Capitalizing Istanbul: reading Orhan Pamuk’s literary cityscape

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Chapter 5 - Bosphorus Mists: the Repository of the City’s Spirit

At present, people see fogs, not because there are fogs, but because poets and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness of such effects.  
Oscar Wilde, *The Decay of Lying*

Istanbul is a site of early morning mists and crepuscular haze. As a city of hills and waterways, its views and vantage points are subject to the changes in light brought by the sun and sea. These views are heightened by the garlands of water that shape the city: the Bosphorus, the waterway that separates the European and Asian sides of the city; the Golden Horn, the haven that divides the Byzantine and early Ottoman seat of power from the Levantine Pera, the capital of the European settlers; and, finally, the Sea of Marmara. These views are transformed into a silhouette. The clutter of buildings blends with the hills that tower over the shores.

For Pamuk, Istanbul’s hüzün resides in its early morning mists. Hüzün, the name of Pamuk’s own brand of melancholy, denotes a medley of melancholy, sadness and tristesse, to unite the city, its past and present in a feeling that is both timeless and transnational. On cold, sunny winter mornings by the Bosphorus, it even acquires substance:

Soğuk kış sabahlarında, birden güneş açıverince Boğaz sularının üzerinde ince ince kipirdanmaya başlayan o buğu gibi hüzün duygusu manzarada ve insanlarda görülebilecek bir açıklığa kavuşur. (2003 101)

When the sun suddenly falls on the Bosphorus and that faint vapour begins to rise from the surface, the hüzün is so dense that you can almost touch it, almost see it spread like a film over its people and its landscapes. (2005 89)

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75 The Byzantine historian Procopius described Constantinople as being “surrounded by a garland of waters” (Freely, 1972 5). The same phrase still determines the charms of the city. This is how *Strolling Through Istanbul*, an iconic travel guide to Istanbul, starts: “A poet writing fourteen centuries ago described this city as being surrounded by a garland of waters. Much has changed since then, but modern Istanbul still owes much of its spirit and beauty to the waters which bound and divide it” (5).
This mist associated with a sunlit sea on a wintery morning is faint, yet substantial. So is Hüzün, which emerges here not as an abstract concept but as a natural phenomenon. Meteorological and topographical, it is part of the everyday of the city and its inhabitants. The early morning haze on the Bosphorus surfaces as the repository of the city’s melancholic spirit.

Pamuk’s visualization carries this theme further; images of haze, steam, and smoke substantiate the hüzün of the city. This chapter follows, albeit hazily, the melancholic imagery of the Bosphorus and its mists to locate Pamuk’s work through a comparison of urban landscapes. Starting with London, literary and artistic capital of the fog, the chapter sketches the modernist preoccupation with the fog, a theme directly linked to London’s cityscape. It then traces similar thematics in Istanbul and the Bosphorus, ending with a discussion of Pamuk’s literary cityscape to illustrate how it reconfigures Istanbul and relates it to the foggy literary cityscapes of nineteenth-century London and to the modernist conception of the fog.

London’s fogs

The literary and artistic capital of mist and fog is London. This capital is at its most evident in nineteenth-century representations of the city’s fog, bearing traces of the anxiety generated by London’s urban sprawl during the period. These preoccupations are reflected in the arts, science and literature, culminating in the aesthetics of literary modernism. Fog, in particular, signifies a certain combination of available discourses that came together to interpret city life and landscape through language. There are several reasons for reading London’s fogs in relation to an analysis of the urban narratives of fog and the cultural interplay of Pamuk’s work. First, social anxiety about fog’s relation to city environment, and the need to define the city, produces conceptualizations of the fog by flexing language. Additionally, the monstrous
expansion of the city was captured by descriptions of the fog in the context of urbanism. Third, writers in that period were further stimulated by painterly representations of the city, where fog regularly featured. Finally, life is, indeed, ‘foggy’ for writers in nineteenth-century London, and the advent of literary modernism tends to induce descriptions of cityscapes characterized through that fog.

Even popular accounts of the city refer to the long tradition of writing about London’s fog to nuance how both fog and the city mutually shape one another over time. To take one example from a popular contemporary historical account of the city, Peter Ackroyd’s popular history, *London, The Biography* (2000), traces a lineage that starts with Tacitus’s account of Caesar’s invasion and culminates in smog, the local term for London’s deadly mixture of natural fog and the smoke billowing from chimneys. Moreover, the city’s fogs become co-opted by nineteenth-century narratives of the arts and sciences, references that serve to make it a culturally inextricable part of the city. One unusual example of this resonates through the work of London-based meteorologist Luke Howard, who coined cloud names in 1802, and hence made it, in Iain Sinclair’s words, “possible to be precise about things which had previously been described in the loosest terms” (94).76

In nineteenth-century literary cityscapes, representations of urban life made frequent use of images of mist and fog. Perhaps the most renowned descriptions of London’s fog are by Charles Dickens. In the opening scene of *Bleak House* (1853), an invasive fog that dominates the streets creeps into the morals and the institutions associated with the city (in this case the High Court of Chancery) (11-12). In *Our Mutual Friend* (1864), the city of London itself is under the spell of fog, and appears as “a sooty spectre, divided in purpose between being visible and invisible, and so being wholly neither” (Dickens 417).77 Mostly,

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76 Howard’s studies triggered a set of responses ranging from Goethe to Constable and to Turner.
77 London’s blinding fog is specifically urban, as the rest of the passage makes clear: “Even in the surrounding country it was a foggy day, but there the fog was grey, whereas in London it was, at
the fog is a trope to refer to the sinister side of the city's urban chaos. Fog is a “fallen cloud,” to borrow R. L. Stevenson’s phrase from *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886 27). This allegory persists with a twist in Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* (1988), where Gibreel Farishta, with his newly found angelic powers, identifies the “trouble with the English” as the weather, which he then proceeds to change to bring an end to “the meteorologically induced [...] moral fuzziness of the English” (354). Drawing from a playful image of “bad weather” as a marker of Englishness, Rushdie makes haziness a part of English morals and identity. All of these examples make use of London’s weather to characterize the city and its inhabitants.

