



# *Turkish Studies*

## *Language and Literature*

Volume 14 Issue 3, 2019, p. 1235-1251

DOI: 10.29228/TurkishStudies.30243

ISSN: 2667-5641

Skopje/MACEDONIA-Ankara/TURKEY



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*Research Article / Araştırma Makalesi*

*Article Info/Makale Bilgisi*

✍ *Received/Geliş:* 17.08.2019

✓ *Accepted/Kabul:* 25.09.2019

✍ *Report Dates/Rapor Tarihleri:* Referee 1 (12.09.2019)-Referee 2 (20.09.2019)

*This article was checked by iThenticate.*

### **CRIME IN THE OLD CAPITAL: HISTORIC ISTANBUL IN AHMET ÜMİT'S A MEMENTO FOR ISTANBUL**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This article discusses the complex and ambiguous images of Istanbul in a work of contemporary Turkish fiction: Ahmet Ümit's *İstanbul Hatırası [A Memento for Istanbul]* (2010). It aims to show how the author utilizes the literary representation of various architectural monuments and the historical figures who erected them in order to emphasize the city's ethnic, cultural, architectural and linguistic complexity. Within the framework of discussions on the relationship between the *flâneur* figure and the modern detective, the study argues that although the novel is fundamentally a contemporary murder mystery, in which the detectives stroll through the streets of an urban city to find a serial killer, the portrayals of both Istanbul's distant history during the Byzantium, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman periods and the protagonist's memories of the culturally diverse neighborhood of his childhood occupy a substantial place. Accordingly, Ümit, a leading contemporary Turkish detective novelist, effectively uses the intermingling of a contemporary detective mystery with stories of the architectural history of Istanbul over centuries and the depiction of the old city during the protagonist's childhood to challenge the dominant representation of Istanbul in Turkish fiction. This narrative strategy in Ümit's novel turns Istanbul into a palimpsest in which layers of architectural monuments, memories, histories, stories, and cultures from different periods come together to define its contemporary urban space. By doing this, *A Memento for Istanbul* also provides profound insights into our understanding of Istanbul's complex and multiple past through the author's skillful blending of depictions of the contemporary urban city with those of the ancient capital. The novel thus informs the reader not only about the complexity, diversity and heterogeneity of historic Istanbul, but also appeals to the reader to preserve its cosmopolitan heritage.

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### STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

This study investigates the fictional portrayal of Istanbul in Ahmet Ümit's *İstanbul Hatırası* [A Memento for Istanbul], which intertwines a detective story with a historical survey of Istanbul, ranging from the early days of Byzantium to today's metropolis, through the depiction of its architectural monuments. Although the novel is fundamentally a contemporary detective story in which the detectives stroll through urban spaces to find serial killers, the depiction of Istanbul's distant history during the Byzantium, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman periods, and the protagonist's reminiscences of the culturally diverse district of his childhood both also occupy a substantial place. Within the framework of discussions on the relationship between the *flâneur* figure and the modern detective, the article explores how Ümit creates a narrative in which the protagonist engages in the activity of a modern city stroller by observing the architectural monuments and ancient sites that shape the contemporary urban environment of Istanbul. Ümit's literary representation of Istanbul operates through a constant negotiation between the city's complex past and present by depicting its urban and architectural transformations over the centuries. He incorporates numerous historical, cultural and ethnic narratives surrounding the great architectural structures into the novel's contemporary plot structure. This narrative strategy turns Istanbul into a palimpsest in which layers of architectural monuments, memories, histories, stories, and cultures from different periods come together to define it.

Through the narration of the city's multiple and palimpsestic past intermingled with its modern urban scenery, the novel thus appeals to the reader to recognize and even to preserve the complex history of Istanbul. At the same time, in representing Istanbul as a space of multiplicity and diversity, Ümit's narrative offers a critique of the dominant image of Istanbul in the official Turkish national discourse that, according to the book, generally overlooks its complex cultural heritage, and proposes to reconsider modern Turkey's relationship with its contradictory ancient past.

Accordingly, the paper first examines the relationship between the modern metropolitan *flâneur* and modern detective figure. It argues that unlike the nineteenth-century *flâneur* in Walter Benjamin's conceptualization, Ümit's protagonist Nevzat in *A Memento for Istanbul* does not practice walking for the pleasure of walking; however, he still walks the city much in the same way as the *flâneur* figure defined by Benjamin. Throughout the book, he observes every aspect of Istanbul's contemporary urban scenery and comments on each architectural landmark he encounters during his search for the murderers in the streets and districts of historic Istanbul. This narrative strategy of linking the serial killings with the history of the city helps the author create a detective protagonist who transforms the aimless wandering of the *flâneur* to a purposeful walking in the narrow streets of the old quarter.

Secondly, the article asserts how each murdered victim abandoned at a historical site provides a narrative opportunity for the author to narrate a new tale associated with that particular architectural landmark and its historical past. Over the course of the murder investigation, Nevzat goes back and forth from one architectural

monument to another where the bodies are left and encounters other historical buildings, essentially becoming a commentator on architectural constructions still forming the contemporary urban landscape of Istanbul. His walks between the monuments and districts in historic Istanbul play a significant role in linking different areas, buildings, stories, historical personalities, and narratives with one another.

The study thirdly contends that in the novel, the fictional portrayal of Istanbul is also closely related to the protagonist Nevzat's own individual identity. This especially manifests itself in his attachment to the neighborhood, Balat, where he grew up and still continues to live after a brief departure due to his official appointments in the Turkish police department's branches in Anatolia. The Istanbul of his childhood functions for Nevzat as a way of escaping the traumatic experiences of his own life and the overwhelming urban scene at the same time, thus characterizing his personal identity through the re-visitation of various historical monuments that refresh his memories and reinforce his sense of belonging to the city at the same time.

The paper concludes that in Ahmet Ümit's *A Memento for Istanbul*, the protagonist Nevzat functions as a *flâneur* and a mediator between the past and present by rediscovering and retelling the stories of the city and its people for the contemporary reader. He is the re-teller and producer of numerous texts on the city in which he lives. His daily life and identity are closely associated with the historical monuments scattered around the cosmopolitan urban space that determines his way of life, perception of identity, and relationships, while reinforcing his belonging to the city. His narratives encourage the reader to rethink their relationship with the past as they witness how the old buildings are constantly demolished and remodeled according to modern needs, economic interests, architectural fashion, and urban planning.

