

The Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin

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I was reading "The Simavne Governor's Son Bedreddin," a treatise written by Mehmet Sherefeddin Effendi, Professor of Scripture at the University's School of Theology, and printed in the year 1341 (1925) by the Evkafi Islamize. I had come to the sixty-fifth page of the treatise. On the sixty-fifth page of this professor of scripture, Ducas - who was serving the Genoese as confidential secretary - was saying:

At that time, a common Turkish peasant appeared in the mountainous country situated at the entrance to the Bay of Ionia and designated as Stylarium-Karaburun in the language of the people. Stylarium is situated across from the island of Chios. The said peasant was preaching and giving counsel to the Turks and advising that, with the exception of women, the whole of things such as food, clothing, livestock, and land should be considered the joint property of all the people

The confidential secretary to the Genoese, who explained so simply and so clearly the counsel and advice of the common Turkish peasant in Stylarium, based before me with his black velvet robe, pointed beard, and long, sallow, ceremonious face. That Börklüje Mustafa, the greatestt disciple of the Simavne overnor's son Bedreddin, showld be called "common" made me smile - at both senses of the word. Then suddenly I thought of the author of the treatise, Mehmet Sherefeddin Effendi. This professor of scripture who wrote,

That Börklüje Mustafa, who was advising that such things as foodstuffs, livestock, and land should be considered join public property, should except women from this seems to us to be an evasion and a deception that he chose to practice in the face of public opinion. For it is certain that his sheik, who believed in the oneness of creation, did not give specific instructions to Mustafa to make this exception . . .

...was, I found, so well versed in geomancy that he could divine in the earth cast over the centuries the innermost thoughts of people. And i thought of two sentences from Marx and Engels:

The bourgeois sees in his wife a mere means of production. When he hears that the means of production are to be socialized, he naturally can come to no other conclusion than that this socialization will extend to women as well.

Why shouldn't the professor of the University's School of Theology think about Bedreddin's medieval peasant socialism what the bourgeois thinks about modern industrial socialism? From the point of view of theology, aren't women property?

I closed the book. My eyes burned, but I wasn't sleepy. I looked at the Chemin de Fer watch hanging on a nail over my bed. Almost two. A cigarette. Another cigarette. I listen to the sounds circulating in the hot, still air of the prison ward, which smells heavy like stagnant water. The ward, with its sweating cement and twenty-eight people besides me, is asleep. The guards in the towers sounded their whistles again, they're more frequent and more piercing tonight. Whenever the whistles go wild with a made contagion like this - possibly for no reasonn at all - I think I'm on a ship sinking in the dark night.

From the ward above us came the rattle of the chained bandits condemned to death. Their papers are in the appeals court.

Ever since that rainy night they returned with their sentences, they pace like this, clanking their chains until morning.

When we're taken out to the back yard during the day, how many times I've looked up at their windows. Three people. Two sit in the window on the right, one in the window on the left. They say the one who was caught first and turned in his friends is the one who sits by himself. He's also the one who smokes the most cigarettes.

All three of them wrap their arms around the iron bars. Although they can see the sea and the mountains very well from where they are, they only look down, at the yard, at us, at people.

I've never heard their voices. In the entire prison they are the only ones who never sing - not even one. And if their chains, which speak like this only at night, suddenly fall silent very early one morning, the prison will know that in the most crowded square of the city hang three long white shirts, their chests labeled.

If I just had an aspirin. My palms burn. My head is full of Bedridden and Börklüje Mustafa. If I could push myself to go a little further, if my head didn't ache so much that my eyes blur, I would be able to see - among the clattering swords, neighing horses, cracking whips, and crying women and children of distant years - the faces of Bedreddin and Mustafa like two bright words of hope.

My eyes fell on the book I'd just put down on the cement.

It has a purplish cover the color of sour cherries, half of it faded from the sun. On the cover, the title of the treatise is written in Arabic script like a sultan's monogram. The torn edges of the yellowed pages stick out from under the cover. I think: Bedridden must be saved from the Arabic script, antique pen-case, reed pen, and blotting power of this professor of theology. In my head there are lines from Arabshaf, Ashikpashazade, Neshri, Idris of Bitlis, Ducas, and even Sherefeddin Effendi - lines I have read over and over until I know them by heart:

There is a strong possibility that the date of Bedreddin's birth would have to be placed at around 770.

Bedreddin, who completed his education in Egypt, remained there many years and doubtless attained great learning in this milieu.

Upon his return to Edirne from Egypt, he found his parents still living.

While his arrival here could have been for the purpose of visiting his mother and father, the possibility also exists that he might have come on the invitation of Prince Musa, who had jurisdiction over this city.

When Sultan Mehmet I came to power by defeating his brothers, he assigned Sheik Bedridden to reside in Iznik.

In the preface to the Foundations, which he completed here, the Sheik wrote, "The fire in my heart

has burst into flame. And it's mounting daily, so that were my heart hard as iron, it would melt."

When they banished the Sheik to Iznik, his chief disciple Börklüje Mustafa removed to Aydin. He made his way from there to Karaburun.

