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THE FRONTIER LORD OF TURKISH POETRY: REREADING OF ILHAN BERK'S ISTANBUL IN THE CONTEXT OF TURKISH MODERNISM*

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Abstract

Modernism, which was established as a civilization project based on reason and scientific ideas, created its own texts in non-western societies within the context of their own cultural geography. Preceding the Tanzimat, Turkish modernism, as one of the non-western modernization processes, started closely interacting with western modernism; however, it was not until the second half of the 20th century that modern-industrialized society started to reflect on Turkish literary texts. The Second New movement generated a distinct sentiment in to modern Turkish poetry, through its innovative language, its investigative approach towards existence, and interrogative attitude towards Modernism. This is an inquisitive attempt to understand Ilhan Berk, one of the leading poets of the Second New movement, and his poem Istanbul within the context of Modernism. In order to situate Berk's poetics, I will conduct a close reading of Berk's poem Istanbul. Berk, a modernist poet whose aesthetics is often associated with the Second New movement, stands out in modern Turkish poetry in terms of his style, versatility of structure and poetic imagery. An attentive reading of his poem Istanbul not only reflects Turkish modernism but also defines the aesthetic imprints of how modernism is perceived in a given time and milieu. Berk, who, in his literary essays, gave one of the first modern manifestations of Turkish poetry, Berk, reflects the existential conditions of the modern individual in the aesthetic plaque of poetry, with a social attentiveness. The poet, who, as a city wonderer, experimented the city through the lenses of modernism, has given one of the first and most striking examples of the interaction between modern society and modern individual.

Keywords: Ilhan Berk, Istanbul, Turkish Modernism, Modern Turkish Poetry, The Second New Poetry.

1. Introduction

Modernism is a civilization project created by the collective consciousness of European societies in the period preceding the western Renaissance and the Enlightenment. The modern consciousness that came up with such project, not very long after its institutional establishment, directed self-criticism towards its own founding principles. Art, through its mind-provoking channels, would become one of the aesthetic terrains where these arguments on modernism would take place. Hugh Underhill, in his introduction to *The Problem of Consciousness of Modern Poetry*, writes, "Modern poetry is merely an attempt to re-instate and enact the true nature of human consciousness. It often seeks to reach back to some original, more 'completed' kind of thought or knowledge" (1992: 2-3). Ilhan Berk (1908-2008) and his poetry illustrates a great deal of a passionate pursue of the original, more completed kind of thought and knowledge through his poetry. Writing, especially writing poetry, for the *frontier lord* of Turkish poetry was a need. Because only then, he once commented, "we could mention of writing. [Writing poetry] is returning to the origin every time you write" (Kitaplık). When, in his *Zero Point of Poetry* (1997:

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9-10), Berk articulates *language* in its very existential layers, he has given one of the first philosophically attuned manifestations of modern poetry in Turkey:

Language, as much it is the medium of telling, it compasses the contrary. It is possible that it does not tell anything besides itself. [...] It can move forward with silence [...] It can disguise in so many ways. [...] It comes so near to dream, irrational, even to madness. [...] Mallarmé would call this language's state of rage as *insanity*. It [language] completely excludes agency. Indeed, in this case, language is not attached to anything. For this reason, Ludwig Wittgenstein once said, about this state of language, "It doesn't propose anything; it prefers silence". This is a state where language puts everything aside and be itself; where it substitutes the subject and where it speaks out loud (silence is a form of speaking as well). Therefore, Michel Butor would say the subject of Ulysses is *language*. In fact, in Joyce's masterpiece, the real load is profoundly in *language*. It is the *language* that first strikes. At times, it feels like it doesn't produce anything, besides itself. It is always the dominant element. T. S. Eliot, too, indicated this aspect of language, when he said,

Silence! And preserve respectful distance
For I perceive approaching
The Rock.