Fog is also a major component of English landscape and cityscape paintings. For many nineteenth-century artists and travelers especially, the fog is London’s magic, a “kindly veil,” to use Théophile Gautier’s words. J. M. W. Turner, the English Romantic landscape painter, is renowned for his later paintings of maritime fogs and mists, which deploy the imagery of smoke as a visualization of seafaring and industrialization. His paintings testify to the relation between industry, science and the poetics of the fog.

Fog does not only blur; it transforms. The American born, London based painter James McNeill Whistler, who is usually credited with “the discovery of fog's beautifying properties,” makes a similar comment in his famous “Ten O’clock Lecture”:

> And when the evening mist clothes the riverside with poetry, as with a veil, and the poor buildings lose themselves in the dim sky, and the tall chimneys become

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78 Stevenson’s fog is not only evil, it is also lethargic, albeit not strong enough to impede the activity of the city: “The fog still slept on the wing above the drowned city, where the lamps glimmered like carbuncles; and through the muffle and smother of these fallen clouds, the procession of the town’s life was still rolling in through the grand arteries with a sounds as of a mighty wind” (Dickens 417).

79 In his “journée à Londres” (1842), he writes, “This smoke, spread over everything, blurs harsh angles, veils the meanness of buildings, gives mystery and meanness to the most positive objects. The Symmetrical barrenness of civilisation and the vulgarity of forms it adopts all become softened or disappear, thank to this kindly veil” (Freeman 119).

80 See especially Nicholas Freeman’s *Conceiving the City: London, Literature, and Art 1870-1914* (2007), and the Tate exhibition catalogue on Whistler, Turner, and Monet.
campanili, and the warehouses are palaces in the night, and the whole city hangs in the heavens, and fairyland is before us. (Whistler, Ten O’Clock)

Whistler’s Nocturnes, an example of which is shown below, address a similar theme. Though the emotions conjured in this scene along the Thames at Battersea are palpable, the painted image is barely discernable. Whistler’s foggy landscape and cityscape paintings play with, attempt to capture, and reveal what fog shrouds in urban settings.

![Fig. 1: Whistler, Nocturne: The River at Battersea (1878)](image)

For Whistler, fog is about the lure of the unknown, clothing the metropolis. In Claude Monet’s words, the fog makes “the massive, regular blocks grandiose with its mysterious cloak” (Novakov).

Literary and artistic representations of the fog and the haze provide imagery for modernist explorations of the problem of perception. Monet’s friend the poet Stéphane Mallarmé, who spent a year in London, even associates the curling smoke from his pipe with London’s smog: both put a smokescreen between him and the everyday world. Upon a first whiff from his pipe, the London of his sojourn reappears, reminding the poet of “the beloved fogs that enclose our brains” (149). For Proust, Monet’s paintings do not simply convey fog, but treat, as their very subject matter, the artist’s craft: “the mist which our eager eyes would like to pierce is the last word in the painter’s art” (On Reading 71). The painter’s mist
obscures all and by allowing the viewer to access his own imagination, exhibits the ultimate artistic achievement. This link between mist and meaning-making is indeed a hallmark of literary modernism. Modernist fiction, especially, aims to make the reader realize the limitations of vision and perception, as the following lines by Virginia Woolf on “modern fiction” (1925) attest: “life is not a series of gig lamps…it is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end” ("Modern," 5). From this perspective, the fog emerges as part of our mental and creative topography, as when Connor argues “haze was part of the atmosphere of thought and perception, the very factor which inhibited artists from getting a fix on things” (Haze 16).

Finally, fog becomes a trope for London’s urban sprawl. As Julian Wolfreys argues in Writing London: the trace of the urban text from Blake to Dickens, “the fog is one trace dictated by and dictating London, part of a disorganizing principle of structure without or beyond structure” (161). This function of London’s fog also applies to the history of literary modernism. This does not mean, however, that London was the capital of the movement. Indeed, in his history of literary modernism, Malcolm Bradbury attributes to the London of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries an ambiguous reputation: “The obvious centre of English-language modernist activity [...] is also in the record as one of the dullest and most deadening of capital cities” (172). London of the late nineteenth century may not have been the capital of literary modernism, but it certainly was the capital of fog, as well as the crucible for shaping fog. This emphasis on fog transforms London meteorology, its urban historical development, and undeniable metropolitan character into a modernist poetics particular to the city.
Mist-ifying the Bosphorus

The historical genesis of depicting London’s fogs relates to Pamuk’s contemporary international appeal. In his Presentation Speech for the 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature, Horace Engdahl made reference to the cultural representations of London fog: “Like Oscar Wilde pointing out that the Thames fog was imitating Turner’s painting, Pamuk shows that the real Istanbul exists only because of its fabulists” (nobelprize.org 2006). This reference to The Decay of Lying (1889), Wilde’s Socratic dialogue on how life imitates art, and how “people see fogs, not because there are fogs, but because poets and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness of such effects,” serves as a comment on the lineage of Pamuk’s cityscape. By linking the two, Pamuk’s perception of mist is given form through an understanding of Turner’s traces. Engdahl here positions Pamuk’s work within the history of literary cityscapes, as well as modernism. Such an analogy necessitates a brief positioning of the mist-erious loveliness of the Bosphorus by way of the mist’s changing appearance in poetic and literary representations of the strait.

