

# Istanbul

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## INTRODUCTION

Asked what he liked most about Ankara, the poet Yahya Kemal replied, 'Returning to Istanbul.' However unfair to Ankara, the reply conjures up Istanbul's special place in the minds of Turks and non-Turks alike. Located in both Europe and Asia, with a current population estimated at 17 million ('Istanbul, the Queen of Cities' 2016), divided by the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn, Istanbul's geographical situation suggests the *brassage de peuples* which has characterized the city for much of its existence. For Western travellers from at least the sixteenth century onwards, the city has symbolized, variously, aesthetics, exoticism and/or sensuality, Oriental despotism, and the seclusion of women, functioning as Europe's 'Other' (Said 1995) in terms of culture, government, and religion. The European Capital of Culture in 2010, today, with Turkey's candidature for membership of the European Union seemingly eternally deferred, and Istanbul struggling to cope with the influx of refugees from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, the city once again symbolizes the complex relationship between East and West. Moreover, the heavy-handed government reaction to the summer 2014 Gezi Park protest against the destruction of an Istanbul city park spiralled into countryside demonstrations against the ruling Justice and Development Party of Turkey (conservative) [AKP] government of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, revealing Istanbul's position on Turkey's political fault line, just as the 1999 Izmit earthquake reminded us of Istanbul's geological vulnerability. (Such heavy-handedness was more than repeated in the summer of 2016.) Nowhere is the complex relationship between Istanbul and literature or Istanbul as the meeting place of East and West more clearly dramatized than in the works of Orhan Pamuk, a writer who is controversial at home while being

seen as *the* Turkish author abroad, although there are many other significant Turkish writers.

### BYZANTIUM—CONSTANTINOPLE—ISTANBUL

Turkey is a land of cities (and today, therefore, also of ruins), whether one considers the ancient cities of the Hittites, such as Hattuşaş, *Yazılıkaya*, and *Karatepe-Aslantaş*, the underground cities of Cappadocia like Derinkuyu and Kaymaklı, or the ruins of such Greek and Roman cities of Ephesus, Bergama, and many others. Istanbul takes its place in this list first as Byzantium, then Constantinople (with the old part of the city being known as Stamboul), and today Istanbul.

Known as Byzantium until 330, when Constantine founded the new capital of the Roman Empire on the same site, the city was renamed Constantinople and became the capital of the Byzantine Empire until 395 A.D., when it became the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire. In 1204 in the Fourth Crusade, it fell to the Crusaders who ransacked and desecrated the Aya Sofia, and then became part of the Latin Empire of Constantinople. Although the Byzantine Empire was restored in 1261, in 1453 Mehmet the Conqueror (1432–1481) took the city, which became the capital of the Ottoman Empire (Chronology of (the) Byzantine Empire). Istanbul remained the capital until 1923, when Mustafa Kemal or Atatürk made Ankara, strategically placed near the centre of the country, the capital of the new Turkish Republic.

The emergence of Atatürk, the establishment of the Turkish Republic, and the population exchange in 1923, during which 900,000 Greeks were repatriated to Greece from Turkey and 400,000 Turks returned to Turkey from Greece, as well as the massacres of Armenians and the destruction of Armenian property in the 1890s, 1915–1916, and 1920 (Anderson 2008), had a huge effect on Turkish cities like Istanbul and Izmir. If Ankara is the capital, Istanbul with its varied historical and cultural heritage—palaces, mosques, churches, museums, Byzantine remains, Ottoman fortifications—as well as the Kapalı Çarşı/covered market, and the city's central place in commerce and tourism, is still by far the more famous of the two.

