

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Uphill: That's How It Was but Not How It's Going III (1996)

Aziz Nesin (1915 – 1995)

OVERVIEW

Aziz Nesin, whose real name is Mehmet Nusret Nesin, is a writer of humor and fiction. He graduates from Kuleli Military High School in 1935, the Turkish Military Academy in 1937, and the Military School of Engineering in 1939. In the third volume of his three-part autobiographical work *So It Comes, So It Will Not Go On*, titled *Uphill* he recounts his years as a student at Kuleli Military High School. However, unlike the first two volumes, the third volume does not proceed chronologically. It even repeats events mentioned in the previous volumes. When Aziz Nesin starts high school, he is a young man who no longer feels indebted to the state as before, but to the people. Therefore, he continues to work hard. However, he also wants to preserve the bond with his friends. In this volume, he shows how far he is willing to go to preserve this bond. In addition, the meaning of the teachers he looks up to becomes clearer. He wants his son Ali Nesin to be surrounded by teachers like the ones he had. Ali Nesin later benefits from the relationships he had with his own teachers. After the abrupt end of his memoirs, the book continues with scattered fragments of memories compiled by Ali Nesin. These fragments consist of repetitions and additions to stories that have already been told. Some of them also convey new memories.

CHARACTERS

Çetin Altan	Journalist, writer, politician
Feza Gürsey	Physics professor
Hamit Doğruer	School principal
Osman Resne	Mathematics teacher
Nihat Aytek	School friend
Reşit Süreyya Gürsey	Physics teacher
Şinasi Sükan	School friend
Mustafa Onanç	School friend

SYNOPSIS

Aziz Nesin feels indebted to the people and continues to work hard. However, he does not want to be ostracized by his friends. For this reason, he comes up with a scheme in the exam of one of his favorite teachers, Reşit Süreyya Gürsey, in order to ensure that his friends also succeed. As a result, he feels guilty toward his teacher. As a high-schooler he starts to share his artistic interests with his friend Nihat Aytek. However, because he is ashamed of his father's poverty, he does not even introduce his best friend Nihat to him. He falls in love with a girl he sees at a tram stop who is his peer. After finding out where she studies, he writes her a letter, but she rejects him because she has a boyfriend. Despite this, his love for her is so overwhelming that even though he has the opportunity to study engineering in Germany after graduation, he hesitates. He graduates from Kuleli Military High School in third place. Despite his success, the reason he ranked third is his mischief; in fact, it is what he does to be appreciated by his friends as well as his teachers. After graduating third, he intends to become a cavalryman but is rejected for being too short. At the suggestion of a friend, he attends the engineering class. Years later, while serving in the army, he realizes that the most fun-loving student of the military school works for the National Intelligence Organization. Again, he is disappointed to see that an old friend he meets years later is someone who does not read novels like he used to. Thus, he realizes how he differs from the people around him. During the days when he is writing his memoirs, he is taken to the hospital one evening when he is alone in his house and he learns that he has no problems. However, he states that human beings have many secrets that cannot be medically detected.

EVENTS

The Debt That Can Never Be Paid

Aziz Nesin gives an example to express how he feels indebted to the people; a bus that is traveling in the dark of the night in a deserted place is blocked by bandits. The bandits demand ten thousand liras from each passenger and kill those who cannot give it right there. Aziz Nesin is one of the passengers and does not have enough money with him. The man sitting right behind him tells him that he can give him ten thousand liras so that he can survive. He takes the ten thousand liras and gives them to the bandits. His life is saved.

When Aziz Nesin starts high school, he starts to question who the state is. What he sees is this; first, there is Allah. Allah is at the center of everything. Then, there is the central government. The central government is the representative of Allah at the center of everything. That is why it is called "religion and state." The state is both everyone and no one. Aziz Nesin states that everyone who has the authority to scold him, in other words his superiors, is the state, those he is equal to are citizens, and those who are inferior to him are the *kuls* (*Kul* was used to describe the subjects of the sultan in the Ottoman Empire). For example, janitors and small civil servants are not the state, but officers, school principals and teachers are the state. They can scold their subordinates for their own good. This is why the state is so feared, and why everyone aspires to become the state.

Over time, his thoughts and feelings about the state change; the state is a concept that does not exist concretely, but can only be represented. It is not an extension of Allah on earth like in the Ottoman period. The state is kept standing by the people. Therefore, it is not the state that looks after him, but the people. Just like that man who gives ten thousand liras to someone he does not know, the people are benevolent. Because the ten thousand liras in that story are not given as a loan; the person does not share his name or address. Even if he did share, owing your life to someone is such a big debt that it cannot be paid with tens of ten thousand liras. This is exactly how Aziz Nesin feels toward the people. The people feed, clothe, shelter, and educate him without knowing him. Thus, thanks to the people, he becomes able to imagine a life better than theirs.

However, he emphasizes that this is a matter of consciousness. Reminding of Mehmet Emin Yurdakul's poem, "Have Your Hands Been Cut?" he explains that the love felt for the people is a different kind of love than parental love. In the poem, a mother who does not have money to give to her gambling son comes to the brink of death when he stabs her. Yet the moment she realizes that he has accidentally cut his own fingers as well, she asks with compassion, "Have your hands been cut?" Aziz Nesin states that parental love is an instinctive love that does not end even at the moment of death, but his love for the people has changed form over the years. Even though he has come to believe that sixty percent of them are foolish and stupid, the feeling of indebtedness toward the people never fades.

Hierarchy

When military students face civilian school students in football matches, they believe they must be the winning side so much that they start fights when the opposite happens. Aziz Nesin witnesses two such fights in Beylerbeyi. In both cases, military school students get into fights with their bandoliers when they realize they are going to lose. Fighting with bandoliers is so common that many students at school tell how they get into a fight by taking off their bandoliers. Aziz Nesin states that the reason for entering a fight with a bandolier is the desire to put someone in their place who dares to attack someone in uniform.

In fact, everything about military school students is designed hierarchically and the visibility of this hierarchy is quite high. For example, middle schoolers have red stripes on their hats, while high schoolers have yellow stripes, and the number of these stripes indicates which grade the person is in. Moreover, since only a few years have passed since the War of Independence, soldiers have great respect in the eyes of society.

In this hierarchical order, a military student who has passed his class can scold classmates who have failed a grade and students in lower grades for not saluting him. This is appropriate according to school rules. So, officers scold students who fail to salute them as a way of enforcing discipline.

However, according to Aziz Nesin, the aim of the student who does this is to impose his superiority on the other. Therefore, since the number of stripes on a student's hat indicates their grade level, one of the greatest fears of those who have failed a class and added an extra stripe or two is being scolded in public by a friend who has advanced to the next grade.

Being a Destructive Nation

Aziz Nesin, in September of 1932, is now a high school student. As he walks toward Kuleli Military High School, he lifts his head and looks back at Çengelköy Military Middle School. To him, it feels like looking at a medieval castle. Yet, by the time he writes his memoirs, a different structure, which is considered more modern, stands where the Çengelköy Military Middle School once was. Based on this, he draws a broader observation: in Turkey's major cities, and even in any place that has undergone the slightest urbanization, the windows of any building left vacant for just a few days are inevitably smashed. He questions whether there exists any other nation as destructive. He admits he hasn't traveled the entire world, but in all the places he has visited, he has never seen stones thrown at empty windows that do no harm to anyone. This destructiveness, he argues, doesn't merely demolish buildings like the Çengelköy Military Middle School. What it truly destroys is history.

Tin Neighborhood

Next to Çengelköy Military Middle School, on the hillside, there is a place known as "Tin Neighborhood" because the single-story, single-room houses there are covered with tins. Most of the people living in this neighborhood work as janitors at the school. By the time Aziz Nesin writes his memoirs, the residents, who had lived there for years without owning official deeds, are granted land titles in the name of "acquired rights." These titles are transferred to their children, and over time, the families become wealthy.