**Keywords:** contemporary Turkish novel, Turkish detective novel, Istanbul in Turkish fiction, *flâneur*, detective figure

## **ESKİ BAŞKENTTE CİNAYET: AHMET ÜMİT'İN İSTANBUL HATIRASINDA TARİHSEL İSTANBUL**

### **ÖZ**

Bu makale, Ahmet Ümit'in *İstanbul Hatırası* (2010) romanında cinayet ve şehir ilişkisi ekseninde, çeşitli mimari anıtların ve onların banisi tarihi kişiliklerin yazınsal temsilinden şehrin kültürel çeşitliliğini vurgulamak üzere nasıl yararlandığını inceliyor. Her ne kadar Ümit'in eseri özünde dedektiflerin seri katillerin peşinde şehrin caddelerini arşınladığı modern bir polisiye roman olsa da anlatıda hem İstanbul'un Byzantion, Roma, Bizans ve Osmanlı dönemlerine ait uzak geçmişinin hem de roman başkışısının çocukluğunun kültürel çeşitlilik sergileyen semtine ait anıtların tasviri önemli bir yer tutar. Çalışma, *flâneur* figürü ile modern dedektif arasındaki münasebet üzerine tartışmalar çerçevesinde, kentin sokaklarını arşınlayan ana kahramanın sürekli modern şehrin kentsel manzarasını oluşturan mimari anıtlarını

gözlemlediği bir anlatı yaratarak romancının İstanbul'un geçmişine ilişkin karmaşık katman ve dokuları açığa çıkardığını ileri sürüyor. Bu doğrultuda roman, İstanbul'u kolektif anlatılarla bireysel anıların kesiştiği, tarihî yapılarla çağdaş kent peyzajının yan yana yer alışı gibi farklı dönemlerden farklı kültürlerin harmanlandığı bir palimpseste dönüştürür. Romanda baş komiser Nevzat, çağdaş okur için şehri mütemadiyen gözlemleyen, şehrin mimari yapılarının öykülerini yeniden keşfeden ve anlatan bir hikâye anlatıcısı ve geçmişle şimdi arasında bir arabulucu işlevi görüyor. Böylelikle, İstanbul'un karmaşık ve çok çeşitli geçmişine ilişkin kavrayışımıza derin bir vuzuh sağlayan roman, İstanbul'un manzarasının asırlar boyunca sürekli nasıl yenilendiğini, yıkıldığını ve yeniden biçimlendirildiğini betimlerken kentin geçmişiyle ilişkimizi yeniden değerlendirmemizi olanaklı kılıyor.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** çağdaş Türk romanı, Türk edebiyatında polisiye roman, polisiye romanda İstanbul, *flâneur*, dedektif figürü

### Introduction

This article analyzes the literary representation of Istanbul in Ahmet Ümit's *İstanbul Hatırası* [*A Memento for Istanbul*], which intermingles a detective story with a historical survey of Istanbul from the early days of Byzantium to a metropolitan space today through the depiction of its architectural monuments. Although the novel is fundamentally a contemporary detective story in which the inspectors stroll through urban spaces to find serial killers, the portrayal of Istanbul's distant history during Byzantium, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman periods, and the protagonist's memories of the culturally diverse district of his childhood both occupy a substantial place. Within the framework of discussions on the relationship between the *flâneur* figure and the modern detective, the article explores how Ümit, a leading detective novelist in Turkey, creates a narrative in which the protagonist engages in the activity of a modern city stroller by observing the architectural monuments and ancient sites that shape the contemporary urban environment of Istanbul. Ümit's literary representation of Istanbul, a recurrent dominant theme in his detective novels, operates through a constant negotiation between the city's complex past and present by depicting its urban and architectural transformations over the centuries. He incorporates numerous narratives surrounding the great architectural structures into the novel's contemporary plot structure exploring the city's multifaceted history, culture and ethnic composition. This narrative strategy in Ümit's novel turns Istanbul into a "historical-cultural palimpsest" (Harding, 2004: 12), to use Desmond Harding's conceptualization, in which layers of architectural monuments, memories, histories, stories, and cultures from different periods come together to define its contemporary urban space.

The novel, which alleges that the reader's perception of Istanbul has been essentially formed by a national narrative based on the Ottoman-Turkish historical and cultural past, imagines Istanbul not as a unified formation founded upon a selective memory, but as a repository of multiple narratives and meanings, as well as a space of dynamic cultural encounters and discrepant experiences in the past and the present. Accordingly, through the narration of the city's multiple and palimpsestic past intermingled with its modern urban scenery, *A Memento for Istanbul* urges the reader to recognize and even to preserve the complex and ambiguous history of Istanbul. In describing Istanbul as a space of multiplicity and diversity, Ümit's novel at the same time provides a critique of the dominant image of Istanbul in the official Turkish national discourse that, according to the book, generally overlooks its complex cultural heritage, and proposes to reconsider modern Turkey's relationship with its contradictory ancient past. It constantly emphasizes on the traces of history in every corner of the city's ancient quarters with innumerable architectural monuments shaping its contemporary urban scenery.

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Published in 2010, *İstanbul Hatırası* [*A Memento for Istanbul*],<sup>1</sup> like most detective novels by Ümit, features the Detective Chief Inspector Nevzat and his two associates, Zeynep and Ali. Set in today's historic Istanbul, the novel's central plot tells the story of the protagonist Nevzat and his deputies' hunt for serial murderers who execute seven people and ditch their bodies at famous architectural sites within the borders of the historic peninsula of Istanbul, the primary setting of actions in the book. Over the course of their interrogation, the book also narrates the brutal plundering and destruction of the historic areas of Istanbul by covetous businessmen and entrepreneurs. The killers murder their victims in the novel in accordance with the same system and set of rules. They abduct their victims, kill them by slashing their throats and leave the bodies at one of the city's historical monuments with a coin from a sovereign they wish to draw attention to in victims' hands. The victims are all involved in the destruction and plundering of the old city. They have each made money out of exploiting the city and looting its historical heritage for their personal gain. The murderers appear to kill for their beloved city that has been losing its sense of past and identity due to the recent aggressive city planning with no consideration for its existing urban environment and cultural heritage.