Istanbul has always been a divided city: at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Mary Wortley Montagu opposed Pera to Constantinople, and today there is Beyoğlu (Pera as was—from the Greek meaning 'on the other side' (Türel 2011, p. 90)), as opposed to Sultanahmet (with the Topkapı palace and the Aya Sofya), versus the 'Asian side' of areas like Kadıköy and Üsküdar (previously Scutari, made famous by Florence Nightingale), and Haydarpaşa, the terminus of the railway from Baghdad built by the Germans in 1909. Moreover, today, in the wake of the Syrian stalemate and the coming of Daesh, Istanbul and other Turkish cities are faced with a huge influx of refugees. There are about 2.2 million in Turkey (Kingsley 2015, p. 1), many remaining in the southeast while others—330,000 in 2014 according to one estimate—are in Istanbul (Cetingulec 2015). The Kurdish problem remains. The Kurdistan Workers'

Party (socialist) [PKK] leader, Abdullah Öcalan, was arrested in 1999 and is currently serving a life sentence on İmralı island in the Sea of Marmara; but while in the early years of the AKP, government relations between the Turkish state and its Kurdish population improved, as of January 2016 the situation has worsened again, partly as a result of the complex political situation in neighbouring countries like Iraq and Syria.

### ISTANBUL THROUGH WESTERN EYES

Often viewed through the Orientalist stereotypes of sexuality, despotism, and an alien religion, Istanbul has been a key location for European writers and travellers, notably Montagu, Lord Byron, Charlotte Brontë, Pierre Loti, W. B. Yeats, and Virginia Woolf, among others. Montagu presents the position of women ambivalently, declaring them to be ‘the only free people in the empire’ (Montagu 1992, p. 116), but also admitting that women’s liberty and their ‘methods of evasion and disguise that are very favourable to gallantry’ do not prevent them from fear of discovery, which would mean their exposure ‘to the most merciless rage of jealousy which is here a monster that cannot be satiated but with blood’ (149). Later, she recounts the story of the finding of the body of a young and beautiful woman ‘naked, only wrapped in a coarse sheet, with two wounds with a knife’, ‘supposed to be brought (to Pera) in the (the) dead of night from the Constantinople side’ (169); Montagu thus identifies this example of male revenge with the Ottoman part of Istanbul rather than European Pera. Elsewhere she states that ‘(T)he luscious passion of the seraglio is...blended so with the surly spirit of despotism in one of the parties, and with the dejection and anxiety which this spirit produces in the other’, that ‘it cannot appear otherwise than as a very mixed kind of enjoyment’ (149), earlier commenting that, fearing a revolt, ‘the Sultan...has begun his precautions, after the goodly fashion of this blessed government, by ordering several persons to be strangled who were the objects of his royal suspicion’ (148).

Tropes of the harem, the black eunuch, and the beauties of the harem inmates and their precarious lives reappear in Cantos V and VI of *Don Juan*. Baba, the black eunuch, warns Don Juan, disguised as one of the odalisques:

You know how near us the deep Bosphorus floats;  
And you and I may chance ere morning rise,  
To find our way to Marmora without boats,  
Stitch’d up in sacks—a mode of navigation  
A good deal practised here upon occasion.

(Byron 2008, pp. 571, V, ll. 732–736)

Towards the end of the harem episodes, Don Juan and the odalisque Dudù are threatened with this punishment when Gulbeyaz, the Sultan’s current favourite, finds that Don Juan has been confided to Dudù’s care and

declares: 'Let the boat/Be ready by the secret portal's side: /You know the rest' (Byron 2008, pp. 619, VI, ll. 898–900). Although Don Juan escapes, the threat remains. The trope is a long-lived one, and it occurs once again in Pamuk's *The Black Book* (Pamuk 2006a, p. 19) and *Istanbul: Memories and the City* (Pamuk 2006b, p. 41) as well as in Barbara Nadel's *Harem* (2003).