Images of Istanbul’s mist and fog are scarce, yet definitive in Turkish artistic and literary landscapes. An earlier and prominent instance in cultural memory is “Sis” (“The Fog”) (1902) by the celebrated poet Tevfik Fikret.81 In this diatribe against Abdulhamid II’s government of absolute power and extreme censorship, fog shrouds the city of millennial intrigues, deceits, and oppression.82

81 Tevfik Fikret (1867-1915) is considered the founder of the modern school of Turkish poetry.
82 Abdulhamid II, issued the first Constitution of the Empire in 1876, which he suspended two years later, and ruled the empire with absolute power during the following forty years. Fikret, was one of the critiques of Abdulhamid’s reign.
[A stubborn fog has shrouded its horizons
a white darkness that grows constantly
under whose weight everything seems to be erased
all paintings are covered in a dusty intensity
an intensity of such immensity
that the onlooker dares not approach its depth! ](trans. mine)

In Fikret’s poem, Istanbul does not give way to a poetics of lament and nostalgia, but is rather a setting for destruction and decay, inspiring disdainful resistance. The poem is directed at the tradition of absolutist rule he associates with the two empires that had the city as their seats: the Byzantines and the Ottomans. Fikret considers the city “the decrepit Byzantium,” which has turned into the seat of oriental despotism. Its only salvation is eternal slumber under its “white darkness,” identified with Abdulhamid’s oppressive rule.

The poem had a great impact on the arts and letters of the period. The most renowned of these is an eponymous painting by Abdülmecid Efendi, the last crown prince of the Ottoman dynasty and caliph, dedicated to the poet.\(^8\) In a manner reminiscent of Turner, Abdülmecid’s painting shows a court caique (a light rowboat typical of the Bosphorus) shrouded by the fog (Renda 17). Like Turner’s paintings, the fog in Abdülmecid’s work is puzzling. It is difficult to conduct an unambiguous reading of the white light that dims the caique and dazzles the viewer. The elegant caique with its Ottoman emblem is the sole subject of the painting, leaving the viewer to wonder whether it is an emblem of the impending destruction and disappearance of the Ottomans, or a sole remainder/reminder of Ottoman military values. Yahya Kemal, a state poet and one of Pamuk’s four melancholic writers, later took Fikret’s poem to heart. Offended by the denigration of the city, Kemal

\(^8\) The Crown Prince Abdulmecid I (1868-1944) was elected Caliph by The Grand National Assembly in 1922. The Caliphate was abolished in 1924, a year after the foundation of the Republic, and Abdulmecid was exiled. Abdülmeid’s position as caliph and a painter rules out the opposition between Islam and the western style of painting, a theme that characterises *My Name Is Red.*
wrote a response to the poem, echoing Fikret’s lines and asking the city to shed its white
darkness and reveal its silhouette to its inhabitants forevermore.84

For the most part, literary depictions of the Bosphorus focus not on the fog, but on the
lost lifestyle once associated with the shores of the strait, dating mainly from the early
twentieth century and the advent of the republic. The lifestyle around the waterway has been
called “Bosphorus civilization” by twentieth-century writer Abdulhak Şinasi Hisar. The
symbol of this civilization was the yalı, the wooden waterfront mansions of the elite,
accessed only via the Bosphorus, and bearing a distinctive Ottoman style. In Boğaziçi yalıları
(Bosphorus Yalı), Hisar foregrounds his discontent at the decline of this civilization, as most
of the yalı have been burned down and their aristocratic owners and lifestyle have
disappeared. Nevertheless, Hisar refers to the Bosphorus as a place more beautiful than
anywhere else. The waterway has one distinctive quality apart from its beauty: it is “a little
melancholy.”85 In the making of the Bosphorus civilization, geography, meteorology, and
history join forces. The shape and movement of the waterway reinforce what the decrepit yalı
seem to say: “everything passes just like the strong currents and the clouds, leaving only a
faint mist behind” (27; trans. mine).

Images of the Bosphorus also infuse the work of Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, a poet and
novelist of early Republican Turkey. Tanpınar’s melancholic depictions of Ottoman Istanbul
made him unpopular as they were considered to be critical of Republican ideology, whereas
his novel Huzur (Peace) (1949) is considered the quintessential novel of the city. Set in
Istanbul on the eve of World War II, the city and the Bosphorus are not simply backdrops but
shape the story and its characters. To be from Istanbul and to be brought up along the

84 “Sıyrıl beyaz karanlık içinden, parıl parıl; Berraklığında bilme nedir hafta, ay ve yıl [...] Hüznün,
ferahlığın bizim olsun kızın, yazın; Hiçbir zaman kader bizi senden ayırmazın!” (“Shed that white
darkness; May you remain bright and clear for ever [...] May your hüzün and your openness be with
us in summer and winter; May fate never separate you from us”) (trans. mine).
85 “Yaşamak için İstanbul'da, başka her taraftan güzel fakat biraz Hüzünlü bir yer var: Boğaziçi!” (“In
Istanbul, there is a place to live which is more beautiful than anywhere else, but a little melancholy:
Bosphorus!”) (Boğaziçi Yalıları 23; trans. mine).
Bosphorus are the two premises that inform the protagonist’s capacity to appreciate a woman’s beauty. His love eventually encompasses the woman he loves, Istanbul, the Bosphorus, and classical Turkish music inseparably.86

The Bosphorus also emerges as a prominent theme in Beş Şehir (Five Cities) (1946), an account of the cities that shaped Tanpınar’s life. In the section on Istanbul, Tanpınar is more explicit than Hisar in suggesting the waterway as locus of identity:

