

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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LITERARY MEMORIES (1975)

HUSEYIN CAHIT YALCIN

People

Abdullah Zuhtu	Journalist
Ahmet Mithat Efendi	Writer
Ahmet Ihsan Tokgoz	Publisher
Ahmet Suayip	Thinker, legal expert
Arakel	Publisher
Artin	Bookseller
Cenap Sahabettin	Poet
Halit Ziya Usakligil	Writer
Karabet	Bookseller
Kirkor	Bookseller
Little Said Pasha	Grand vizier
Mehmet Cavit	Writer, politician
Mehmet Rauf	Writer
Tevfik Fikret	Writer

Synopsis

Huseyin Cahit grows up in a house where books written by conservative writers such as Ahmet Mithat Efendi are read aloud. When they settle in Serres due to his father's job, he endeavors to read all the books in his father's library, even though he cannot understand them. When they return to Istanbul, he writes his first novel, *Nadide*, under the influence of Ahmet Mithat Efendi, whom he admires much. But as he improves his French, he falls under the influence of French literature and begins to translate for the magazine *Servetifunun*. But French literature is not the only thing that affects him. When his exiled uncle, who is a supporter of the constitutional monarchy, comes back to Istanbul, he is also affected by his uncle's thoughts on patriotism and sovereignty. He begins to question everything that he has not questioned until that day. His uncle is banished from Istanbul by the government, but he continues to read the prohibited publications thanks to his friend Ahmet Suayip. He studies Political Sciences and works as a journalist. His career in journalism starts in *Mektep* magazine, then continues in *Tarik*, *Sabah*, *Saadet*, *Ikdam*, and *Tanin* newspapers.

Events

Under the Impact of Inspirational Figures

Huseyin Cahit's earliest memories are full of folk tales, like *Âsik Garip* or *Kerem and Asli*. After dinner, as his father has a cup of coffee, his older sister continues reading from where she left off in the book the previous evening. Yet, the most interesting stories belong to Ahmet Mithat Efendi. Huseyin Cahit remembers that in his books, Ahmet Mithat make didactic comments on morality issues, and in these moments, his father and mother argue with each other. When they move to Serres because of his father's job, he becomes a passionate reader of Ahmet Mithat, trying to read the books from his father's library. But he does not understand them because they are the products of Ottoman Divan poetry. Yet there is an exception; Nasimi. Although Huseyin Cahit does not comprehend what Nasimi says, he is impressed by his life story. Nasimi was skinned alive because he said, "Your god is under my feet." He meant the money under his feet, but the authorities were incapable of perceiving his subtle point. Huseyin Cahit is affected by that Nasimi did not hesitate to tell what he thought although he knew that he was going to be murdered. His memory is filled with other examples of extraordinary courage, like warrior Battal Ghazi and a former grand vizier Davut Pasha. A desire to write a novel emerges inside him as he reads their stories. His family returns to Istanbul when he is thirteen years old, and he can reach out to Ahmet Mithat's all books. His little library acquires some French crime fiction. Yet he writes his first novel, *Nadide*, under the impact of Ahmet Mithat.

His First Novel

He sets off on a literary journey. First, he has his manuscript examined and approved by the censor board. Second, as publishers do not publish a book without a preface at that time, he seeks a well-known writer to write one. Luckily, one of his acquaintances provides a preface written by Ahmet Mithat. He is thrilled by his acclaim. Third, he searches for a publishing house. Arakel, the owner of the first publishing house he applied to, does not show any interest in his manuscript. He is disappointed but does not give up and goes to another one. The second publishing house is a newly established one. Its owners, Ahmet Ihsan Tokgoz, and his partner decide to publish his book. With the book, the young writer Huseyin Cahit announces a list of his future books in order to impress his potential readers. However, he does not write any of them.

He shares some pages from *Nadide* to show that it is an unqualified work and says that he is happy because he did not continue to write bad fiction. Yet one of his announced books is the translation of a novel, *Hélène et Mathilde*. He makes fun of his first translation job because when he translated the book, he did not speak French very well.

Under the Impact of French Literature

He learns French by acting like a person who knows it; he reads novels and translates books. When his publisher starts to publish *Servetifunun*, he translates a French book on sewing with his friend Cavit for the magazine. Their translation is published under the heading Needle and Thread in separate issues. He says that Ahmet Ihsan could not resist free writings and published them.