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* evokes both 'the bazaars of Stamboul' (Jane) and 'the grand Turk's...seraglio; gazelle-eyes, houri forms and all!' (Rochester), and Rochester imagines himself bargaining for 'so many tons of flesh and such an assortment of black eyes' (Brontë 1993, p. 282). Other nineteenth-century women travellers like Julia Pardoe and Fanny Blunt generally followed Montagu in describing the harem, the hamam, despotism, and the position of women, but it falls to Pierre Loti to represent the lives of Turkish women (both inside and outside the harem) in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries through a haze of sensuality and exoticism in works like *Les Désenchantées* (1879) and *Alizadé* (1906). Other early twentieth-century writers like Yeats and Woolf take a more aestheticizing approach. In 'Sailing to Byzantium' Yeats sees the city as the embodiment of 'sensual music' and imagines himself as a bird:

Of hammered gold and gold enamelling  
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;  
Or set upon a golden bough to sing  
To lord and ladies of Byzantium  
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

(2012, pp. 2102, 2103)

This makes the city the symbol of both eternal art and imperial power. 'Byzantium', similarly, represents the city through the 'starlit or...moonlit dome' of the Aya Sofya, and again evokes the golden bird, whose 'changeless metal' 'scorn(s) aloud... / Common bird or petal / And all complexities of mire or blood' (Yeats 2012, pp. 2107–2108). Responding to early twentieth-century Constantinople, as she calls it, Woolf sees it as merely a 'very large town', noting that 'it was not ten years ago that the Turks & Armenians massacred each other in the streets', and adding that while the name of 'The Golden Horn' has whispered sweetly in ears that have never left London, 'the actual waters are a little disappointing as the real thing must always be' (Woolf 1990, pp. 348, 357, 351). Similarly, her impression of the Aya Sofya before the restoration of the mosaics is of something 'fragmentary and inconsequent', and not 'beautiful', since 'the zeal of the Turks has stripped the temple bare of ornament', and the place is 'so large, & so secular' that it scarcely seems 'the precinct of an awful religion' (349, 350). However, in Chapter 3 of *Orlando*, she uses the familiar associations of Istanbul with sexuality, despotism and rebellion against it when Orlando's change of sex takes place against the backdrop of an uprising against the Sultan (Woolf 1987, pp. 83–86).

More recently, following the earlier trend represented by Graham Greene's *Stamboul Train* (1932), Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934), and Ian Fleming's *From Russia With Love* (1957), Istanbul has become the site of several successful series of detective stories by Barbara Nadel, Jason Goodwin, and Jenny White, as well as by Turkish writers like Mehmet Murat Somer and Ahmet Ümit, where the time settings range from the 1990s to the 2010s (Nadel), the mid- and late nineteenth century (Goodwin and White respectively), and contemporary Turkey (Somer and Ümit). The detectives are, variously, Inspector Çetin İkmen (Nadel), Yashim, a eunuch (Goodwin), Kamil Pasha (White), an unnamed male transvestite (Somer), and Chief Inspector Nevzat Akman. Nadel, Goodwin, White, and Ümit all draw on Istanbul's Byzantine and Ottoman past and its mix of races and religions.

### ISTANBUL IN TURKISH LITERATURE

Pamuk is preceded by Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, whose novels, *A Mind at Peace* (1949)—declared by Pamuk to be 'the greatest novel ever written about Istanbul' (qtd. in Riker 2014)—and *The Time Regulation Institute* (1962) respond to the early days of the Turkish Republic. *A Mind at Peace*, like later works by Pamuk, evokes Istanbul's *hüzün* (melancholy), its cosmopolitanism, and its position between East and West, tradition and modernity, while *The Time Regulation Institute* satirizes the bureaucracy and the infatuation with systems of all sorts which accompanied Turkey's modernization/Westernization.

ORHAN PAMUK: 'FOR ME THE CENTRE OF THE WORLD IS ISTANBUL'  
(2007, p. 414)

Istanbul dominates Orhan Pamuk's work from *Cevdet Bey and His Sons* (1982) to *A Strangeness in My Mind* (2015): the city is both context and protagonist, and the city and many types of literature are often closely intertwined. Pamuk's Istanbul is dominated by *hüzün*, and he presents his works as 'made from a mixture of Eastern and Western methods, styles, habits, and histories' (Pamuk 2007, p. 264). While *The White Castle* (1985) and *My Name is Red* (1998) create fictionalized versions of Istanbul in the seventeenth and sixteenth centuries, respectively, the works which focus most intensely on the city are *The Black Book* (1990), and *Istanbul: Memories and the City* (2003).

