Capitalizing Istanbul: reading Orhan Pamuk’s literary cityscape
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Chapter 4 - A Melancholy of My Own: Melancholy of *Istanbul*

I have neither the scholar’s melancholy, which is emulation; nor the musician’s, which is fantastical; nor the courtier’s, which is proud; nor the soldier’s, which is ambitious; nor the lawyer’s, which is politic; nor the lady’s, which is nice; nor the lover’s, which is all these, but it is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects.

*William Shakespeare, As You Like It* (4.1.10-17)

“The Tower of Babel never yielded such confusion of tongues as this chaos of melancholy doth variety of symptoms,” laments Robert Burton in his colossal Anthology of Melancholy. Burton’s complaint, dating from four centuries ago, has been transposed to the conceptions and representations of the term: from Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* to Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* (2005), from the theory of four humours to psychoanalysis, from the blues to fado, from spleen to saudade and to tristesse. With theorists ranging from Aristotle, to Avicenna, and to Freud, melancholy traverses the arts, sciences, and literatures across cultures and histories.

Orhan Pamuk’s *Istanbul: Memories and the City* (2003), is a recent addition to the literature on melancholy. In the memoir, Pamuk identifies the predominant mood of the city as the melancholy of a city in decrepitude:

Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nun yıkım duygusu, yoksulluk ve şehri kaplayan yıkıntıların verdiği hüzün, bütün hayatım boyunca, İstanbul’u belirleyen şeyler oldu. Hayatım bu hüzünün savaşarak ya da onu, bütün İstanbullular gibi en sonunda benimseyerek geçti. (2003 15)

[Istanbul has been defined by the end-of-empire, decrepitude, and the melancholy of the ruins that extends over the city] it has always been a city of ruins and of end-of-empire melancholy. I have spent my life either battling with this melancholy or (like all Istanbullus) making it my own. (2005 6)
Pamuk’s Istanbul is a humanized city suffering from chronic, even pathological sadness, which transmits its mood to its inhabitants. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the attribution of melancholy to a city, the above lines echo the quote from *As You Like It* with which I started this chapter: the struggle to come up with a personal and personalized conception of melancholy.

This chapter stems from a simple question on Pamuk’s personalized understanding: how does melancholy make sense when relating to Istanbul, and, reciprocally, what makes the city’s melancholy, as it arises from Pamuk’s work, stand out from the large body of literature on the term? The following pages aim to answer these questions by tracing the evolution of the concept as melancholy, an imagery that connotes a certain sensibility and aesthetics, and as melancholia, or melancholy pathologized, a concept at the core of identity formation, to link it to the imagery of melancholy in Pamuk’s work, and particularly in the memoir.

**Contrapuntal reading**

In Western classical music, counterpoint refers to the art of writing musical lines that sound very different and move independently from each other but result in a harmonious polyphony when played simultaneously. In the same vein, this elaboration on melancholy, highlighting the multiple melodies and themes that underlie a single feeling, is contrapuntal. Focusing on the interplay between Pamuk’s conceptualization and the canonical representations of melancholy, I will argue in the following pages that counterpoint informs not only this study, but also the memoir. Counterpoint relates to the interweaving of the different understandings of the word, the pathological and the popular, or the individualistic and the communal.
The use of counterpoint as a metaphor for this chapter also explains the politics of this reading. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said transposes this musical term to literature, to define reading across cultures and histories:

In the counterpoint of Western classical music, various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one; yet in the resulting polyphony there is concert and order, an organized interplay that derives from the themes, not from a rigorous melodic or formal principle outside the work. As we look back at the cultural archive, we begin to reread it not univocally but contrapuntally, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts. (60)

Contrapuntal reading entails a reading practice that makes a note of different, even competing ideological and political contexts that apply to a text. In terms of close reading, it involves “reading a text with an understanding of what is involved when an author shows, for instance, that a colonial sugar plantation is seen as important to the process of maintaining a particular style of life in England” (78). Similarly, drawing from the two dominant discourses that shaped the cultural landscape of Istanbul, that of Islam and of the West, the melancholy of the memoir displays, to follow Said’s definition, “an awareness of metropolitan history,” in this case Western definitions of melancholy, but which nevertheless highlights the “other histories,” in this case that of Istanbul, Islam, and Turkish men of letters.54

Ultimately, contrapuntal reading itself is melancholic; it deals with loss and absence, especially if we are to follow Bill Ashcroft’s definition of the term, where “Contrapuntal reading acts to give absences a presence” (*Edward* 96). The act of giving presence in the memoir is twofold: Pamuk’s conceptualization of melancholy contributes to Istanbul’s presence in the literary topos of melancholy. It also makes western conceptualizations of

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54 Pamuk’s literary world is predominantly male. His inventory of Western and Turkish writers on Istanbul does not include any women.
melancholy present within the history and cultural landscape of the city. Absence also defines the memoir as it also introduces relatively unknown experiences of the feeling, poeticizes loss and makes it an indispensable part of the cityscape. In short, the counterpoints I aim to highlight in Pamuk’s memoir are not only about music and politics, but also about melancholy.

