

## SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

In the late 1990s, Turkish author Orhan Pamuk began planning a novel set in Istanbul between 1975 and 1984. The work would feature a secret romance between a wealthy Turkish businessman and a poorer, distant relative—and after the protagonist finds himself unable to be with his beloved, he begins obsessively collecting everything that she has touched. Likewise, over the years that Pamuk spent writing the work, he himself began collecting a wide range of artifacts from the period in question—artifacts that he not only described in exquisite detail in the novel but would also put on display in an actual “Museum of Innocence” *museum* that he planned to coincide with the release of the novel. The novel was eventually published in August 2008, making it the author’s first major publication after winning the Nobel Prize in 2006, and although Pamuk had intended to have the museum debut two months later in Frankfurt to coincide with that year’s Frankfurt Book Fair, the debut was delayed until 2012, when it finally opened in a house that Pamuk had purchased in Istanbul for that purpose.

This rather unusual literary-museological project juxtaposes two rather different representational modes—with the novel representing objects through narrative and the museum re-presenting the same objects by putting them on public display. In addition to straddling these two different representational practices of literary description and exhibitional display, the project also strategically blurs the boundaries between attachment and loss, public and private, and between reality and representation. At the same time, the museum also functions as a miniature history of Istanbul itself, offering a glimpse into the materiality of daily life four decades ago.

In August 2018, almost precisely ten years after the publication of Pamuk's novel, a similar project opened to the public in Shenzhen, China. Just as Pamuk's *Museum of Innocence* spans roughly four decades of modern Turkish history (from the 1975 beginning of the novel to the 2012 opening date of the actual museum) and is structured around a public display of an assortment of quotidian and previously private artifacts, the opening of the Shekou Museum of China's Reform and Opening Up similarly commemorated the fortieth anniversary of the beginning of Deng Xiaoping's Reform and Opening Up campaign. Deng's campaign marked the beginning of a decades-long period of rapid privatization, industrialization, and economic growth: it is hardly surprising, therefore, that the museum adopts a triumphant tone, celebrating the remarkable achievements that Shenzhen—not to mention China as a whole—had made over the past four decades. The Shenzhen museum is organized chronologically and includes not only historical photographs, charts, and full-size re-creations of rooms and even entire alleys but also numerous artifacts from the periods in question. These artifacts include ordinary objects like tools, appliances, and clothing, as well as highly personal items like letters, ID cards, and examination booklets. Some of the objects will still be familiar to many viewers, while others, like rotary phones and cassette tapes, will be less so. Consequently, this Shenzhen museum also carries a distinctly nostalgic tone because it straddles many of the same boundaries between attachment and loss, public and private, reality and representation, as does Pamuk's museum in Istanbul.

Located just outside the frame of the Shenzhen museum's celebratory and nostalgic gaze, meanwhile, is a much more complicated historical period, and it is probably no coincidence that China's only Reform and Opening Up museum is in the special economic zone of Shenzhen, which literally didn't even exist before the beginning of the 1978 campaign. The Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) had officially ended only two years earlier and itself had been preceded by the highly volatile, and deeply traumatic, “Seventeen Years” period that extended from the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 to the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966.

Jie Li's *Utopian Ruins*, meanwhile, focuses precisely on this historical period immediately preceding the beginning of the Reform Era, though it attends to a set of representational and exhibitional practices that resemble the ones featured in the Shenzhen museum. More specifically, Li's study takes inspiration from Ba Jin's call in the early 1980s for a museum memorializing the Cultural Revolution. This proposal was compelling yet profoundly challenging since the question of how to memorialize this tumultuous and traumatic period remains

deeply contentious. In her study, Li takes Ba Jin's proposal a step further and considers various attempts to memorialize not only the Cultural Revolution but also other particularly traumatic periods from the Maoist era, ranging from the Anti-Rightist Movement (1957) to the Great Famine (1959–1961). In six eloquent and moving chapters, Li uses a variety of different case studies—straddling an array of different media—to illustrate how the Chinese state used a dialectic of propaganda and censorship to shape not only beliefs but also lived realities, while at the same time attending to the private voices and memories that were often embedded in the fissures within this larger regime.

Just as the historical turmoil of the Maoist period lies just outside the Shenzhen museum's celebratory gaze, a similar shadow of turmoil and suppression also haunts the nominal innocence of Pamuk's *Museum of Innocence*. Specifically, on July 15, 2016, just four years after Pamuk's museum opened in 2012, there was an attempted *coup d'état* against the Turkish government by a group advocating for democratic rule and human rights. After the coup failed, President Erdoğan retaliated by orchestrating a massive wave of arrests and purges targeting journalists, authors, and academics, among others. In fact, as early as 2005 (even before the attempted coup and subsequent purge), Pamuk himself had been arrested and charged with “public denigration of Turkish identity” after he tried to draw attention to Turkey's complicity in the Kurdish and Armenian genocides. Although the charges were subsequently dropped, he nevertheless cited this incident three years later in his opening address at the 2008 Frankfurt Book Fair—at which Turkey was the country of honor, and where Pamuk had originally planned to stage the debut of his *Museum of Innocence* exhibit. Speaking along with Turkey's then-president Abdullah Gül, Pamuk made an impassioned plea in defense of intellectual and artistic freedom, noting that “there are at this moment hundreds of writers and journalists being prosecuted and found guilty under [the same article for which Pamuk had been arrested in 2005].”<sup>1</sup> Pamuk's Frankfurt lecture, and the even more severe crackdown on human rights and intellectual freedom that unfolded in Turkey a decade later, serves as a sober reminder that the sorts of repressive practices that Li examines in *Utopian Ruins*—and the corresponding memorial practices that they invite—are hardly confined to the past.

—Carlos Rojas