d'extratemporel, un être

Adorno on the other hand is lacking the creative momentum. Thus, for Adorno, when one finally realizes that the happiness remains in the past, irretrievable, and, worse, irreplaceable, it is lost. For Adorno, one has to reach to the future to be able to understand the past.

To sum up, we can conclude that his "autobiographical space" consists of these two components: future and past:

The future that lies ahead

Not only did Adorno feel protected by his mother and family, but also by the place Amorbach itself. His little town had protected him so well, he writes in *Amorbach*, that it even prepared him for places that stood in total opposition to it.[7] The experience he is referring to here is his first confrontation with electricity in Amorbach during his childhood. He explains that as a child, while sitting on a mountain at dusk, from where he had a birds-eye view of his small town, he experienced a shock when all of a sudden the lights came on, allowing him to see electricity for the first time in his life. This experience made him aware of the possibility of unexpected changes in a world that until then he had considered safe and well known. It was a shock, he recalls, that would prepare him for everything that was to come in his life. Here he refers to his later exile, which took place during World War II in the United States, a place to which he had always kept a certain distance, and the modernity and technical progress of which he always questioned.

Similarly, years later, following his return from exile in America, while strolling through Paris in 1949, the sound of his footsteps on the cobblestone brought back memories of his hometown. This made the exiled Adorno feel as if he was at home in the big city and that Paris had more in common with Amorbach than it did with New York (see Adorno 1967: 22.).

Looking back, we come to the second aspect:

The past that links to history

Räumliche Nähe wurde zur zeitlichen (Adorno 1967: 26), "spatial proximity became temporal," writes Adorno, a statement which he relates to another childhood experience that took place in Amorbach. The taste of freshly shelled nuts given to him as a child evoked his imagination and transferred him back to sixteenth cen-

qui n'apparaissait que quand par une de ces identités entre le présent et le passé, il pouvait se trouver dans le seul milieu où il put vivre, jouir de l'essence, des choses, c'est-à-dire en dehors du temps" (Proust 1927: 14)

7 "So gut hatte mein Städtchen mich behütet, daß es mich noch auf das ihm gänzlich Entgegengesetzte vorbereitete" (Adorno 1967: 22).

tury Amorbach. Unlike his quiet home, Amorbach, due to the changing economic atmosphere in early modern Europe, became a stage for peasant rebellions. Thus, perhaps inspired by his later reading of Proust, Adorno imagines the nuts he was eating were a present from sympathizing peasant leaders of the revolts in 1525 in order to calm his fear of the future.[8]

Keeping in mind Adorno's "autobiographical space," Amorbach, and what it stands for, we shall now have a closer look at:

Orhan Pamuk's "autobiographical space" Nişantaşı

Benim merkezim (...) Nişantaş'tır (Pamuk 1999: 287), "my center is Nişantaşı," writes Pamuk in *Öteki Renkler*, a book containing the short story "Pencereden Bakmak" plus a collection of essays by the author. The modern, wealthy district of Istanbul, where he spent most of his early childhood and where his parental home is located, is the setting of many of his novels, and also of "Pencereden Bakmak."

According to Pamuk, everyone who is born and lived in a single city, or at one place for an extended period, carries a topographic image in his head, a personal map, with one district as a center, which is usually established in childhood. In this place, one feels safe and secure on the one hand, while at the same time there is a need to escape (Pamuk 1999: 287-288).

Thus, for Pamuk, we can say that his early "autobiographical space" consists of the following two components: staying in one place and escaping from it.

This conflicting attitude is well presented in "Pencereden Bakmak" by the image of about six year old Ali gazing out the window of his family's home in Nişantaşı. The character evokes direct associations with Orhan Pamuk the child, even if we do not have a correspondence between the names. So according to Lejeune's definition, which demands congruency of the author's and the protagonist's name, this story is not an autobiographical one in the strict sense. However, since there are strong similarities between Orhan Pamuk the child and the young Ali, this story crosses over into the realm of an autobiographical story. The parallels between Pamuk's own childhood and the protagonist Ali's are especially striking when Ali's father leaves his family and moves to Paris.