**Melancholy**

Given how the word derives from the Greek *melan khole*, or black bile, melancholy traverses usages as a concept that contains a history of medicine and arts. Linked to the theory of four humors, melancholy was originally viewed as mental illness, caused by an invasion of the brain by vapors rising from the spleen, the source of black, bilious humor. From its earlier conceptions onwards, melancholy was considered a precondition of genius. Notable among these is Aristotle’s question on the frequency of melancholic disposition among philosophers or politicians.⁵⁵ Melancholy was also associated with gloom resulting from intellectual talent, scholarly pursuits, and creativity, defining thus a gamut of contradictory mental, emotional and intellectual states.⁵⁶

A renowned example from the pictorial representations of melancholy is Albrecht Dürer’s engraving, “Melencolia I,” from 1514, depicting two gloomy winged angels lost in thought, surrounded by tools of measurement and construction, all disused. In the background we see the word melancholia itself against a setting sun (Melencolia I). Melancholy has been

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⁵⁵ A passage attributed to Aristotle that associates melancholy, or black bile, with creativity, genius and intellectual pursuits starts with the following question: “Why is it that all those who have become eminent in philosophy or politics or poetry or the arts are clearly of an atrabilious temperament, and some of them to such an extent as to be affected by diseases caused by black bile, as is said to have happened to Heracles among the heroes?” (Northwood).

⁵⁶ Rufus of Ephesus is considered the founder of this trend (Toohey). Later associations, including Burton’s *Anatomy* and Dürer’s melancholy, draw from this approach.
a popular theme in literature, whether in personal writings as Montaigne’s Essays from 1580, in the disposition of Hamlet, the protagonist of Shakespeare’s most famous play, or in anthologies on the topic as in Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, dating from 1621, considered the most influential anthology on the topic (Radden).

Melancholy has also been considered a marker of local and national identity. The link between emotions and nationalism, or “civic melancholy,” to borrow Eric Gidal’s term, was a popular French conception of English national image and political climate during the eighteenth century. Gidal cites a passage from Germaine de Stael’s de la literature from 1800 where she identifies melancholy as a particularly English feeling, a result of much thinking: “why the English, who are contented with their government and customs, have an imagination so much more melancholy than was that of the French?” (Gidal). French melancholy, on the other hand, draws from the traditional imagery and Albrecht Dürer’s depiction reverberates in the following lines by Gerard de Nerval: “My sole star is dead and my constellated lute Bears the Black Sun of Melancholia” (Nerval).

Melancholy also runs through nineteenth century French poetry, which is characterized by glorification of melancholy and the man of sensibility prone to the feeling. In his analysis of modernist writing in France, Ross Chambers traces melancholy in the works of nineteenth century French writers, Théophile Gautier, Gérard de Nerval, Gustave Flaubert, and Charles Baudelaire, against the backdrop of French politics of the period (1987). Melancholy, according to Chambers, conveys the disillusionment following the political turmoil of the period, “a feeling of discontinuity between a past in which enthusiasm was still possible and still made sense and a present that labors instead under a painful

57 This relates particularly to the difference between the English and the French versions of melancholy. The French approach is considered more private and positive and the English more communal but also confining (Gidal; Toohey 239). The same trend can be traced in the difference between Kristeva’s conceptualization of melancholy as opposed to Gilroy.
consciousness of lack” (29). Melancholy as such is a personalized response to the politics of the period: “The poets personalize and privatize this lack” (29). Such associations also mark the poetry from the other side of the Channel. Watching the French Coast from the English Side, Matthew Arnold hears the shingles on the Dover Beach “bring the eternal note of sadness in” (1867). Linking the British to the French and to the Greek traditions, Arnold’s poem also establishes “human misery” as a transhistorical feeling that runs through the Western tradition.58

A key figure on the glorification of melancholy is Baudelaire. His use of Spleen, an English word, to denote his melancholy can be traced back to the eighteenth-century French letters. The alienation he writes about, however, is urban, and specifically Parisian. Baudelaire’s melancholy is almost always associated with the streets of Paris. In “The Swan,” from his Parisian Tableaux (1861), a stroll outside the Louvre, along the boulevards newly designed by Baron Haussmann, makes him remember Andromaque, and as such all who have lost something they may not find again. The poet acknowledges, and yet is impervious to the changes in the cityscape: “Paris may change, but in my melancholy mood nothing has budged!”59 Baudelaire’s Paris is an allegory, his memories heavier than stones, and his melancholy feeds on the loss brought by the rapid urbanization of the city.