Berk's, with respect to his time, provocative voice can be considered as a modern(ist) demeanour that announces the independence of *language* that liberates it from its derivative *signe artificiel*, and that brings Mallarmé, as a revolutionary inspiration; and Eliot and Joyce, as two of the most significant representatives of 20th century modern literature, into the same context. One of the most inclusive key terms for Berk's modern poetry is *change*. This change illustrates itself not as a mere substitution of one idea or concept with another; but as a steady evolution and progress in terms of aesthetics of poetry and philosophical foundations behind it. When change is fundamentally the center principle of the poet, the need of a re-analysis of his poetry becomes necessary, if not imperative. What John C. Van Dyke (2000: IV) commented on Robert Penn Warren's poetry is also true for Berk's because "[his] texts, too, harbor such a future of meaning which calls for a rereading of his poetry. There is something about them that remains enigmatic and obscure, something that is yet to be disclosed. Despite the amount of criticism that has been devoted to these texts, there is something about them that urges us to begin again".

2. Declaration of Modern Poetry in Turkey

Berk's contemporaries, peers and academics assign a special significance for the place that he holds in modern times of Turkish poetry. For instance, that Behçet Necatigil calls him as "the frontier lord of Turkish poetry" and "the awesome lad of Turkish poetry" has a lot to do with the fact that Berk, as considered by many, is one poet that experimented the most different forms and most various patterns in Turkish poetry. For Mehmet Fuat, "Berk showed that poetry can be written in 40 different ways", as according to Mehmet H. Doğan "Berk made the [concept] of change as the constitution of poetry". Turgut Uyar, one of Berk's peers within the Second New movement, strongly emphasizes Berk's place in poetry, when he says, "If poetry didn't exist, Berk would invent it" (Berk, 1994: 179). At this point, the reader is still entitled to ask what exactly is it that gives Berk such a privileged status as a grand poet? It seems like the answer lies between and behind the lines of his poem *Istanbul*. This originality mostly shows itself in his poem *Istanbul*, when he vocalizes his inner self and begins his poem, saying,

Here you are in Istanbul, the city of lead domes¹
In the air, whisper of fleeing clouds
The rain drops to the glasses of trains passing the Karaköy Bazaar,
As Yenicami, Süleymaniye lean their back to a filthy sky
So not moving
And Hagia Sophia, covering his face with its hands, heartily cries.

As a small drop contains much of ocean's qualities, the opening lines of *Istanbul* reflect much to illustrate Berk's modernist stance in terms of its language and poetic imagery. A closer look in to Berk's beginning lines show that he's providing the readers with a mostly pure language, in terms of the origin of lexical units. When it is examined within the framework of modern Turkish revolution, Berk's word choice becomes more telling. Because one of the most significant reflections of Modern Turkey in the arts and language was the demand of the purification of Turkish through the elimination of Arabic and Persian loanwords.² However, the poet's modern attitude mostly reflects itself through photographic imagery. Istanbul, after being introduced and defined as a city of *lead domes*, an architectural symbol going beyond any spiritual denomination, the poem's narrator brings his attention to the natural environment and how this environment is reflected through his senses. For instance, the image of *whispering clouds* is in harmony with Berk's notion of silence and assertion, saying that poetry can move forward with silence. Similar to the silence of *whispering clouds*, the rain drops dropping to the Karaköy trains establish yet another verbal brush stroke in the hands of a modern artist. Along with the two, the Yeni Cami and Süleymaniye (Mosques) are so not moving. At the thematic level, the silence hinder at one of the main aspects of modernism, the modern city, alien person and loneliness. From a modernist perspective, the picture is slightly different. Because the researcher, through a close reading of Berk's *Istanbul*, will soon find out that the text is not only a true reflection of modernism but it also defines it in a very elaborated manner because his poems represent the defense, or as Koçak (2012: 141) point out, the manifestation of modernism in Turkish poetry:

Today, I don't know why I suddenly said that there's no war that poet cannot venture. But I don't think I felt it that well until today. The poet is tied too, however I say, for his poetry, he should break his cuffs [...] He can destroy his everyday order [...] and] can reestablish a new one. He can live lives that he dreamed of; he can play with his life only for the sake of poetry's adventure. He can act like an actor, he can play a game he finds beautiful.