"Pencereden Bakmak" describes two days in a family's life, seen through the eyes of little Ali alias Orhan. The boy witnesses his father secretly leaving his mother, him, and his brother. On that day, he comes home from school early as he had persuaded his father on the previous day to write a letter excusing him

[8] "In seinem Schultersack aber hatte Herkert frische Nüsse in ihren grünen äußeren Schalen. Die wurden gekauft und für mich geschält. Ihren Geschmack behielten sie das Leben hindurch, als hätten die aufständischen Bauernführer von 1525 sie mir aus Sympathie zugedacht, oder um meine Angst vor den gefährlichen Zeitläufen zu beschwichtigen" (Adorno 1967: 26).

from the inoculation-process at school. After arriving home, his father reveals to him that he is leaving secretly for Paris. For Ali, as he is the only one that knows of his father's future whereabouts, he is confronted with the fact that his safe refuge has come to an end. This leads to an inner conflict.

On the one hand Ali feels...

The desire to stay

... and would like to remain on his mother's lap, observing the world through the window from a safe and secure perspective.

This is vividly demonstrated in a passage of the story where Ali gets into the little, cozy space between his mother's body and the window and gazes with her out the window, as if he were expecting his father's return as well. Even though the child feels the sadness of the mother, who in the meantime knows that her husband has left, he does not tell her where his father has gone. But he now sees the world beyond the window through the eyes of his mother–who has lost all hope of her husband's return–as sad, rainy, and deserted. At the same time, he feels content being so intimate and close to her, being on the inside, and not on the outside. Only hours later, when everybody is sleeping, Ali gets up, joins his mother once more, who again is staring out the window, and he tells her everything he knows.

On the other hand Ali feels...

The wish to escape

...and longs to get out of his closed universe, step out into the world–just as his father did.

The fact that for at least one day he was the only one that knew about his father's trip gives him, beside a vague sadness, a feeling of collaboration with his father and, as a result, a feeling of power.

Also, his father was the only member of his family who knew he did not get his shots that day. Beside the big secret of his father's leaving for Paris, he also holds his own secret about missing school and his shots. This gives him extra power, insofar as he can now beat his older brother easily when they played football after dinner, since his brother is obviously weakened by the inoculation.

It is not the only trump card that Ali, who is used to losing against his brother, holds in his hands now. This is symbolized by the way he changes his attitude playing *alt mı üst mü*, "top or bottom" with his brother, a game about gaining and losing little chewing gum pictures portraying personalities from all over the world. After Ali had caught his father in the act of leaving his house and family, his father gave him two liras, which Ali immediately invested in an extra pack of chewing gum, which of course no one knows about.

Later on, in their maternal grandmother's house, Ali keeps on losing–mainly because of the unfair rules his older brother has established. However, despite this, he does not break down and cry. But finally, Ali loses his temper and burning with rage throws all the picture cards away while secretly keeping the most wanted card of the game, the "91 Lindbergh" that came with the chewing gum he had bought with his father's money. When he shows the picture to his brother on their way home, the brother excitedly asks him where he got it from. Ali tells him both his secrets, feeling a sense of pride about the special bond that he has formed with his father. During the struggle for the "91 Lindbergh," which immediately follows Ali's revelations, he manages to keep this last card from his brother's clutches.

Orhan Pamuk's prolonged "autobiographical space": the "virtual space" and "fictitious space"

This theory of these two aspects–wanting to stay on the one hand and wishing to escape on the other hand–can also be applied to Orhan Pamuk's own life as we understand it from various essays in *Öteki Renkler*. In one passage, Pamuk refers to a similar situation. After his father disappeared to Paris when Orhan was six or seven, several months passed before he would ask his family to join him in Geneva, where he settled and found work. In Geneva, not speaking French, Orhan and his brother instead of quarrelling now stuck together physically and mentally. At school Orhan remained silent and he spent his school breaks holding his brother's hand in the schoolyard.

Given these difficult circumstances, the boys were soon sent back to their paternal grandmother's house in Nişantaşı (Pamuk 1999: 331-3). In this context, Pamuk says that the Geneva experience (which tore him out of his safe universe) caused him to turn to his inner self. This inner space protected him from the hardships of life but at the same time kept him away from the richness and complexity of the outside world.[9]

We can even go one step further and say that when he had to step out into the world like a traveler, Orhan took his old familiar life, which he was born and raised in, with him and transformed it into a protective inner space that later on became his "virtual space."

Here, his journey began at his window: looking OUTSIDE from the INSIDE made him aware of the "real" world and would in a later stage of life induce his

[9] Pamuk 1999: 333: "Daha sonraki yıllarda başka şehirlerde, başka okullarda da yapacağım gibi, bu içe dönüş tepkim beni hayatın zorluklarından korudu, ama zenginliklerinden de uzak tuttu." (As I would do again in the following years, in other cities and at other schools, this reaction of mine of taking refuge to an inner world has protected me from life's difficulties, but it has, at the same time, kept me away from the richness of life.)

wanderlust. So we can say that from his home in Nişantaşı, he carefully discovers life, the rest of the city, and the rest of the world. The safe and secure home has been transferred into an inner room, into the writer's creative source.