What the School Promised

Aziz Nesin spent his vacations at school because he does not feel comfortable at home. He wanders around the orchards on the hills of Çengelköy, Kandilli, and Beylerbeyi with his friends who also stay at school. While his friends use the bushes they found as whips to attack the imaginary enemy armies, he imagines them sitting there.

When he climbs the hill in İcadiye, where the observatory is located, he is drawn to astronomy. In the tenth grade, he listens to the astronomy lesson with great curiosity, but he knows that he cannot be an astronomer because he will be graduated from military school. Then he remembers that in Turkish history, all the so-called "great men" have a military background. So, he once again decides to become a soldier.

Night Watch

When he starts high school, the number of students in the first grade reaches a thousand due to both the new students and those transferred from Bursa Military High School. The newcomers are seen as rough by the poor children of big cities, like Aziz Nesin, because of their village manners. Some of them are woken up at two on the first night and informed that they will be on duty for 2-3 a.m. watch. Unfamiliar with the rules, a newcomer heads to the kitchen, the dormitory, or the toilets as he is told. There, the student who is supposedly finishing his shift, for instance, the one watching the toilets, hands over the duty, reporting that he has stood the 1–2 a.m. watch, that there have been no incidents in the toilets, how many faucets are clogged, and how many are leaking. Then he passes the responsibility on to the newcomer.

The Difference between Principals

The former principal of Kuleli Military High School is Arif Pasha, whose wife is a famous singer. However, when Aziz Nesin starts high school, there is a new principal; Staff Colonel Rifat Mataracı. Rifat Mataracı speaks with a French accent when talking about Europe, and never laughs or even smiles.

Aziz Nesin says that soldiers are taught to have shadowy faces, that those who laugh are insulted because they are like women, but that Rifat Mataracı's face is not shadowy, but dark, and that he sees the traces of war on his face. Since he himself has lived in poverty, he makes the students live that way. He gives them two slices of bread, some cheese and a few olives for breakfast, and beans, rice, chickpeas, and lentils for lunch and dinner. Aziz Nesin is content with what is given because he cannot

find such food at home, but most of the students complain. Yet, as they are as poor as he is, Aziz Nesin thinks that they complain just to show off.

A few months later, when Rifat Mataracı is assigned to the continent, Staff Colonel Hamit Dođruer takes his place. Hamit Dođruer is a stern commander with a limp in one leg from a war injury, but he knows how to smile. Rifat Mataracı's view of himself as a commander and the school as a barracks becomes even clearer when Hamit Dođruer makes the students feel like they are at a school, not in a barracks. Hamit Dođruer makes the kitchen workers wear white aprons. He gives the students plenty of olives, cheese, and jam for breakfast every morning, and stuffed turkey and fish for lunch and dinner.

After a while, they learn the reason for this difference. While Rifat Mataracı uses the budget allocated to the school sparingly and returns the leftover money to the state at the end of the year, Hamit Dođruer spends the entire budget. As a 17-year-old young man, Aziz Nesin finds what Rifat Mataracı does more appropriate, considering how poor the people who have just come out of the war are. However, when he later establishes the Nesin Foundation, he behaves more like Hamit Dođruer.

An Encounter

In 1983, Aziz Nesin is hospitalized in Çapa Hospital after suffering a stroke. Once he overcomes the critical stage, visitors begin to come and go. A decade later, on November 28, 1993, as he speaks on the phone with his old classmate, Mustafa Onanç, the latter recalls a moment from his time in the hospital. He says that the room was crowded and there was a female doctor. He stepped out with her. Years ago, when they were students at Çengelköy Military Middle School, he distributed the leftover food from the cafeteria through iron bars to people from nearby makeshift homes. The female doctor was one of the children who often came to that window. She lived with her family in a makeshift home under a plane tree near the school.

Aziz Nesin is touched. Though he wishes he could have met her, he feels joy knowing she isn't ashamed of her past or poverty. Her journey, from hardship to healing others, gives him hope. As Mustafa Onanç speaks, Aziz Nesin sees himself as a boy of nine or ten, standing in line with other poor families in front of the Abbas Halim Pasha Mansion on the island, waiting to receive some ashura. The image brings a lump to his throat. But moments like these have shaped his life.

Osman the Algebra

The first lesson in the first year of high school is mathematics. Osman Bey, known as "Osman the Algebra" who has not yet taken the surname "Resne" since the surname law has not been passed, enters. All the students stand up, but a few of them are giggling. Osman the Algebra spits in the face of the laughing child who is closest to him. Everyone suddenly falls silent. He walks slowly with his arms apart from his body to the podium and sits down. The representative announces how many people are in the class. He moves slowly again, takes the ink pen in his hand and dips it into the inkwell and signs his black-bound notebook. Aziz Nesin, who is a representative, has seen him sign slowly many times and has engraved it in his memory.

The teachers on duty stay overnight at the school on certain nights each month. On the nights when Osman the Algebra is on duty, Aziz Nesin answers his private letters. Sometimes he sees Osman the Algebra in his white nightgown because wearing pajamas is not common among the people. He summarizes the answers to the letters to Aziz Nesin and he writes a reply according to this summary. Sometimes there are letters written in old Turkish, and Aziz Nesin replies to them in old Turkish. During the conversation they have while writing these letters, Osman the Algebra tells him that when they were on a break from the war, they used to shoot the nails hammered into the crumbling wooden planks in the village houses they stayed in and pull them out of their places, and that this was their greatest entertainment during the nights of the war. As a matter of fact, Osman the Algebra is one of the friends of Niyazi from Resen, who was declared a hero by the Committee of Union and Progress government. He was one of the 208 people who, together with Niyazi from Resen, went to the mountains on July 8, 1908. After they went to the mountains, Abdülhamid reinstated the constitution and thus the Constitutional Era II began.

One weekend, while walking toward Çengelköy Pier with his friends after school, they see Osman the Algebra walking in front of them. Since he moves slowly as usual, they are undecided whether it would be disrespectful to get in front of him. Because the ferry is about to depart. A few of them could not

resist and start running in front of Osman the Algebra. While the dockman pulls the boarding ladder and unhooks the ropes from the bollards, Osman the Algebra calls out in Resen dialect, "Captain, where are you going without us?" The captain, who has just sailed two or three meters, docks the ship to the dock and greets him smilingly from the window.

Osman the Algebra and Reşit

Reşit, who was transferred to Kuleli Military High School from Bursa Military High School because of failing a grade, is a student that Aziz Nesin admires for his mathematical ability. His grasp of mathematics is so strong that he cannot tolerate someone else who understands a subject better than him.

Osman the Algebra, who is fond of Reşit, calls him to the board whenever another student cannot solve a problem. Yet, one day, when Reşit cannot solve a problem either, he calls Aziz Nesin to the board. Aziz Nesin solves the problem, but Reşit insists on his own solution so much that Osman the Algebra gets up and slaps him on the back of the head.

However, he is equally unsuccessful and unpretentious in verbal lessons. He is very afraid that Nafiz the Lambe, the teacher of the military punishment course, will fail him. Finally, he cannot stand this stress and commits suicide by jumping off a ferry into the sea.

Years later, when Aziz Nesin is a student at the Military Academy, he and his friends come across Osman the Algebra on a ferry. They kiss his hand as a sign of respect and start chatting. At one point, when they tell how Reşit killed himself, Osman the Algebra starts crying by hitting his knees with his hands and saying, "I beat him up!" Aziz Nesin and his friends start crying without knowing exactly what they are crying for.

Aziz Nesin notes that as he writes this memory, he finds himself crying again, still not fully sure why.

Why Osman the Algebra is Loved

Despite everything, Osman the Algebra is a beloved teacher. Some children try to get beaten or spat on by him, knowing that he'll feel sorry afterward and help them pass the grade. When he calls a student to the board, the first thing he asks is where they are from. If the student is from Malatya, he mutters in his local dialect, "You've brought shame to Malatya." If it's Adapazarı, he says, "You've brought shame to Adapazarı."