For Berk (1997: 18), one of the essential components of poetry is *ambiguity*. When he refers to poetic ambiguity, he writes, "poetry can be [meaning wise] pulled to any place. If we eliminate the title, which is just like a night watchman that doesn't go beyond a sentence that blinks through out the whole poem, then we can read the poem from any angle we wish. This is not it. It is open to all the interpretations. Every one can understand it as they want. It is an open work". The reader is reminded here of Stephané Mallarmé's concept of ambiguity and Umberto Eco's insightful articulation in his famous *The Open Work*. As pointed out by David Robey (1989: XI), "ambiguity is one term used by Eco to represent the effect of formal innovation in art". As Eco (1989: 10) pointed out,

Even when it is difficult to determine whether a given author had symbolist intentions or was aiming at effects of ambivalence or indeterminacy, there is a school of criticism nowadays which tends to view all modern literature as built upon symbolic patterns. W. Y. Tindall, in his book on the literary symbol, offers an analysis of some of the greatest modern literary works in order to test Valéry's declaration that "il n'y a pas de vrai sens d'un texte" ("there is no true meaning of a text"). Tindall eventually concludes that a work of art is a construct which anyone at all, including its author, can put to any use whatsoever, as he chooses. This type of criticism views the literary work as a continuous potentiality of "openness" – in other words, an indefinite reserve of meanings. This is the scope of the wave of American studies on the structure of metaphor, or of modern work on "types of ambiguity" offered by poetic discourse.

Berk's aesthetics can be read in the same line with that of the American poet, essayist and journalist Walter Whitman. On a letter he wrote to Mehmet Fuat on March 1954, Berk said, "I've read [Walt] Whitman, I congratulate you. I always read his journal critics too, they emotionally make me stronger, and I forget about my loneliness. I liked your translations better this time; first of all, it is a more clear and proper translation. I'd like kindly to ask you another book by

Whitman".³Remarks made by Mehmet Fuat (1985: 26), who translated Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* into Turkish, shows us there are associations between Whitman and İhan Berk's way of writing and seeing poetry. He continuously points out, "Whitman was not a poet who didn't value *form*. However, he believed the things he told about would not fit into the old forms. For all these newly developing phenomena, meanings and purposes, there was a need for a new poetry, new forms and new ways of saying things. He didn't admire innovation for the sake of it, he saw it as the inevitable". If we follow Fuat's phraseology, it is possible to say that Berk, with *Istanbul*, created a new poetry, a new form and new ways of saying things for all these newly developing phenomena, meanings and purposes.

3. *Istanbul*

Istanbul has always been a source of inspiration for many artists, including musicians, painters, photography artists and, above all, poets. Similar to Berk's special place among modern Turkish poets, his poem *Istanbul*, too, possesses a distinctive value among its contemporaries. The poem's noteworthiness does not only stem from its subject matter or stylistic features, but also its form, structure and poetic imagery. *Istanbul* was first published in 1944, in the 3rd volume of *Büyük Doğu* (The Big East), an influential periodical of its time. The poem slightly exceeded one single page when it was first published. This short version, which can be read as the earliest draft of the poem, would reach to a sheer size of 34 pages and become an urban tale of modern Turkish poetry. In the Ada Publishing's 1980 edition of *Istanbul*, Berk notes that "This part which, at times is repeated throughout the poem is the first version, which later became the core for the whole poem" (Berk, 1980: 40). This information provides reader with a striking quality of Berk's writing style as a modern poet, which is the constant state of *change*; or progress. Behind this notion of change, there lies Berk's modernist attitude towards aesthetics of poetry and his compassionate conception of poetry as an alive entity to be experimented. This reminds the reader of T. S. Eliot, one of the most renowned representatives of modernist poetry. Like Eliot, Berk's poetry, too, underwent significant transformations over the course of his career. In his *Poetics*, he wrote, "I feel like I'm visioning and touching the subject (matter) of the poem. But this still didn't go beyond of being a puzzle. This didn't provided me with the effect or what affected me. This time, I focused on the meaning. Because even without full comprehension, the poem sustained its effect, I decided to dig deeper. I laid it on the table and thoroughly wrestled with it" (Berk, 2007: 46).