The Bosphorus has always seemed to me as a major skein of our taste and sensibilities. I have always felt that we would discover our truth once we can understand its congealed signification in our mind. This might be a dream. [...] What is true for art and for humans might as well apply to a scene that has witnessed, shaped, and even managed the manners, the tastes and the sensibilities of a few centuries. In the end, the Bosphorus itself is artistic, even musical. (trans. mine)

In the foregoing account, the waterway becomes more than a metaphor. It is an object on its own, a repository of the city and of the culture associated with it. Tanpınar also writes on the fogs over the Bosphorus. Commenting on the foggy views of the city in a manner that echoes Whistler’s description of London’s smog, he writes:

Istanbul’s minarets, chopped as if they are oversize lilies by a faint layer of haze, dissolve in a light whiter than their dreams. (trans. mine)

86 “Artık ne İstanbul'u, ne Boğaz'ı ne eski musikiyi, ne de sevdiği kadın birbirinden ayırırmaya imkan bulamadı” (“He was now incapable of perceiving the difference between Istanbul, the Bosphorus, classical Turkish music, and the woman he loved”) (188; trans. mine).
Tanpınar’s fog follows the image of white darkness Fikret introduces, and in doing so, dazzles without dimming. In another essay “Lodos, Sis ve Lüfere Dair” (“On South Wind, Fog, and Bluefish”), Tanpınar tells of a fog that envelops the city for three days, which allows him to elaborate on one of the myriad faces of the city with references to Wagnerian operas, Turner’s paintings, as well as to poetry by Poe and Mallarmé. His reading of the fog displays a Proustian understanding similar to the one mentioned earlier in this chapter; both associate fog with art. Yet, for Tanpınar, Istanbul is a protean city with scenery that renders art “superfluous.”

From the depictions of the Bosphorus, notably by Tanpınar, Pamuk’s literary materializations of Istanbul’s fog can be intercepted as the contemporary understanding of the city’s spirit and its mists. Similarly, Engdahl’s reference to Oscar Wilde in relation to Pamuk gives form and meaning to the cross-cultural lineage of the imagery of fog as part of the urban imaginary of both cities.

Pamuk’s Haze

Pamuk’s work is in direct dialogue with the tradition of foggy landscapes. The most memorable description of the fog in Pamuk’s work is the opening scene of his White Castle (1985), the novel that brought international attention to the author. The novel opens with an account of Venetian ships attacked by an Ottoman galley that suddenly emerges from the fog (5). Narrated by the soon-to-be captive of the Ottomans, the fog is a cliché image from an account of naval struggles. Yet, it also foreshadows the plot of the novel, a doppelgänger.

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87 Tanpınar makes the following comment: “Sisi daima çok sevdim. […] onu zihnin bazı hallerine ve sanatın kendisine benzetirim… Ruh için o kadar lüzumlu olan o değiştirici hülya, bize dışümüzden doğru gelir ve dikkatimizin tarzını ve üslubunu değiştirir. Galiba san’atın da eninde sonunda yaptığı şey budur. İstanbul bazan sanatı lüzimsuz bırakacak kadar değişimyi biliyor” (“I have always loved the fog. It reminds me of certain states of mind and of art itself […] essential for the soul, that extrinsic transmutative dream alters our perception. Probably that’s what art ultimately does as well. Istanbul at times knows how to transfigure itself in a way that renders art superfluous”) (163-64; trans. mine).
Urban fogs, however, are nearly exclusive to his two novels on Istanbul, *The Black Book* and *Istanbul*. Fog, smoke, haze and mist are part of his poetics of the city, terms he does not always use literally or in relation to their specific meanings. With Istanbul, haziness, and indistinction are as much about the city’s geography as its urban sprawl. The smoke appears as a homely odor in *The Black Book*, mostly in line with the density of the city. Galip, the solitary protagonist of the novel, equates smog with the neighborhood: “Galip [peacefully] inhaled the pungent smell, which he thought was strangely particular to this quarter” (196).88 The novel revolves around Nişantaşı, the westernized neighborhood in which Pamuk was born and has lived. The city center’s haze is more like London’s smog. Just like Mallarmé, Galip considers smog to be part of the city. Galip is an embodiment of the melancholy of urban smog; haziness in his case evokes flanerie in the way Walter Benjamin defines it in his analysis of Baudelaire’s Paris (1939) when he describes “(a) way of life (which) still conceals behind a mitigating nimbus the coming isolation of the big-city dweller” (40). Fog also isolates, and it is nowhere more visible than in the heart of the big city.

Pamuk’s imagery is a counterpoint to Benjamin’s understanding, following, but also departing from it. Alongside Benjamin’s vision of fog as “a consolation of solitude” (157) and its comforting (if isolating) embrace, the fogs of the Bosphorus are unsettling in a way that simultaneously fosters a sense of community. For those who live along the Bosphorus and are aware of the effects of fogs on maritime traffic, fog creates a sense of urgency, uniting the inhabitants of the city in a communal feeling, albeit in dreams: “there are millions of people living in the hills of the Bosphorus troubled by the same dream on foggy nights” (192). The notion of a solitude of togetherness informs the life on the Bosphorus.