He was saying, "As I could have the use of your possessions, you could in the same way have the use of my possessions" After he had won the common peasants to his side with such sayings, he tried to establish friendship with the Christians. Although Sultan Mehmet's Saruhan governor Sisman moved against this false prophet, he was unable to penetrate the arrow passes of Stylarium.

When the Simavne governor's son Bedridden heard how the situation of Börklüje was progressing, he fled Iznik. He arrived in Sinope. Eventually he boarded a ship and landed in the province of Walachia. From there he fled to the Mad Forest in Dobruja.

At this time, word of the intrigues and heresies of the agitator Mustafa, the designated representative of the aforesaid Bedreddin in the province of Aydin, reached Sultan Mehmet's ear. Immediately an imperial edict was handed down to Prince Murad ruler of Amasya and Little Rumelia, that he set out to remove the heretic Mustafa by assembling a regiment of Anatolian soldiers and that he descend on Mustafa in the province of Aydin with a full complement of men and equipment.

Mustafa, with a force of nearly ten thousand of his seditious and subversive followers, stood up to defy the Prince.

A great battle took place.

After much blood was split, with divine guidance the godless forces were defeated.

The survivors were brought to Seljuk. Even the most terrible tortures applied to Mustafa could not turn him from his obsession. Mustafa was stretched on a cross on a camel. After his hands were nailed to the wood, he was led through the city in a great procession. His confidants who remained loyal to him were killed before his eyes. Shouting "Come, Grand Sultan Mustafa!" they gave up their souls and died at peace.

Lastly they tore Börklüje Mustafa to pieces and inspected the ten provinces; satisfied, they granted fiefs to the soldiers. Bayed Pasha returned to Manisa and found there Bedreddin's disciple Torlak Kemal. And there he hanged him.

At this time, the situation of Bedridden in Dobruja was improving. People came from everywhere and gathered around him. He was very close to uniting all the people. For this reason, the personal intervention of Sultan Mehmet became necessary.

On the suggestion of Bayezid Pasha, certain persons infiltrated the professional followers and disciples of Bedreddin. And taking the proper precautions, they arrested Bedridden in the forest and bound him up.

They brought him to Sultan Mehmet in Serrai. Accompanying Sultan Mehmet was an advisor named <evlana Haydar who had newly arrived from Persia. Melvin Haydar stated: "According to Islamic law, the killing of this man is holy, but his substance is unholy."

From there they carried the Simavne governor's son Bedridden to the market place and hanged him in front of a shop. After some days, a few of his unclean disciples appeared and took him away. Even today he has disciples in that region.

My head is splitting. I checked my watch. It's stopped. The rattle of chains upstairs has let up. Only one of them is still pacing. He must be the one who sits alone in the window on the left.

I have to hear an Anatolian song. It seems to me that if the highwaymen started singing that mountain song again, my headache would disappear on the spot.

I lit another cigarette. I reached down and picked Mehmet Sherefeddin Effendi's treatise up from the cemet. A wind has come up outside. It's grumbling under the window, shutting out the sounds of the sea, chains, and whistles. It must be rocky below the window. How many times we've tried to look down there where our wall meets the sea. But it's impossible. The iron bars of the window are too close together. You can't stick your head out. So here we see the sea only as a horizon.

Next to my bed was the lathe-turner Shefik's bed. Sheik rolled over in his sleep mumbling something. The wedding quilt his wife sent him slipped off. I covered him up.

I turned agin to the sixty-fifth page of the professor of scripture of the School of Theology. I had read only a couple of lines from he First Secretary to the Genoese when I heard a voice through the pain in my head.

The voice said: "Silently I passed the waves of the sea to be here with you."

I turned around. Someone's at the window. That's who is speaking.

"Have you forgotten what Ducas, First Secretary to the Genoese, wrote? Don't you remember his speaking of a Cretan monk who lived on Chios in a monastery called Turlut? I, 'one of Börklüje Mustafa dervishes.' didn't I used to visit that monk like that over the waves of the sea, bareheaded, barefoot, wrapped in a piece of cloth?"

I looked at the one who spoke these words standing big as life outside the bars where there wasn't anything for him to hold on to. He really was as he said. His seamless robe flowed down white.

Now, years later, as I write these lines, I think of the theology professor. I don't know if Sherefeddin Effendi is dead or alive. But if he's alive and reads what I write, he'll say: "What a fake! He claims to be a materialist and then, like the Cretan monk, goes on - and centuries after the event! - about talking with Mustafa's disciple who silently crosses seas."

And I can almost hear the divine laughter with which the master of scripture will follow these words.

But no matter. Let his excellency laugh. And I'll tell my story.

My headache was suddenly gone. I got out of bed. I walked up to the one in the window. He took me by the hand. We left the sleeping ward wit its sweating cement and its twenty-eight people besides me. Suddenly I found myself where we could never see - on the rocks where our wall meets the sea. Side by side, Mustafa's disciple and I passed over the waves of the dark sea and went behind the years, centuries back, to the time of Sultan Mehmet I.