The book's plot revolves around seven murders closely associated with the seven hills on which Istanbul was originally founded. Each site of an architectural landmark is linked with a past sovereign who marked a new era in the history of the city. The protagonist Nevzat's first person contemporary narrative weaves together the stories of the victims and the detectives' interviews with the witnesses and suspects in the streets and districts of historic Istanbul. Nevzat's narrative is accompanied by eight poetic odes dedicated to the stories of architectural structures closely associated with the city's past. At the end of the novel, the reader learns that they were actually written by the protagonist's childhood friend Yekta, a poet and architect who shares Nevzat's passionate love and deep curiosity for Istanbul's cosmopolitan past and his grief for its disappearance in recent years. Indeed, the book begins with Yekta's poetic text depicting the origin myth of Istanbul and ends with the expression of the three childhood friends', Yekta, Nevzat, and Demir's, strong affection and attachment for the city in whose streets they once played happily. The formal and stylized language of this poetic narrative functions as a celebration of the cultural and architectural monuments of Istanbul, as told through the perspective of historical figures that devoted their energies to the urban design of the city over the centuries. On the one hand, this linguistically and stylistically interrupts the protagonist's contemporary narrative, on the other hand, it thematically depicts Istanbul's urban geography in depth over time, connecting the history of the city across generations and eras. This serves for the layering of Nevzat's first person central narrative that already includes numerous tales about contemporary Istanbul's architectural landmarks and historical neighborhoods. It also allows the author to create a narrative that envisions the city of Istanbul as "the intersection of multiple narratives" as defined by Doreen Massey (1999: 165) in regard to the notion of modern urban space across cultures in the world.

### **Murder in Historical Istanbul**

Ümit's *A Memento for Istanbul*, set in today's Istanbul, opens with the murder of a university professor of art history and archeology. His throat is cut and body left by a statue of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey, in Sarayburnu on the European side of the Sea of Marmara opposite today's Kadıköy on the Asian side. Byzantium, the city's original pre-Roman name, is engraved on a coin that lay in his hand. The detectives initially think that the killing was a sacrifice to Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey. Yet, later we learn that the place actually is known as the area in which the city was first established centuries ago. This is a region where the Poseidon Temple is believed to have stood when the city was originally founded by the Greeks.

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<sup>1</sup>Ümit, A. (2010). *İstanbul hatırası*. İstanbul: Everest. The book was translated from Turkish to English by Rakesh Jobanputra in 2011. See Ümit, A. (2011). *A memento for Istanbul* (R. Jobanputra, Trans.), İstanbul: Everest. Unless otherwise noted, all citations used in the article are from this translation.

The second body belongs to a city planner working for the Istanbul municipality and is found at the foot of the column of Emperor Constantine in the Çemberlitaş district. This time the coin in the deceased's hand was minted for Constantine, who built the column to commemorate Istanbul as the new Roman imperial capital in 330 BC.

The third victim is a journalist for one of the most prestigious newspapers in Turkey. His body is ditched at the Golden Gate of the old City Walls running from the Golden Horn to the Sea of Marmara. The most elaborate, most extravagant of the city's gateways in Yedikule, it was used by the emperor returning from victories abroad for his entrance into the city. The city walls had protected Istanbul for centuries from foreign threats.

The fourth victim is an architect associated several entrepreneurs involved in unlawful business operations in the tourism industry in historic Istanbul. His body is found by the Hagia Sophia Museum, perhaps the city's most well-known and prestigious architectural landmark.

The fifth victim is an ex-deputy mayor whose body is left at the courtyard of the Fatih Mosque Complex built by Mehmed II after he captured Constantinople and turned it into the capital of the Ottoman Empire in the middle of the fifteenth century. With this murder, the novel's historical narrative plane shifts to the Ottoman period. The victim's head is also sent to the director of Topkapı Palace, in which the Ottoman Sultans lived and governed the empire from the fifteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century. The victim's hands were cut off in just the same way as the fifteenth century architect who built the Mosque for failing to make the dome of the then-new mosque larger than the dome of the Hagia Sophia.

The body of the sixth victim, a lawyer, is left by the grave of the Imperial Architect Sinan at the Süleymaniye Mosque Complex built during the time of Süleyman the Magnificent. As the chief architect of the empire, Sinan designed and constructed various buildings around Istanbul. The Süleymaniye Mosque is considered his masterpiece by many.

Finally, the killings end where they started as the seventh victim's body is left by a statue of Atatürk built after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey. This marks the beginning of a new era in the history of Istanbul. The killers, who turn out to be Nevzat's best friends Demir and Yekta, murder those people whom they find responsible for the death of Yekta's wife and son, and for ruining the city for more money and power. Yekta's wife and son had died in the construction of a five-star hotel on the ruined site of a Byzantine palace located in the Hippodrome with the wall falling over them.

Ümit's sequencing of events surrounding the seven murders enables him to create a detective figure engaging in a criminal interrogation and experiencing the city at the same time. Nevzat's practice of walking in the streets and districts of historic Istanbul becomes a means of narrating the diverse and conflicting cultural past manifested in its contemporary urban landscape. The seven serial killings and their investigation by the detectives thus plays a determining role in representing the layer-upon-layer history of Istanbul. Nevzat narrates the history of Istanbul because the Istanbulites appear to know,

next to nothing about the history of our own city, our own hometown. Forget the Greeks and Romans; we were just clueless when it came to the Ottomans, and yet, despite knowing absolutely nothing about them or their history, we loved to brag and boast about the 'heroic exploits' of our forefathers. (Ümit, 2011: 52)

The linking of the murders with the ancient monuments of Istanbul allow Nevzat to dig into the dark and hidden mysteries of his city like an archaeologist and share them with the reader while making his way from one architectural landmark to another in the historic peninsula.

### The Detective as a City Walker

From the first pages of *A Memento for Istanbul*, Ümit establishes chief detective inspector Nevzat, a native of the city, as an urban wanderer who possesses many primary characteristics of the modern *flâneur* that originated in the writings of Charles Baudelaire. According to Baudelaire, in the context of the modern city, people have become strollers or “*flâneurs*” who move through the labyrinthine streets and hidden spaces of the city, thus playing a significant role in observing and reflecting on modern urban environments (2010). Walter Benjamin later examined the notion of the *flâneur* within the framework of the nineteenth century metropolitan experience portrayed in Baudelaire’s work. Benjamin, who considered Baudelaire the poet of the modern metropolitan masses, argued that the *flâneur* wandered around modern urban spaces by moving through the crowd that he constantly watched and mapped during these strolls (1997: 35-66). As put forward by Sven Birkerts, for Benjamin, the *flâneur*’s

highest aspiration is to become a medium, a precipitate in which the scattered particles of sense can reconstitute themselves. The original whole (...) has been shattered, by time, by history, by the hubris of progress; but the *flâneur*, by drawing together bits and pieces from the rubble, can discover its echo. The *flâneur* is, thus, dedicated to the surveying of space, for it is only in space, in the network of layered particulars, that the successive images of time are concretized. (Birkerts, 1982: 165)

Benjamin’s view of the *flâneur* as a modern metropolitan walker surveying the palimpsestic aspects of the modern urban setting formed over centuries, and subsequent theoretical discussions around this notion, provide a useful framework for investigating the ways in which Ümit’s detective novel represents contemporary Istanbul. Although unlike the nineteenth-century *flâneur* in Benjamin’s formulations, Ümit’s protagonist Nevzat in *A Memento for Istanbul* does not “indulge in the pleasure of walking for the sake of walking” (Ümit, 2011: 130); he walks in the city much in the same way as the *flâneur* figure defined by Benjamin. As the investigation progresses, he notices “every aspect of urban life” (Pogossian, 2016: 130) and comments on each architectural landmark he encounters during his search for the murderers in the streets and districts of historic Istanbul. This narrative strategy of linking the serial killings with the history of the city enables Ümit to construct a detective protagonist who transforms the aimless wandering of the *flâneur* to a purposeful walking in the narrow streets of the old quarter in the city of Istanbul. Nevzat thus functions as the *flâneur* as he “witnesses the unseen spaces of the city, its ruins and relics, and he actively constructs a causal link between unmoored signifiers” (Dickens, 2004) the ancient buildings of contemporary Istanbul.

