

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## OLD PAVILIONS

ABDULHAK ŞINASI HISAR

### Important Terms

Haremlik	It refers to domestic spaces where both men and women of the family socialize
Selamlık	It refers to domestic spaces that are reserved for men
Buyukada	It is the largest of the Princes' Islands in the Sea of Marmara, which literally means Big Island
Bey	It is an honorific for men, equals to Mr. in English

### People

Doctor Zici	Neighbor
Hani	A Greek egg seller from Buyukada
Râkım Bey	A friend of his father
Cemal Bey	A friend of his father

### Synopsis

In this work, Abdülhak Şinasi Hisar conveys his memoirs about the pavilions he lived in during his childhood. He tells about the life in his grandfather's pavilion in Buyukada, how the pavilion they rent in Çamlıca due to his grandmother's illness makes him feel, how he gets used to it, the pastimes and curiosities offered to a child.

### Events

#### *Istanbul's Houses*

There are three types of houses in Istanbul; wooden houses by the seaside on the Bosphorus are mansions, wooden houses with gardens in the countryside are pavilions, and houses made of stone or brick with *haremlik* and *selamlık* in the city are residences. Families do not live in Beyoğlu as there are no *haremlik* and *selamlık* in the apartments.

#### *Life in the Pavilion on the Princes' Islands*

At the highest point in the pine grove, on the right of the pier in Buyukada, there are two yellow two-story buildings side by side, one is *haremlik*, and the other is *selamlık* with green shutters. Every day, as it gets dark, the last ferry docks at the pier, Abdülhak Şinasi's grandfather comes home on a white donkey, gets off the donkey with the butler's help, and after a while, the stars shine in the sky. His grandfather drinks red wine, which he calls "my medicine" since it is necessary to call things forbidden by religion with different names and offers him some at every meal. As Abdülhak Şinasi sees that his words are appreciated at these dinner tables, he feels that his mind is respected despite his age.

As his grandmother is a Circassian, kidnapped and sold as a slave in Istanbul when she was a child, she is a touchy and timid woman. Since his father is assigned to distant provinces by the administration, whenever a letter comes from him, his grandmother asks, "Is your father coming?" Whenever Abdülhak Şinasi remembers her voice, he repeats this sentence in his mind.

His favorite room in this pavilion is his mother's dark-curtained, bluish room that smells powder and lavender. His mother puts on her cream-colored robe and a white headscarf, rubs a few drops of lavender oil on her robe, and they go for a walk together. When she prepares to go to Istanbul for shopping, he finds her in her room wearing her charshaf and gloves. When he enters the room, she

opens her veil and kisses him saying, "Behave." At those moments, he inhales the scent of her lavender.

He has a private spot in the pavilion. When he feels sad, he hides under the mahogany desk in the living room. Here, he contemplates the unfairness of life. Especially when his mother is in Istanbul, he becomes pessimistic.

As he walks around in the backyard, he feels like he is on a trip; the coop where the chicks and turkeys stay and the soap-smelling laundry room are Asia. The empty bunker which makes you feel like you are in a desert is Africa.

He feels like Robinson Crusoe and Christopher Columbus when they go to the pine grove for an afternoon stroll. He imagines that the sound they make when they hit the lid of the cistern they pass by on the way comes from the spirit of nature. As they pass through the wooden monasteries among the pine trees, the priests greet them silently if women are not with them. Here, too, he feels such a sacred air that he thinks monasteries grow by themselves, like pines.

They go for a walk with donkeys once or twice a month in the moonlight. There is always something to laugh about these nights, but when the laughter subsides, he looks at the moon, the sea, and the pine trees and then averts his eyes as if he were looking at a book that he is not allowed to read yet. He reserves the pleasure of this magical beauty for the future.

Many guests come to the pavilion; Emine Hanım, who tells parables. Zehra Hanım, who tells tales. Necip Bey, who tells stories. And Cemal Bey, who inspires patriotism. Cemal Bey, a friend of Abdulhak Şinasi's father, is hosted with pleasure because he is a patriot who knows Abdulhak Hamid and Namık Kemal well. His grandfather's donkey is not sent to the pier in the evenings when he comes, his mother sends Abdulhak Şinasi and his aunt to the pier to meet him. When he gets off the ferry with his grandfather, the two of them take a carriage and then drink a glass of raki in a coffeehouse. When they come home for dinner, a crystal jug and glasses are waiting for them in the middle of the table. When Cemal Bey is about to talk after dinner, Abdulhak Şinasi gets sleepy, and although he wants to stay and listen to him, he cannot resist his sleep and goes to bed.

#### *Character and Place*

For Abdulhak Şinasi, moving to another place means changing their habits, because, for him, their neighborhood is their souls' cover. Therefore, when his father's family informs his mother's family that they are thinking of marrying their son off to their daughter, his mother's family does not agree to this because they live on the island. But when his father's family say that their son is to settle in the mansion in Rumelihisarı after they get married, they allow this marriage. Thus, the first years of Abdulhak Şinasi's life pass between Rumelihisarı and Buyukada. Whenever he comes to Buyukada, he thinks that the island is full of various beings that only he can see. He sees a smiling mouth on trees, a child swinging at the junction of several branches, sad animals and weeping masks on walls, a pair of sad eyes on the front of a house with raised eyebrows. He feels like a deity walking among adults and the beauties of nature.