This journey is the adventure I want to tell you about. And the spectacle of sounds, colors, movements, and shapes that I saw on this journey I'll try to capture piece by piece and mostly - according to an old habit - in assorted long and short lines with an occasional rhyme.

Like this:

1.

On the divan Bursa silk in green-branching red boughs, a blue garden of Kütahya tiles on the wall,
wine in silver pitchers,
in copper pots lambs roasted golden brown.
Strangling his own brother Musa with bowstring
-purified with his brother's look in a gold owl -
Sultan Mehmet had ascended the throne and was sovereign,
Mehmet was sovereign but
in the land of Osman
the wind was a barren cry, a death-song.
The peasant's work done by the light of his eyes
and by the seat of his brow
was a fief.

The cracked water jugs were dry,
at the springs there were horsemen twisting their mustaches
and land without men
And a foaming horses neighed and swords-clashed
at the door of the castle at the end of the roads,
the market place was in disorder,
the guilds had lost faith in their masters.
In short, there was a sovereign, a fief, a wind, a wail.

2.

This is Iznik Lake.
It is still.
Dark.
Deep.
It's like a well
in the mountains.

Around here lakes
are smoky.
Their fish taste flat,
their marshes breed malaria,
and the men die before white shows in their beards.

This is Iznik Lake.
Next to it, the town of Iznik.
In the town of Iznik,
the blacksmith's anvil is a broken heart.
The children are hungry.
The women's breasts are like dried fish.
And the young men don't sing.

This is the town of Iznik.
This is a house
in the workers' quarter.
In this house
there's an old man named Bedreddin.
Small build,
big beard -

white.
Sly, slanting, child's eyes,
and yellow fingers like reeds.

Bedreddin
as sitting
on a white sheepskin.
In Persian script he's writing
the Foundations.
They are on their knees, facing him.
And at a distance,
as if looking at a mountain, they look at him,
he looks:
head shaved,
eyebrows bushy,
tall and rangy Börklüje Mustafa.
He looks:
hawk-nosed Torlak Kemal.
They don't tire of looking,
they cannot look enough,
they're looking at the Iznik exile Bedreddin.

3.
On the shore a barefoot woman is crying.
And in the lake
an empty fishing boat has broken loose
and floats on the water
like a dead bird.
It goes where the water takes it,
across the lake to be smashed on the mountains.

Evening came to Iznik Lake.
Thick-voiced horsemen in the mountains
slit the sun's throat
and drained the blood into the lake.
On the shore a barefoot woman is crying,
the wife of the fisherman chained in the castle.
for taking a carp.

Evening came to Iznik Lake.
Bedreddin knelt down,
cupped water in his hand, and took up.
And as the water
slipped through his fingers
and returned to the lake,
he said to himself:
"The fire in my heart
has burst into flame
and I'm mounting daily.
Were my heart wrought iron, it could not resist this, it would melt...
I will come out now and declare myself.
Men of the land, we will conquer the land.
And realizing the power of knowledge and the mystery

of Oneness,
we shall abolish the laws of nations and religions..."

The next day,
as the boat was smashed in the lake,
a head was cut off in the castle,
a woman cried on the shore,
and as the one from Simavne
wrote his Foundations,
Torlak Kemal and Mustafa
kissed
their sheik's hand.
They saddled their roan horses
and road out through the gates of Iznnik
each with a naked sword at his side
and a handwritten book in his saddlebag.

The book:
Bedreddin's Illuminations.

4.
After Börklüje Mustafa and Torlak Kemal took

1. "I will come out now and declare myself, that with my believers I may come into possession of the world. And with he power of knowledge and the revelation of the mystery of Oneness, we shall abolish the pretenders' laws ad religions" - the Sheik's words as reported by the author of Eight Heavens in M.S.'s translation.

their leave of Bedridden and mounted their horses
and rode off, one for Aydin and the other for Manisa,
I left with y guide for Konya, and one day, upon
reaching the Haymana plain,

We heard Mustafa had appeared
in Karaburun in Aydin.
He spoke Bedreddin's word in the audience of peasants.

We heard: "That the people might be freed of their suffering
and the earth's flesh be made pure
as the skin of a fifteen-year -old boy,
the landowners have been slaughtered wholesale
and the lords' fiefs made public land."

We heard . . .
Can one hear of such things and sit sill?
Early one morning,
as a lone bird sang on the Haymana plain,
we ate olives under a scrawny willow.
"Let's go,
we said,
and see.
Grab
a plow,

and let's us work this brother's land

We hit the mountains,
and left mountains behind . . .

Friends,
I don't travel along.
On afternoon I said to my companions:
We're here.
I said: Look.
The earth that wept just a step back
started to laugh like a child before our eyes.
Look, the figs are like big emeralds,
the vines can barely hold the amber clusters.
See the fish jumping in the reed baskets:
their sparkling wet skin shimmers,
and their meat is white and tender
like a young lamb's.
I said; Look,
here man is fertile like the earth, sun, and sea,
here the sea, sun, and earth bear fruit like man.

