

Conclusion to Part III

Pamuk's *hüzün* is, in some aspects, a complex concept. Like *saudade* and *lítost*, it relates to the emotions of the individual and the collective, and plays with pre-existing cultural tropes; it boasts a range of influences from different ideologies and stages in Turkish-Ottoman history, as well as European, Arabic and Persian elements. On the other hand, it is extremely simple: it reflects the author's desire for continuity and certainty on an individual level, and inveigles its way into a broader psychohistorical narrative along with some generous literary padding.

In this respect, Pamuk's conceptualisation of *hüzün* would have been much more convincing if he had dropped the claims of post-imperial nostalgia. Certainly, there are elements of fatalism and melancholy in Turkish culture, and there is an appreciation for the splendour and achievements of the Ottoman Empire, but it does not necessarily follow that these two are linked. In a period when Turkey and Istanbul are enjoying something of an economic, cultural and geopolitical renaissance, the idea of the collective imagination leaping back to Ottoman times to mourn its loss is fanciful to say the least.

Pamuk successfully conceives of Istanbul as a site of memory and longing by skilfully weaving together reminiscences of Constantinople of the nineteenth century and Istanbul of his childhood in the 1950s and 1960s. In this way, the reader gets the sense that there is nothing much in between or since, and the book is largely pre-Republican both ideologically and in its focus. Pamuk rejects Kemalist positivism and rationalism in favour of an Occidental approach that celebrates *İstanbul*'s heightened, 'authentic' sensibility even as it superficially condemns it. Contra to the usual program of boosting national self-definition through pride, *hüzün* identifies sadness, shame and humiliation as unifying points.

Perhaps unwittingly, however, Pamuk's *hüzün* still reveals an adherence to Republican ideology. Pamuk laments the lack of the cosmopolitanism for which Istanbul was so renowned at the same time as he glorifies the indigenous Turkishness of *hüzün*, which is owned by a homogenised urban population. Since it reflects a longing for imperial glory, it appears to be for those Turks who feel connected to their Ottoman and Islamic heritage, but not anyone else. Furthermore, as with the Kemalists, Pamuk takes the French to be the embodiment of Europeanness and, therefore, civilisational sophistication. The literary influence of the French is paramount. When Pamuk speaks of looking at Istanbul through the eyes of an outsider, what he is talking about is principally looking at it through the eyes of the French nineteenth-century traveller and flâneur.

Yet despite its Francophilia, *hüzün's* pedigree comes most decisively from Germany – that is, from the Romantic nationalism of the nineteenth century. Ideas of fate, of national spirit, of sentiment over rationality, the rejection of modernity and of the forlorn genius wallowing in his own nostalgia and longing – all of these can be traced back to the legacy of German Romanticism.

Essentially, Pamuk's *hüzün* concerns childhood regression, and the alienation of a secular middle-class writer during a time of personal and national crisis. The death of Pamuk's father, the breakdown of his marriage and the economic problems of the first years of the twenty-first century all comprise the context in which *Istanbul* was written and, presumably, *hüzün* was conceived. The nostalgic return to the past, through two-dimensional images and re-imagined memories, is reminiscent of Kundera's description of *lítost* as characteristic of immaturity: *hüzün*, in its self-obsessed escapism, also reveals a desire to retreat from the complications of the adult world.

The more recent history of the city is also reflected in Pamuk's conceptualisation of Istanbul. The difficult post-coup years of the 1980s fostered an awareness of the importance of a healthy civil society beyond conceiving common identity through only political means. In the 1990s, the Istanbul municipal council's project to promote the city's Ottoman and Islamic heritage contributed to the growth of a popular consciousness that recast Istanbul as a place of historical and cultural importance. Cultivating an urban nostalgia for a city before development and gentrification, the *hüzünlü* mood of Istanbul is illustrated through historical images of the city from the two historical periods its nostalgia relates to: black and white photos from the 1950s and 1960s, and drawings and paintings of Constantinople by nineteenth-century Europeans. Accordingly, the accompanying text echoes the writing both

of Istanbul's indigenous observers, like the four melancholy writers, and its European admirers, such as Loti and Flaubert.

The appeal of *hüzün* lies not in its being authentic, but in that it reflects a *desire* for authenticity. This yearning to find what is essential and real is a feature of changing societies – a modern condition, one might say. Pamuk's concept of *hüzün* as a site of spiritual and emotional authenticity offers *İstanbul*, Turks and non-Turks alike something as existentially modern and universal as it is historically contingent. Nevertheless, the sentiments on which it is based, such as pessimism and inertia, have their limits, and are not representative of Istanbul today. Ultimately, the nostalgic fatalism of *hüzün* is not a useful lens through which to understand Istanbul or its people. It is, however, a very good one to understand Pamuk's preoccupations and, of course, to entice tourists to this inscrutably melancholy city.

And so although *hüzün* reflects multiple markers of Turkish culture and identity, it is somewhat out of date, for it ultimately derives from a personal nostalgia based on aesthetics and not a collective nostalgia based in lived reality.

What grievance I feel when I read Western travellers on Istanbul is above all that of hindsight: many of the local features these observers, some of them brilliant writers, noted and exaggerated, were to vanish from the city soon after having been remarked.¹

Pamuk cites the Janissaries, the slave market and harems, the dervish lodges, Ottoman clothing and calligraphy as some of these lost features of the city. Perhaps he should also have added *hüzün* to the list.