Baudelaire’s Paris and the link between urbanscape and melancholy are made even more significant by Walter Benjamin’s writings on the topic, notably The Writer of Modern Life. Benjamin contributes to the tradition of the melancholic thinker not only through his depictions of Baudelaire as a “genius nourished on melancholy,” but also through his persona (40).60 In the same vein, Benjamin associates Spleen, another word traditionally associated

58 “Listen! you hear the grating roar/ Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,/ At their return, up the high strand,/ Begin, and cease, and then again begin,/ With tremulous cadence slow, and bring/ The eternal note of sadness in.”
59 From “The Swan” (“Le Cygne”), Part II.
60 See Walter Jennings’s introduction to Benjamin’s The Writer of Modern Life.
with melancholy, and the title of a collection of Baudelaire’s poems, with the pursuit of ideals. For Benjamin, it means “that it is the melancholic above all whose gaze is fixed on the ideal, and that it is the images of melancholy that kindle the spirit most brightly” (29). Benjamin’s understanding evokes Nerval’s “black sun” and the traditional imagery of melancholy rather than Freud’s pathological understanding of the concept.

Contemporary understanding of melancholy and its use in social and cultural studies transposes the historical usage and the imagery of melancholy to a language of pathology and diagnosis. This approach is mostly based on Sigmund Freud’s essay from 1917, “Mourning and Melancholia,” where Freud differentiated mourning from melancholia, and defined the first as a normal, and the second as a pathological reaction to loss. In usual mourning, the subject overcomes the feeling of loss after a period of grief; in melancholia however, the object of loss is unknown. The subject resists confronting the loss of the object and preserves it through a process of introjection. Freud presents melancholy as pathological, famously commenting that in mourning “it is the world that has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself” (286).

Recent conceptualizations of melancholia, on the other hand, provide alternative readings of the same essay. Melancholy is not about loss but about the introjection of the lost and reviled object, and the emerging confusion between the object and the subject, the lost object and the self (9). The loss of ego results from an idealized identification with the lost subject. In other words, it is a loss that feeds the sufferer of melancholy. Julia Kristeva, whose work on melancholy, The Black Sun (1989), draws from the history of artistic representations, wherein melancholy is inescapably linked to imagination. She comments: “there is no imagination that is not, overtly or secretly, melancholy” (6). On a similar note, melancholy, as Judith Butler argues in Psychic Life of Power, marks the constitution of the ego: “the account of melancholia is an account of how psychic and social domains are produced in relation to each other” (168).
This understanding of melancholy and psychoanalysis is used also to emphasize its links with imperialism and its role in cultural identity, albeit in diametrically opposite ways. In *The Melancholy of Race* (2001) Anne Anlin Cheng uses a psychoanalytical approach to melancholia to delineate the melancholy within American racial dynamics as “private desires… enmeshed in social relations” (27). She adds:

> When we turn to the long history of grief and the equally protracted history of physically and emotionally managing that grief on the part of the marginalized, racialized people, we see that there has always been an interaction between melancholy in the vernacular sense of affect, as “sadness” or the “blues,” and melancholia in the sense of a structural, identificatory formation predicated on—while being an active negotiation of—the loss of self as legitimacy. Indeed, racial melancholia as I am defining it has always exited for raced subjects both as a sign of rejection and as a psychic strategy in response to that rejection. (20)

Drawing from the popular understanding of the word and treating it within the framework of racial politics, Cheng’s argument is based on the blurred lines between the popular and pathological understanding of the word. Popular ways of dealing with grief and loss, such as the blues, has always been associated with melancholia. As such, the term can be used not only for the racialized, but also for the ‘geographical’ other. The use of the term for the subjectivity of the other shows melancholia to be a term that defines not only the individual, but also the collective way of dealing with loss.

Interestingly, melancholy can explain not only the psychology of the discriminated, but also that of those who discriminate. In *After Empire: Multiculture or Postcolonial Melancholia* (2004), Paul Gilroy uses melancholy to explain racism in contemporary Britain and treats it as an outcome of the country’s inability to come to terms with its imperial past,

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61 In “Çeviride Modern Olan” (*What becomes Modern in Translation*), architectural historian Esra Akcan interprets Turkish responses to Western urban planning in the early years of the Republic as melancholy of the geographical other, thus indirectly drawing from Cheng’s argument (180-84).
or “the morbidity of heritage” (109). Gilroy’s conception of collective melancholia stands in diametrical opposition to Gidal’s civic melancholy as a marker of English cultural identity in the Eighteenth century. Post-World War II melancholia appears primarily in hostility to immigrants, seen as the reminders of an imperial past, its painful loss and shameful history. In short, the pathological and collective aspect of melancholia and its link to cultural identity make the concept a relevant one to explain our present.