5.

When we left, the fiefdoms of the sovereign and his lords behind and crossed into Börklüje Mustafa's country, we were met first by three young men. All three wore seamless white robes like my guide. One had a curly, ebony-black, beard, passionate eyes the same color, and a big hooked nose. He used to be of Moses's faith. Now he was one of Mustafa's braves.

The second one had a pointed chin and a straight nose. He was a Greek sailor from Chios. He too was a disciple of Mustafa.

The third was of medium height and broad-shouldered. When I think of him now, I liken him to Hüseyin who sings that mountain song in the highwaymen's ward. Except Hüseyin comes from Erzurum. This one was from Aydin.

The one from Aydin spoke first: "Are you friend or foe? If you are friends, welcome. If you are enemies, your next breath will be your last."

"We're friends," we said.

Upon which we learned that in the high passes of Karaburun they had just destroyed the army of the Saruhan governor Sisman, who tried to return the lands to their sovereign lords.

Again, the one who looked like Hüseyin said: "If, on our brother's table that stretches from here to the sea off Karaburun, the figs are so honeyed this year, the grain this heavy, and the olives so fat, it is because we watered them with the book of the gilt-jacketed despoilers."

The joyful news was very great.

"Then let us return immediately, let us beat the tidings to Bedreddin," my guide said.

Taking with us Anastos, the sailor from Chios, we left the brothers' land we had barely set foot in, and plunged once more into the darkness of the sons of Osman.

We found Bedridden in Iznik on the shore of the lake. It was morning. The air was damp and sad.

"Now it's our turn," Bedridden said. "We'll leave for Rumelia."

We left Iznik at night. Horsemen pursued us. The darkness was like a wall between us and them. And we could hear their hoofbeats behind this wall. My guide led the way. Bedreddin's horse was between my roan horse and Anastos's. We three were like mothers, Bedreddin was our child. We were breathless for fear that they might do him harm. We were like three children, Bedridden was our father. Whenever the hoofbeats behind the wall of darkness seemed to come nearer, we moved closer to Bedreddin.

Hiding in daylight and traveling by night, we reached Sinope. There we set sail.

6.

Stars and a sailboat alone
on a sea one night.

On a sea one night a sailboat
alone with the stars.

The stars were without number.

The sails were down.

The water was dark
and flat as far as the eye could see.

Blond Anastos and the islander Bekir
were at the oars.

I was in the bow
with Bull Salih.

And Bedreddin,
his fingers buried in his beard,
was listening to the oars splash.

"Well, Bedridden!"

I said.

"We see nothing but stars
above the sleeping sails.

No whispers stir the air.

And no sounds
rise from the sea.

Only mute, dark waters,
only its sleep."

The little old man with the white beard bigger than himself
laughed.

He said:

"Never mind about the stillness of the air,
the deep sleeps to awaken."

Stars and a sailboat alone

on a sea one night
One night a boat sailed the Black Sea
headed for the Mad Forest
the Sea of Trees . . .

7.

We landed in this forest, this Mad Forest,
we pitched our tents in the Sea of Trees.
We flew a falcon from every branch to every village
with the message, "You know why we have come,
you know the trouble in our heart."

Every falcon came back with a hundred lionhearted.
They all came - the peasant burning the master's crop,
the apprentice the shop,
the serf leaving his chains.
All those like us in Rumelia came,
an army flowing to the Sea of Trees.

What pandemonium!
A blur
of horses, men, spears, iron, leaves,
leather, beech branches, oak roots.
Since the Mad Forest went made,
it hadn't seen such revelry
or heard such a din . . .

8.

Leaving Anatos in Bedreddin's camp in the Mad
Forest, my guide and I went down to Gallipoli. Some-
one long before us swam this strait - for love, I guess.
We too swam across to the other side. But what made
us quick as fish was not the desire to see a woman's
face in the moonlight but the need to reach Kara-
burun via Izmir with news - this time, for Mustafa
from his sheik.

We we stopped at a caravanserai near Izmir, we
heard that Bayed Pasha, who led the Sultan's twelve-
year-old son Murad by the hand, was gathering Ana-
tolian soldiers.

We didn't waste time in Izmir. We had just left
the city by the Aydin road when we came upon four
gentlemen in a vineyard resting and chatting under a
walnut tree while they waited for the watermelons
they'd lowered into a well to cool. Each one had a
different costume; three wore turbans, one a fez.
They greeted us, we greeted the back. One of the
turbaned was Neshri the historian. He said: Sultan
Mehmet sends Bayezid Pasha against Börklüje Mustafa,
who invites the people to a religion of libertinism."
The second turban was Shekerullah bin Sheha-
beddin. He said: "Numerous persons have gathered
around this mystic. And many of their practices that
are clearly contrary to Islamic law have come to

light."

The third turbaned personage was the historian Ashikpashazade. He said: "Question: if the afore-said Mustafa is torn to pieces, will he go with faith or without? Answer: God alone knows, for it is not given to us to know the final state of his soul."