Sometimes, he also acts as a mediator to help students who are failing in other subjects. Aziz Nesin's friend Mustafa Onanç tells an incident as an example. At the end of high school, one student who has failed the make-up exam tells Mustafa that their geography teacher, Niyazi Balıkçı, is determined to fail him again. Mustafa turns to Osman the Algebra for help. Osman tells him to have his friend show up at the exam hall on the day of the test. When the student goes to the hall on the exam day, he finds Osman the Algebra there with the French teacher Salih Arif. A short while later, geography teacher Niyazi Balıkçı joins them and Osman the Algebra asks him if he was in the war. Niyazi Balıkçı says that he was. Thereupon, Osman the Algebra makes a fist with his right hand, strikes the left side of his chest, and says "You need a heart, a heart" and then adds that the student has a heart. The student passes the exam and graduates and starts the Military Academy with his friends.

Aziz Nesin states that Osman the Algebra does not want the students to pass the grades without learning the subjects, and that is why he urges Aziz Nesin to make his classmates study, but they avoid studying. Sometimes, even though he tells the students what he plans to ask in the exams, some cannot answer the questions. In such cases, if other teachers are present at the exam hall, he says the student is actually one of his hardworking students and gives a passing grade. But when a student truly knows the subject, he proudly tells the other teachers "Ask him whatever you want."

Aziz Nesin says that although he cannot measure Osman the Algebra's knowledge of mathematics, he is a teacher who knows how to teach mathematics very well but does not want the students to fail simply because of the things they do not understand. Indeed, all the top students and hardworking ones like Aziz Nesin dream of becoming generals, but most generals are made up of average students. Many of Aziz Nesin's friends, whom he helped pass the class by cheating, later become generals.

Osman the Algebra's Children

Osman the Algebra has two sons and a daughter. As Aziz Nesin and his classmate Nihat Aytek are walking toward Kandilli Pier, they see five newcomers harassing Osman the Algebra's daughter. They attack them, even though they are burly because they are both on the wrestling team. Meanwhile, the girl escapes and saves herself. Years later, Aziz Nesin hears that she is married to Ahmet Demir, the Istanbul Police Chief, and he gets very upset. Because Ahmet Demir is one of the worst people he has ever met in his life.

Osman the Algebra's eldest son Fuat is in his last year of school. Aziz Nesin deduces that he is a tough boy from his behavior at the matches. His middle son Selahattin is a very calm boy. Osman the Algebra gets permission from the school administration to let Aziz Nesin give science lessons to his son Selahattin. Aziz Nesin teaches his son at his mansion in Beylerbeyi from the last class until dinner time. The reason why Osman the Algebra himself does not teach the subjects is that back in his day, subjects such as physics and chemistry were not taught.

One day, while he is studying in the hall with windows overlooking the sea, Osman the Algebra enters and sits down on a sofa. His son Selahattin is more nervous about his presence than Aziz Nesin. Osman the Algebra listens to them for a while and then shouts, "Where is my cigarette case? Find my case!" Immediately footsteps are heard from above. Aziz Nesin does not know whether he should look for his plate with them. Osman the Algebra shouts again and moves a little in his seat, revealing his case under his robe. Aziz Nesin is too shy to say that he is sitting on his case. As Osman the Algebra is about to shout again he notices his case and says, "Who would put this case under me?"

When Aziz Nesin is in his senior year, Selahattin is enrolled in Kuleli Military High School. Years later, when he is working as a journalist, they run into each other on the train. Selahattin is now a colonel. When Aziz Nesin brings up Ahmet Demir, the husband of Selahattin's sister, Selahattin refers to him as "The tin." Since Aziz Nesin calls Ahmet Demir as "Ahmet the Tin" playing on his surname "Demir" which means iron in Turkish, in his satirical newspaper *Markopaşa*, he thinks that Selahattin is reading his work and that he is not on good terms with his brother-in-law either. This pleases him.

Şinasi Sükan

Şinasi Sükan has been Aziz Nesin's friend since middle school. However, they do not study in the same class in high school. There are fourteen sections in the same grade, ten of them study French as a foreign language, two study English and two study German. Aziz Nesin is in the English section and Şinasi Sükan is in the German section. The sharpest students of the school come from the English and German sections. Şinasi Sükan is one of the sharpest students from the German section. He later loses a leg in the Korean War and becomes a veteran. While Aziz Nesin's memoirs are serialized in *Akşam* newspaper, he writes a letter to the newspaper about him. Aziz Nesin includes this letter in his book.

In the letter, Şinasi Sükan writes that his friendship with Aziz Nesin began in the fall of 1930. He says that they call him "hairy" because he is hairy. He describes him as a person who cares a lot about his friends, but adds that he does not see anyone to protect them during the days when the police are after him. He says he loves nature very much that they even walked together all the way from Harbiye to Kilyos and back. Even though he is now a pot-bellied man, he is fond of sports and even a very good wrestler. On days he did not study, he would say, "I could not study today. I have ruined the people's bread." While he was a student at the Military Science Training School, he also attended the Academy of Fine Arts. And he always wants to be someone important in life.

Questionnaire Notebooks

Female students at other schools send questionnaire notebooks for boys to answer. These questionnaires contain many stereotypical questions ranging from which flowers they like to their favorite books and artists. Since Aziz Nesin has a strong pen and writes witty answers, his friends ask him to answer these notebooks on their behalf. He uses the nickname "Hairy daddy" in one of these answers, and his friends start to call him "Hairy." Aziz Nesin states that many of his friends assume that they gave him this nickname because he is hairy, but he is not a person with a thick beard or a hairy body, even though his hair is bushy.

The daughter of a deceased friend of his gives Aziz Nesin the questionnaire notebook he had left behind, and he shares the answers to one of the questions in the notebook. The question is about the favorite author and his work. In the answers, some people mention the names of writers such as Oscar Wilde, Victor Hugo, Rabindranath Tagore, and some of their works. Aziz Nesin points out that books by authors such as Tagore have not yet been translated into Turkish and says that the answers are not accurate. Moreover, he does not believe that high school students read novels in French or English and says that these are simply the names mentioned in literature classes.

Since these questionnaires are forbidden, he does not keep them. Students' belongings are often searched. Aziz Nesin reads all books other than school books in the libraries he visits on his vacation days. He reads all of Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar's books in this way. He is so impressed by Falih Rıfkı's Zeytindağı that he writes a note saying "All Turks should read this book."

Ali from Bursa

There is a student in the class who does not stand out in any way; Ali from Bursa. One day, while Aziz Nesin is chatting with him in the school garden, he realizes that Ali has read many novels. He admires him especially because he has read all the books of Reşat Nuri Gültekin, which he has not read yet. He borrows books from him and reads many novels. After that conversation, they never have the chance to chat again.

However, years later, when Aziz Nesin receives his first international award, there are many congratulatory articles about him in the newspapers. Just in those days, he receives a phone call from Ali. Now, Ali is an artillery battalion commander in the provinces and asks for his home address to visit him. Aziz Nesin is very happy to receive this call and welcomes Ali to his home. At their first meeting, they hug longingly. But after some time passes, Ali listens to Aziz Nesin without speaking. At one point Aziz Nesin asks him if he still reads novels, and is saddened to learn that he does not. He asks him which newspaper he follows Ali replies that he doesn't read many newspapers. Finding nothing to talk about, they both fall silent. While eating, no sound is heard except the clinking of cutlery and the smacking of lips. Aziz Nesin wishes for the meal to end quickly so he can leave as soon as possible. They hug again as they say goodbye. At that moment, Aziz Nesin feels as if he has lost a cherished memory from his student years.

Stolen Piggy Bank

One day at school he receives a letter from Hilmi. In the letter, it writes that a friend of his from school had come to their house saying that he got permission from school to go to the hospital, that he had asked for his piggy bank to be delivered to Aziz Nesin in the evening, and that he had given it to him, but that he could not make sense of it. Aziz Nesin states that no one from his section had been granted leave that week, that he had not tell anyone that he kept his piggy bank at the Hilmi's house, so this person must have somehow known that his piggy bank was nearly full. After that, he never buys a piggy bank again.