Melancholy is private and public, personal and collective; it can be affirmative, but also pathological and hostile. Despite its overuse, melancholy is still potent and a loaded concept when theorizing identity, both in terms of creativity and also in a wider context of cultural identity and politics. I will argue in the following pages that Pamuk’s melancholy draws from the intricate link between the popular and pathological, and between the individual and collective understanding of the word to develop an understanding of the concept that he turns into a hallmark of his writing.

**Melancholy in Pamuk’s work**

In the popular sense of the word, melancholy, denoting deep, pensive and long lasting sadness, is a recurrent theme in Pamuk’s work. His novels recount bitter oppositions between the main characters and their surroundings; all protagonists are desolate characters who have something to feel sad and gloomy about and they are progressively more so as their stories

62 Gilroy comments: “Once the history of the Empire became a source of discomfort, shame, and perplexity, its complexities and ambiguities were readily set aside. […] The resulting silence feeds an additional catastrophe: the error of imagining that postcolonial people are only unwanted alien intruders without any substantive historical, political, or cultural connections to the collective life of their fellow subjects. These extraordinary failures […] deserve the proper name ‘postimperial melancholia’ in order simultaneously to underline this syndrome’s links with the past and its pathological character” (98).
unfold. The first novel, *Cevdet Bey and His Sons* (1982)\(^6^3\) tells the story of three generations, Cevdet Bey, his son Refik and later the grandson Hasan, all being at odds with the newly emerging Turkish bourgeoisie; the former strives to whereas the latter members resist to take part in. In *Silent House* (1983), Pamuk’s second novel, a group of childhood friends suffer from the alienating effects of the struggle between the new rich, the middle classes, and the poor. In *White Castle* (1985), the struggle between different cultures is transposed to an international level through the two protagonists of the novel, the Venetian captive and his Ottoman master. In later novels, melancholic disposition becomes an attribute of the main character: Galip in *The Black Book* (1990) in search of a lost lover; Osman in *New Life* (1994) on a quest to find Canan, the object of his unrequited love; Kara in *My Name Is Red* (1998) commissioned to revive a fading art and solve a murder case as well as to rekindle an old love; Ka in *Snow* (2002) reconciling bitter oppositions to win the heart of beautiful İpek, an old flame from university in the derelict city of Kars in the northeast Turkey; Kemal in *The Museum of Innocence* (2008) realizing the power of his love for a distant relative only after he loses her.

Melancholy appears as a leitmotif that marks the plot and the main characters; it is perhaps in its most intense in the endings of the novels. The novels almost always end in mayhem. An obvious theme is the death of either the protagonist; Osman in *New Life*, Ka in *Snow*, Kemal in *The Museum of Innocence*, and/or the beloved; Rüya in *The Black Book*, Nilgün in *The Silent House*, Füsun in *The Museum of Innocence*. The quests the novels relate mainly end in futility: In *White Castle*, the cannon that the Hodja and the Slave have worked on for years cannot even be put to use; in *My Name is Red* the art of the miniature fades and masterpiece miniatures are lost; Kemal and Füsun, the secret lovers of *The Museum of Innocence* can not unite; a mysterious and life-changing book is lost in *New Life*, as are Ka’s

\(^{63}\) Dates refer to original publications in Turkish.
poems in *Snow*. Melancholy as such entails or results from futile quests or searches that end in vain. This loss, however, does not simply convey sadness or pessimism; it leads to a generative urge that accompanies the feeling of loss. All novels end with a character transfiguring the story into a novel. In *The Museum of Innocence* the act of transfiguration is carried one step further and accompanied by the protagonist opening a museum devoted to his lost love. Writing as such appears as a solace, as Galip at the end of *The Black Book* announces, and as a means of triumphing over the aforementioned struggles. Melancholy as such is not simple sadness. With a further twist, the creativity that accompanies loss is itself melancholic, in line with the tradition of scholarly melancholy.

Pamuk’s use of melancholy as it relates to Islam is a hallmark of his writing. In his analysis on the role of Sufism and Islam in *The Black Book*, Ian Almond delineates a similar understanding of melancholy. Almond identifies a tripartite understanding of melancholy in the novel: the futility of the quest and the death of mystery, the dissolution of identity with the failure of the quest, and finally the need for meaning or story that nevertheless remains (78). Melancholy, according to Almond is a defining element of Pamuk’s work, and its elaboration his major accomplishment:

> The success of Pamuk as a novelist lies in the skill with which he explores the metaphysical echoes of certain sadnesses—homesickness, aimlessness, unhappiness in love—a skill which transmutes sequences of concrete events and sufferings into speculatively postmetaphysical parables. (75)

For Almond, the ultimate origin of the metaphysical echoes is Islam. The civic melancholy of the book in other words, is religious. The novel alludes to Islam as a marker of melancholy and resignation, symbolized in “sad, concrete minarets” (*Black* 306). Pamuk’s melancholy indeed draws from both the popular and the traditional understanding of the word to develop

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64 In Almond’s words, by playing with the form and critiquing its content, Pamuk’s representation of Islam simultaneously celebrates the tradition and attacks it (84).
an aesthetics of melancholy.\textsuperscript{65} It is in his Istanbul, however, that the aesthetics is explored in terms of its cultural implications. The memoir offers Istanbul as the space and the story, the “concrete” and the “parable” in Almond’s words, making the cityscape a mythical and distant one. Melancholy becomes the definitive element of the city and of its inhabitants. The act of transmutation belongs to the city: it is not a literary skill exclusive to him but part of the city’s history and topography. Pamuk’s deployment of melancholy, containing a history of the city and of Islam and literature, is a trademark of his writing.