The gentleman in the fez was the professor of scripture of the School of Theology. He looked at us. He blinked his eyes and gave us a sly smile. He didn't say a thing.

At that, we dug our spurs into our horses and left. Leaving behind in the dust of our hooves the gentlemen chatting under a walnut tree in a vineyard while cooling the watermelons they'd lowered into a well, we reached Karaburun and Börklüje Mustafa.

9.

It was hot.

Hot

The heat

was a dull knife dripping blood.

It was hot.

The clouds were full.

The clouds were about
to burst.

Motionless, he looked:

his eyes like two eagles dived
down from the rocks
into the plain.

There the softest, hardest,
most generous, thriftiest,
most

loving,

biggest, most beautiful woman

EARTH

was about

to give birth.

It was hot.

He looked out from the Karaburun mountains.

Brows knitted, he looked at the horizon,
at the end of this earth:

plucking the heads of children in the meadows
like bloody poppies

and draggin the naked cries in its wake,
a five-star fire swept across the horizon.

It was

Prince Murad.

An imperial edict had been handed down to Prince Murad
that he hasten to Aydin

and descend on Bedreddin's designated representative Mustafa.

It was hot.

Bedreddin's representative, heretic Mustafa, looked,

peasant Mustafa looked
without fear
anger
or a smile
He looked straight
ahead.
He looked.
The softest, hardest,
most generous, thriftiest
most loving,
biggest, most beautiful woman
EARTH
was about
to give birth.

He looked.
Bedreddin's braves looked out from the rocks at the horizon.
The end of this earth was coming closer
on the wings of a decreed bird of death.
And yet they
who looked out from the rocks
had opened up this earth
like a brother's table spread for all -
this earth with its
grapes, figs, pomegranates,
sheep with fleece blonder than honey
and milk thicker than honey,
and thin-waisted, lion-maned horses.

It was hot.
He looked.
Bedreddin's braves looked out at the horizon . . .

It was hot.
The clouds were full.
The first drop was about to fall like a sweet word.
All
of a sudden,
as if streaming down from the rocks
raining down from the sky
and springing up from the ground,
Bedreddin's braves faced the Prince's army
like the last work of this earth.
With flowing white robes
bare heads
bare feet and bare swords.

A great battle took place.

Turkish peasants from Aydin,
Greek sailors from Chios,
Jewish craftsmen,
Börklüje Mustafa's ten thousand heretical comrades

plunged into the forest of enemies like ten thousand axes.

The ranks of green and red flags,
inlaid shields,
and bronze helmets
were torn apart but,
as the day descended into night in pouring rain,
the ten thousand were two thousand.

That they might sing as one voice
and together pull the net from the water,
that they might all work iron like lace
and all together plow the earth,
that they might eat the honeyed figs together,
that they might say,
"Everywhere
all together
in everything
but the lover's cheek,"
the ten thousand gave eight thousand . . .
They were defeated.

The victors wiped their bloody swords
on the flowing white robes
of the defeated.
And the earth that brothers worked all together
like a song sung together
was ripped up
by the hooves of horses bred in the Edirne palace.
Don't say
this is the necessary result
of historical, social, and economic conditions —
I know!
My head bows before the thing you speak of.
But the heart
doesn't understand this language too well.
It
says, "O fickle Fate -
O cruel Fate!"
And they pass one by one,
their shoulders slashed by whips,
faces bloody,

in a flash they pass
their bare feet crushing my heart,
the defeated of Karaburun pass through Aydin . . . 1

Now as I write these lines I think of certain young men who pass for "leftists" and who'll be saying things like: "Well! He separates his head and his heart: he says his head accepts the historical, social, and economic conditions, but his heart; he says his heart still burns. Well, well - will you look at the Marxist!" The way I thought of the professor of scripture and heart his laugh at the very beginning of this work . . .

And if I am now making such a statement, it is not for these young men. It is for those who are far beyond the leftist affections of the recent discoverers of Marxism.

If a doctor has a tubercular child, if the doctor knows that his child will die, if he accepts this as a physiological, biological, I-don't-know-what-logical necessity, and if the child dies, the doctor - who well knew the necessity of this death - won't he shed a single tear for his child?

Marx, who knew that the Paris Commune would be overthrown, who knew the historical, social, and economic conditions necessitating its over-throw, didn't he feel the great dead of the Commune pass through his heart throw, didn't he feel the great dead of the Commune pass through his heart like a "song of pain"? And wasn't there at least a touch of sadness in the voices of those who shouted, "The Commune is dead, long live the Commune"?

A Marxist is not a "mechanical man" - a ROBOT; he is, with his flesh, blood, nerves, head, and heart, a historically and socially concrete person.

They stopped at dark.

It was he who spoke:

"The city of Seljuk has set up shop.

Now whose neck, friends,
whose neck is it now?"

The rain

kept on.

They spoke,

they said to him:

"It isn't

set up —

it will be.

The wind hasn't

stopped -

it will.