One of the most striking characteristics of *The Black Book* is the dense pattern of allusions to works of what Pamuk calls elsewhere 'the... Eastern canon' (Pamuk 2007, p. 371), most significantly Rumi's *Mesnevî* (Long Poem) and Sheyh Gâlib's *Hüsn ü 'Ashk* (Beauty and Love). Both these allusions serve to indicate the moral degeneracy of Istanbul, possibly as a result of Western influences. From the *Mesnevî*, Pamuk takes the episode of the competition between the Chinese and Anatolian (Rûmî) artists for the favour of the Shah (Andrews et al. 1997, pp. 119–120), a story also referred to in *My Name Is Red* (Pamuk

2002, p. 331) and in ‘Şirin’s Surprise’ (Pamuk 2007, p. 283–289). In Rumi’s poem, the Chinese painters use all the colours available and produce a stunning painting which ‘stole (the Shah’s) wits away’, but the Anatolian artists produce a highly polished mirror in which ‘All that he saw there, here was bettered’ so that ‘(H)is eye was robbed from its socket’ (qtd. in Andrews et al 1997, p. 120). In Rumi, the Chinese painters create a masterpiece, and the mirror’s reflection of the beauty of their painting represents the ‘mirror-like purity’ of the heart of ‘those of Rûm . . . the sufis’ (120), since an ideal Sufi is ‘the perfect mirror that completely reflects the attributes, the word, and the power of God’ (121). In Pamuk, by contrast, the two paintings are commissioned by ‘a Beyoğlu gangster’, who decides to decorate the lobby of his new brothel ‘with scenes of the city’ (Pamuk 2006a, p. 397). He appeals to the painters of the academy, but they refuse, so instead he turns to ‘the artisans who painted the ceilings of provincial mansions, the walls of summer theaters, and the vans, horse-carts, and snake-swallower tents you saw at fairs’, promising the winner ‘a large cash prize’ (398). Rumi’s Shah is replaced by the gangster, the palace by the brothel, the best painters of two cultures by two low-class, unskilled artisans, access to God by money. 1950s Istanbul is decadent and degenerate. Moreover, Sheyh Gâlib’s *Hüsn ü Askh* (Beauty and Love) provides the name of one of the main protagonists, a name meaning ‘winner’ or ‘victorious’, both equally inappropriate and ironic, and Gâlib’s young male and female protagonists, Hüsn and Askh, become the young Galip and Rüya; instead of living and falling in love at the edge of a desert in Diyar-i Kalp—the Realm of Hearts, they live in a city apartment block, the ‘City-of-Hearts’ Apartments (225). There are also references to *The 1001 Nights* which relate to male sexual fantasies (42), Celâl’s literary ambitions (113), and Haroun al-Rashid’s wanderings around the city (307, 315; see also Pamuk 2007, p. 366).

*Istanbul: Memories and The City* encompasses all the main themes and leitmotifs related to the city in Pamuk’s work to date. The first is the dystopian vision of Istanbul: the disappearance of the Bosphorus ferries, the burning of the Ottoman mansions and *yahıs* (summer houses), the dilapidation of the city in the 1950s and 1960s, recalling both Pamuk’s essays (Pamuk 2007, pp. 66–67, 77) and the nightmarish evocation of the drying up of the Bosphorus in *The Black Book* (Pamuk 2006a, pp. 16–20). *Istanbul* also evokes the loss of multi-cultural Istanbul, its *hüzün*, Western travellers’ accounts of Istanbul and their influence on twentieth-century Turkish writers including Pamuk himself, and Istanbul as the West’s exotic Other. Interspersed with these are accounts of Pamuk’s family and their apartment block, his schooldays, his love of painting, his first love affair, and his decision to become a writer.