Sharing a similar destiny with many classics, *Istanbul* did not receive much attention upon its first publication. After more than half of a century of its first publication, it is now drawing more attention among literary circles and critics. Comparing Berk's *Istanbul* to Tevfik Fikret's *Sis* and some of Mehmet A. Ersoy's poems, Mehmet Kaplan (1996: 197) points out in *Istanbul*, "the city, nature and people are not depicted in a manner that would form a detailed and coherent painting, rather they're given [to the reader] through some symbolic elements that are attached to the poet's state of mind. As it is the case in the entire book, everything is surprisingly compound in this poem. According to Kaplan (197), "[w]hen it is carefully scanned, it is possible to see that the poem is in possession of an aesthetic order that is usually associated with modern painting". Koçak, who pointed out Berk gave one of the first manifestations of Modern Turkish poetry, considers *Istanbul* as the first *city poem*. For Koçak (2012: 155), "[In *Istanbul*], we encounter the city wanderer of Istanbul poems". While Berk wanders the city Istanbul from the perspective of a modern traveler, I will attempt to interpret his lines through the lenses of a modern aesthetics.

3.1. The Modern and Lonely Individual

Modern art, from its very early ages, has been associated with loneliness, along with chaos, isolation, alienation and separation. In his 1963-essay *Chaos and Loneliness –Modernism in Literature*, David Craig (271) quoted D. H. Lawrence, reminding the reader that "As early as 1915, [Lawrence] made the hero of his most comprehensive novel, *Women in Love*, say: 'We are all different and unequal in spirit... spiritually, there is pure difference... In the spirit, I am as

separate as one star is from another". Craig continuously writes "In the *Waste Land* (1922) T. S. Eliot wrote these lines, shortly before the end with its imagery of neurosis and social chaos:

... I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only
We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison...

In regards to Eliot's lines, we, as the readers, are provided with more insight and read "in his notes the poet explains these lines by quoting the philosopher F. H. Bradley: 'My external sensations are no less private to myself than are my thoughts or my feelings. In either case my experience falls within my own circle, a circle closed on the outside.'" (Craig, 1963: 271).

Established behind the remnants of the Ottoman state and with the establishment of modern Turkey, Turkish modernity reflects a distinctive process in terms of its social institutions. The impasses that he has gone through, the individual, as an inbetweener, had to make a choice between Eastern and Western cultures. Even though literary historians initiate the modern times of Turkish literature with the announcement of the Tanzimat reforms in 1839, it was not until modern Turkey's industrial breakthrough, when the modernist trends of literary movements were started to be seen in Turkish literary scenes. Thus, what is seen in the Second New movement, one of its leading representatives İhan Berk and his poem *Istanbul* are the literary representations of a modernizing society.

Loneliness does not necessarily reflect itself through lack of people surrounding the modern individual but by the effect of modern city life that prevents him to have strong ties with his inner self and his human environment. *Istanbul* reflects loneliness from a fresh and contemporary perspective, as the poet introduces various portraits of ordinary people in a way that is generating a new paradigm for the modern individual and his/her state of mind. In his poetic world, if you are in Istanbul, "You're in a city where no one knows who you are" (29). This is not only the reflection of Istanbul in its poet's consciousness but the inevitable outcome of a modernizing city that is going through a big transformation in terms of its history, social order, and with no hesitation, its culture in the broader sense of the concept.

Loneliness is as one of the constitutive key words of Berk's poetry. On an interview he gave to Orhan Koçak and Skender Savaşır (1992: 137), Berk commented, "The unchanging motifs you're referring to. That is true. I am aware that I overemphasize some words". On an essay Berk gave (1960: 14), he articulates more on the notion of loneliness and his perception of it: "Neither the joy nor the hope and despair of our age did not enter in to my poetry. If it did, I only let *loneliness* from this age come in. [...] What connects me to this world is my *loneliness*; my disgust. I scatter my *loneliness* and disgust. To disturb, that is my mission. I say, no happiness can attach me to my *loneliness* that much. No happiness can replace my disgust".