His throat isn't

cut -

it will be."

As rain seeped into the folds of the darkness,

I appeared at their side,

I spoke and said:

"Where are the gates of the city of Seljuk?"

Show me so I can go!

Does it have a fortress?

Tell me and I'll raze it.

Is there a toll?

Speak so I don't pay!"

Now it was he who spoke:

"The gates of Seljuk are narrow.

You can't come and go.

It has a fortress

not so easy to raze.

Go away, roan-horsed brave,

go on your way . . ."

I said: "I can come and go!"

I said: "I can raze and set fires!"

He said: "The rain has ended,

it's getting light.
The headsman Ali
is calling
Mustafa!
Go away, roan-horsed brave,
go on your way . . ."

I said: "Friends
let me go
let me go
Friends
let me see him
let me see him!
Don't think
I can't take it.
Don't think
I can't burn
without letting it show!

Friends
don't say no,
don't say no uselessly.
This is not a pear that will snap its stem,
This is no pear;
it won't fall from its branch even if it's wounded,
this heart
this heart is not a sparrow,
a sparrow!

Friends
I know!
Friends
I know where he is, how he is!
I know
he's gone and won't come back!
I know
he's nailed
by his hands
naked on a bleeding cross
on the hump of a camel.
Friends
let me go,
Friends
just let me go and see
see Bedreddin's man
Börklüje Mustafa
Mustafa."

Two thousand men to be beheaded,
Mustafa and his cross,
headsman, block, and sword -
everything is ready
everything is set.

A gilt-embroidered red saddlecloth,
gold stirrups,
a gray horse.
On the horse is a thick-browed child,
the ruler of Amasya, Crown Prince Murad.
And next to him,
Bayezid Pasha - I do it on his I-don't-know-what the decoration!

The headsman struck.
Bare necks split like pomegranates.
Like apples dropping from a green branch,
heads fell one after another.
And as each head fell,
Mustafa took a last look
from his cross.
And each head that fell
he did not turn a hair:
it just said,
"Come,
Grand Sultan Mustafa!"
and not a word more . . .

11.

Bayezid Pasha had gone to Manisa and found there Bedreddin's disciple Torlak Kemal, and there he hanged him. The ten provinces were inspected and returned again as fiefs to the sovereign's servant lords.

My guide and I passed through these ten provinces. Vultures circled overhead and, from time to time, with wild shrieks they swooped down in dark streams, descending on the fresh, bloody corpses of women and children. Although the bodies of men young and old lined the roads in the sun the fact that the birds preferred the flesh of women and children showed how gluttoned they were.

On the roads, we met the parading troops of the sovereign lords.

As the sovereign's servant lords passed with their loud-colored banners and drums and fanfare through the sluggish winds weighing like the air of a rotting vineyard and returned over the chopped-up earth to settle down on their fiefs, we left the ten provinces. Gallipoli appeared in the distance, and I said to my guide: "I have no strength left. I can't swim across."

We found a boat.

The sea was rough. I looked at the boatman. He looks like the picture I tore out of a German book and hung up on my wall. His thick mustache is ebony-black, and his beard is broad and white. In all my life I've never seen such an open, such an eloquent forehead.

We were in the middle of the strait, the sea flowed on nonstop, the water foamed and slipped under our boat in the lead-painted air, when our boatman who looked like the picture in the cell said:

"Freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman, in a word, the oppressor and the oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another and carried on, now covertly, now openly, a constant struggle.

12.

Upon setting foot in Rumelia, we learned that Sultan Mehmet had lifted the siege of Salonika and come to Serrai. We traveled day and night to get to the Mad Forest as soon as possible.

One night when we were resting on the roadside, three horsemen heading away from the Mad Forest rode by at full gallop toward Serrai. In one of the horsemen's saddles I saw a dark shape tied up in a bag, which looked like a person. My hairs rose. Is said to my guide.

I know these hoofbeats.

These jet-black horses foaming blood
have carried prisoners tied to their saddles
at full gallop down the dark road.

I know these hoofbeats.
One morning
they
come up to our tents like a song of friendship.
We break bread with them.
The air is so beautiful,
the heart so beautiful,
the heart so hopeful,
the eye is a child again,
and our wise friend, SUSPICION, is asleep . . .

I know these hoofbeats
One night
they
ride away from our tents at full speed.
They knife the sentry in the back,
and in one of their saddles,
arms tied behind his back
is our most precious.

I know these hoofbeats,
and the Mad Forest knows them too . . .

Before long we learned that the Mad Forest did in fact know these hoofbeats. As soon as we stepped into our forest we heard that Bayed Pasha had, with all the necessary precautions, planted men in the forest who penetrated the camp, joined Bedreddin's followers, and one night, coming upon Bedridden asleep in his tent, carried him off. So the three horsemen we met on the road were the forefathers of all the undercover agents in Ottoman history, and the prisoner they carried in their saddle was Bedreddin.

13.
Rumelia, Serrai,
and an old expression:
HIS IMPERIAL PRESENCE.

At the center,
straight as a sword stuck in the ground,
the old man.