As the plot unfolds, Nevzat thus acquires the role of the *flâneur* or the leisurely city stroller conceptualized by Benjamin, for a modern detective and comments on Istanbul’s palimpsestic cultural past. At one point in the novel, Nevzat directly reveals how he fulfils the dual roles of a detective and an urban walker in the book:

[...] here we were, police officers working on an unsolved murder case, and instead of brainstorming, weighing up the facts and the hypotheses, discussing and arguing the various conjectures, which was our normal course of action, we were more like archaeologists, probing the dark and ancient mysteries of the city. (Ümit, 2011: 52)

This clearly shows how walking in the city for Nevzat becomes a means of encountering the ancient architectural structures that are carved into the contemporary urban landscape. His awareness of the dual-task of deduction and walking manifests similarities with the central character Quinn of Paul Auster’s *The New York Trilogy* (1988), since he

is the one who looks, who listens, who moves through this morass of objects and events in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all these things together and make sense of them... The reader sees the world through the detective’s eye, experiencing the proliferation

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of its details as if for the first time. He has become awake to the things around him, as if they might speak to him. (1988: 8)

As the chief inspector, Nevzat collects evidence and analyzes it in order to unravel the mystery behind the seven serial murders in historic Istanbul and as a stroller, he observes the contemporary urban space to decode notes left by the killers in the crime scenes associated with architectural landmarks of the city. Accordingly, while walking through the city, Nevzat looks, reads, retells, and interprets the details and stories of the architectural constructions and public spaces inscribed in every street, neighborhood and at every corner of Istanbul. For example, at one point in the book, Nevzat pays a visit to the first victim's house located in Samatya, one of the oldest and most colorful districts in Istanbul:

The address on the business card was Samatya, a district at the foot of one of Istanbul's seven hills. Although not as much as Balat, I'd always had a soft spot for Samatya. It was one of those historic districts which make Istanbul the city it is. Once inhabited by a large Armenian community, Evgenia [his girlfriend] and I often stopped by when we felt like having a *rakı* in a different setting. Evgenia would call it by its Greek name, *Psamatheia*, meaning 'sandy' or 'of the sands', but for me Samatya always meant the sun reflecting off the roofs of the old stone houses whose windows were always left open to let in the heady fragrance of the sea, old mosques, ancient churches, narrow streets with cosy old inns and those ancient rusty suburban trains which never seemed to tire of carrying thousands of city folk every day past those city walls which had been standing there so obstinately for thousands of years. But like Balat, Samatya was also tired, old and worn out, which is why I would never have expected the deceased's two-storey wooden house to be so impressive. Passing under a pair of ancient towering trees and through the iron gate over which hung bunches of delicate purple flowers, we came across a fig tree, its trunk bowed and bent, in a garden which transported one back to Byzantium. A stale, burning smell wafted over the garden as the sun continued its climb overhead, the shrill screech of the raucous seagulls mingling with the sound of children's voices from the street behind the house. (Ümit, 2011: 16-17)

Nevzat, a self-proclaimed observer, here engages in the activity of the urban walker who pays close attention to his environment and comments on Samatya's centuries-old wooden houses and its seagulls that have circled above this old district for centuries with their haunting cries mixed with the voices of children playing in the streets. His camera eye, a defining characteristic of the *flâneur*, sees everything in the streets of Samatya, transforming him into a viewer of the cityscape as defined by Michel de Certeau, whose movements "shape" spaces and "weave" (1988: 97) different periods of Istanbul together. The contemporary landscape of Istanbul in turn "gives him purpose and meaning" (Parsons, 2003: 223) in life and strengthens his attachment to the city. He feels lucky to have been born and lived in Istanbul "despite its ugliness, crowds, dirt and pollution" due to the rapid urban development in recent years (Ümit, 2011: 67) and takes a strong sense of pride in being from this city. Through the story of detection, the camera eye of Nevzat does not miss anything in the narrow streets and districts of the old quarter filled with spectacular old palaces, churches, mosques and other structures; each having particular stories to be told as he makes his way past them. At one point, he notices a group of tourists gazing in wonder at the Old Hippodrome's treasures, now Sultanahmet Square, such as "the Walled Obelisk, looted of its bronze plates during the Latin invasion and occupation," (Ümit, 2011: 45) the now headless Serpent Column, and the Obelisk of Theodosius brought from Egypt to the Ottoman capital.

The act of deducting crimes combined with the act of examining the urban space helps Nevzat to see the city and to discover its hidden stories, attempting to make sense of his city's cultural heritage and history through the structures he encounters during his walks. This way, on the one hand, Nevzat discloses "his extreme familiarity with the ins and outs of the city and reports on everyday sensory of encounters of all kinds" (Boutin, 2012: 127), and, on the other hand, "registers the city as a text to be inscribed, read, rewritten and reread" (Parsons, 2003: 3). For Nevzat, in addition to finding murderers, "walking in the city is at once an encounter with modernity and with the past, with the new and unknown

but also with haunting ghosts” (Parsons, 2003: 10). Istanbul thus becomes an immense archive of cultural memory and narratives inherited by the city from its diverse populations and conflicting historical and cultural past. Nevzat’s strolls, accompanied by memories and storytelling, serve to tell the tales of the city’s past and unmask its signs inscribed in the structures scattered around the old quarter, as in the case of the legend of the Serpent Column that he heard from his mother. According to the myth:

Once a part of the Apollo Temple in Delphi, the column, it was said, protected the city from snakes, scorpions, centipedes and vermin of all kinds; the legend states that when the snakes’ heads were hacked off, by some imbecile, some fool with no sense of decency or values, the city was struck by a plague. As for the snake’s heads now, one was on display in the Archaeological Museum, which I’d visited with my mother as a child; another was in a museum in London, whilst the third was lost in the mists of time. (Ümit, 2011: 45)

The above citation clearly exhibits that, in a similar way to modern city walker, Nevzat conceives of the city as a space of the new and the old where past and present are connected together. This enables him to assume the role of a city spectator and to provide lengthy depictions of architectural monuments (churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and palaces (Roman columns, foundations, arches, mosaics, tiles, frescoes, ceremonies, marbles, stones, basilica cisterns, towers, tombs, the headless Serpent Column, the Obelisk of Theodosious, a train station, etc.) scattered around historic Istanbul that constitute its contemporary urban landscape.