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88 From Pamuk’s original, (“Galip tuhaf bir şekilde bu mahalleye özgü bulduğu bu geniz yakan kokuyu huzurla icine cekti” [278]). Gün translates “huzurla” as “calmly” in English.
In Istanbul, haze and hazy melancholy become hüzün. This sentiment comes across in myriad forms: in the city’s history and its most cherished views, in an internal feeling akin to melancholy, and ultimately in poetic material. Hüzün, as Pamuk puts it, is the haze that accompanies artistic activity; it is “the smoky window between (the poet) and the world” (93). The condensation on the window limits understanding by preventing clear vision and thinking. Yet, the resulting isolation is also part of a creative process and an everyday experience, as the passage below shows us, through the imagery of a misted window:


Offering no clarity, veiling reality instead, hüzün brings us comfort, softening the view like the condensation on a window when a teakettle has been spouting steam on a winter’s day. Steamed-up windows make me feel hüzün, and I still love getting up and walking over to those windows to trace words on them with my finger. As I trace out words and figures on the steamy window, the hüzün inside me dissipates, and I can relax; after I have done all my writing and drawing, I can erase it all with the back of my hand and look outside. But the view itself can [ultimately] bring its own hüzün. (2005 79-80)

Lack of clear vision leads to mixed feelings. The hüzün of steamed windows is a comforting one, acting as a springboard to creativity and daydreaming. This is not unlike the experience of Jack London’s bookish protagonist in Sea Wolf (1904), who, in the opening scene, the sea journey in San Francisco Bay, “allowed the mystery of the fog to lay hold of [his] imagination” (3). Steamed windows obstruct the view only to facilitate self-reflection. In a manner that recalls Tanpinar’s imagery and a nineteenth-century preoccupation with the fog, Pamuk’s steam here becomes a mist the author seeks to dispel, yet it is one he also enjoys being enveloped in, as it mystifies both the city and the writer. Steam, in this case, is what
obscures the object, precluding the view but also allowing the onlooker to turn inwards. The blurring of the view, in other words, associates the interior *hüzün* with the exterior one. *Hüzün*, then, is a creative urge, as well as a presentiment that pushes the author to absolve himself.

**Pamuk’s Bosphorus**

Pamuk’s depictions of Istanbul’s mists and the Bosphorus reveal a multifaceted understanding of the city. The Bosphorus emerges as a magical realm of catastrophe, fear, and bliss. One telling title is “Catastrophes Never End: The Ships That Pass Through the Bosphorus, Famous Fires, Moving House and Other Disasters.”89 The fires here refer to the burning down of the yalı, which are merely reduced to bonfires for the city’s new bourgeoisie, a spectacle for the gilded youth who drive to the shores to watch them from the opposite side, and an opportunity for the constructors to use the area to build concrete apartments instead. In short, Pamuk’s apocalyptic imagery is clearly grounded in his experiences of the cruel transformation of the shores.

The memoir continues this imagery while also celebrating the Bosphorus civilization. The shores of the Bosphorus bear traces of the late Ottoman elegance one can still glimpse in the yalı, which, for Pamuk, testify to the vitality and power of Ottoman culture to retain its authenticity, even when under Western influence (57).90 The Bosphorus for Pamuk is marked

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89 The chapter is a revised form of an earlier article, published in *Öteki Renkler (Other Colours)*, but omitted in the English translation: “Felaketler Bitmez: Boğazdan Geçen Tankerler, Yangınlar ve Diğer Felaketler.” The article in Turkish reads, “Boğaz’ı bir felaket ve mutluluk kaynağı olarak görmemizin arkasında ise tabii ki bu karانlık, dar, ve akıntısu suyun bize sunduğu korkular ve zevkler var” (“The fears and pleasures that this dark water with strong currents offer us are the reason why we see the Bosphorus as a source of happiness and disaster”) (373; trans. mine).

90 Pamuk’s lines clearly delimit Western influence to the late period of the Ottomans, and depict the yalı as the emblems of Ottoman distinctiveness during the period: “[A]sil Boğaz zevklerinden biri burada, bir zamanlar Osmanlı medeniyet ve kültürünün Batı etkisine girdiği, ama kendi özgünülgünü ve gücünü kaybetmediği çok zengin bir döneminkalıtımları görmekti” (57-8). In Freely’s translation, on the other hand, Western influence seems to inform the Ottoman Empire and civilization as a
by this celebration, and he writes that the waterway is distinct in its comparison with Amsterdam, Venice, Paris and Rome, cities famous for their urban waterside architecture (45), both because of its geography, and because of the traces of the Ottoman elegance. This favorable comparison reveals pride, and exhibits what Pamuk calls a certain “chauvinism” of the city, a belief in its glorious past and uniqueness. Pamuk’s imagery posits the Bosphorus as the waterway where the exceptionality of Istanbul appears most immediately. Waterway travel may be experienced by means of the Bosphorus ferries, or vapur as they are called in Turkish, deriving from the French vapour for steam and corresponding to the vaporetti in Venice. The vapur mark the modernization of the city, and notably of the Bosphorus. They facilitated transportation and provided travelers from the city access to the remote towns along the Bosphorus. Having brought important changes to the city, the vapur require our closer attention, a view evidently shared by Pamuk who devotes Chapter 30, “The Smoke Rising from Ships on the Bosphorus,” to the ferries of Istanbul. Pamuk’s interest, however, lies not only in the vapur themselves, but in the ways the smoke coming from their funnels changes the silhouette of the city and leaves traces on the skyline. This smoke, obscuring the view and complicating the skyline, is a favorite subject for Pamuk the young artist, and an essential theme for conveying “the melancholy of the scene” (256). The young Pamuk’s outlook is shaped by paintings of smoke and fog by Turner and Monet.

At the same time, a vapur ride is the epitome of the Bosphorus experience. Pamuk comments as follows:

whole: “What I enjoyed most about […] the Bosphorus was to see the traces everywhere of a sumptuous culture that had been influenced by the West without losing its originality or vitality” (46).