\textit{Hüzün: the Names of Melancholy in Istanbul}

Pamuk’s own brand of melancholy has a specific name: \textit{hüzün}. In the memoir, he uses this Turkish word, \textit{hüzün}, denoting a medley of melancholy, sadness, and tristesse, to unite the city, its past and its present within a timeless as well as a transnational feeling. Used repeatedly in the titles of the chapters, the word runs through the text; the Turkish original has the word repeated multiple times on the titles of the chapters as an adjective to define the visitors, writers and the ruins of the city.\textsuperscript{66} The imagery of \textit{hüzün} is a scholarly one. Starting with the etymology of the word in Turkish and then in the western tradition, it then draws from the long tradition of the literary representations of the city by its visitors and its inhabitants, emphasizing the melancholic tone in all of these ‘western’ and ‘eastern,’ or ‘local’ representations of Istanbul, which in turn helped construct Pamuk’s perceptions of his home city.

In the eponymous chapter devoted to its definition, \textit{hüzün} emerges through a dialogue with definitions from Eastern and Western traditions. Starting with the Arabic etymology of

\textsuperscript{65} For more on the aesthetics of \textit{hüzün}, see Seçkin, according to whom, \textit{hüzün} is born from the gap between the “reality” of the city and Pamuk’s imagining of it (273-81).

\textsuperscript{66} In the English version, \textit{hüzün} is used in Turkish only in the chapter devoted to it, and translated as “melancholy” in the others.
the word, Pamuk bases the Turkish understanding of the word on the Islamic tradition. In the traditional Islamic understanding, hüzün is considered a sign of excessive attachment to earthly pleasures, and a topic of disdain. In the Sufi understanding of the word, on the other hand, hüzün is cherished as an awareness of the separation of the self from God, as a feeling close to prelapsarian nostalgia. Hüzün, according to a Sufi tradition, is a constitutive part of the Creation, a core feeling of God as well, and the Creation of men a direct outcome—an effort on God’s part to break away from loneliness. Almond ends his article quoting Henry Corbin’s study of Ibn ‘Arabi, a Sufi philosopher, who referred to a commonplace hadith of untraceable origin: “I was a hidden treasure and I yearned to be known. So I created creatures in order to be known by them” (89). Corbin accordingly speaks of a Sufi God “whose secret is sadness, nostalgia, the aspiration to know Himself in the beings who manifest His being” (89). These two contradictory approaches in Islam, which evoke the ambiguity of the concept, are then set in contrast with the Western tradition Pamuk offers as the counterpart of hüzün. Melancholy, however, becomes a solitary and intellectual disposition; with it science and not religion, the individual and not community, come to the foreground.

With references to the etymology of the word, to Aristotle, and to Montaigne, Pamuk’s melancholia reveals a scholarly disposition, alluding to the role of creativity and scholarly learning in the concept. Pamuk’s western account of hüzün draws mainly from Richard Burton’s anthology of encyclopedic proportions, Anatomy of Melancholy, which praises melancholy and focuses on it as an individual feeling of loss (82-83). The second ‘western’ source in this chapter on hüzün, on the other hand, shows that the term generates mixed responses in ‘western’ traditions as well. The link between hüzün and the fall of the

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67 According to Peter Toohey, Pamuk's intellectual disposition becomes a flaw, and relates more to the tradition of the melancholy thinker than to Istanbul’s cityscape: “I am not at all sure that the ideas within these chapters match on all occasions the descriptions of the emotions to which the memoir’s narrator is subject. The narrator is above all a highly intellectual individual and quite a scholar” (239).
Ottoman Empire, for Pamuk, evokes tristesse: the sadness the late French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss detects in the ex-colonies in the tropics and defines in his *Tristes Tropiques* (1955). Involving another major temporal leap, tristesse allows for an allusion to the legacy of Western colonialism, and thus to incorporate a political note to the concept. Nevertheless, Pamuk is quick to fend off the likeness he evokes between *hüzün*, melancholy and *tristesse*. *Hüzün* in Istanbul diverts not only from its Islamic understanding but also from Burton’s individualistic and from Levi-Strauss’s anthropological approach. Unlike the Islamic understanding, it is about the relation to the city and not to God; unlike Burton’s scholarly melancholy, *hüzün* is collective and about the everyday. And, finally, unlike *tristesse*, which Pamuk regards as the legacy of colonialism on a “guilt-ridden Westerner who seeks to assuage his pain by refusing to let cliché and prejudice color his impressions,” *hüzün* is a local feeling that escapes the outside observer (93). Pamuk comments,

