

İLHAN BERK

Translated by
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ISTANBUL

You're in Istanbul, city of leaden domes;
a man on the gallows swings to and fro in the rain,
a drop, a blue sky drop, on his eyes.
Someone lies face down on the stones before the mosques
near trees and sea,
a sailor who fled ashamed from the dreams
he dreamed in this city's park.

An old peddler by the bridge
arranges his greasy loaves in his glass case,
contented;
poems have been written to a sky full of mighty masts.

Look below where the dirty painted sailing-boats lie;
the loves and dreams peculiar to bums and bureaucrats
toss with a vulgar sky of ivory inlay.
And the madmen never forsake their endless cursing.
The poets declared
clouds caught on minarets were drunk.

You know that at night
the tiny festooned ships,
your stars that always bring us pleasant thoughts
enter and tangle in the sleep of girls.
While weeping her heart away for tramps and vagrants
Istanbul lights a cigarette for the pipes and cymbals.

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Istanbul lights a cigarette for the pipes and cymbals.
Everyone lives their lives cursing Allah.
Just mention raki everyone leaps to their feet
but questions of how to live are never asked.

Long-haired hippies in transit,
refugees from lovers, countries, wars,
have come to see the world and its peoples.
What's he observing, the man on the bridge,
hands clasped behind? He's probably watching
the sky, the park, the silvery palaces.
But this is a decadent city of loveless lusts,
ready to give up the ghost,
a city of young whores, dead sultans and the sick,
an Istanbul debased.

Ilhan Berk, born in 1918 in Manisa, one of the most well-known poets in Turkish literature.