Steamboats were first introduced in 1844, between the Bosphorus towns and the center. They were put to wider use in 1851. Previously, and also after the introduction of the steamboats, boats with oarsmen were the only means of transportation across the strait or around the Golden Horn. Pierre Loti, in Aziyadé (1879) uses boats to cross the Golden Horn. So does Tanpınar, seventy years after Loti, in the above-mentioned essay. The silhouette of the Bosphorus changed as the shores became more accessible, both to the foreign embassies that built summer residences along the shores for prestige, and to Istanbullus who could use this effective means of public transportation.
The Bosphorus shapes the city, and yet is not part of the city or the feelings it generates: freedom and openness are precisely the opposite of what the clutter of buildings conveys. Yet the feeling of freedom generated by the ferry ride is also a journey into the city. Pamuk attests to this feeling in a short piece on the Bosphorus ferries in Other Colours (2007), in the following words: “when I take a ride on an Istanbul ferry, I never feel as if I am travelling through the city; rather I sense my place inside it” (75, emphasis mine). Here, the travel through the Bosphorus becomes an image that dissolves the simple reciprocity between inside and outside.

In a manner that recalls Gaston Bachelard’s analysis of space in his Poetics of Space (1956), the memoir develops a “dimension of intimacy” (85), to borrow his terms, through an account of the ferry ride. The ride is an opportunity for an intimate experience of the city:


To travel along the Bosphorus on a boat is […] [to peep in] the city house by house, neighbourhood by neighbourhood and to see the city from afar, as [an ever-changing] silhouette, [a dream]. (2005 45)\(^2\)

The ferry and the Bosphorus are the means to experience the city from within while at the same time being outside it. The ferry ride along the Bosphorus allows an experience of contrasts and convergences. Nature and culture are converged, in and out are converged, and the result is a blend of these with its own peculiar imagery.

\(^2\) Compare my interjections with Freely’s translation: “To travel along the Bosphorus…is to see the city house by house, neighbourhood by neighbourhood, and also from afar, as a silhouette, an ever-mutating mirage” (46). My translation follows the original, but I opt for peeping instead of seeing to hint at the unseemliness of looking in. I substitute dream for mirage to avoid further orientalizing the city and its experience.
Pamuk’s imagery of the mist relates to that part of the city prized throughout its history. The Bosphorus, in the memoir emerges as the repository of the city’s spirit and strength. In a similar vein, the chapter “Exploring the Bosphorus” ends with these words:


“Life can't be that bad,” I think from time to time. “Whatever happens, I can always take a walk along the Bosphorus.” (2005 54)

Here, the Bosphorus appears as a therapeutic waterway, alongside which one might stroll and gather optimism. Above all, however, it emerges as the repository of our projections of the city’s spirit and strength. It is a garland of water that weaves not only through our immediate senses of the city, but also through the palimpsests of its history, literally channeling the ‘fogged’ vision of the city.

**Black-and-White Photographs**

This haze that surrounds the city is perhaps at its most apparent in the black-and-white photographs that are scattered, without captions, across Pamuk’s memoir. His selection of photographs conveys a contemporary preoccupation with the lost Istanbul(s). The city’s Ottoman past peeks through these photographs. Indeed, few of the exterior scenes show the city’s Western aspect, places like Robert College, the American college Pamuk attended, or Nişantaşı, the upscale neighborhood where the Pamuk family has lived for nearly a century. At the end of the memoir, Pamuk adds a note about the photographs, registering some astonishment at his selection, and in his words, “a feeling in between nostalgia and amazement at the strangeness of the past” (347; trans. mine). The photographs recall

93 “İstanbul’un ruhu ve gücü Boğaz'dan gelir” (“Istanbul's soul and strength emanates from the Bosphorus”) (54; trans. mine).
childhood memories of the city, transmitting haze: “black-and-white, dim, dismal and smoky.” Pamuk comments:

This feeling of black and white has to do, on the one hand, with the poverty of the city, with the fading, negligence and oblivion of what is beautiful and historic. On the other hand, it has to do with the humble simplicity of Ottoman architecture even during the heyday of the empire. (48; trans. mine)

Just like hüzün, black-and-white is also a feeling of contrasts. The decrepitude of the city, made more somber by the remnants of the Ottomans, also fed the nostalgia for past grandeur, which even at the height of the Empire, retained a modesty. This nostalgic feeling pervades the city, and Pamuk lists a few neighborhoods and instances where “the black-and-white haze” is evident (35). Thus the photographs in the memoir become melancholic objects, as mementos for the now largely reconfigured cityscape.

The photographs Pamuk chooses are mostly shot by Ara Güler, a renowned photographer from Turkey whose photographs of the Istanbul of the 1940s and 50s have been praised for their aesthetics as well as for their documentary value. Güler’s photographs unite multiple layers of Istanbul’s history in single frames. For Pamuk, they provide visual representations of his memoir, revealing the city’s melancholy refrain, “where…the old combines with the new to create a humble music that speaks of ruin and poverty” (234).

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94 Pamuk writes, “Çocukluğumun İstanbul’unu siyah-beyaz fotoğraflar gibi, iki renkli, yarı karanlık, kurşun bir yer olarak yaşadım ve öyle de hatırlıyorum.” This is altogether omitted in the English translation, and the English in text above is my own translation.

95 Compare with Freely’s translation: “to see the city in black and white is to see it through the tarnish of history: the patina of what is old and faded and no longer matters to the rest of the world. Even the greatest Ottoman architecture has a humble simplicity that suggests an end-of-empire melancholy” (38).