Facing him, the Sultan.
They looked at each other.

It was the Sultan's wish
that, before finishing off this incarnation of blasphemy,
before going the word to the hangman,

the law should exercise its skills
and the matter be disposed of properly.

A member of the court,
Mevlana Haydar by name,
newly arrived from Persia
and a man of great learning,
bowed his hennaed beard to divine inspiration
and, saying "This man's substance is unholy,
but his blood is holy,"
wrapped the matter up.

They turned to Bedreddin.
They said: "You talk now."
They said: "Account for your heresy."

Bedreddin
looked out through the archway.
There's sun outside.
The branches of a tree turning green in the year,
and a brook carving stones.
Bedreddin smiled.
His eyes lit up,
he said:
"Since we have lost this time,
words avail not.
Don't draw it out.
Since the sentence is ine,
give it - that I may seal it . . ."

14.
The rain hisses,
scared,
whispering,
like words of betrayal.

the rain hisses,
like the bare white feet of renegades
running on wet dark earth.

The rain hisses.
In the market place of Serrai,
across from the coppersmith's
Bedreddin hangs from a tree.

The rain hisses.
It's a late and starless hour of the night.
And swinging from a leafless branch,
getting wet in the rain,
is the naked body of my sheik.

The rain hisses.
The market place is mute,

Serrai is blind.

In the air, the doomed sorrow of not seeing and not speaking.
And the market place of Serrai has covered its face with its hands.

The rain hisses.

The Lathe-Turner Shefik's Shirt

The rain hissed outside. On the horizon of sea beyond the iron bars and in the cloudy sky above, it was morning. I remember it very clearly even today. First I felt a hand on my shoulder. I turned around. The lathe-turner Shefik has fixed his shining, coal-black eyes on my face: "It looks like you didn't sleep last night," he said.

Upstairs, the bandits' chains were quiet. They must have gone to sleep when it got light. In daylight the guards' whistles also lose their meaning. Their colors fade, and their sharp outlines, which show only in the darkness, soften.

The ward door opened from the outside. Inside, the men are waking up one by one.

Shefik asks: "You look a little strange - what happened?"

I tell Sheik my night's adventure: "But," I say, "I saw it with my own eyes. He came right up to this window here. He wore a seamless white robe. He took my hand. I made the whole journey at his side — I mean with his guidance."

Shefik is laughing. He points to the window: "You made your journey not with Mustafa's disciple but with my shirt. Look - I hung it out last night. It's still at the window:

By now I'm laughing too. I take down from the bars Shefik's shirt, which served as my guide in Sheik Bedreddin's movement. Sheik puts his shirt on. Everyone in the ward has heard about my "journey." Ahmet says: "Now this is something you should write down. We want a 'Bedreddin epic.' And I'll tell you a story myself - you can put it at the end of your book."

And here at the end of my book is the story Ahmet told.

Ahmet's Story

It was before the Balkan War. I was nine years old. My grandfather and I were the guests of a peasant in Rumelia. The peasant had blue eyes and a copper beard. We had tarhana soup with lots of red pepper. It was winter - one of Rumelia's dry winters that cut like a well-sharpened knife.

I can't remember the name of the village. Except the gendarme who saw us down to the road had described the people of this village as the most stubborn, hardest-to-get-taxes-from, most pigheaded peasants in the world.

According to the gendarme, they're neither Moslems nor infidels. Perhaps they were Kizilash. But not quite that either.

I still remember going into the village. The sun was just about set, the road frozen. There were red lights on the hard frozen puddles that glittered like glass on the road.

A dog met us at the first barbed-wire fence sinking into the darkness. A huge dog looming even larger in the half-dark. He was barking.

Our driver tightened the reins. The dog attacked the horses, jumping way up to their chests.

"What's happening?" I said, and stuck my head out to see. The driver's elbow hit me in the face as he raised his whip and it cracked down on the dog's head with a snake-hiss. Just then I heard a thick voice. "Hey! You think you're the governor and anything you hit is a peasant?"

My grandfather got down from the carriage. He said hello to the dog's thick-voiced owner. They talked. Then the blue-eyed, copper-bearded owner of the dog invited us to his house.

I can still hear many conversations from my childhood. I've come to understand what most of them meant only as I've grown older, and I've been surprised at some and laughed or gotten angry at others. But no grown up's talk that I listened to as a child has affected the rest of my life like that talk between my grandfather and the blue-eyed peasant that night.

My grandfather had a soft, gentlemanly voice. The other spoke with a thick, cross, sure voice.