> Hüzün İstanbul’da hem önemli bir yerel müzik duygusu, şiir için temel bir kelime, hem hayata bir bakış açısı, bir ruh durumu ve şehir şehir yapan malzemenin ima ettiği şey. (2003 93)

> [The *hüzün* of Istanbul is an important local sentiment for music, a fundamental term in poetry, an outlook on life, a spiritual state, and what is implied by the material that makes the city a city. (trans. mine)]

An idiosyncratic appreciation of the city’s “beautiful places,” it is a local aesthetics conjoined with this feeling. Pamuk’s emphasis on leaving *hüzün* untranslated calls for a comparison with Baudelairean *Spleen*. Yet, Baudelaire emphasizes the history and the foreignness of the concept, whereas Pamuk introduces a Turkish word of Arabic origin, tracing it in relation to

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68 Compare with Freely’s translation: “The *hüzün* of Istanbul is not just the mood evoked by its music and poetry; it is a way of looking at life that implicates us all, not only a spiritual state, but a state of mind that is ultimately as life affirming as it is negating” (2005 82).
Islam and the cityscape, thus bringing in the Orient into a concept mainly discussed within the tradition of western humanism.

In an autobiography molded around a city, tracing personal feelings is inextricably linked to tracing collective ones, particularly the city’s cultural history and its present. Pamuk comments:

Çocukluğumun İstanbul’unun bende uyandırduğu yoğun hüzün duygusunun kaynaklarını sezmek için, bir yandan tarihe, Osmanlı Devleti’nin yıkılışının sonuçlarına, bir yandan da bu tarihin şehrin “güzell” manzaralarında ve insanlarında yansışı biçimine bakmak gerek. (2003 93)

If I am to convey the intensity of the hüzün that Istanbul caused me to feel as a child, I must describe [on the one hand] the history of the city following the destruction of the Ottoman Empire, and [on the other hand] the way this history is reflected in the city’s “beautiful” landscapes and its people. (2005 82)

The feeling as such becomes the motif that combines experiences of the city with its history and geography. It is a collective feeling that defines city-dwellers’ relation to the city, “the melancholy of a solitary person, but the black mood shared by millions of people together…of an entire city, of Istanbul” (83).

A recurring theme throughout the memoir, hüzün also marks the city, emerging in its views, in its imperial and Islamic past and its decrepit present, in its inhabitants’ faces, lifestyles, and ultimately in its representations. Pamuk’s memoir draws from a wide array of travelers; ranging from a fellow Nobel laureate, the Russian Joseph Brodsky (214-15), to the eighteenth-century Austrian painter Antoine-Ignace Melling whose work and sojourn in Istanbul comprises a chapter (Ch. 7, “Melling’s Bosphorus”), and to Le Corbusier (34). Nevertheless, the main emphasis lays with the French writers who visited the city in the nineteenth century, Gérard de Nerval, Gustave Flaubert, Théophile Gautier, and the great
Turcophile, Pierre Loti. To cite an example, Pamuk refers to *Constantinople*, Gautier’s account of his sojourn in the city in 1852, as a proclamation of the melancholy of the city: a walk through the neighborhoods and cemeteries along the Byzantine walls, for Gautier, is the most melancholic on earth (209). For Pamuk, rather than simply poeticizing the exotic decrepitude of the city, these writers mainly reflected on their individual problems: the beginnings of a deadly depression in Nerval (Ch. 23), a friend’s cherished memories overlapping with rekindled public interest in Istanbul for Gautier (Ch. 24), syphilis for Flaubert (Ch. 31), and wanderlust coupled with belle-époque ennui in Loti’s case. Such depictions of the city, according to Pamuk, are formative to the melancholy image of the city:

> Anlatmaya çalıştığım şey, [hüzün] bir kavram olarak keşfi, ifade edilmesi, seslendirilmesi ve bunların itibarı Fransız şairlerince (melankolik arkadaşı Nerval'in etkisiyle Gautier) ilk yazılmış olmasını sonuçları. (2003 220)

What I am trying to explain is [the consequence of the fact] that the roots of our *hüzün* are European: the concept was first explored, expressed, and poeticized [by renowned] French [poets, notably by] (Gautier under the influence of his [melancholic] friend Nerval). (2005 210)

The above lines both pay homage, and convey a sense of indebtedness, to the work of the nineteenth-century French writers. The choice of period and writers are significant: the nineteenth century marks the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent impoverishment of the city, as opposed to the unprecedented expansion of the Western

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69 With the exception of Loti, the above-mentioned writers are also the focus of Chambers’s work on French melancholic writers. Pierre Loti, despite being the writer who wrote on the city most extensively, is mentioned only in passing (Ch. 25 and Ch. 36).

