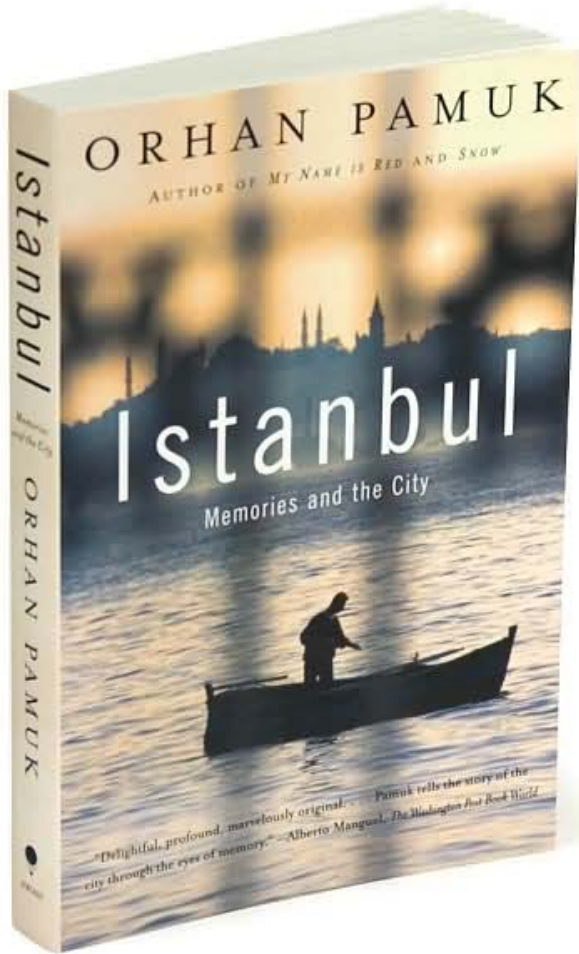


# Istanbul

by Orhan Pamuk

Reviewed by Stephen Carter – 3/24/2010



It's Istanbul  
Not Constantinople  
Why its Istanbul  
It's nobody's business  
But the Turks...

So goes the song. But Pamuk is Turkish, so he seems qualified to explain it to us. In so doing he intersperses a memoir of his childhood in the 1950s with a melancholic review of Istanbul's history, its writers, and the loss of traditional neighborhoods and architecture.

Clearly Orhan has suffered from depression throughout his life, something which concerned his mother and father. But he transmutes his personal sadness into something bigger, something shared and collective which he calls by the Turkish word "Hüzün."

"Hüzün," he says is the feeling a child has staring through a misted window pane. In Sufi tradition it is the pain caused by insufficient unity with God. To Orhan it is the collapse and burning of the old wooden mansions which once lined the Bosphorus, the vague sense of the literati that they belong neither to the East or to the West, and to his frustrations in realizing artistic and personal visions.

The city itself becomes a mirror to Turkish identity, to the loss of Ottoman Empire and culture, and through which Orhan wistfully looks for clues to himself.

~ Stephen Carter

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