Istanbul as dystopia is associated with ruins, the end of empire, loss, and *hüzün*: ‘after the Ottoman empire collapsed’, says Pamuk, ‘the world almost forgot that Istanbul existed’; ‘For me’, he adds, ‘it has always been a city of ruins and of end-of-empire melancholy. I’ve spent my life either battling this melancholy, or (like all Istanbulus) making it my own’ (Pamuk 2006b, pp. 6). Later he says, ‘the city speaks of defeat, destruction, deprivation, melancholy,

and poverty' (43), and the catalogue of loss includes the disappearance of the Byzantine/Ottoman past (27), the Turkish film industry (32), the landscape around the city (61, 63), the 'glorious street fountains' (88), the cemeteries (264), and so on. The dystopian note is also sounded when, reading *The Istanbul Encyclopedia* of Reşat Ekrem Koçu, Pamuk finds pleasure 'in thinking of the history of Istanbul as a gallery of death, torture and horror' (140). Similarly in *Other Colors* he says, 'Today's Istanbul—today's Turkey—is a world leader in state-sponsored murder by unknown assailants, not to mention systematic torture, trammels on freedom of expression, and the merciless abuse of human rights', although he then adds that 'Turkey also has a democracy strong enough to allow voters to force the state to refrain from such practices' (Pamuk 2007, p. 297). However, this democracy did not prevent Pamuk from finding himself in 2005 accused of 'insulting Turkishness', because of his references to the killing of a million Armenians and 30,000 Kurds in an interview with a Swiss newspaper ('Avoiding EU Condemnation' 2006), although the case was later dropped.

Although one chapter of *Istanbul* does deal with Tanpınar, Yahya Kemal, Abdülhak Şinasi Hisar, and Koçu and another discusses Koçu's *Istanbul Encyclopedia*, Pamuk confesses that he is much closer to Western observers of the city than to Turkish Westernizers since he frequently 'identified with a number' of the former—'Nerval, Flaubert, de Amici' and thus 'forged (his) own identity', and 'because so few of Istanbul's own writers have paid their city any attention whatever' (260). This claim is challenged by Laurent Mignon (2011, pp. 62–63) and disproved by some of the poems in İskender Pala's article (2010) and in *The Age of Beloveds* (Andrews and Kalpaklı 2005, pp. 64–68). In any case, in *Istanbul* Western—especially nineteenth-century French—writers dominate. Gérard de Nerval, Théophile Gautier, and Gustave Flaubert get separate chapters, and Pamuk also refers to Honoré de Balzac, Victor Hugo, Émile Zola, and Jules Verne, among others. He argues that since Turkey was never a Western colony (Pamuk 2006b, pp. 218, 260, 263 and see Pamuk 2007, p. 370), he is able to share Westerners' Orientalizing views of Istanbul and Turkey as 'exotic' (261) without any humiliation, and to 'become one with the Western traveller... at once the object and the subject of the Western gaze' (261). This feeling, he asserts, has been common to all Istanbulis 'for the last hundred and fifty years' (261). The claim is extraordinary if taken literally, and it has been disputed by Mignon (2011, pp. 60–61), although films like *Hamam*, *The Harem*, and *Istanbul: Crossing the Bridge*, as well as the repeated staging of Mozart's *Entführung aus dem Serail* at the International Istanbul Opera Festival in 2011, 2012, and 2015 ('6th International İstanbul Opera Festival' 2015), and the popularity of the long-running TV series *The Magnificent Century*, based on the life of Süleyman the Magnificent (Batuman 2014), to some extent bear out Pamuk's claim, at least for a certain class. Along with the return of *Fal* (fortune-telling) and *Nargile* (hookah) cafes and the recent middle-class taste for imitations of Ottoman artefacts, these cultural phenomena can be seen as nostalgia for a lost world.