Berk, through his modern consciousness, creates a photographic language that deals with modernism at its very core element. When the subject/narrator speaks or refers to the people of Istanbul, it is at the same time an acknowledgement of the fact that modern individual is subject to loneliness, as one of the consequences of modern society. From here, the subject/narrator, at different points throughout the poem, speaks to the people of Istanbul, especially emphasizing the loneliness of the working class in particular. For instance, he speaks to the phaeton, and says,

You, with your bed and blanket on the phaeton
Feel all alone in the world.

Similarly, a chatty Batumian salesmaker in Kadıköy is depicted as someone that has "one to talk besides his mottled cat". It can be said, with a level of confidence, *phaeton* is not a random pick but a deliberate word choice made by the poet, for the phaeton represents the middle/working class during the Ottomans. Not only working class, but ordinary people of Istanbul are said to be not aware of others in the world:

They're not aware of those sleeping at a back street in China
They don't know that they're not alone in the world.

Every time you'd be more lonely, more desolate, more distressed
Every time, you were lonely all alone in the hands of hatred, of sorrow.

For Berk, "The [subjects] of loneliness and depression in the Second New poetry, is the loneliness and depression of [their] time. If today's poetry seems to be nonsensical and meaningless, it's not coming from anywhere other than the lives [they were] living" (Karaca, 2005: 355). Turgut Uyar, one of Berk's peers at the Second New movement, pointed out, "the problem of [their] generation was not writing good poetry, it was bringing the everyday life in to poetry" (Do an, 2001: 95). As Ramazan Kaplan (1981: 64) pointed out, the individual [drawn] in the Second New poetry seems like he gave himself in to the problems." He emphasizes that *loneliness, abandonment, depression and suicide* have often been used by Second New poets; and "[they] commonly used loneliness as a key concept" because in 1950's and 1960's, which, at the same is the time when Second New poets actively produced their poetry, also refers to a time "when the consequences of technological advancement were intensely felt and when every individual in city centers felt a bit lonely" (Kaplan R., 1981: 63).

3. 2. Urban Life and *Flâneur*

Modern art, from its very early times, seems to have grown a peculiar interest in urban life. In his renowned essay *Painter of Modern Life*, Charles Baudelaire extensively praises works made by Constantin Guys. In his essay, Baudelaire praises Monsieur G.'s works –engravings from his travel sketches made in Spain, Turkey, the Crimea. He also provides the reader with a striking comparison between an "artist" and, what he calls, "man of the world". He writes, "By 'man of the world', I mean a man of the whole world, a man who understands the world and the mysterious and legitimate reasons behind all its customs; by 'artist', I mean a specialist, a man tied to his palette like a serf to the soil" (Baudelaire, 1995: 6-7). This will remind the reader of the *seyahatnâme* ("book of travels") tradition of the Ottoman Turks and Evliya Çelebi's ten volume *Seyahatnâme*, where Çelebi portrays his travels, starting in his native Istanbul and covering Anatolia, Safavid Persia, Ottoman Europe, North Africa, Austria and Egypt.

Modernism, which rested upon rationalism and science, and which aimed to reach to a state of bliss through those, resulted in outcomes that were, in their own respective way, counterproductive to their very proposals. One of the most captivating social outcomes of the industrialized, modern society, no doubt, is a new, mostly changed concept of social order. That is, the continuity of modern, industrialized society is closely tied to the existence of social classes. Even though Turkish modernity "signifies a very distinct continuum, compared to Eurocentric explanations of modernity" (Lüleci, 2014: 161), it did interact with both western and eastern literary traditions. Furthermore, it was not until the Second New movement, that the reflections of a modern society started to be seen in Turkish poetry. *Istanbul* is one of the typical examples of Berk's modern consciousness which was blended in modern city life and its consequences. As Domingues (2004: 55) pointed out, "Along with modernization, the individualist mood seems to interfere, more than ever, in people's routine. This causes the *flâneur* to travel through phantasmagorias. These phantasmagorias embrace the dreams of modern life, – dreams such as fashion, technique, architecture, urbanism, and the dream of the arcades, where all unreal energies get condensed in the city".