96 In Turkish, Pamuk refers to the black-and-white soul of the city (“siyah beyaz ruh”) (44).

97 Pamuk’s recent collection of essays, Manzaradan Parçalar: Hayat, Sokaklar, Edebiyat (“Pieces from the View: Life, Streets, Literature”), includes an essay (“Ara Güler’in İstanbul'u”) on Güler’s Istanbul. In the essay, Pamuk writes that his discovery of Güler’s archive after completing most of the text led him to despair and to joy (198).
Güler’s Istanbul is a city of both splendor and poverty, with the ostentatious remnants of the Ottoman Empire providing a backdrop to the everyday activity of its inhabitants on land and water. His photographs are more than a visual rendering of Pamuk’s themes; they add to the thematization of the mist.

Güler’s photographs reveal not only the fog or faint vapors emanating from the Bosphorus, or a picturesque smoke coming from a distant steamship. They evoke the economy of smoke by capturing the people who work with or against it: the fishers who make a living from the Bosphorus, dock workers, or the inhabitants who struggle to make ends meet in this metropolis where the remnants of an imperial past acquire a looming presence, towering over the figures in the photographs, adding an air of oriental allure as well as decrepitude.

In Manzaradan Parçalar (“Pieces from the View”), Pamuk comments on how the sentiment the photographs of the fishing boats evoke differs from hüzün. The fishing boats make the viewer feel: “tarihin ve modernliğin anıtları ve yıkıntıları arasında, doğanın çocukuluğunu görmemenin heyecanını da hissederiz” (“the excitement of seeing the innocence of nature amidst the monuments and ruins of history and modernity”) (195; trans. mine).
A close reading of Güler’s photograph on page 255, illustrating the haze that envelops the city, elaborates the connection between mist, mystery and hüzün. This photograph is a particularly good example of the persistent imagery of smoke and mist in representations of Istanbul, because it discloses an important component of the leitmotif of smoke and mist. In a manner that evokes Pamuk’s “steam on the window,” smoke clouds one’s vision. In this black-and-white photograph of a crepuscular Golden Horn, the past and the present of the city frame four shadows on a caïque. The smoke from a ship’s funnel blends in with the sky, cutting through the silhouette of the city: the signature minarets of the Blue Mosque, seen from a distance. Amidst the funnel and the mosque stands the city as a dark void, looming above a boat with four people. Beneath the city, the people in the boat are exposed to the sun and lit by the glittering sea. Yet, darkened by the backlighting of the sun, they blend in with the shadowy metropolis. The city and the men in the boat are in the dark; they are unknowable and indefinite. Their framing, however, is not, for the smoke from a ship’s funnel and the silhouette of the mosque inform the darkness, adding a tone of oriental allure. The smoke that makes the mosque seem insubstantial gives the impression that Istanbul itself may be a figment of imagination. What matters, finally, is the perspective of the onlooker for whom snapshots of fleeting instances may be all that is possible. The photograph seems to reveal that the city is unknowable. Mist mystifies: it evokes secrecy as well as the limitations of perception, hence the difficulty to understand and define. The mist clouds the onlooker’s view, and the experience of the city becomes a mystical one, immaterial, unintelligible and contemplative. Istanbul’s haze is like the veil worn at the demise of the Ottoman Empire by the city’s women, a diaphanous piece of white cloth barely concealing the face. View is not precluded, but most certainly obscured.

The city, framed by a glittering sea and the ethereal mosque, appears as a “heart of darkness.” The allusion to Joseph Conrad’s 1899 novella is deliberate, as Heart of Darkness
includes, along with its critique and observation of colonialism, a much-quoted note on mist and meaning-making. An unnamed narrator explains what meaning means for Marlow, the storyteller and protagonist:

[T]he meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine. (9)

For Conrad, the job of the writer is to make one see (Narcissus 147). Yet, what he shows is something ephemeral and intangible, a “misty” halo that could be brought out by “spectral” moonshine, and something that is perhaps not to be understood but enjoyed and felt. Just like the steam that comes off the funnel of the ship in Güler’s photograph or the steam from a water kettle, meaning in the above passage surrounds the story, only to make it more mysterious.

Istanbul of today no longer peeks through Güler’s photographs. Yet, many of the themes his photographs convey still mark the city. If not black-and-white, it is nevertheless a city of contrasts between rich and poor, locals and immigrants, fervent Muslims and secularists, and the resulting indistinctness of its cultural space. Enveloping both the city and the self, hüzün, as Pamuk defines it in Istanbul, is essential to the city and its inhabitants. Moreover, and as Güler’s photograph shows, all that is needed is a cloud of steam, if not a spectral illumination of moonshine, to bring out the play of dark and light that gives Istanbul its identity.

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99 In the preface to Nigger of the Narcissus, published first in 1897 a few years before Heart of Darkness, Conrad explains, “My task, which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see” (147).
Mistifying Istanbul

Istanbul’s mists and fogs mist-ify the city: they add a tone of dreaminess and mystery to the city and to the text, a black-and-white patina conveyed both textually and visually. The association between mist and melancholy is not exclusive to Pamuk’s memoir; it dates back to the theory of four humors, where melancholy was viewed as an invasion of the brain by mists or vapors rising from the spleen. Melancholy is indeed foggy. Yet, Istanbul’s misty melancholy is different. As opposed to the black bile or vapors originating in the spleen, Istanbul’s “faint vapour emanates from the Bosphorus” (89). In that regard, Istanbul’s hüzün evokes Keats’s “veiled melancholy”: both are prized, with “[their] sovereign shrine in the very temple of Delight” (1884 25-6). However, unlike Keats’s melancholy, which falls from the heavens “like a weeping cloud,” Pamuk’s hüzün rises from the sea and stretches over the entire city. Nor is the hüzün of Istanbul the same as Paris Spleen. Unlike the invasive dirty yellow steam that Baudelaire traces in his Parisian scenes, Pamuk’s vapor is faint, and associated with the part of the city that gives it its soul and vigor.100 The mist is faint, but it generates a hüzün that is dense, encompassing the city and its people.