From here he can go one step further and prolong his "virtual space" into a "fictitious" one, and thus transport the local surroundings into his novels.

Once having established his own, inner "virtual space"–that is, the transformed "autobiographical space" of childhood–having the needed distance, Pamuk can concentrate on this "fictitious space" and plunge into the plots of his novels. Having a "Western" oriented family background–on which he has referred to in various interviews–he always had a distant or perhaps a more objective point of view on his local "Eastern" environment. Being in the present, in the modern parts of Istanbul, he can dive into history and write brilliant novels as he did, for instance, with *Benim Adım Kırmızı*, which takes place in the old part of the city in the sixteenth century. Wandering around his city, discovering the world, he is open to inspirations and surprises, just as Adorno was, when the taste of the nuts transferred him back to 1525. Even the most intimate interfamilial interactions can at this artistic stage become abstract. In an interview with Ahmet Hakan, Pamuk states that what he writes about the relationship between the two brothers–Orhan and Şevket–and the relationship between Orhan and his mother Şeküre in *Benim Adım Kırmızı*, comes from deep with in; merely, put into a new context, into another time.[10]

Comparable with Proust's writing of "everyone's autobiography," Pamuk points out that the descriptions of the interpersonal relationship between the three–the mother and the two sons–are not just based on his own history, but are universal: "*Herkesin öyle bir annesi olmuştur. Herkesin böyle bir kardeşi olmuştur.*" (Everyone knows what it means to have such a mother. Everyone knows what it means to have such a brother.)[11]

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10 Hakan 2002: 35: "Ben de kardeşimle *Benim Adım Kırmızı*'da anlatıldığı gibi didiştim, (...). Pek çok abi-kardeş, kardeş ilişkisi böyle sorunlu, didişmeli, itişmeli, çekişmelidir. Bu çekişmeleri anlatmak istedim. Çok içimden geliyordu bu." (As described in *Benim Adım Kırmızı*, I also used to fight with my brother. Quite many brotherly and sisterly relationships consist of such problems, fightings, scrappings and draggings. It was really important to me to describe these quarrels.); 36: "Ama kendi hayatımda olan çok özel, çok mahrem, cok kırılgan şeyleri kendi oyunculuğum içerisinde 16. yüzyıla taşımaktan özel ve çok büyük bir zevk aldım." (But I took a special and great pleasure in transporting the very private, intimate and fragile things of my life playfully into the sixteenth century.) And: "Üç kişi arasında anne ve iki çocuk arasındaki en saf şeyi anlattım. Bu bir mağarada da olsa, bir çölde de olsa, üç kişi arasında en saf hikâye." (I told the purest thing between three people, between a mother and her two children. This purest story between three people could as well have taken place in a cave or in a desert.)

11 See Hakan 2002: 36.

Conclusion

From the analysis undertaken here, I would like to draw the conclusion that all three, Pamuk, Adorno, and Proust, rekindled their own childhood in their later lives and therefore were able to fuse this early part of their lives into the artistic and philosophical talent of their writing career. In addition, the inner space helped them to overcome difficulties: When Proust's illness got worse, he took his isolation as an opportunity to write his masterpiece in an extreme state of seclusion, being separated from the outside through thick blue satin curtains. As for Adorno, the inner space helped him to deal with criticism. He became almost immune to misunderstandings and protests concerning his philosophical or musicological lectures. Finally, Orhan Pamuk frankly admitted in the above mentioned interview that he does not intend to leave his "ivory-tower," as isolation from everyday life, politics, and so on gives him the space to concentrate on his profession: writing.[12]

In conclusion, during their childhood, in which they were raised in a well protected environment, they retreated into their own space, which created a certain distance from everyday life outside, and, in a later stage of life, would be prolonged into a personal inner space, their "virtual space" to which only the artists themselves had access. Thus the "autobiographical space" gave them the opportunity to develop the necessary aesthetical distance to observe the environment and surroundings from an outsider's perspective. These specific points of view gave them the ability to narrate in a detailed and well-observed way, subtly criticizing human conditions and pointing out its absurdities and shortcomings.

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[12] It should be noted, however, that Orhan Pamuk's political and social engagement is remarkable. Based on various statements he has made during the past two decades, it becomes obvious that Pamuk often breaks out of the private and enters the public realm.

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