Flâneur, first a literary type in 19th century France, later popularized by Walter Benjamin, who drew on the poetry of Charles Baudelaire. Benjamin also made this figure the object of scholarly interest in the 20th century, as an symbolic form of urban, modern practice. At the level of poetic language, Berk creates a paradigm that clearly illustrates the confused state of the modern mind. On one hand, there's these "unreal energies" turning into a-utopia-like ambiance, as if there's a desire of an escape from being confrontational with modernization; and a criticizing voice of a socialist. This escape illustrates itself in the form of a state of bliss in terms of the dream-like working states of working class; because Berk depicts the working class as a group

of working people who, in their world, live a happy life:

They all work in small, dark places, in uptight jobs,
all madly love their lives
the group walking ahead
work in Tophane, Dikimevi
Eight girls, of whom only three got married
These lads, with messed up hair, sullen face
are colliers
These three are salesgirls in a big shop
These ones road workers
And these roustabouts

On his famous essay *On Some Motifs on Baudelaire*, Walter Benjamin (2007: 156) provides one of the most inclusive descriptions of Baudelaire in terms of his relation to his city and the notion of *flâneur*: "In Baudelaire Paris becomes for the first time a subject of lyric poetry. This poetry is not regional art; rather, the gaze of the allegorist that falls on the city is estranged. It is the gaze of the *flâneur*, whose mode of life still surrounds the approaching desolation of city life with a propitiatory luster. The *flâneur* is still on the threshold, of the city as of the bourgeois class. Neither has yet engulfed him; in neither is he at home. He seeks refuge in the crowd".

On an interview Berk gave to Andaç (2004: 21), Berk commented the following: "In *Istanbul Book*, both the form and content is discintive. I was almost a social scientist. A Marxist book that is. I wanted Istanbul to be illuminated/enlightened. I said it should wear another dress. To sum up, I wanted people of Istanbul to raise their voice. This is what i did in content, and in the form". Rouanet studies Benjamin's thoughts and, through the *flâneur*, he builds his conception of what the German philosopher means by being a "modern hero". The *modern hero* is the one who walks through the mass - the man of the big city, - the crowd duelist. Rouanet says that, according to Benjamin's ideas, "the crowd hero has more conscience than memory, he is more capable of noticing than remembering, he is more sensitive to the existing discontinuation than to the experience of continuation." (64).

One of the aeshetic parameters that is allowing us to consider *Istanbulas* a modern work of art is the fact that the poem is presented as a reflection of its poets' senses. The city (of Istanbul) is no longer a separated entity from its poet, but an embodied and unified concurrence. In an interview Berk gave to Melih Cevdet Andaç (2004: 23), he said, "In my eyes, back then, Istanbul was a symbol of putrefication. I felt like the city was in the hands of others. Some kind of a *city of dukes*. Just like James Joyce saw Dublin as the *center of paralysis*, I saw Istanbul as a paralyzed city". At different times, careful reader will remember that Berk called his *Istanbul Book* "the book of the hungry and the poor" (Karaca, 2009: 52); or he once said "[he] used to see the Istanbul of that time as an example of depravation (Andaç, 2004: 23).

This time we'll watch the hungry and poor Istanbul
Outside of the city walls
The workers will come up suddenly
passing by with their tired, pre-occupied faces
Bridges, shops, factories will open again
And again his labor will be butchered
...
Here the people of the morning in 1944
Fishermen workers children
Children's tummies are so little
Their hands misty

The above lines clearly show, as its poet put it, Istanbul, "as the symbol of putrefication", or "an example of depravation". Berk, as a late settler of Istanbul had the ability to view the city through the lenses of a subsequent traveler. As Andaç put it, "it seems like an latecomer's

projection goes even deeper. When we name Istanbul as a mosaic of people and culture, and then scratch this mosaic off of these poems, we, too, see what is hidden underneath” (Andaç, 2004: 22).