However, as he delves into French literature, his desire to write fades because he thinks that he is not qualified to write. He reads Alexandre Dumas, George Ohnet, Octave Feuillet, and Dumas Fils. One day, he buys Paul Bourget's *Terre Promise*, but he cannot understand what he reads. The book's French is at an advanced level. In the end, he gives up on it. Yet six months later, when he tries to read it again, he can understand it. Then, he reads Bourget's all books and meets other important French figures, like Hippolyte Taine. He admires Bourget until the Dreyfus affair. When he learns that Bourget is in favor of kingship and religious community, he stops reading his books.

The Uncle

He finds out that his mother has a brother, who was exiled at the age of fifteen by the government of Abdulhamid II because he supported the constitutionalist Mithat Pasha. His uncle makes an impression on him with his ideas related to patriotism and love of freedom. In their conversations, he scorns Huseyin Cahit for his unquestioning character, and that is the way he starts to question the things he has never questioned. He reads the books of Namik Kemal that his uncle gives him and is fascinated by the concept of patriotism. Now, he knows what national pride is.

His uncle is sent to another city by the government, but Huseyin Cahit continues to read banned publications with the help of his friend, Ahmet Suayip. Ahmet Suayip is an interesting boy who knows how to reach out to prohibited texts. Thanks to him, Huseyin Cahit can read the texts written by the exiled leaders of the Young Turks, like Mizanci Murat and Ahmet Riza.

Huseyin Cahit describes how difficult it was to go from one district to another through the dark and muddy roads in Istanbul to get a banned newspaper. He says that he and his friends were motivated by two things; patriotism and love of freedom.

A College Student

While Huseyin Cahit and his friends prepare to be college students in the faculty of political sciences, the department decides to accept students based on an exam. Huseyin Cahit and his friends resist taking the exam to protest the decision. They spend the whole day wandering through the streets. Because it rains the next day, they take the exam. Yet they are blacklisted by the government. Although the government hires the most successful graduates, Huseyin Cahit's cohort is deprived of pursuing a career in the palace.

He and his friends can read banned publications through their Armenian acquaintances that are entitled to use foreign postal organizations in the Ottoman Empire without any surveillance. Huseyin Cahit starts to consider leaving the country at this time. He dreams of living in Paris, but it is forbidden

to leave the country. He says that they were like in Paris because of their keen interest in French literature.

Abdulhamid II is also interested in French literature. Crime fiction is his favorite genre. The bookseller Karabet hires translators for him. As books are expensive for a student, Huseyin Cahit and his friend Ahmet Suayip become Karabet's translators. He says that he and his friend argued whether they were doing a bad thing or not because anything related to the government was abject for them. Yet, at the end of the discussion, they decided that their translations were not to support the reign of Abdulhamid II, and they did not do anything wrong.

Mektep

Six months before his graduation, he begins to worry about making a living and decides to work as a journalist. He and his friends want to revive a magazine called *Mektep* [school], which was published before by Karabet. They ask Karabet to hand over the magazine to them, but Karabet does not trust young Huseyin Cahit and his friends. Then they ask their former French teacher, Baki for help. As their teacher accepts it, they start to work and then publish it. However, other magazines harbor ill will against the new outlook of *Mektep*. Especially, Cenap Sahabettin's poetry attracts attention. The established literary figures scorn his modernist style, but Huseyin Cahit and his friends defend it.

One day, they get a letter from one of their readers appreciating Sahabettin's style and see that there are other people thinking the same way. The owner of the letter is Mehmet Rauf, a naval officer who is interested in literature. After a short time, he becomes the director of the magazine. However, when a conflict arises between Cenap and Baki, Huseyin Cahit and his friends quit the magazine. Then the magazine is published under the directorship of Cenap Sahabettin. Huseyin Cahit says that neither he nor his other friends condemn Cenap for that.

Daring to Write

After he graduates from college in 1896, he becomes a correspondence officer in the ministry of education. Meanwhile, *Servetifunun* is transformed into a literary magazine under the leadership of Tevfik Fikret. Huseyin Cahit follows the magazine but is afraid of writing. Despite his fear, he writes a story named "Roneka" and shares it with none but Mehmet Rauf. Upon listening to the story, Mehmet Rauf takes the story to *Servetifunun*. Once the magazine publishes it, Huseyin Cahit finds the courage he needs to write other stories. Mehmet Rauf gives him the books of Halit Ziya Usakligil to support his writing career. Huseyin Cahit is fascinated by Usakligil's books. As he reads them, he realizes that novels written in Turkish are different now; writers do not stop to lecture in the middle of the story. The novels increase his desire to write.

