

Writing Life Writerly: Orhan Pamuk's *Istanbul* as an Aesthetic Autobiography

In 2006 Orhan Pamuk became the first Turkish writer to receive the Nobel Prize. Prior to this, three years earlier, his memoir *Istanbul: Memories and the City* was published. Pamuk, who has always been an experimental writer, now blends his life and that of the history of Istanbul in a memoir which closes with his triumphant decision "I am going to be a writer." Although genre definitions can be seen as problematic, as readers we have to admit that they also propose new approaches to texts and thereby enrich our reading, particularly of autobiographical fiction such as that of Pamuk. A new theory of this genre, "aesthetic autobiography", has been identified/proposed by Suzanne Nalbantian in *Aesthetic Autobiography: from life to art in Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Anais Nin*¹ (1994). According to Nalbantian, these writers share an aesthetic as they transform lived data into fictionalized discourse. By locating these writers' works under the umbrella of aesthetic autobiography, common elements of this creative process of artistic transmutation (or aesthetic recreation) emerge. In Sterling's review of Nalbantian's book, these common elements are identified as: "perception", "selectivity", "dislocated or amplified place", "intervention of artifacts and appearance of artists", "transformation of the quotidian", "the creation of evolving personalities", and "the intervention of subjective time which interrupts chronological time".² In this paper I will discuss how Orhan Pamuk's memoir *Istanbul: Memories and the City*, can also be included under this umbrella (reinforce the analogy) of "aesthetic autobiography". My discussion will depict each element above from the memoir, with the intention to uncover this book's "hidden symmetry"³.

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¹ Nalbantian, Suzanne. *Aesthetic Autobiography: From Life to Art in Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Ana's Nin*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994. Print.

² Sterling, Richard L. Rev. of "Aesthetic Autobiography: From Life to Art in Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Ana's Nin", Suzanne Nalbantian. *The French Review* 72.1 (1998) : 133-134. Print.

³ "But if I dwell any longer on military coups and political Islam (which has much less to do with Islam than is commonly thought), I risk destroying the hidden symmetry of this book." (Istanbul, p.183)