## CONTEMPORARY TURKISH NOVELISTS

Pamuk's writings on Istanbul must be related to those of contemporary novelists like Elif Shafak, Buket Uzuner, Latife Tekin, İzzet Celasin, Ahmet Ümit, and Mehmet Murat Somer, along with poets like Nâzım Hikmet, Yahya Kemal, Orhan Veli, İlhan Berk, and Bedri Rahmi Eyuboğlu, among others. Their works also take the city as a central character. Shafak's *The Flea Palace* (2004) creates an image of Istanbul's diversity and the split between tradition and modernity through its depiction of the varied inhabitants of the Bonbon Apartments and touches on the motifs of disappearing graves and cemeteries, while *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006) highlights the issue of the Armenian genocide, causing Shafak, like Pamuk, to be charged with 'insulting Turkishness', although she was later acquitted. Tekin, offers a highly original non-realist vision of the shanty town dwellers who against all the odds create a community out of waste on the edge of an unnamed city in *Berji Kristin: Tales from the Garbage Hills* (1984), although one reviewer identifies the city as Istanbul (Berji Kristin). Tekin's focus on migration to Istanbul is shared by several other writers, notably Pamuk in his 2015 *A Strangeness in My Mind* and many filmmakers from the 1950s onwards (see below pp. 14–17). Buket Uzuner's *İstanbullu* (2010) raises the question of what it means to live in Istanbul: the city's inhabitants represent a cross-section of ethnicities and religions, and many are migrants, but it is clearly suggested that they do indeed belong. Uzuner's earlier *Mediterranean Waltz* (2000) is set partly in the Kuzguncuk area of Istanbul and mourns the loss of its multi-ethnic and multi-religious community, creating a dystopian vision of a near-future civil war. Another novel in which Istanbul is a site of conflict is İzzet Celasin's *Black Sky, Black Sea* (2013), translated into English from Norwegian, since its author left Turkey in 1988 after having been imprisoned for left-wing activism after the 1980 military coup. The novel covers roughly the same time period as that of Pamuk's *The Museum of Innocence* (2009), but whereas in Pamuk's novel the political events seem to impinge on the protagonist narrator mainly when the curfew interferes with his visits to Istanbul's expensive restaurants, in Celasin's novel political events are central to the novel since they are intertwined with the lives of the two main protagonists, Oak and Zuhul.

## ISTANBUL IN TURKISH POETRY

In Ottoman poetry, Istanbul is often described or implied as a background for the beloved, as the poems by Sa'yi and others quoted in *The Age of Beloveds* (Andrews and Kalpaklı 2005, pp. 72, 145–146) and Nedim's 'We Understand the Purpose of that Glance' (Silay 1996, p. 210) make it clear. Or it takes the form of the setting of the garden, seen as a microcosm of order (Andrews 1996, pp. 160–166), as in Nedim's 'The Time for Festivity Has Come' (211). Occasionally, however, as İskender Pala shows, sometimes the city or one of its neighbourhoods did take centre stage, as in Nabi's 'A Declaration to Honourable Istanbul', Bâki's 'Ghazal' (2010,



pp. 192–193, 196), or Latifi or Revani’s poems about Galata (Andrews and Kalpaklı 2005, pp. 64–66).