Unpublished Magazine

In time, he does not find writing once a week for *Servetifunun* satisfactory and attempts to publish a magazine with his close friends including Ahmet Suayip, Mehmet Cavit, and Mehmet Rauf. Inspired by *Revue Encyclopedia* they prepare a magazine, *Yeni Mecmua* (New Magazine). Huseyin Cahit puts his father's name on the official documents and gets the permission to publish. However, they cannot achieve it because of an informer's report. Huseyin Cahit refrains from giving his name, saying that the informer was someone he respected.

Literary Conflicts

Because of the failure, he contents himself with *Servetifunun*. Yet the magazine is under the attack of writers he once admired. Ahmet Mithat Efendi stands out as the most aggressive attacker by calling the writers of the magazine "the decadents." Huseyin Cahit and his friends manage to cope with all these attacks as they believe that the one who does wrong to his country is Ahmet Mithat Efendi. Huseyin Cahit says that Ahmet Mithat harmed his country by serving an oppressor.

In Tarik Newspaper

While struggling with attacks in the literary world, Huseyin Cahit and his friend Mehmet Cavit start to work in a newspaper, *Tarik*, meaning route. One of his articles in *Tarik*, "Sciences that help us benefit from the Arabs" creates controversy. In the article, he criticizes the inclination to appreciate anything

Arabic. He considers it an obstacle to benefit from Western culture. This time he is personally attacked by other literary figures that are against anything Western. Other than being insulted as a decadent again, the controversy affects him financially too. Since the government does not pay salary regularly, the civil servants borrow from a charity organization within the ministry. Because of the article, the Arab accountant refuses to lend money to Huseyin Cahit for a while.

However, he does not give up defending his thoughts. When *Ikdam* newspaper accuses Huseyin Cahit of ignorance by changing a letter in his middle name (the third letter of Cahit is changed to "i" making the name Cahil, meaning ignorant in Turkish), he uncovers that *Ikdam's* correspondent Ali Kemal plagiarizes some of his writings. This conflict attracts Said Pasha's attention, and he invites him to his house to appreciate his works. Years later, when Huseyin Cahit is in a difficult situation he asks a favor of him, and Said Pasha helps him find a job as vice principal in Vefa High School.

Sabah Newspaper

Meanwhile, Mihran, the owner of a newspaper, *Sabah*, meaning morning, offers a job to Huseyin Cahit and Mehmet Cavit to compete with *Ikdam*. Since *Tarik* is closed, they accept the offer. While working for *Sabah*, the government bestows medals upon the birth of a prince. However, considering that civil servants are fond of medals, money is requested in return. Huseyin Cahit and his friends do not pay the money not to take the medals. Huseyin Cahit says that those who want to understand the ethos of the period should take into account the censor board. For example, he translates Pierre Loti's *Pêcheur d'Islande* into Turkish but refrains from putting his name on the book because of the revisions of the censor that distorts the translation. Thus, being honored by the government is undisputedly disgraceful.

Semsettin Sami

While working in *Sabah*, he revises the third edition of the French to Turkish and Turkish to French dictionary prepared by Semsettin Sami. As the publisher Mihran does not want to pay Semsettin Sami he prefers to put Huseyin Cahit's name on it. In this way, he can refuse to pay Semsettin Sami. However, Huseyin Cahit does not accept it, and the book is published with Semsettin Sami's name. Huseyin Cahit is offended by that Semsettin Sami writes a preface and does not mention his efforts.

Strike

His departure from *Sabah* occurs in an unusual way. When the writers cannot get a pay raise leader-writer Abdullah Zuhtu communicates with *Ikdam's* writers and organizes a strike. Although the owners of the two newspapers do not get along well with each other, they agree on this matter and do not accept the demands. Thus, Huseyin Cahit and the two newspapers' employees resign and decide to publish a newspaper, *Saadet*, meaning happiness. Yet after a short time, they realize that they are not able to manage it. Except for Abdullah Zuhtu, they quit the newspaper with debts.