Nevzat’s fascination with the history of Istanbul and conversations about its culture with other characters, such as the murder suspects, art historians with a genuine interest in the city’s cultural past, and ordinary homeless men who witness the killings, are included into the story of his hunt for the serial killers. In this way, along with his own observations on the urban space, the reader is also presented with detailed and hidden stories behind the construction of the architectural monuments at which the bodies of victims are dumped. The novel re-tells the social events and political motives of the historical figures, including kings, emperors, sultans, their wives and lovers, princes and princesses, architects and others, behind the erection of the architectural monuments found in Istanbul. Indeed, Nevzat appears to be happy about the fact that the crimes are directly linked with the history of the city by stating that “I’d always enjoyed stories about Istanbul and if the stories had some kind of connection to the case we were working on, there was no way I could ignore it” (Ümit, 2011: 48). In addition to his own knowledge of the city, he learns new tales about the city from other characters he meets, ranging from homeless people to art historians or greedy business people to night guards.

Nevzat’s figure of modern stroller is therefore strengthened as he writes and rewrites the social, political, and cultural history of the city from its mythical origins to the present day. The first-person narrative aims to reawaken forgotten histories and legends, allowing for the recapitulation and reconstitution of the urban environment in time and space. For this reason, he even encourages his associates to learn about Istanbul’s complex history so that they can detach themselves from the national narrative taught in textbooks that generally underlines the Ottoman-Turkish cultural heritage of the city. Nevzat’s activity of urban observant and narrator of abundant stories functions as a means of transforming the city into a space of cultural memory and remembrance, and also operates for him “not just as setting or image, but as a constituent of [his] identity,” (Parsons, 2003: 7) as the place of his birth, childhood, youth, and now adulthood. He closely associates his own identity with the complex history and destiny of Istanbul, whose rich past and culture continue to surprise and fascinate him without interruption.

### **Urban Representations: The Past Meets the Present**

As mentioned above, through blending the history of Istanbul with a contemporary detective story, Ümit’s *A Memento for Istanbul* describes an investigation in which the murderers kill for their beloved city that they think has been destroyed and plundered by greedy people in recent years. Each

victim abandoned at a historical site provides a narrative opportunity for the author to comment on and tell a new story or tale associated with that particular architectural landmark and its historical past. New commentaries and tales are continually added to the stories of the seven cultural monuments where the bodies of the seven victims are left as Nevzat and his associates walk in the streets to find new clues for the murder interrogation, contributing to making Istanbul the repository of multiple narratives throughout the novel. In this regard, the mythical foundation of Istanbul is retold and re-interpreted during the murder investigation. For instance, after the first slaying takes place, the book re-narrates various legends and myths behind the foundation of Byzantium on the shores of the Sea of Marmara opposite today's Kadiköy, known as "The City of the Blind" on the Asian side of the Bosphorus facing Istanbul's historic sites.

According to the origin legend of the city told by Nevzat's deputy Zeynep in the novel, "The blind' are those people who lived in today's Kadiköy; they were called the blind because they chose to settle there instead of on the other - better - side of the straits" (Ümit, 2011: 49). The legend further explains that the first founders of the city were the Greeks led by King Byzas who settled down on the European side of the Bosphorus in today's Sarayburnu, because, "It was also easily defendable, surrounded on three sides by the sea. It also had strategic value, as the ships passing through the straits paid a tax to the inhabitants on that side" (Ümit, 2011: 49). At various times in the novel, Nevzat attempts to imagine the ancient city with the details provided by Zeynep's research on its first settlers. Nevzat's picturing of the city based on new information provided by his deputy serves to add new details about the original foundation of Istanbul by the Greeks. This re-narration of the myths around the foundation of the Temple of Poseidon in Sarayburnu and Byzantium, the initial name of the city, serves for the author to inform the contemporary reader about how the city was indeed first established by the Greeks, not the Romans, contrary to general belief.

Another part of Istanbul's past that constantly occupies the protagonist's mind in the novel is the Hagia Sophia, first built as a church, later converted to an Ottoman imperial mosque, and now used as a museum. Each time Nevzat walks by this marvel of engineering, he gazes upon its beautiful massive dome and splendid structure that still continues to astonish people today. The detective's concentration on the Hagia Sophia intensifies when the fourth victim's body is left by it. Nevzat reflects on the interior and exterior architectural characteristics of the building and depicts the significant historical events and political and religious motives surrounding its construction in the sixth century, emphasizing the architectural uniqueness of its structure and the scientific mastermind behind its erection. Similarly, through Nevzat and his conversations with other characters, the novel re-narrates various stories depicting the epoch-changing events centered around the Hagia Sophia, whose architectural structure gradually turned into a palimpsest with continuous new additions, such as the four minarets and a fountain for ablutions. These intertwining stories show how the Hagia Sophia's fascinating history displays similarities with its multi-layered-architecture.

At one point in the novel, the reader finds Nevzat having a dream in which he observes the glamorous structure of the building as he and another character, Leyla Barkın, the director of the Topkapı Palace Museum, walk towards the museum:

Once again, as was always the case when I entered these premises, I found myself looking up at those mausoleums, so reminiscent of stone tents, and imagining the myths and tales of the dead the tombs enclosed, those sultans and padishahs whose rules had long since crumbled, their wives and concubines, each with her own tale to tell, at those princes whose lives had been cut short in their prime as the princes struggled for the throne. We passed the fountain and walked along the road between the church and the Roman columns lining the path until we came to the entrance of the church. We went through the central door under the three arches crowning the entrance and came out into a long, wide corridor. (Ümit, 2011: 354)

The depiction, on the one hand, reveals the structural harmony of the building by singling out its enormous dome, beautiful and invaluable mosaics, massive columns, marbles, and impressive windows from the Byzantine period, and on the other hand, reveals the four minarets, the fountain, mihrap, medallions, Islamic calligraphy, and tombs of sultans from the Ottoman times. The physical representation of the museum revealing the architectural characteristics of both periods at once is accompanied by echoes in Nevzat's ears of mixed voices of people from the Roman and Ottoman periods:

I pictured the Romans of the past as they knelt barefoot on the ground, their heads bowed... I could almost hear their hushed thousand-year old prayers echoing off the walls... I turned and looked further on, towards that part of the church which was out of bounds for them, and saw five huge doors, the crosses from the Byzantine period since removed by the Ottomans to leave an-arrow-like shape in the centre of each. (Ümit, 2011: 354-355)