3. 3. Imagery

The modernist element of Berk’s poetry can be clearly illustrated, especially when it is read along with Garip Movement within a comparative context. For instance, it is possible to re-read Berk’s *Istanbul* in comparison with Orhan Veli Kanık’s *Istanbul’u Dinliyorum*, a very well known poem in Turkish poetry, which starts, “I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed/ At first there is a gentle breeze/ And the leaves on the trees/ Softly sway/ Out there, far away/ The bells of water-carriers unceasingly ring/ I am listening to Istanbul, intent, my eyes closed”.⁴ Both in the opening section and through out the poem, one of the linguistically dominant features is the usage of indefinite adjectives/articles. The usage of “a (gentle) breeze” is multiplied later in the poem with “a woman”, “a thing”, “a rose”, “a bird”. What is common among these is the fact that they are referred as generic nouns and the lack of detailed description; so the rose is mentioned in the text is “a rose” as opposed to a one specific rose. Of course, the poet is free on his linguistics choices; yet it hints the reader at its creator’s stance. On the other hand, Berk’s *Istanbul*, in terms of the illustration of humans as the essential element of the city of Istanbul, portrays a different set of features. This can be seen by the reader, when he reads,

Coppersmith is pleased with the stringy, red and fine copper
making a handle with both hands, then destroying it.
Barber has cleaned his mirrors, tools and chairs, is waiting,
with scissors in his hand
Tailor, the iron in his hand, giving our shoulders a round shape,
Then taking the pin in his hand
Repairwoman is finished with one shoe, will start to the other one
Coffeemaker, by everyone’s will, threw the old tea
and brewed some new.

Unlike Kanık’s poem, Berk’s lines offer a more descriptive facet, which as an end result, gives a more fresh and dynamic picture. This dynamism is achieved through the usage of various tenses and aspects in the verbs at the end of each poetic sentence. As it is seen above, people, the pleased coppersmith who is making a handle or the barber who has just cleaned his mirrors, are illustrated as living humans, and not as abstract ones. The elaboration of humans allows the poet to generate a dynamic picture of modern individuals, and of working class in particular. Thus, if we speak with the novelistic terminology, as opposed to Kanık’s stereotypes, Berk is creating *characters*, which is yet another aspect of his modernist poetry.

4. Conclusion

The titles of Ihan Berk’s poetry collections point more explicitly towards the modern cultural transformations in Turkey, through language and aesthetic imprints of poetry: *Salute by Those who Burn the Sun*, *The Shadow Falling upon the Door*, *Book of the Things*, *Galilee Sea*, *Cuneiform*. These titles, which could be interpreted as ambiguous or vague, send reference to the aesthetic and cultural codes of Turkish modernism. Thus, a rereading of Berk’s *Istanbul* as an open work, is holding the potential to illuminate Turkish modernization not only as a cultural process but also as an social phenomenon.

Notes

¹ All translations of Berk’s poems are mine.

² As Ertürk (2010: 166) noted, “Scholars of Turkish history have noted crucial continuities between the Young Turk and Kemalist periods. The conflict between radically purist and moderate linguistic nationalism first emerged during this period, as one

faction of the intelligentsia (tasfiyeciler) demanded the purification of Turkish through the elimination of Arabic and Persian loanwords and their replacement by words obtained from ancient Turkish texts. For the most part, however, the Young Turks advocated a program of linguistic simplification, proposing the elimination of only the most complex and least utilized Arabic and Persian grammatical structures and vocabulary.ö

³ As the publishing house YKY noted, the book mentioned here is Mehmet Fuat'ın translation of Walt Whitman'ın collected poems. (*Çimen Yapraklar*, Yön Yayınları, İstanbul 1954).

⁴Trans. by Sait Talat Halman. Halman translated Veli'ın poems and published them in two different editions at different times: First, *I am listening to Istanbul*, Orhan Veli Kanık. Translated & with an introduction by Talat Sait Halman, New York: Corinth Books, 1971; and the second, *Just for the Hell of it*, 111 poems by Orhan Veli Kanık, Translated and with Introduction by Sait Talat Halman: Multilingual Yabancı, Dil Yayınları, 1997.

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