His thick ice said: "Hanging from a leafless branch of a tree in the market place of Serrai by the will of the Sultan and the pronouncement of Judge Haydar from Persia, Bedreddin's naked body slowly swung from side to side. It was night. Three men came around the corner. One led an extra gray horse. Without a saddle. They stopped under the tree Bedridden hung from. The one on the left took off his shoes. He climbed the tree. The others opened their arms and waited below. The man in the tree started to cut the lot i the wet soaped rope that would like a snake around Bedreddin's think neck under his long white beard Suddenly the knife slipped off the rope and pierced the stretched neck of the corpse. No blood came. The young man cutting the rope turned white. Then he leaned over and kissed the wound. Throwing the knife away, he undid the knot with his hands, and, like a father leaving his sleeping child in the arms of its mother, he entrusted Bedreddin's body to the arms of those waiting below, They put the naked body on the bare horse. The man in the tree climbed own. He was the youngest. Leading the bare horse that carried the naked body, he came to our village. He buried the body on the hill under the black tree. But later the sovereignn's horsemen invaded the village. When they left, the young man dug the body up from under the black tree. Thinking they might come back and find the body. And he did not return again."

My grandfather asks: "Are you sure it happened like that?"

"Sure. My mother's father told it to me, and his grandfather told him. And he heard it from his grandfather. It's always been this way . . ."

There are eight or ten peasants in this room besides us. They sit at the edge of the circle of half-light the fire paints red. Now and then one or another moves, and a hand, part of a face, or a shoulder comes inside the circle of half-light and reddens.

I hear the voice of the copper-beard. "He will come back. The one hung from a tree naked will come back naked."

My grandfather laughs: "This belief of yours," he says, "is like the Christians' faith. They say the prophet Jesus will come back to earth. Even among Moslems there are those who believe Jesus will one day appear in Damascus."

He doesn't answer my grandfather right away. Pushing against his knees with his thick-fingered hands, he straightens up. Now his whole body is inside the red circle. I see his face in profile. He has a long, straight nose. He talks as if fighting: "Jesus is to be reborn with his flesh, bones, beard. This is a lie. Bedreddin will be reborn without his bones, beard, mustache - like the look of an eye, the words of a tongue, the breath of a chest. this I know. We are Bedreddin's men; we don't believe in any afterlife or Resurrection that we should believe a dead, scattered body would gather together and be reborn. When we say edreddin will come again, we mean that his words, look, and breath will appear from among us." He stopped and sat down. Whether my grandfather believed in Bedreddin's return or not, I don't know. I believed it at nine and, and thirty-some years, I still believe it.

It's This Way

I stand in the advancing light,
my hands hungry, the world beautiful.

My eyes can't get enough of the trees --
they're so hopeful, so green

A sunny road runs through the mulberries,
I'm at the window of the prison infirmary.

I can't smell the medicines —
carnations must be blooming nearby.

It's this way:

being captured is beside the point,
the point is not to surrender.

Letter to My Wife

My one and only!
Your last letter says:
"My head is throbbing,
My heart is stunned!"

You say:
"If they hand you,
If I lose you,
I'll die!"

You'll live, my dear -
my memory will vanish like black smoke in the wind.
Of course you'll live, red-haired lady of my heart:
in the twentieth century
grief lasts
at most a year.

Death -
a body swinging from a rope
My heart
can't accept such a death.
But
you can bet
if some poor gypsy's hairy black
spidery hand
 slips a noose
around my neck,
they'll look in vain for fear
in Nazim's
 blue eyes!
In the twilight of my last morning
I
will see my friends and you,
and I'll go
to my grave
regretting nothing but an unfinished song . . .

My wife!
Good-hearted,
golden,
eyes sweeter than honey-my bee!
Why did I write you

they want to hang me?
The trial has hardly begun,
and they don't just pluck a man's head
like a turnip.
Look, forget all this.
If you have any money,
buy me some flannel underwear:
my sciatica is acting up again.
And don't forget,
a prisoner's we
must always think good thoughts.

This Journey

We open doors,
close doors,
pass through doors,
and reach at the end of our only journey
no city,
no harbor —

the train derails,
the ship sinks
the plane crashes.
The map is drawn on ice.
But if I could
begin this journey all over again,
I would.
1958
Leningrad

A Sorry Freedom

You sell the care of your eyes and the light of your hands,
you knead the bread of all happiness
without tasting so much as a crumb,
with your great freedom you work in the houses of strangers,
with the freedom to make a Croesus of him who works you to
death you are free.

They stand over you from the day you are born,
they grind out lies nonstop as long as you live,
with your great freedom you think, you finger on your temple,
with the freedom of conscience
you are free.

Your head hanging as if cut at the neck,
your arms drooping down on both sides,
with your great freedom you wander around,
with the freedom to be unemployed

you are free.

Acting as your next friend, they give away your country -
one day, for example, they sign it over to America
along with you and your great freedom,
with the freedom to be an air base
you are free.

The damned hands of Wall Street grab you by the collar,
one day you may be sent, say, to Korea,
with your great freedom you might fill a hole,
with the freedom to be an unknown soldier
you are free.

You say one shouldn't live like a tool, a number, a means,
but like a human being -
with your great freedom they slap on the cuffs,
with the freedom to be arrested, imprisoned, and even
hanged you are free.

You don't have an iron, wood, or tulle curtain in your life,
you don't need to choose freedom -
you are free.
This freedom, it's a sorry thing under the stars.
1951