In the twentieth century, George Messo singles out Hikmet, Veli, and Berk as poets of Istanbul par excellence, also noting the work of contemporary poets like Gonca Özmen, Küçük İskender, and Birhan Keskin (2016: personal communication). Hikmet’s *Human Landscapes from My Country* starts from Haydarpaşa station (2002, pp. 3–16), and in his *Poems from Prison*, ‘October 5 1945’ evokes ‘the misery of Istanbul’, ‘the city of honest, hardworking, poor people—my real Istanbul’ (Halman 1982, p. 315). Many of Veli’s poems evoke places in Istanbul, like ‘The Covered Bazaar’, ‘Galata Bridge’, ‘Sandıkburnu’, Bebek (‘The Bebek Suite’), or the waters encompassing the city (My Boats), while others imagine Istanbul as the site of love (‘For Istanbul’ and ‘To Live’), or depression (It Makes Me Blue) (Messo, *Veli* forthcoming). All of these are to be found in Veli’s most famous Istanbul poem, ‘Listening to Istanbul’ (Halman 1982, p. 346). Images of the city also dominate Berk’s work, notably but not only in the two book-length poems, *Pera* and *Galata*. In *Pera*, Berk provides a detailed dramatization of the area, evoking its past and present and its multicultural inhabitants. Murat Nemet-Nejat points out the ‘ironic and revealing parallels’ between Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* and Berk’s ‘The Arcade Hristaki’: Benjamin’s quotations are from ‘philosophers, poets, anarchists, journalists, politicians, etc.’ while in Berk they come from ‘prostitutes...in the whore house’ (2007: n 12). Berk’s long poem, ‘Istanbul’, recreates the city’s geography, its past rulers, its monuments, and the engravings of Hogenberger and Melling, and alludes to Yahya Kemal, Orhan Veli, and Sait Faik (many of whose short stories deal with Istanbul’s Greek community) (Messo, *Berk*, forthcoming). But many of Berk’s shorter poems also evoke specific places, like the Church of Saint Anthony of Padua and the Aya Sofya (Saint-Antoine’s Pigeons), ‘Gulhane Park’ (also the subject of Hikmet’s ‘The Walnut Tree’, and quoted in *Black Sky, Black Sea* (Celasin 2013, p. 98)), Pera (‘An Old Street in Pera’), Galata, the Bosphorus, the Golden Horn (‘The Thames’), or Ümraniye (‘Novembers’) (Messo, *Berk*, forthcoming). Other famous poems evoking Istanbul’s beauty, its multiculturalism, its glorious past but also the problems of migration and poverty are Yahya Kemal’s ‘Aziz İstanbul’ (qtd. in Boyar and Fleet 2010, p. 1), Bedri Rahmi Eyuboğlu’s *The Saga of Istanbul* (Silay 1996, pp. 473–477), and Fazlı Hüsnü Dağlarca’s *The Epic of the Conquest of Istanbul* (Halman 2006, pp. 45–47).

#### ISTANBUL AND FILM

Istanbul, and especially the neighbourhood of Beyoğlu/Pera, is at the heart of Turkish cinema. It was the site of the first film screenings in Turkey (1896) and the first cinemas (1908); from the 1940s to the 1980s, one of its streets—Yeşilçam Caddesi—gave its name to the dominant popular mode of film-making in Turkey (Türel 2011, p. 90). Most films—whether Turkish or non-Turkish—

are set in the European side of Istanbul, although there are exceptions, such as *The Losers' Club* (2011) which is set in Kadıköy on the Asian side.

Yeşilçam dominated Turkish popular cinema from the 1950s to the 1970s, producing mainly melodramas and comedies, but also historical, adventure, and gangster films (Arslan 2011, pp. 63–199). Asuman Suner (2010) identifies the mid-1990s as the beginning of both new wave Turkish cinema, exemplified by the films of Nuri Bilge Ceylan, and of a new form of popular Turkish cinema, which combines Hollywood technique with Yeşilçam themes, as exemplified in Yavuz Turgul's *The Bandit* (1997). In Turkish art cinema from the 1950s to the present, perhaps the most important theme to emerge is immigration from the country to the city (Türel 2010, p. 161), and the migrants' isolation and alienation. The theme characterizes many 1950s and 1960s Turkish films, which often use the arrival at Haydarpaşa railway station as a key scene, as in *The Nights of Istanbul* (1950) or *Birds of Exile* (1964) (Çiçekoğlu 2011, pp. 42–43), but it is also present in the 1971 Yeşilçam film *Give Some Consolation*. In a later film, *Istanbul Tales* (2005), the station is the setting for an (abortive) attempt at escape from the dystopian city. The 1960s and 1970s also saw the continuation of the association between Istanbul and thrillers or detective stories—harking back to the spy film *Five Fingers* (1952)—with the heist film *Topkapı* (1964), *From Russia With Love* (1963), or *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974).