The Book That Inspired the Coup Plotters

At school, publications such as novels, poems and newspapers are collected during searches. However, there are some books that are not banned. One of these books is Grigoriy Petrov's *The Country of White Lilies* and the other is Pertev Demirhan's *The Real Power of the Japanese*. The former tells the idealistic story of Finland's development, the latter how the Japanese preserve their culture while acquiring Western technology.

For example, when Admiral Togo, who fought in the war against the Russians in 1905, is retired, he is asked what kind of position he wants, and he replies that he wants to be a teacher in a village. After a while, he is told that his request cannot be fulfilled because he had not received the necessary training to teach in a village school. Like Turkey, Japan sends its young people to the West for education. When these students fail, they commit hara-kiri and kill themselves. According to another story of "morality" told by Pertev Demirhan, when a newly married Japanese soldier joins the war in 1905, his wife kills herself by committing hara-kiri because she does not want him to keep his mind on her.

While Aziz Nesin reads the first book with enthusiasm and is immersed in dreams, years later, he begins to find the second book unrealistic. For although the book states that traditions and customs are essential for development and that the Japanese have achieved this, Aziz Nesin states that in reality, capitalist morality has replaced all kinds of traditions and customs.

After the May 27, 1960 coup, Yaşar Kemal interviews the coup plotters for *Cumhuriyet*. In the interview, he asks them which books had inspired them before the coup. Many of them say that they had been inspired by *The Country of White Lilies*.

Femininity

It is not only forbidden to read certain books at school, but also to write about anything other than heroism and patriotism. Those who write anything other than poems to be read on important days are not taken seriously among the students. They are seen as “feminine” for expressing their feelings. Nevertheless, there are students who write poetry.

A friend, Necati, who is interested in poetry and painting, likes to be alone and has a beautiful handwriting, asks Aziz Nesin to write for a magazine he plans to publish. Aziz Nesin delivers the manuscript, but the magazine is seized in a search after a while. While they expect to be expelled from school, they receive no punishment. Moreover, the school administration keeps the magazine in the school library.

On Military Service

Aziz Nesin, who is in the army from the age of fourteen to twenty-nine, says that military service seems illogical to many people, that he himself was not a militarist even when he was in the army, but that he loves military service as a profession and that it is a profession that operates according to highly logical rules. According to him, the reason why military service is seen as irrational is that it is a profession that does not help people to live, but to kill them.

In 1966, while he is at a festival in Georgia, a handsome young Soviet general comes to his table during a meal at a restaurant and tells him that he likes the Russian translations of his books. He invites Aziz Nesin to the city where he is stationed with his unit in Siberia. During the conversation, he often describes himself as a pacifist soldier and states that he does his military service to keep the peace.

Aziz Nesin says that he and other like-minded soldiers are sincere about their pacifism, but that it is impossible for any soldier to be a pacifist. Because there is not a single army whose aim is not to kill. Aziz Nesin thinks that this is where the seemingly illogical aspect of military service stems from. He states that this is why people from all other professions that aim to keep people alive find military service illogical.

The soldiers almost never smile because they are sending the soldiers under their command to their death. Captain Kâmil Çelikkol, whom they nickname “Mechanism,” tells them at every opportunity, “The soldier’s face must be shadowed!” Because no commander can send the soldiers under his command to their death with a smile. To illustrate the issue of sending soldiers to their death, he gives the example of Doğan Güreş, who is the Chief of General Staff at the time he writes his memoirs. In his speech published in the newspapers on May 2, 1994, Doğan Güreş, while describing his duty, says, “Look, it is like nothing else, you order people to die. You send them to their death.”

For this reason, Aziz Nesin notes that the ideal soldier of his time was Field Marshal Fevzi Çakmak, who did not talk much, did not laugh, and sometimes ignored what he heard. In the first year of the Military Academy, there is a course that teaches how a soldier conducts himself. Since Aziz Nesin cannot remember the name of this lesson, he phones his friends, but they cannot remember it either. In this lesson, it is taught that one should not talk about things that are not necessary and useful to oneself, even if it is necessary for one’s interlocutor.

Aziz Nesin notes that the two people who break this rule with their excessive talkativeness are Kenan Evren and Doğan Güreş. He even shares a passage from *Nokta* magazine dated May 22-28, 1994, in which Doğan Güreş, the Chief of General Staff, is described as “the most colorful and talkative Chief of General Staff.” He then shares another passage from a magazine or a book.

The passage recounts how Kadir Ercan, a *Hürriyet* reporter who spent three weeks in Somalia, where 11 journalists were killed in a single month, was expelled from the country, and how the Turkish soldier was portrayed as a figure who does not get tired, sleep, feel cold or hunger, eat, or drink. After Kadir Ercan reports that a soldier has fainted, Lieutenant General Çevik Bir warns him: “Turkish soldiers do

not faint.” Two days later, Ercan’s permission to remain with the Turkish unit is revoked. Drawing from this incident, the passage notes that Turkish soldiers are, after all, human; they get hungry, they feel cold, and of course, they can faint.

Aziz Nesin comments that this is the civilian logic, and that the opposite is military logic. According to military logic, a soldier does not feel fear, does not get cold, does not laugh, and does not talk much. Reminding readers that he himself underwent military training, he adds that he is neither talkative nor smiling.

If Atatürk Smiles

Buca Municipality invites Aziz Nesin to give a speech and sign his books. When Aziz Nesin enters the mayor’s office, the dean appointed by the newly established Council of Higher Education is also inside. While chatting with Aziz Nesin, he talks about how progressive he is and strongly criticizes the Council of Higher Education as an undemocratic institution. Then, claiming to be an Atatürkist, he says that he is disturbed by the fact that Atatürk is not represented smiling in any sculpture or painting, so he asked the sculptors and painters at the university to create works depicting Atatürk smiling, and that if he visits his faculty, he will see smiling Atatürk sculptures and paintings. Aziz Nesin is so surprised by this that he listens to the dean without any reaction.

Sullenness

Aziz Nesin is often told that he is sullen at book signings. Although he always says that he can’t laugh for no reason and tells anecdotes about how humor writers are not smiling people, he is indeed a sullen person. In fact, because of his military training, his face is “shadowed,” as he is told.

According to him, Turks are also sullen. However, they are a society with a sense of humor. They know how to mock and ridicule very well, but this is because they are not smiling. Laughter is only a defense mechanism for them. That’s why he thinks that he himself can be a surly humorist.

Soldier Nation

Aziz Nesin observes that Turks are proud of being a soldier nation, and that military dress and any kind of clothing that symbolizes state authority gives honor. To make sense of this, he analyzes the word “civil.” “Civil,” meaning “civilized” in French, carries the dual meanings of “civilized” and “citizen” in Ottoman Turkish. Aziz Nesin states that in his childhood, people in Turkey were essentially divided into two categories: “soldiers” and “mavericks.” In this context, the term “civilian” was synonymous with “maverick,” someone outside the disciplined military order. That is why families wanted their sons to join the military first to become a man. There is no place for women in this picture.

Military service is an emotion so deeply ingrained in everyone that when Aziz Nesin’s father is asked where he is from, instead of telling the name of the city, he gives the name of the army in the city. Therefore, when his father says that he is from the third army, he cannot understand for a long time why he is also considered to be from the third army. When he grows up, he learns that the city where his father was born is the city where the third army is based.

Teaching People

One reason Aziz Nesin says he likes the military is that he teaches many illiterate men, who don’t even know how to walk or run properly, how to read and write, walk and run, and speak appropriately over the course of two years. When he compares the soldiers’ state at the time of discharge with how they were on their first day, he realizes the value of his teaching. But later, when he encounters a discharged soldier in his village and sees that he has returned to his former manners, he witnesses how the environment these men live in erases everything they had learned. Aziz Nesin runs into men like this more than once.