Here Nevzat sees a close affiliation between the complex configuration of the Hagia Sophia and that of its historical past. The interplay of science and aesthetics that is evident in the monument's structural harmony and proportion presents its engineering and architectural genius. The detailed portrayal also symbolizes this magnificent building's religious and political importance for both Christian and Islamic civilizations over the centuries. Accordingly, the Byzantine mosaics depicting the Virgin Mary, Jesus, Christian saints, and emperors are intertwined with enormous Islamic calligraphy displaying the names of Allah, the Prophet Muhammad, and his first four Caliphs hung on the columns. With the ghosts of his wife and daughter who had been violently murdered in a car bombing several years previously following him through the central door beneath a mosaic of Jesus Christ, Nevzat and Leyla Barkın enter the building and his focus centers more on its interior design:

Even if she hadn't told me, it wouldn't have been difficult to work it out as the difference between this corridor and the corridor we'd left behind was startling. This corridor was illuminated with candles and the walls were lined with dark green, white and smoky marble. Stunning mosaics covered the golden ceiling. When I looked up, I came face to face with a mosaic of Christ flanked by the Virgin Mary on his left and the Archangel Gabriel on his right staring down at me. He seemed to be ignoring the image of the prostrate emperor begging for forgiveness for his sins, and instead stared straight at me, as though to ask what I was doing there...

[...]

The moment I stepped through the door, I found myself in a sea of golden light. The columns and frescoes, the mosaics and tiles, the *mihrab* and the verses from scripture and *The Koran*, the calligraphic works, the pulpit, the area set aside for the congregation; everything in that chamber, whether it be made of marble, stone, wood, glass, gold, silver, copper or iron, suddenly came alive in that celestial light from another world. (Ümit, 2011: 355-356)

The protagonist's careful observation further underlines the building's beautiful yet complex structure with Byzantine and Ottoman architectural elements mixed together. Therefore, the Hagia Sophia and the narratives surrounding it mark the complex and ambiguous history of Istanbul as the book re-writes stories of how this building was initially constructed and changed over time with the city.

The finding of the fourth victim's body in the middle of a street running past the Hagia Sophia also serves for the author to narrate the legends and stories surrounding the construction of the Hagia Sophia by the Emperor Justinian in the sixth century after the Nika Riots took place in Constantinople. In this regard, the book depicts the conflicting narratives and tales about the Nika uprising, including the rival chariot racing teams, the Blues and Greens, in a time when sports and politics were closely intertwined in the Byzantine Empire. Attempting to overthrow Justinian, the riot rapidly spread throughout the city, causing the city center to be covered with flames and smoke. Influenced by his wife

Theodora, the emperor responded to the uprising with brutality and violence. The two generals assigned to quell the riot

entered the arena with their troops through the two gates on either side, effectively cutting off the exits, and proceeded to slaughter each and every one of the demonstrators; men, women, and children. All in all, around thirty thousand people were killed. By the end of the day, the protestors had learnt their lesson. The rebellion had been crushed, and Justinian was now free to begin his reconstruction of the city. (Ümit, 2011: 385)

Through the narration of the Nika Revolt, the novel underscores the cycles of bloodshed and violence caused by competition for power and dominance across human history. Ironically, Nevzat hears the story of the violent suppression of the demonstration from the antagonist of the novel, the developer Adem Yezdan, who plans to build a shopping center at the heart of the Hippodrome, which would lead to the destruction of many of the few remaining urban landmarks from ancient times and further shatter the skyline of the historical peninsula in Istanbul.

The novel's depiction of these events through the dialogue between chief inspector Nevzat and prime suspect Yezdan contributes to the paradoxical internal design of the Hagia Sophia museum and myths and legends surrounding its construction. In emphasizing the cycles of violence and bloodshed in history, Yezdan attempts to rationalize the brutal suppression of the Nika uprising by stating that "had Justinian not crushed the revolt with Theodora's prompting, the city of Constantinople would have not undergone such a renovation. The Hagia Sophia we see today, for instance, would not have been built" (Ümit, 2011: 385). Following the destruction of the city, along with the building of the largest Christian cathedral of the time, Justinian erected a number of other great monuments around the city, some of which still form the contemporary landscape in the main square in addition to the Palatium Magnum and the Baths of Zeuxippus.

This underscores once more that the palimpsestic features of the Hagia Sophia's internal design, by reflecting the city's continual change with layering upon layering and continual re-narration of tales about the building over the centuries, are closely connected with the stories of other buildings in the novel. Over the course of the murder investigation, Nevzat goes back and forth from one architectural monument to another where the bodies are left and encounters other historical buildings. Hence with his knowledge and curiosity, combined with his dialogues with other characters on the history of Istanbul, Nevzat essentially becomes an observer and commentator of the Hagia Sophia Museum and other architectural constructions and historical figures associated with them. Nevzat's walks between the monuments and districts in historic Istanbul play a significant role in linking different areas, buildings, stories, historical personalities, and narratives with one another. He thus creates the cultural and historical inventory of historic Istanbul in time and space by traversing the seven hills, noting the architectural landmarks, and laying out the topology and geography of this ancient urban center.

The conversations Nevzat holds with other characters over the course of his murder investigation reveal to the reader other tortures and massacres of the past, never-ending cycles of violence and oppression in the history of the city, while also, for example, rewriting the conquest of Istanbul by the Ottomans. The novel re-narrates the Ottoman conquest of the city and the subsequent developments that led to its political, architectural, economic and cultural restoration. For instance, using the abandonment of the fifth victim's corpse at the Fatih Mosque Complex, the novel retells the narratives around the conquest of Istanbul by the Ottomans and its consequent reconstruction and rebuilding by Mehmed II. The novel relays how the Conqueror, who aimed to lay "the foundations for a new city for Islam," (Ümit, 2011: 435) ordered his soldiers to plunder the city after its conquest and did not hesitate to have the chief architect's hands chopped off because he failed to build a dome as big as the Hagia Sophia's for the Fatih Mosque Complex (consisting of a madrasah, a primary school, a

hospital, a guesthouse, a soup kitchen, a library, a caravanserai, and a public bath). In addition, *A Memento for Istanbul* especially singles out the Prophet Muhammad's prophetic tradition (hadiths) about Constantinople's conquest by the Muslims, Sultan Mehmed II's objective to fulfill this divine providence by conquering the city, the architectural features of the Fatih Mosque and its subsequent renovations, the rumors around Mehmed II's body and his reappearance as a ghost from his mausoleum in the Fatih Mosque complex, and the city's restoration and prosperity under the Ottomans. Using this murder, the novel then goes on to depict other magnificent mosques and complexes, such as the Süleymaniye and Bayezid Mosque Complexes, that still shape Istanbul's historic skyline today, and their splendid aesthetic and architectural characteristics to complete the Islamization of the city.