#### *Character and Time*

Some days, when he wants to play games that he does not like, he feels like completely different. At those moments, he is surprised to hear that adults still call him by the same name. Since he has two names, he wishes to go by both depending on how he feels. Because he sometimes feels pessimistic.

But he is also sure that people's emotional world is largely shaped when they step out of childhood and into youth. And they recognize their feelings with the help of this first light.

#### *A World of Fantasy*

For him, children spend their lives half asleep and see the world as a dream. However, this state does not prevent them from a thorough understanding of what happens in the world of adults. Every evening, he takes a walk with his French governess, whom everyone calls Mademoiselle, and as the sun sets, his eyes open to his inner world, and he leaves his childhood behind and dives into a world of poetry. No matter how much he loves the adults around him, he never tells them about this dream

world because he knows that none of them can walk with him in it. His grandmother, who sees them returning home in the dark, always complains about Mademoiselle's eagerness to be outside.

Since their room is next to a pine forest, all its smells and sounds fill the room. Most of the time, he cannot sleep because he believes that the sounds coming at night are not caused by the wind shaking the pines but by the crying of the pines. As everyone is asleep, he sits on his bed and listens to these sounds. The world turns into something groaning for him at those moments, and in the morning, he wakes up as tired as someone who has just swum across a sea. Although these sounds of the nights affect him so much, he never tells anyone about them.

### *The People of Buyukada*

Remembering the people living in Buyukada gives Abdulhak Şinasi peace. The first of these people is Doctor Zici and his family. Doctor Zici is a tall and thin old man who always wears crumpled clothes. His overweight wife with red hair and a red face always scolds him. That is why they go everywhere with a noise.

The second is Râkım Bey and Madame Râkım Bey, who are among his father's friends with whom he plays poker and bezique. Madame Râkım Bey, who sits at the game table with her covered head next to her male guests, is addressed as Madame Râkım Bey, not Râkım Bey's harem, as is the custom. For this woman, who only gets up from the game table to eat and sleep, the most intolerable setbacks of life are those that prevent her guests from attending these card games. If the apocalypse were to break out one day while she was playing, she would ask, "Is it the time for this now?" Râkım Bey, on the other hand, is a cleaning freak man who believes that his stomach gets dusty.

His great aunt is nicknamed "Aunt in a moment" because whenever she wants to caress him, he runs away, saying, "Aunt in a moment." This great aunt always lives in contradiction. She does not know what to do with the money when her tenant pays the rent, but on her penniless days, she craves many things. She wants to take a stroll on a rainy day but does not want to go out on a sunny day. When she comes to the island, she misses Istanbul and wants to see the island while in Istanbul. When she finally sells her green emeralds to buy pearls, she weeps for her emeralds. Not to upset her, none of her female guests wear green, and Abdulhak Şinasi's grandmother hides all the green matches in the matchbox at home when she visits them.

There are also Greeks in Buyukada who never left the island throughout their lives. One of them is Hani, who sells eggs. This woman, who always smells of freshly watered garden soil, carries eggs even in her pockets. When they see her, they ask right away where the eggs are, and she is pleased that people like her eggs. When Abdulhak Şinasi learns that she has never been to Istanbul, he condemns his relatives for not sending her to Istanbul, but they think that it is not appropriate to disturb her if she does not want to.

Abdulhak Şinasi wants to thank these islanders by commemorating them.

### *Objects*

One of the customs that all old houses adhere to is to have quilts at home for prospective guests. When Abdulhak Şinasi looks at these quilts, he sees people. Some look young and cheerful, while some look tired and tired. Those whose cover is buttoned up like shirts resemble European people and those basted look like Turkish people. Among them are men in uniform and women in fancy dresses.

Another custom of old houses is to have a storage room for the people of the house to keep their personal belongings. Sometimes, when one of the owners opens a chest, the children gather and wait eagerly for what will come out of it. As soon as the lid is opened, the scent of lavender flowers, Bursa soaps, flower water, and amber spread around, and things like silk handkerchiefs, kerchieves, covers, shirts, ribbons, gold-embroidered bathroom sets, hammam bowls, clocks, fans, and toys show themselves.

### *The Pavilion in Çamlıca*

On the advice of a doctor for his grandmother's illness, they rent a large and unpainted pavilion in a neglected, dusty garden in Çamlıca. That is the first rental house where Abdulhak Şinasi is to live. He

finds this pavilion strange because its residents left it. He is used to imagining the houses as self-created beings that derive their spirituality from the people who inhabit them. Not knowing its past and not being able to connect it with familiar feelings and faces causes him to feel alienated. In addition, because its entrance is at the side and its front is covered with dense trees, he feels uneasy thinking that he cannot see its face. Since he cannot see its face, he cannot predict its nature and morals. He also feels like a nomad, because they take a few of their belongings when moving to this pavilion.