About Teachers

His physics teacher, who leaves no particular memory in Aziz Nesin’s mind, is the father of Faruk Gürler, the Chief of General Staff during the 1971 military memorandum. Because of his white hair, students call him “Cotton Father.” When students treat him disrespectfully, he says he has never experienced anything like it in his life. Soon after, he leaves the school, and Reşit Süreyya replaces him.

Reşit Süreyya graduates from medical school and continues his education in England and France, eventually shifting his interest to physics. He teaches at Kuleli Military High School for a while. To

describe him properly, Aziz Nesin shares a letter written in 1963 by one of his former students, Sedat Beşe, a retired lieutenant colonel, following Reşit Süreyya's death in the U.S.

The letter states that after graduating with top honors in medical school, Reşit Süreyya goes to Germany and switches to physics. He is sent to Azerbaijan as a teacher, where he marries another teacher like himself. Before the war, he works in Germany with Heisenberg. When World War II breaks out, he returns to Turkey and teaches mathematics in Polatlı. He is curious whether the Germans or Americans will be the first to use the atomic bomb. After the Americans do, he writes a book explaining what the atom bomb is and submits it to Turkish authorities, but it is ignored. Fearing the information might fall into the hands of the Soviets, he hides it. He uses a letter of recommendation from Lord Rutherford to go to America, but when he is asked to become a U.S. citizen in order to join the atomic program, he refuses and begins offering mathematical consultancy to private firms, earning his living this way.

Curiosity about the Teacher's Private Life

While wandering through the old book market, Aziz Nesin comes across a poetry book compiled by Reşit Süreyya Bey and buys it. He admires Reşit Süreyya Bey as a scientist with a passion for the arts. Although he is not a good teacher, Aziz Nesin is sure that he is a great scholar. That's why he's also curious about his personal life. He feels deeply saddened when he learns that Reşit Süreyya has separated from his wife, Remziye Hanım, and he becomes curious about the reason. He reads an interview with Remziye Hisar and draws some conclusions from it. He includes this interview, published in *Hayat* magazine on October 27, 1977, in his book in full.

According to the interview, Remziye Hisar, born in Ürgüp in 1902, lives in a time when most female students become elementary school teachers after graduation. However, she graduates at the top of her class and completes a preparatory program offered by the school, after which she is sent to Azerbaijan as a teacher. There, she meets and marries Reşit Süreyya. A year later, their son Feza is born. She teaches for two years at the Adana Girls' Teacher Training School. When her husband is sent to Paris for an internship, she also obtains a scholarship and goes to Paris to continue her education.

Because her level of education is deemed sufficient, she is called back to Turkey, where she teaches chemistry at Erenköy Girls' High School for a year. However, her dream is to pursue a doctorate. She finds another scholarship and returns to Paris. She gives birth to her daughter in Paris and brings her sister along to help her. She goes to school with her son. When her husband's internship is over, she is expected to drop out and return to Turkey, but she resists this mindset and separates from him.

When she returns to Turkey, she continues her academic journey without support from anyone and eventually earns the title of professor. Her son, Feza Gürsey, later receives the Oppenheimer Prize. Her daughter, Deha Gürsey, becomes a psychiatrist.

A Chemistry Trick

One day, the first class is chemistry and the second is physics. Reşit Süreyya Bey plans to make a midterm exam. While conducting an experiment in the laboratory in chemistry class, their teacher pours acid into a tube containing sulfur, and the smell of intestinal gas spreads inside. In the next class, Reşit Süreyya Bey comes to the classroom and dictates three questions for the exam. Şevket the Mud, who was transferred to Kuleli Military High School because he failed at Bursa Military High School, asks Aziz Nesin on which page of the book the answer is. Aziz Nesin says he does not know. Soon the smell of intestinal gas permeates the classroom. As Şevket pours acid into the sulfur tube he took from the chemistry laboratory, the smell drives Reşit Süreyya Bey back from where Şevket is sitting, allowing him to copy his answers undisturbed. Unable to tolerate the smell any longer, Reşit Süreyya Bey repeatedly tells the students who want to go to the restroom to do so immediately. After the class is over, he quickly leaves the classroom. When the exam results are announced, Şevket learns that he got a 1. Because his friend, whom he had asked which page of the book the answer was on, had purposely given him the wrong answer.

A Case of Copying

In an upper grade, the bully and lazy student convinces the hardworking student to help him cheat on a math exam. Realizing during the exam that he doesn't have enough time to show the answers, the hardworking student tells the lazy one that he will whisper the answers to him, but that he has to

change what he whispers a little. At the end of the exam, he asks him if he made small changes as he said, the lazy student says "Sure! I wrote minus when you said plus, and plus when you said minus."

Stating that even generals come out of such students, Aziz Nesin notes that it may not be clear at what age a person might mature.

An Intriguing Case of Copying

When Aziz Nesin sees how scared his classmates are about a midterm exam to be given by Reşit Süreyya Bey in his last year of high school, he devises a plan. At the end of each chapter in the physics book, there are questions from past baccalaureate exams in famous European high schools. No matter what question Reşit Süreyya Bey dictates for the exam, everyone will write down three questions they've selected from those baccalaureate examples along with their answers. Aziz Nesin works day and night to solve the three questions that were once asked at Lyon High School. Meanwhile, others explain the situation to Dursun Bey, the class officer who will be present with Reşit Süreyya Bey in the exam, and ask for his help. The idea is that, no matter which questions Reşit Süreyya Bey dictates, everyone will insist he dictated those three questions and Dursun Bey will back them up as a witness.

On the day of the exam, Reşit Süreyya Bey dictates three questions, but everyone writes the three questions they have memorized. Many students quickly hand in their papers and leave. Aziz Nesin, feeling remorse for the plan, deliberately writes wrong answers. A few days later, Reşit Süreyya Bey calls him into the teachers' lounge. In a class of 60 students, Mustafa Biricik from Biga had written the right questions, even though he could not solve them correctly. Aziz Nesin is very ashamed of the situation he has gotten himself into. He is also irritated with Mustafa Biricik who, instead of saying that he would not participate in the plan, chose to act in a way that left them all exposed and embarrassed. Reşit Süreyya Bey gives failing grades to everyone except Aziz Nesin and later arranges another exam for him.

A Scholar Who Doesn't Deign to Answer

Aziz Nesin's son Ali Nesin wants to pursue a doctorate in the United States after studying in Lausanne. Aziz Nesin looks for a university with a good mathematician rather than a very prestigious university for his son. His friend, Yaşar Trak suggests him write a letter to Kurşunluoğlu, a famous professor in the US (The person in question is probably Behram Kurşunoğlu, since there is no famous Turkish scientist with this surname in the US). Aziz Nesin hesitates to write to someone who does not know him, but Yaşar Trak tells him that the famous professor surely knows him. Following his friend's suggestion, Aziz Nesin introduces his son in a long letter and asks if there is a professor he would recommend for his son.

After a while, he receives a two-and-a-half line reply written in English by the secretary of his interlocutor. The answer lists Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. When Aziz Nesin reads it, he swears angrily and starts pacing around the house. He always replies even to letters in which he is cursed at, if there is an address on the envelope. This treatment makes him very angry for this reason. He thinks that this famous professor is a bitter man who, no matter how educated he is, has not refined his manners.

Feza Gürsey Intervenes

Since Haldun Taner's wife at the time, Leyla Pamir, is a friend of Feza Gürsey's wife Suha Hanım, Aziz Nesin gets Feza Gürsey's address from Haldun Taner and writes him a letter. Afterwards, they become friends. At this point, he quotes an article written by Ali Nesin in *Bilim ve Teknik*, meaning Science and Technique, in April 1994.