Tevfik Fikret's Impact

He does not get paid for his writings in *Servetifunun* but when Tevfik Fikret becomes the director he provides the writers with a small amount. They relate to each other through their shared political and literary ideals although they cannot discuss political matters openly. At some point, they think of escaping from the country to New Zealand because of censorship and then change their mind and plan to settle in a village in Anatolia. However, as Tevfik Fikret gives up the idea, they stay in Istanbul.

New Literature

Huseyin Cahit thinks of launching a special publication series under the heading of *Edebiyati Cedide*, meaning New Literature, and Tevfik Fikret and Mehmet Rauf find the idea meaningful. The first book becomes Huseyin Cahit's *Hayati Muhayyel*, meaning Imaginary Life that is followed by Tevfik Fikret's Broken Violin. The series has other two books written by Huseyin Cahit; *Hayal İcinde* [In Dream], and *Hayati Hakikiye Sahneleri* [Real Life Scenes]. Huseyin Cahit's initial intention is to make *In Dream* the first book of a series, but he does not continue to write.

Servetifunun without Tevfik Fikret

Tevfik Fikret quits *Servetifunun* upon a discussion with the owner Ahmet Ihsan Tokgoz. While leaving, he asks Huseyin Cahit to fill the space he leaves. Huseyin Cahit accepts it but in time, he realizes that Tevfik Fikret is offended that the magazine can function without him. However, when Huseyin Cahit translates a text titled *Edebiyat ve Hukuk* [Literature and Law] the magazine is reported to the government and closed. It is accused of importing the ideas of dangerous people who murdered their king. Subsequently, writers are sued and acquitted. Huseyin Cahit praises the then minister of justice for his honesty.

After that date, *Servetifunun* continues to be published as a newspaper without a literary dimension, and Huseyin Cahit stops writing fiction. He spends his time preparing a Turkish grammar and syntax book in order to erase the influence of Arabic and Persian on Turkish.

After the Young Turk Revolution

He goes back to journalism and starts to work for *Ikdam*. After a while, one of his friends proposes to start their newspaper with Tevfik Fikret. Tevfik Fikret gives the newspaper its name: *Tanin*, meaning Resonance. Yet he resigns for no apparent reason. After his leave, Huseyin Cahit continues to write and discover new writers until the Balkan Wars.

He says that when he was in Malta as an exile, he dealt with his homesickness by translating Annie Vivanti's *I. Divoratori* to Turkish and later continued his translations with the same enthusiasm. He translated many books published in different disciplines to create a special series titled *Ođlumun Kütüphanesi*, [My Son's Library].

Themes

Transformation Huseyin Cahit is a man changes from a traditionalist to a freedom seeker. As his inspirational figures change, his political stance changes. His first novel *Nadide* is a traditionalist text imitating Mithat Efendi's style. However, as he reads French fiction and meets French philosophers, he starts to contextualize texts. For example, his translation *Literature and Law* expresses that literary texts originate from the gaps in the legal order; the literary works published before 1789 are in favor of divorce. After it is legalized, the writers begin to point out the deficiencies of the amendment through their works in France. Therefore, Huseyin Cahit learns to analyze literary works in relation to social mechanisms in time.

Oppression Young Huseyin Cahit spends his youth under the reign of Abdulhamid II. He understands how oppression affects a man's life when he meets his exiled uncle. As he is politicized, he realizes that even reaching out to a literary text is a privilege for a person living under an authoritarian regime. Throughout his writing career, his works are always distorted for ridiculous reasons by censorship. He gives an example to show the rigidity of censorship. He says that he refrained from using the word "nose" in his translations because the censor board associated the word with the big nose of Abdulhamid II. Since the word *burun* means both nose and cape in Turkish, he could not translate the geographical term, cape into Turkish as *burun*. Instead, he described it with long sentences.

Patriotism Huseyin Cahit meets patriotism when his exiled uncle returns home. He reads the books of the exiled writer, Namik Kemal, and intuitively grasps what national feeling is. Although he is like any other young man who has concerns about making a living, he turns his side hustle into a tool of resistance. Most of his writings in newspapers contribute to the intellectual development of his country. He underlines that he and his friends could not touch upon political matters in *Servetifunun* because writers had to convey their ideas in subtle ways without attracting the attention of the censor board at that time.

He seeks a moral guide in the personality of the writer and determines whether a writer is honorable or not by looking at his political stance as in the case of Paul Bourget. Upon learning that Bourget is in favor of kingship and religious community, he stops reading his books. For him, patriotism requires intellectuals to work for independence.

Bibliography

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