Among the Ottoman monuments of Istanbul portrayed in the book, the Topkapı Palace especially occupies the protagonist's mind. Nevzat closely observes this complex and shares his thoughts and reflection on its historical importance during the Ottoman Empire. For example, in the courtyard of the Topkapı Palace, he not only gives information about various significant architectural, social, and political characteristics of the complex, but also reflects on the contemporary urban scenery within it:

I turned and saw a small van in the front of Hagia Irene Church. There were four people at the van carefully lowering a huge piano down to the ground with the aid of a winch, most probably in preparation for an upcoming concert. A few steps on we felt a cool breeze coming in from the right, all the way up from the Black Sea, a breeze following in the footsteps of the storm which had blustered and raged a few hours ago. The raindrops fell off the branches of the sycamore trees lining the avenue. All around, voices speaking in various languages from all around the world could be heard, reminding me of the foreign emissaries who, during Ottoman times, would leave their horses here at the courtyard and advance further up the lane to conduct their business with the empire's governors. It was a strange feeling, approaching the centre of the building which for four hundred years had been the very heart of the Ottoman Empire. I'd read somewhere that twenty-thousand people had gathered here in this courtyard for the funeral of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror and to see him off on his final journey. I could almost hear the cries and lamentations amongst the ancient trees piercing the sky and the centuries-old fortifications surrounding the palace until... (Ümit, 2011: 395)

Feeling at home in crowds, here Nevzat provides a detailed account of his experience of contemporary urban scenery by relying on his knowledge of the city's past and receptive observations of the present-moment. He connects the complex history of Istanbul, which here becomes a cosmopolitan gathering space, to the diverse contemporary urban city, made up of various buildings from different eras and a crowd speaking different languages and coming from different geographies and cultures. Istanbul here becomes a cosmopolitan gathering place that serves for dynamic encounters and experiences in the past and present. It is a scene "in which people come alive, where they expose, acknowledge and address the discordant parts of themselves and one another" (Sennett, 1996: 354), disclosing the protagonist detective's obsessive desire to know and to write his urban space in its totality. This desire enables Nevzat to combine historical facts about the city's past with his personal reflection on the dynamics of the contemporary urban landscape as he shares information with the reader on the architectural monuments of Topkapı Palace, the present-day classical music concerts in Hagia Irene Church, the kind of wind coming from the Black Sea, the state procedures for welcoming foreign embassies in the Ottoman period, and the funeral ceremony of Mehmet II who conquered Istanbul in the fifteenth century.

### **The City of Personal Memories and Loss**

In *A Memento for Istanbul*, the literary representation of Istanbul is also closely related to the protagonist Nevzat's own individual identity. This especially manifests itself in his attachment to the neighborhood, Balat, where he grew up and still continues to live after a brief departure due to his official appointments in the Turkish police department's branches in Anatolia. Balat was once known

as the Jewish quarter of the city by the Golden Horn. It is located next to Fener, another formerly cosmopolitan district that was especially associated with the Greek community during the Ottoman Empire. In the novel, Nevzat often recalls playing with kids from different ethnic backgrounds in the streets of these historically diverse neighborhoods during his childhood. His Greek and Jewish neighbors later began to feel unwelcome in Istanbul, implied to be due to the nationalistic environment of the 1950s and 1960s in Turkey, and gradually left the districts for good. Every time Nevzat passes by his neighbors' vacant and dilapidated houses, he remembers the good old days of his upbringing. Although Balat appears to have lost its cosmopolitan identity with the gradual migration abroad of the remaining members of minority groups, it still possesses the traces of Jewish and Greek communities and retains their churches and synagogues, thus continuing to provide links to its diverse past. These include the Kariye Museum, or Church of St. Savior, in Chora with its fascinating mosaics and frescoes, which is one of the most important architectural landmarks in the historic peninsula of the city, and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, the spiritual center of the Greek Orthodox community worldwide since the early seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup>

Balat is also the place Nevzat fell in love for the first time, played soccer with friends, and had fights with kids from other neighborhoods. It is a district where his two closest childhood friends, Yekta and Demir, still live just a couple streets away. They have all inherited their houses from their parents, establishing their connection to their neighborhood both through their own recent personal memories and through the distant past of the city they adore so much. In other words, Nevzat's strong attachment to his birthplace Balat is especially characterized by his bond to his beloved family and friends, as well as to Istanbul's historical past. Experiencing the city for Nevzat is thus a reminder of both the events of his own life and the history of Istanbul:

As I approached Balat, the sun was setting, lighting up the hills overrun by those awful buildings on the far side of the city in a symphony of light and colour. Before I swung my battered old Renault around to head off home, I turned around and looked one more time at the serene waters of the Golden Horn. Straining my neck, I saw the dark blue waters flow gently towards Sütlüce, and thought about the legend of Io, and about Keroessa, whom Io gave birth to in those hills just over the water there, and about her son Byzas, the founder and first king of this city. As the sunlight faded and the monstrous buildings I was gazing at were plunged into shadow and darkness, I found myself starting to believe in the myth of Byzas. It was odd but I suddenly felt as intimately connected to Keroessa [a heroine of the foundational myth of Byzantium] as I did to my neighbours Nadide Hanım and her son Tunç; Yahya Kemal's lines, '*Sade bir semtini sevmek bile ömre değer*' [*To know and love just one of your neighborhoods is worth an entire lifetime.*] started to make sense. I realised how lucky I was, despite all its ugliness, crowds, dirt and pollution, to have been born and lived, like the great Yahya Kemal himself, in Istanbul. I began to feel a sense of something resembling pride rising up from within the depths of my heart. (Ümit, 2011: 67)

Nevzat's reflections on his district Balat and its surroundings near the Golden Horn, combined with the remembrance of Istanbul's foundational myths, here function as a way to contemplate his own personal story together with the stories of the city's past. He sees Istanbul through its present and past and attempts to make sense of its history and topography (Certeau, 1988: 93) that are carved on the contemporary urban landscape.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Keep in mind that Nevzat's current girlfriend Evgenia is a local Greek [Rum] woman, who runs her father's tavern [meyhane] in Kurtuluş, another once ethnically and culturally diverse neighborhood in Istanbul. Just like Nevzat, she is also so closely attached to the city of Istanbul.