In the article Ali Nesin tells that when his father is looking through the documents he had collected over the years he finds a photograph of Reşit Süreyya Bey. He, looking at that photograph says "My dear!" Ali Nesin thinks that his father remembers Reşit Süreyya Bey as a young man and sees him as a child because of his own age. Later, while Feza Gürsey is giving a lecture at the Collège de France, he goes to listen to him as a university student. While listening to him, he is impressed by his fluent French and the liveliness of his lectures. Feza Gürsey vouches for him at Yale University. After learning this, Ali Nesin feels more responsible for his studies. Years later, when he goes to the Feza Gürsey Science Center in Ankara, he sees his photograph and wants to say "My dear!" just like his father.

Girls

Aziz Nesin's favorite friend is Nihat Aytek, who is transferred from Bursa Military High School. Nihat Aytek's older sister, whose father is a soldier and mother a housewife, is a student at the American College. On some days off, Aziz Nesin stays at their home, Nihat's sister says she wants to introduce them to her friends. They, trying to appear indifferent, pretend not to care.

Aziz Nesin believes that if he wants to marry a virgin, he should remain a virgin himself. One day, he asks his teacher, Ismail Hakkı Bey, how the Virgin Mary could have been a virgin. Ismail Hakkı Bey explains how sperm and egg unite, then adds that there's a rumor claiming the Virgin Mary became pregnant by a carpenter.

One day, Nihat's sister invites them to a Safiye Ayla concert at her school and tells them that two of her friends will meet them at the entrance and show them around. That week, they try to smooth out the wrinkles in their trousers by placing them under their beds. Although they never speak of the girls, they think about them day and night.

Aziz Nesin started shaving two years earlier. His friend, Mustafa Onanç, doesn't want to spend money on shaving foam, so he simply lathers his face by rubbing his brush on shaving soap. After the age of 55, Aziz Nesin also begins to think shaving foam is unnecessary and starts shaving like friend. But back then, he mocks him for doing so. While shaving with him, he accidentally cuts a spot on his face. That day, for the first time, he tries to style his hair by wetting it, but in vain. His hair still stands straight up.

He and Nihat head out for the concert. When they reach the pier, Nihat suggests buying chewing gum. His aim is to show the girls who will meet them at the entrance that they don't care about them. But as soon as they come face to face with the girls, both of them spit out their gum. While the girls give them a tour of the school, Aziz Nesin sees students reading books in the library and thinks to himself that such a thing would never happen at their own school.

After that day, they never see those girls again because they are friends of Nihat's older sister, and flirting with your sister's friends is considered inappropriate. Aziz Nesin later reflects that he has never truly been able to see women as human beings. To him, a woman is a being above human. In every woman, he sees his mother, who is delicate, fragile, dignified, and out of reach. He believes this idealization is the reason he is never happy in his romantic life.

A Transformation

Aziz Nesin stays at the school on a vacation day. The school is empty. As he steps into the schoolyard he spots a boy in the garden. He is a new student who has just graduated from Fatsa Secondary School. He is very good at math. When they sit on a bench and start chatting, they start asking each other math problems. As Faik takes a stick in his hand and easily solves the problems he writes on the ground, Aziz Nesin is surprised that a boy in tattered clothes knows mathematics so well.

Years later, after leaving the military service, he sees him on Bankalar Street. They hug; Faik is wearing his uniform because he is a captain. However, he is walking with a limp because his leg was injured during a cannon shot. He tells him that there is a possibility of his leg being amputated. Later, in 1957, when Aziz Nesin is on his way from Erenköy to visit Kemal Tahir, who lives in Suadiye, he sees Faik at the taxi stand in Suadiye. He gets out of the taxi and goes up to him. Faik is crying, saying that he wants to go home. Aziz Nesin realizes that he is senile, he cannot stay with him because he is in a hurry, but he immediately puts him in a taxi, overpays the taxi driver and asks him to take him to a police station and then to his home. He gives him his phone number and asks him to call him to call and give an update.

A Book from the Past

In the libraries he visits on his days off, he reads the war memoirs of German generals because he thinks that he will be a general himself. However, one of the books he reads, Falih Rıfki Atay's *Zeytin Dağı*, makes a great impression on him. Years later, in 1989, when he sees that the book is published again, he reads it for the second time and looks at the notes he had taken on the book when writing his memoirs. In one of these notes, he expresses his astonishment that a man like Falih Rıfki Atay would secretly negotiate with Adnan Menderes to secure paper for his newspaper.

What Happens to the Most Cheerful Boy in a Military School?

Nedim from Üsküdar is the most popular student at Kuleli Military High School. He is too cheerful and funny to be a soldier. Aziz Nesin knows him because of a satire he says in Azeri dialect, the satire is about an Azeri exaggerating everything. In those days the Azeris are known as Persians and Persians are known for their exaggerations. So when someone exaggerates something they are called "Persian braggart." Nedim performs on the school's theater stage, which is only used for movie screenings, and talk in Laz, Persian, Kurdish, and Jewish dialects, making everyone laugh with his impressions.

In those days, even if the music played is not jazz, every orchestra is called a "jazz band." Nedim forms a jazz band from the school's band and they lower their instruments from the windows with ropes to play at engagements and weddings. However, one day, the school principal, Hamit Doğruer hears about this and warns him. Nedim promises that he will never do such a thing again. Yet, one day, he performs on stage with the famous actor İsmail Dümbüllü and is photographed riding a donkey backwards. Afterwards, a party is held in the vineyards of Maltepe. Anyone who pays the entrance fee can eat as many grapes as they want, but they cannot take them with them. Nedim takes the stage that day dressed as a juggler. He is photographed there too. When these photos fall into the hands of Hamit Bey, Nedim is expelled from school.

Years pass. While Aziz Nesin is serving as a first lieutenant in Kars, he is informed that a villager in the border village of Kars had made a deal with a Russian to light the stove of his house and smoke from the chimney whenever the Russian asks him to do so, and that he receives 35 cents for each burning. A committee is formed to investigate this villager who is acting as a subcontractor for the Russian agent. Aziz Nesin, as an engineer lieutenant, takes part in this committee to draw up a plan of the area in question and determine whether the smoke can be seen from across the border. He will be joined by three other people from Erzurum, one of whom will be a civilian. The civilian is an officer of the National Intelligence Organization. When he goes to meet the people from Erzurum, he sees that the civilian is Nedim. They hug but behaved somewhat formally toward each other.

Because of the heavy snowfall, they rent a sled. They set off as five people with the sled driver. The year is 1941 and the snow has reached half a meter in some places and up to two meters in others. As they move on the white road, they encounter wolves and foxes, but they have to go slowly to avoid rolling. When they reach the village, the headman realizes that the state has set foot in the village and welcomes them to his house and feeds them. After all, the state can do no good, but it can do harm.

Stating that he is writing this memoir in the middle of the night, hours before his prostate surgery in the morning, Aziz Nesin does not continue.

The Beauties He Cannot Share with Anyone

On his day off, Aziz Nesin buys a chocolate cake from a Bulgarian pastry shop and goes to the theater after eating it on foot. In those days, there are no theaters in Istanbul except the Millet Theater, the Ferah Theater, and the Darülbedayi, meaning "house of beauty," which is later renamed the City Theaters. Aziz Nesin comes here to watch operettas. The most famous of these operettas is *Lüküs Hayat*. While the audience with means sit in the cherry-rot colored seats, poor people like Aziz Nesin would run up the stairs to get one of the chairs on the balcony. However, he can never find a chair with a good view of the stage by jumping ahead of everyone else. But the whole audience laughs at everything that is being staged. Everyone is so ready to laugh that they even laugh when the actors turn to Ekrem Reşit Rey, the playwright, and Cemal Reşit Rey, who composed the music for the play, sitting on the sidelines, and make remarks. Aziz Nesin states that at that age he was not yet mature enough to digest such beauties on his own, so he was always looking for a friend like himself, but he could not find one.