Another central concern is nostalgia for Istanbul's multicultural past, as seen in *Oh Beautiful Istanbul* (1966), which both expresses and ironizes the sense of loss, and *Hidden Face* (1991), which features Pamuk's only screenplay (Çiçekoğlu 2011; 40). The dystopian vision of Istanbul in recent films may be said to begin in the 1970s, with the focus on isolation and claustrophobia (or agoraphobia), in settings which include prisons as in *Midnight Express* (1978) and *Don't let Them Shoot the Kite* (1989), high-rise apartment blocks on the edge of Istanbul, as in *C Blok* (1994)'s dramatization of the life of an isolated housewife, or the ruins of the Rumeli Castle and the city streets as seen by a drifter, as in *Somersault in a Coffin* (1996). In the 1980s and 1990s, films like *Steam: The Turkish Bath* (1997) and *The Harem* (1999) offered both nostalgia and modernity. Both directed by Ferzan Özpetek, a Turk who lives and works in Italy, they were criticized by many Turks for being Orientalist, but Savaş Arslan argues that they indicate the 'shifting parameter(s)' of Turkish identity (2011, p. 271). In the twenty-first-century Turkish cinema, the dystopian mood often dominates, as in the linked revisionist negative fairy tales of *Istanbul Tales*, the alienation in *Distant* (2002), the self-destructiveness, despair, and violence of the characters and the city in *Head On* (2004) and *Three Monkeys* (2008), and the exposure of the negative effects of the marketing of Istanbul as a global city in *City Without Limits* (2011), which charts the dispossession of poor communities to make way for the innumerable high-rises on the outskirts of Istanbul. A lighter mood characterizes Jackie Chan's adventures in *The Accidental Spy* (2001), and the musical documentary, *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul* (2005). The latter presents the varied Istanbul music scene as being neither Eastern nor Western and underlines the ethnic, cultural, and musical diversity of the city through its Kurdish,

Roma, and Turkish musicians, and its mediators, the German musician Alexander Hacke and the Canadian singer Brenna MacCrimmon (Göktürk 2010, pp. 187–190). Deniz Göktürk (193), moreover, points to the recent discovery by Bollywood of Istanbul as a setting as witnessed by Mani Ratnam's *Guru* (2007) and Apoorva Lakhia's *Mission Istanbul* (sic) (2008).

### CONCLUSION: A DYSTOPIAN FUTURE?

The dystopian vision of Istanbul is not confined to Turkish films. In a 2009, essay on Sait Faik, Nedim Gürsel concludes that 'Istanbul... did not fall in 1453... but it is "falling" today' (127). He laments the transformation of the Golden Horn into 'a putrid swamp', the destruction of the 'Jewish, Greek, and Levantine neighborhoods in Galata and Pera' and their replacement by 'skyscrapers and luxury hotels', the damage done to 'the waterside mansions on the Bosphorus' by huge oil tankers, the 'mass of concrete buildings' along the shores, and the 'crowd of tense, nervous violence prone men': 'No trace of cosmopolitan Istanbul... remains', he concludes (127). Gürsel who, like Pamuk and Shafak, has been charged with 'insulting Turkishness', lives and works in Paris ('Nedim Gürsel'), but his view of the city is echoed by Ümit's *When Pera Trees Whisper* (2014), which is dedicated to 'the precious memory of the people who were forced to leave these lands' and includes laments for the deportation or exodus of Istanbul's Greek and Armenian communities and comments on the lack of justice, the violence, and the corruption of the city. Such views might seem over-pessimistic, but current developments are not promising. The AKP/President Erdoğan plans to turn Istanbul into a global hub. What this means in practice is the ever-increasing destruction of the natural environment to the north of Istanbul through the planned construction of the Third Bosphorus Bridge, a six-lane highway, a third airport, the Istanbul Canal, and the transformation of areas like Ayazma and Tarlabası (the latter the neighbourhood in Ümit's novel discussed above), involving the destruction of entire neighbourhoods, like that of Sulukule, where the 3400 Roma inhabitants were removed with inadequate compensation ('Movie night: *Ekümenopolis—city without limits* (Turkey 2011)' 2014). As one of the commentators in *City without Limits* says: if the current trend continues, the result will be 'Chaos': or, as the epigraph to Part 7 of Pamuk's *A Strangeness in My Mind*, from Baudelaire's 'The Swan', has it: 'The form of a city / Changes faster, alas! than the human heart' (2015a, p. 561).

### NOTE

This essay is dedicated to the memory of Talât S. Halman, lover of Istanbul and literature, both Turkish and English.

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