But his grandmother's illness forces the atmosphere in the house to be understanding and compassionate. The view from Çamlıca and the spring winds turn the neighborhood into paradise, and he finally starts to like the pavilion. Each morning, he takes long walks in the countryside. A pantheistic spirit grows in him as he plunges into the universe of beautiful flowers accompanied by changing landscapes in high places. He returns home as if coming from a magical country. He falls asleep at night, hearing the smell and sounds of spring. Rumelihisarı smells of the sea, Büyükada of pine, and Çamlıca smells of thyme, eucalyptus, pine, lavender, and fresh herbs. Towards morning roosters crows, during the day insects sing. With these scenes, smells, and sounds, his soul connects to life and the world with a sense of friendship.

Moreover, everyone is as kind to each other as possible. Women who see him always caress his head affectionately. His fears, which haunt him at night, vanish among the crowds during the day. He walks, has fun, runs, plays with the guests, and sometimes sings with joy, but then is warned, "Have you forgotten your grandmother's illness?"

He feels the burden of all these feelings in the evening and is afraid of his grandmother's illness. Fear of death, which he hides even from himself, starts to haunt him. Although he is advised to pray before sleep, he does not feel like praying because of the doubts created by his father unwittingly. He does not know if there is an afterlife, but as he listens to the sound of insects, he hears a pantheistic lullaby and is sure that there is a world that illuminates his soul with its light and caresses his eyes with its scenery. He does not know if there is an afterlife, but he is sure of the existence of the people he loves and their affection.

#### *Children and Toys*

While describing the world of his childhood as paradise, he states that his paradise is his grandfather's garden in Büyükada. In this garden, he feels like he owns a world of his own. There, he plucks a flower he loves and then smells and kisses it rubs it on his face. Then, while loving it, he starts to tear it apart. For him, we are all children who love the toys in their hands and tear them apart, and we are never convinced that we should be content with the pleasure our toys give us.

Kites are his favorite toy. Kites require sky, wind, and running. That's why it makes kites look like our dreams that we always want to fly high. Writing criticism or poetry, being a good official or expert are the kites we fly.

#### *Evenings*

According to Abdülhak Şinasi, evening hours increase a person's need for poetry. When the cautious and calculated day turns into a meaningless memory, the person attains the noble climate of the first youth. As the colors change, the spirit, a secret chameleon, changes color and becomes darker. People adapt to this change and slow down their steps and make their movements less frequent. When the colors get darker, the appearance of everything changes. The weight of history pervades the city. Thus, the evening prepares everyone for the most intense flavor of the world, love.

#### *Old Neighborhoods*

Children are chameleons who adopt what they see by following the spirit of the neighborhoods they inhabit. That is why people who live away from where they grew up always yearn for a homeland. Abdülhak Şinasi likes old neighborhoods and the buildings there like his relatives. All neighborhoods of Istanbul are like separate personalities. While one lives in his favorite neighborhood, he misses the neighborhood he used to live in. However, all neighborhoods seem far from each other, as getting to a place requires taking various vehicles from ferries to trains, cars to boats. A person who goes to Kozyatığı from the Bosphorus stays overnight to rest instead of returning the same day. However, the widespread use of automobiles eases going everywhere, changing the identity of the city. That is something that disappoints Abdülhak Şinasi.

## Paintings

One year, when Galatasaray High School exhibits the works of Painter Ali Rıza Bey from Uskudar, Abdülhak Şinasi admires his paintings. Ali Rıza Bey is a neighborhood painter. Pavilions mingling with dreams in Çamlıca, mansions immersed in memories in and around Paşabahçe, a pavilion with shutters in Acıbadem, a secluded country road, a car, a man who looks like grass, grown from that soil. These scenes of Ali Rıza Bey remind him of some of his relatives and make him feel like waiting for something. Indeed, the spirit of the era that these paintings depict is waiting. When he looks at them carefully, thinking about what they were waiting for, he realizes that the walls, doors, houses, and other things are waiting to get rid of Sultan Abdulhamid and attain freedom. Since there are very few paintings describing the past as these paintings, when the exhibition is about to close, he leaves with full of sympathy for Ali Rıza Bey.

## Themes

**Nostalgia** Abdülhak Şinasi's memoirs are intertwined with his longing for the past. He envisions the past as a time in which not only people but also things are waiting to get rid of Abdulhamid's tyranny. But he sees every innovation as a source of melancholy since he does not see people different from a plant of their birthplace. Even the ease of the painful journey between the districts causes astonishment and disappointment for him because he still seeks the conditions under which he grew up like a plant. Thus, while looking at Ali Rıza Bey's paintings, he sees the past awaiting the changes promised by the future but yearns for the days of yore, too.

**Human-Environment Relationship** Abdülhak Şinasi sees harmony between humans and the house they inhabit. He neither separates a house from its inhabitants nor the inhabitants from a house. Both are extensions of each other. Therefore, the deserted and unfurnished pavilion they rent in Çamlıca confuses him as he encounters a spiritless and identityless house for the first time. He gets used to it only when spring comes, making him feel the presence of nature with which he lives in harmony in his father's mansion in Rumelihisarı and his grandfather's pavilion in Buyukada.

## Bibliography

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