A Punishment and the Conditions Leading to It

Aziz Nesin does not want to stay at home, both because he is not comfortable in the two-room house built by his father and because he is worn out on the way home. When he goes home, he gets off the ferry from Çengelköy at the Galata Bridge's pier in Sirkeci, walks to the tram stop, waits fifteen or twenty minutes for the tram, takes the packed tram to Şehremini, and walks from there to their house in Mevlanakapı. During both summer and winter, the road is so poorly maintained and dirty that his clothes either get muddy or covered in dust. For this reason, he wishes he had never lived in that house. He is not even interested in his neighbors. The only neighbors he remembers are the tall "Sugar sister" known for her masculine demeanor, a horse-drawn carriage driver who is a hoarder and

a man who works as a carpenter at Tekel. He likes this carpenter the most. The man does his work so delicately that he boasts of the thin wooden frames of the showcase in his house, which is his own work. Aziz Nesin never forgets his pride in his work.

Therefore, on his days off, he goes to his friend Hilmi's house to watch theater in the evening. However, when he does not want to stay with them, he returns to school. Going to school at night is troublesome because the door is closed. One night, he leaves the play and goes back to school because he does not want to go home. He finds a few other students like him waiting to enter the school at that time, but this is his first time. On either side of the gatehouse are windows, and they pass through the one whose bars have been widened, one after another. Aziz Nesin is one of the last few. When it is his turn, he tries to enter through the widened bars, but someone starts tugging at his legs. At first, he thinks it is a joke, but when he hears footsteps running away, he realizes he has been caught and throws himself inside. At that moment he finds the officer on duty. The one pulling his legs is Hamit Bey, the school principal.

The officer on duty takes him straight to the isolation room. When they enter, everyone is in their beds, but when the officer leaves, everyone continues to throw dice as before. Aziz Nesin does not like the appearance, attitude, and demeanor of the students he stays with. He likens them to the friends of Ibrahim the Head-Seller, whom he had stayed with before, rather than students. He lies down in one of the beds. When he wakes up in the morning, he is surprised that everyone treats him with respect. Then he learns that after he fell asleep, Hamit Bey, the school principal, had come in and covered him up. This is the reason for the respect. Hamit Bey repeats this for the few nights he stays there. Aziz Nesin is very surprised, as he is unaware that the school principal knows him. However, he later learns that he knows all the school's standouts, whether the best or the worst.

A Well-Read German

The year is 1933. Newspapers begin publishing interviews with Hitler. In one photograph, Hitler is sitting at a table in an empty hall, reading a book. Aziz Nesin is deeply impressed by how Hitler is portrayed as a man who reads extensively. Up until then, the person he considered the most well-read and knowledgeable was Prof. Hilmi Ziya Ülken. He knows of him through his step-grandfather's son Naim, who is studying at the medical faculty. Prof. Ülken is his professor. Aziz Nesin thinks that Hitler must be even more studious and knowledgeable than him.

Sports

One of Aziz Nesin's greatest desires is to play soccer, but he is so clumsy that he can never succeed. Years later, when his journalist friend Çetin Altan asks him what he dreams of before going to sleep, he replies that he plays soccer. After Captain Hüsametdin Bey arrives as a physical education teacher, he directs the students to various sports branches. Since Aziz Nesin is very good at gymnastics, he decides to join the wrestling team. The fact that hard-working students are called "nerds" and that "nerds" are usually children who are not interested in sports plays a role in this decision.

He asks his friend Muzaffer, who had been a wrestler before, to show him some moves. After all, Muzaffer always asks him to teach him math and geometry as exams approach. However, Muzaffer has no time as the tryouts are the next day. Ten candidates wrestle in pairs on mats laid out in the school's movie theater. That's how Aziz makes the team.

However, because students interested in sports are often seen as lazy, teachers usually look down on them. One day, while Aziz Nesin is deeply engaged in wrestling practice, he arrives fifteen minutes late to geography class. The teacher, Niyazi Bey, asks where he's coming from. He replies, "From training." The teacher asks again "What training?" When Aziz Nesin says it's wrestling, Niyazi Bey responds with a disappointed "Oh..." From the look on his face, Aziz Nesin immediately understands the unspoken message: "You, too?"

Love

He finally finds a friend to go to the theater with him; Nihat AYTEK. He is so talented in music that after leaving the operetta they watch, he imitates the music they hear by whistling, and if there are lyrics, he remembers them perfectly. One day, he suggests that they buy an accordion. Aziz Nesin likes this idea, and they decide to go to the flea market because the new accordions are very expensive.

Since their vacation days now start on Saturday instead of Friday, they make plans for a Saturday afternoon: They will leave school together, go to Sirkeci, take the tram from there, Nihat will get off the tram at Beyazıt and wait for Aziz to go home and get his allowance and the 7 liras needed for the accordion from his father, and then they will go to buy the accordion together.

The reason why Aziz leaves his friend in Beyazıt is because he is ashamed of their home, the mud on the road to their home, and their poverty. After getting the money from his father, he chooses to head toward Çapa instead of Şehremini. Reflecting on that day, he says the road to Çapa was probably less dirty.

While waiting at the tram stop in Çapa, he notices a girl with a navy blue beret with the letters “KKL” on it. She is with her younger sister, and he falls in love with her. Once on the tram, he continues to observe her from a distance. Her brown hair peeks out from under the beret. When she takes off her gloves, he sees her nails with transparent nail polish. He particularly likes the transparent nail polish. She has a thin ring with a small blue stone. Her earrings are also blue and tiny.

The tram arrives at Beyazıt, but he does not get off because the girl and her sister do not get off. They go to Sirkeci, the last stop. When he gets off the tram, he follows them, and when they get on a ferry at the Galata Bridge, he gets on too. When they reach Büyükdere Pier, he gets off with them. When he sees them enter a street across the street, he stops and waits so as not to be seen following them.

He arrives at the school at night. He can only talk to Nihat the next evening. He thinks that Nihat will be very angry with him for making him wait for hours, but he is very happy when he finds out that he is in love with a girl. Anyway, he is not the same anymore. He starts to slide on the slippery floor of the school with his hands outstretched like the other children. One day, while sliding like this, he hits Captain Zülfü, one of the class officers whom everyone is afraid of, and tumbles to the ground. That week he cannot listen to any lesson. He draws pictures of girls in berets on every piece of paper he finds in front of him. This becomes such a habit for him that for the rest of his life he always draws pictures of girls with berets on the blank spaces of the papers.

Some of his friends are having sexual experiences. For example, Refik — a name he changes in the story — wakes one night to his young stepmother caressing him. and their relationship continues in secret during the days when his father is away. One of his friends starts experimenting back in the village, and in the city, he continues. He listens to these stories with curiosity, but when he learns that the KKL on the beret stands for Kandilli Girls’ High School, he is afraid to even approach her.

One Saturday, he goes to Kandilli Pier with Nihat. He sees that his schoolmates gathered there, he regrets. At that time, the students of Kandilli Girls’ High School start arriving at the pier in droves. Very few of them board the ferry, but she is among them. He points the girl out to Nihat just as they pass by. Nihat also likes the girl. Aziz leaves Nihat behind and gets on the ferry after her. This time, after he gets off at Büyükdere, he follows her home.

His only dream now is to become a champion, to make the papers and to make that “Dream Girl” fall in love with him. He dreams of this day and night. He likes Marlene Dietrich, whom he sees in the movie *Der Blaue Engel* shown at school, so much that he compares the “Dream Girl” to her. In fact, there is no such resemblance, but he wants her to look like her just because he is in love with her.

Finally, he can’t stand it and writes one of the letters that he had been writing on behalf of his friends. To show off, he fills the letter with Arabic and Persian words and slips it into her hand when they are about to get off the ferry they took from Kandilli Pier to Büyükdere on a Saturday.