<sup>3</sup> Like Nevzat, his childhood friends, Yekta and Demir, also know everything there is to know about Istanbul and its history. For example, Yekta, who is indeed the poet of the lyrical odes about the city that follow the main contemporary detective narrative plaine in parallel, "can tell you whatever you want to know about this fair city of ours; which fountains are where, which sultan built which palace, which architect designed and built which monument" (Ümit, 2011: 93).

More importantly, Nevzat used to live with his beloved wife and daughter in a house in this once-traditional neighborhood. After his wife Güzide and daughter Aysun die in a mysterious car explosion, he often experiences a feeling of nostalgia mixed with melancholy, grief and guilt. Balat is a place that concretely manifests the city's ambivalent past, both communal and personal, that triggers Nevzat's everlasting and overwhelming sense of loss. Each time he goes back home, he constantly struggles with these unsettled emotions, memories, and anxiety. Each time he opens the front door of the house, Nevzat still hears his wife's distinctive voice, which he will never hear again, and imagines his daughter greeting him with hugs and kisses. Nevzat looks at their pictures on the wall and remembers the horrific accident, thus opening the deep wound in his heart.

The ghosts of his wife and daughter haunt Nevzat in other parts of the city. At one point in the novel, he has a nightmare about being in the Hagia Sophia, where he sees visions of his dead wife and daughter, connecting his personal past with the past of Istanbul. He is overwhelmed with profound sorrow and guilt. Upon hearing his daughter Aysun's whispering into his ears, Nevzat collapses in the middle of the Hagia Sophia:

The entire church was silenced by her voice; the angels quietly folded their wings and retired back to their corners while the breeze faded away and I was left momentarily floating in the middle of the emptiness of that vast dome. I looked for Aysun, hoping to see [his daughter] her eyes to give me something to cling on to, but those wings had closed up over her face again. Güzide's face was concealed too; all I could see were feathers shimmering in the darkness. I realized that the last vestiges of hope had been snatched away from me by the angels... I began to fall, like a stone, plunging so rapidly that everything around me – the columns, frescoes and mosaics, the mihrab, the calligraphy and verses from scripture – became a blur. I knew now nobody would come to my rescue; not the angels, not my wife, child or friends. Nobody would help me now. I knew I was falling to my death, through the void and onto the marble floor where I would meet my end. So fast was my descent that I could now make out my rapidly growing shadow and the lines on the marble floor. I knew I was heading for my doom and braced myself for the end when I suddenly woke up. (Ümit, 2011: 360)

Here Nevzat closely ties his personal life with the city of Istanbul. Like Balat, the Hagia Sophia is not only a glorious architectural landmark that shapes the city Nevzat lives in now, but also a place where he encounters the ghosts of his wife and daughter. It is a place where he experiences aesthetic appreciation and delight, but also a place in which he reveals his profound personal loss, sadness, and guilt, and experiences a psychological breakdown. This clearly shows that just like the neighborhood in which the protagonist lives, historical sites function paradoxically in Ümit's novel. They function as places of beauty, aesthetic appreciation, nostalgia, memory, and contemplation, yet they also symbolize his loss, pain, sadness, anxiety, grief, guilt, and isolation. Ümit's perception of the city through the contradictory portrayal of the Hagia Sophia appears to be closely associated with the protagonist's individual personality. The impressive architectural structure that he looked at admiringly just a short while ago turns into an uncanny place where he encounters the ghosts of his daughter Aysun and his wife Güzide.

In this regard, Ümit's portrayal of historical monuments, the old peninsula, and the traditional culturally diverse districts in Istanbul (like Balat and Samatya) reminds us of Svetlana Boym's notion of "reflective" nostalgia. In her discussion of nostalgia, Boym discusses the differences between "restorative" and "reflective" nostalgia, arguing that "restorative nostalgia evokes the national past and future; reflective nostalgia is more about individual and cultural memory" (2002: 49). She further points out that "Nostalgia of the first type gravitates toward collective pictorial symbols and oral culture. Nostalgia of the second type is more oriented toward an individual narrative that savours details and memorial signs, perpetually deferring homecoming itself" (Boym, 2002: 49). While the former creates a collective myth, the latter implies a feeling of loss. Similarly, in offering the complex and contradictory

visions of the cultural past through the portrayal of the contemporary urban space of Istanbul, Ümit creates a narrative in which the protagonist constantly negotiates with the past in order to cope with the present. Nevzat often has the unsettled feelings of exhaustion, sadness, despair and melancholy as he strolls through the streets of contemporary urban city of Istanbul. He experiences a sense of lost home or lost self, yet he does not automatically long for the past just because he feels out of place or dissatisfied with the present. Occupying himself with the past through his neighborhood and childhood friends as a form of reflective nostalgia, the old Istanbul functions for Nevzat as a way of escaping the traumatic experiences of his own life and the overwhelming urban scene at the same time. It is this reflective form of the past in Ümit's novel that shapes both the modern urban landscape and characterizes his protagonist's personal identity. The constant negotiation with the past and the re-visitation of various historical monuments refresh his memories and reinforce his sense of belonging to the city at the same time.

### Conclusion

To conclude, in Ahmet Ümit's novel, *A Memento for Istanbul*, the protagonist Nevzat is always concerned with how most people living in Istanbul are unaware of its past. He constantly underlines how Turks are clueless about not only the Greeks and Romans, but also the Ottomans, even though they love to brag about the military accomplishments of their forefathers. As an investigator, he strolls through the streets of contemporary urban Istanbul, a defining feature of the *flâneur* figure, and comments on the cityscape while trying to find the killers who have violently murdered seven people and ditched their bodies at historical sites. Nevzat thus functions as a *flâneur* and a mediator between the past and present by rediscovering and retelling the stories of the city and its people for the contemporary reader. He is the re-teller and producer of numerous texts on the city in which he lives. His stories make us rethink our relationship with the past as we witness how the old buildings are constantly demolished and remodeled according to modern needs, economic interests, architectural fashion, and urban planning.

Reading and experiencing the changing city, with its neglected neighborhoods and abandoned buildings, makes him conscious of the contradictory effects of the social and economic transformation of the Istanbul he lives, loves and struggles in. As dynamic entities, the historical sites also constantly challenge his place between the past and present and his notion of selfhood. They function as palimpsests on which memories and histories are written and rewritten. These historical sites for Ümit encourage politically- and ethically-motivated reflections that can lead to a historical revision of his past and the creation of a possible alternative future. They offer a constructive and critical reading of the past by Ümit, whose *A Memento for Istanbul* attempts to shape the modern urban landscape and characterize the protagonist's identity as he develops his personality in relation to historical monuments in Istanbul. His daily life and identity are closely associated with the historical monuments scattered around the cosmopolitan urban space that determines his way of life, perception of identity, relationship and reinforce his belonging to the city.

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