70 For Gautier, the peculiarity of the walk is its awakening of a sense of melancholy and grandeur: “Je ne crois pas qu’il y ait nulle part au monde une promenade plus austèrement mélancolique que ce chemin qui circule entre un cimetière et des ruines” (“I do not think that there is, in any other part of the world, a road more austerely melancholy than this one that extends through the ruins [of the city walls] and cemeteries,” translation mine) (Gautier 205).
European Empires, notably of the French and the British. These writers’ outlook on Istanbul epitomizes the Orientalist tradition Edward Said problematized in *Orientalism* (1978). Pamuk’s preoccupation with the Western origins of *hüzün* displays melancholy not simply as an aesthetic sensibility, but also as a sign of east-west rift, and as a ‘Western’ product introjected by the East. Nevertheless, instead of setting East against West, as in the initial theorizing of the concept in the eponymous chapter on *hüzün*, the rest of the memoir presents the concept in its myriad faces, within the perimeters of Istanbul. Pamuk’s response, in other words, to Western origins of *hüzün* is one that makes them part of his literary cityscape.

With ‘The four lonely melancholic writers’, Abdülhak Şinası Hisar the Bosphorus memoirist, Reşat Ekrem Koçu the writer of the unfinished *Istanbul Encyclopaedia*, Yahya Kemal the great poet of the republic and of Istanbul, and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar the novelist of Istanbul, the western ‘roots’ of *hüzün* acquire different undertones. *Hüzün* is not the same with the melancholy of the scholar. Like Burton’s *Anatomy*, Koçu’s *Encyclopedia* stems from the writer’s melancholy. However, unlike Burton, Koçu’s encyclopaedia is unfinished, a failure Pamuk considers a sign of Istanbul’s anarchy and strangeness resisting Western taxonomy, as well as the writer’s melancholy. The strangeness of the city from this perspective leads not simply to melancholy, but to a type of urban nationalism (153-62; my trans.). Pamuk’s favourite Turkish writers of the early twentieth century reflected on the decrepitude of the city through their knowledge of French literature, to find in it a means to

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71 The political climate of France during the nineteenth century is itself contrapuntal: its imperial dominion contrasts with the great upheavals such as the July Revolution of 1830, the restructuring of Paris, and the commune of 1871.

72 In Çeviride Modern Olan, Akcan points to the similarity between Baudelairean and Pamuk’s conceptions of melancholy, as a feeling attached to the object, and not to the subject (179).

73 In Freely’s translation, “*Istanbul milliyetçiliği*” [“Istanbul nationalism”] becomes “chauvinism”: ‘[t]his otherness we complain about... allows us to indulge in a certain chauvinism’ (153).
be both authentic and to write like their favourite writers. Thus we read about Tanpinar and Kemal following Gautier’s footsteps in the 1940s, almost a century later, as well as the young Pamuk into the derelict parts of the city in the 1970s, nearly thirty years after. The presence of the Ottoman past through the monumental buildings, feeding these writers’ nostalgia for past grandeur as well as their awareness of present decrepitude, hüzün becomes a “choice,” in Pamuk’s words, “a poetic licence to be paralysed” (93).

As poetic licence, hüzün can be linked to arabesk, a popular music that dates from the early 1970s and associated with the rural migrants living mainly in shantytowns on the peripheries of the big cities, and notably Istanbul. Though absent from the memoir and from Pamuk’s work in general, possibly as it is about a culture which Pamuk’s urban upper class milieu and scholarly pursuits do not relate to, arabesk helps understand the way hüzün permeates through the culture of the city. Arabesk is a hybrid genre of Turkish, Egyptian, and Western music: folk music instruments with string accompaniment and a beat from a synthesizer backing a vocal with lyrics that rail against the corruption and the injustice of the metropoles, in songs like ‘Batsin Bu Dünya’ [“Down with This World”]. In her article on arabesk as a particular instance of Turkish modernity, Meral Özbek comments on the urban nature of the feelings of loss, anger, and grief that inform this genre:

[Arabesk] is the much–disputed urban culture of the peasant generations whom the founders of the Turkish republic once revered as the authentic foundation of the new society but whose “uncultured” presence, after they had migrated to live

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74 Pamuk comments as follows: “From the aesthetics they had acquired in France, they knew enough to realise that in Turkey they would never achieve a voice as strong and authentic as Mallarmé or Proust. But after long deliberation they found an important and authentic subject: the decline and the fall of the great empire into which they were born. Their deep understanding of Ottoman civilisation and its irreversible decline helped them avoid the traps of watered-down nostalgia, simple historic pride, or the virulent nationalism and communitarianism to which so many of their contemporaries succumbed, and it became the basis for the beginnings of a poetics of the past. The Istanbul in which they lived was a city littered with the ruins of the great fall, but it was their city””(101).
subordinately at the fringes of the urban centers as a spare army of labor, has been much resented by the various established urban others. (228)