The relation between seeing and understanding, or perception, is a theme that runs through Pamuk’s work, as I argued in earlier chapters. The thematization of smoke, mist and haze, however, is exclusive to Istanbul. Mist is not simply a trope, but a strategy that informs the politics of the memoir, as well as of Pamuk’s writing. Pamuk’s imagery selectively draws from previous cultural representations of Istanbul. Indeed, Pamuk’s memoir, as well as his other work, is marked by nostalgia for the Ottoman past of the city, lamenting its disappearance. This is especially evident in relation to Istanbul’s architectural heritage, and what he calls the great Ottoman civilization (after his favorite writers A. S. Hisar, Ahmet

100 From “Les Sept Vieillards” (“Seven Old Men”), in which Baudelaire sketches the streets transformed by the mist: “Un brouillard sale et jaune inondait tout l’espace.”
Hasim, Yahya Kemal and Tanpınar). However, there are no references to Tevfik Fikret or to Abdülmecid Efendi in the memoir. That is to say, Pamuk’s account omits the revolutionary movements and westernizing trends which also addressed the concerns that mark his work.

This omission seems to have been made for the sake of maintaining symmetry, the modus operandi (guiding principle) of his memoir. For Pamuk, “symmetry” is key to the memoir and presides over truthfulness:

Bir ressam için şeylerin gerçekliği değil biçimi, romancı için olayların sırası değil düzeni ve hatıra yazarı için geçmişin doğruluğu değil, simetrisi önemlidir. (2003 275)

What is important for a painter is not a thing’s reality but its shape, and what is important for a novelist is not the course of events but their ordering, and what is important for a memoir writer is not the factual accuracy of the past but the symmetry of its account. (2005 265)

Symmetry, here, concerns not only the aesthetic arrangement of past events and ideas in the narrative of the memoir, but the arrangement/relation between form and content. This symmetry applies on a different level as well; form echoes the content, and literary and textual mists converge.

It is characteristic of Pamuk’s work to obscure the workings of identity and meaning-making. To envelop the city in a hazy melancholy is not simply an aesthetic choice, but also a strategic one. His tactics are not unrelated to modernist literature, where aesthetics, rather than truthfulness of narrative, is prized. Pamuk’s narrative also mist-ifies: it obscures the history of the city and its traditions, while at the same time mystifying the reader. Within the indistinct space of globalization, mist provides Pamuk the substance to link the city’s past and present, the poetic matter to shape and envelop his city.

The ways in which Pamuk positions himself in relation to both Turkish literature and literary modernism may be best explained by his response to Tanpınar. Here a parenthesis on

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101 This nostalgia and yearning are most prominent in the memoir, and heightened by the photographs of monuments that reflect this past.
Pamuk’s position within this framework nuances his argument on the quintessential novelist of Istanbul. According to Pamuk, literary modernism has bypassed Turkish literature. Nevertheless, Pamuk’s texts and his persona situate him along the lines of modernist writers. For example, he privileges the act and process of writing in his work, especially in those books that situate Istanbul as protagonist. Moreover, Pamuk is seen as a solitary public figure and exiled writer, factors that align him with modernist authors.

Tanpinar’s influence on Pamuk is evident in his own comments in the memoir, and in the parallels between their works. An obvious example is The Black Book (1990), which reworks Tanpinar’s Huzur, albeit in reverse. Pamuk’s reading of Tanpinar, however, marks their differences. In a recent essay on literary modernism, Pamuk discusses modernism through Tanpinar, and refers to him as a writer who writes for the community with which he identifies and does not challenge it. In Pamuk’s view, this places Tanpinar outside modernism. Pamuk also argues that modernist writing broke away from the mimetic understanding of literature, and therefore its signature works do not point at the world, but create it. This description, demonstrating why Tanpinar is not a modernist, contains a surprising image: “Modernist novelists have hidden the unity and the centre of their novels behind a veil of mist” (“Tanpinar” 291; trans. mine). This imagery of a center hidden by mist reverberates the Conrad phrase I cited earlier. Once again, by using the modernist trope of mist or haze, Pamuk establishes a thematic continuity not only with modernists but also between Tanpinar and his work.

102 In the memoir, Pamuk refers to Tanpinar as the greatest Turkish novelist of the twentieth century (225), and the one to whom he feel closest (99). See also Oya Mentese’s article on Bes Sehir as a subtext of Pamuk’s memoir in “An Analysis of Orhan Pamuk’s Istanbul: Memories and the City, from the view point of its sub-texts.” See Taciser Belge “Rüyadan Kabusa Fantastik Şehir Istanbul” (“From Dream to Nightmare, Istanbul as a Fantastic City”) in Kara Kitap’ı Anlamak (“Understanding The Black Book”) (205-27).
Conclusion

From the mists that envelop Istanbul in early mornings to its cherished views and alienated past, Pamuk’s memoir mist-ifies the city. It spreads *hüzün* over the city through images of steam, smoke and mist, from the early morning haze on the Bosphorus, to a steamed-up window, the smoke of motorboats used for public transportation, and to the mysticism evoked by the minareted silhouette of the city. The recurrence of mist in the memoir places Istanbul within the modernist tradition, while ironically obscuring the history of the city itself. Positioning Pamuk’s preoccupation with mist in relation to London’s literary cityscape and literary modernism, on the other hand, suggests that his depictions work not only with the tradition of literary cityscapes, but also with notions of seeing, knowing, and understanding.