For Özbek, the genre is crucial for an understanding of Turkish modernity. Silenced and excluded, arabsesk has been a means for the immigrants to give voice to their metropolitan experience. Hüzün as such is not an elitist feeling exclusive to artistic creativity, but a sensibility that informs both high and low culture—the poetics of the city and a quotidian way of dealing with them. Melancholy thus leaves the isolated individual and infiltrates the city itself as its mark of distinction, its collective emotion, and part of everyday reality, uniting the city and its inhabitants, the newcomers with the locals (Pamuk 83).

The melancholy image of Istanbul relates to more recent conceptualisations of melancholia. A pertinent take on Pamuk’s hüzün, left out in his account but taken up in subsequent readings is Freud’s definition. Pamuk’s localization of hüzün and his identification of the concept with the decrepitude following past glory highlight its embedment in and relevance to colonialism. Reading Istanbul’s hüzün through Freud’s essay, the architectural historian Esra Akcan suggests: “The melancholy of the geographical ‘other’ is produced by the imaginative loss of a never possible perfection” (“Melancholy”, n.p.). In the same vein, in the eponymous chapter, Pamuk comes up with a two page long inventory of the scenes that evoke the feeling, from “clock towers that no one notices” (88) to “bored high-school students in never ending English classes where after six years no one has learned to say anything but ‘yes’ and ‘no’” (89).

The repeated references to the burnt-down mansions and palaces of the past and the city’s grandeur, on the other hand, reveal Istanbul’s hüzün to be generated by not simply spatial but also temporal distance to the ideal. In that sense, the discussion of hüzün delineates the post-colonial stance of Turkish and Ottoman culture. One example from the memoir is Chapter 19, “Conquest or Decline? The Turkification of Constantinople,” which gives an account of state enforced anti-minority campaigns and a resulting plunder of non-
Muslim property in 1955. Istanbul’s imperial past and its violent end are relevant to the understanding of anti-minority practices in the city. The account of antagonism against non-Muslim minorities as well as the rampant indifference to and even hostility to the remains of the past makes an argument similar to Paul Gilroy’s in *Postcolonial Melancholia*. Such an understanding of melancholy can help explain the text’s stance on cultural policies. If we follow Freud and read melancholic pleas not as complaints but as accusations, then Pamuk’s melancholy is an accusation of state politics and urban policies. Nevertheless, these accounts are not elaborated on but are left as instances of Istanbul’s traumatic change following the end of the Empire. Pamuk’s account of *hüzün* links the non-Muslim minorities forced to leave the city with its visitors fishing for the alien and exotic, the derelict wooden mansions along the Bosphorus and impoverished suburbs in the Golden Horn with literary sensibility. The *hüzün* of the city involves rejection and hostility, but also aesthetic sensibility and creativity. Pamuk’s memoir doubly implicates the city as a locus of melancholy, one that draws from multiple histories, heritages, and traditions.

**Conclusion**

This chapter traced the significance of melancholy in Pamuk’s memoir: how it stands out and why it makes sense within the larger body of literature on melancholy. To highlight the multiplicity as well as the political charge of melancholy, I employed a contrapuntal perspective, based on its musical meaning and its Saidian adaptation. What starts out as a straightforward historical fact, a natural outcome of the past glory of a bygone empire, is elaborated so that its definition changes with each perspective included; drawing from histories that took place and are unique to Istanbul’s distinctive history and topography, comprising all, and yet reducible to none.
Hüzün, or Istanbul’s melancholy, allows the self to connect to the society, the city to the Islamic and to Western traditions, the individual to the public, the high culture to the low. As the overview of the word reveals, Istanbul’s hüzün does not simply combine the city with the self, the East and the West, the past and the present; it emerges as an emotion, which draws from and relates to different, even contrasting traditions conceptions of the word. And perhaps the skill with which Pamuk can bridge these within the literaryscape of Istanbul leads him to claim that the melancholy of the city has a counterpart neither in the Eastern nor in the Western culture. Istanbul, the seat of a long-dismembered empire and its lost civilization, provides the basis for a poetics of lament and nostalgia, as well as a means of appreciating the city. The city’s hüzün is one where the self feeds on and triumphs over loss. A means of self-empowerment, hüzün in the memoir is glorified in a manner that evokes Baudelaire’s melancholy as Walter Benjamin defines it in The Writer of Modern Life: “heroic” (168). The city and the text, in other words, lament, but also celebrate decay, loss, and the resulting melancholy and isolation, making Istanbul’s hüzün something exceptional and definitive.