On Saturday the following week, he takes the same ferry with her again. When he is about to get off at Büyükdere, this time she leaves a letter in his palm. At that moment, he is so excited that he doesn't know what to do and throws himself on the seat in the waiting room of the pier. He holds the paper tightly because he doesn't want the warmth of the letter to pass. When he opens it, he finds a one-line answer: “Unfortunately, I can't be friends with you because I'm dating another boy.” However, her name and surname are written underneath. At least he knows the name of “Dream Girl.”

He puts the letter in his pocket and goes outside. It is dark already because it is winter. The wind blows and snow falls. He cannot return to school because he has very little money left in his pocket

and the ferry service is over. He asks someone what time it is and waits at the bus stop opposite the pier to go home. According to the sign at the bus stop, the last bus is an hour away. But the bus does not arrive even after an hour. When he learns from passersby that the time written on the bus stop is the summer schedule, he is forced to walk. He arrives at Bebek, shouting and singing in the snow along the shore, sometimes on lit paths, sometimes on dark ones. When dogs start barking at him, he falls silent. The last tram has left, so, he has no choice but to walk all the way to Sirkeci.

Suicide

Everyone talks about how Captain Zülfü who is in love with the garbage man's daughter, the one who collects the garbage from the school, and has fallen into gambling and drinking. When Aziz Nesin runs into him on the ferry on his way back to school one Saturday night, he is afraid of being caught out so late, but he salutes him anyway. However, Captain Zülfü does not even notice. That month, the students don't receive their state-paid salaries. This situation continues into the following month. Then they hear that Captain Zülfü has committed suicide after gambling away the students' salaries.

Trying to make up for the damage, the other officers in the class pool their money and pay the students' salaries themselves. While distributing the salaries, Aziz Nesin sees Captain Kâmil say that his wife had cashed in the jewelry around his neck.

M. from Kadıköy or Muhlis

In the previous volume of his memoirs, Aziz Nesin refers to him as "M. from Kadıköy," but in this volume, he calls him Muhlis. When Muhlis, who is very meticulous, starts to develop boils on his body, he is sent to Haydarpaşa Military Hospital. The medical board gives him a report. According to this report, Muhlis will go to the brothel every time he is on leave, and if the officials prevent him from entering the brothel in his uniform, he will show his official documents, and even his entrance fee to the brothel will be covered by the state.

Choosing a Surname

Aziz Nesin notes that although Mustafa Kemal is no longer admired by some, he introduced many innovations to Turkey, one of which is the adoption of surnames. Before the 1934 Surname Law, wealthy individuals like Sami Paşazade Sezai, appended "son" or "zade" (which is Persian) to their fathers' names. Members of the scholarly class, such as Mevlana Celaledin-i Rumi, were identified by the region they came from. Commoners were referred to by their fathers' names, and women took the names of their fathers or husbands as part of their full names.

After the law passed, Aziz Nesin's father asks him to choose an appropriate surname for their family. The first name that comes to his mind is "Kıral," a word with multiple meanings: to break, to seize, and "king." Besides, newspapers at the time report that many people are choosing surnames like "Kıral" and "King." But one day, while walking down the school corridor, he notices something written on a blackboard showing lesson times. It is the surname of the school's slowest-moving teacher; "Üşenmez," meaning "one who doesn't get lazy." He thinks to himself that people are choosing surnames to compensate for what they lack. Embarrassed by his idea, he gives up on "Kıral."

He eventually chooses the surname "Nesin," inspired by a year when he had listened to philosophy classes with great interest. Each time someone calls him "Nesin," which means "What are you?" in Turkish, it will prompt him to reflect on who he really is.

"Ulan"

Students who are close to each other at school call each other "ulan." However, "ulan" turns into "efendi" meaning "sir" in the presence of a teacher. "Ulan" is an altered form of the word "oğlan" meaning "boy" in Turkish. "Oğlan" is later also used to mean "sodomizer" influenced by the Persian word "gulamperest," which means "boy worshipper." Aziz Nesin states that no one at school uses "ulan" without thinking about these meanings, only as an expression of closeness, but some children are not addressed as such. Not because they refuse to be called that, but because they cannot be addressed so for some reason. He says that he still hasn't figured out what that reason is.

Reflecting on which group he belongs to, he recounts an incident that reveals he never calls anyone "ulan" himself but his friends use it among themselves. One day, because he is the class representative, he writes the names of those who misbehave on the blackboard before Osman the Algebra enters the classroom. When the teacher arrives, he scolds those whose names are written on the board. One of them is Necmi the Potato. Necmi suddenly can't contain himself and shouts "Ulan

Nusret Efendi...” When it is time for recess, Aziz Nesin immediately runs away. One evening, however, his friends catch him and pull him by his hands and arms, supposedly making him taller. Even though it hurts, Aziz Nesin laughs at himself with them so as not to show it. He is called “ulan” because he could take a joke like that.

One evening in 1946, while chatting in a tavern where everyone is with their spouses, Çetin Altan repeatedly calls Aziz Nesin “ulan.” Aziz Nesin gets upset but doesn’t show it. After they leave, his friends, to tease him, remind him that Çetin Altan had been calling him “ulan” all night, he says that he had never noticed and that he had always thought that Çetin Altan called him “master.” However, the truth of the matter is different. When Aziz Nesin establishes the Düşün Publishing House together with Kemal Tahir, Çetin Altan comes to visit him. He speaks the same way then too. Aziz Nesin warns him and explains that he does not like being addressed as “ulan.” Çetin Altan agrees with him.

Disease

One summer evening, Aziz Nesin is alone on the seventh floor of a newly constructed building at the Nesin Foundation when he feels a great pain in his chest. Having experienced something similar before, his son had told him to always leave the door of his house unlocked, but he had locked it. He tries to take the pill he uses in such situations but accidentally spills all the pills on the floor. He can’t tell the time because the electric clock by his bedside is broken; power cuts are frequent in Çatalca. Sweating heavily, he barely manages to open the door. But soon he runs to the bathroom, feeling nauseous. A little later, his son Ali Nesin arrives with a few others. They rush him to the hospital. However, the tests show nothing wrong. Aziz Nesin feels ashamed, thinking he caused a fuss over nothing.

He recalls the death of the famous actor and director Ulvi Uraz. Ulvi Uraz is examined by his famous doctor friend Dr. Siyami Ersek. There is nothing wrong with him. He joyfully comes to Aziz Nesin’s house to tell him that there is nothing wrong with him. But after going to his house in Bebek, he dies of a heart attack. Based on this, Aziz Nesin notes that there are many mysteries in human beings that medicine cannot detect.

Notes Compiled by Ali Nesin

The third volume of Aziz Nesin’s *That’s How It Was but Not How It’s Going* ends at the point where he begins talking about Vâlâ Nurettin. In this unfinished manuscript, Ali Nesin notes that Vâlâ Nurettin had been diagnosed with an illness before he started writing *Bu Dünyadan Nâzım Geçti (Nâzım Passed from This World)*, that he passed away after completing the work, and that Aziz Nesin had said Vâlâ Nurettin was granted permission by the Grim Reaper to finish his book.

Other autobiographical notes taken by Aziz Nesin in Ottoman Turkish are read by Vâlâ Nurettin, and compiled by Ali Nesin. In some parts of these notes, which are mostly scattered and lack a narrative unity, Aziz Nesin makes new additions to the events he had mentioned before. For example, when he mentions Hilmi’s letter about a friend from school taking the piggy bank from Hilmi, he implies that he does not believe Hilmi’s letter by stating that a “so-called” friend went to their house and took the piggy bank.

When he graduates third from Kuleli Military High School, he is deeply disappointed. Around that time, it is announced that there will be an exam for students who wish to study engineering in Germany. He chooses not to apply, as he wants to become a general, not an engineer, and also doesn’t want to leave the girl he is in love with. When the school principal, Hamit Doğruer, calls him into his office and says he didn’t see his name among the applicants and asks why he didn’t apply, he is surprised that Hamit Bey knows his name. Hamit Bey then explains that although he deserves the first place they ranked him third because, while he is academically capable, he spends a lot of time on sports and is known for being mischievous. Hearing this, Aziz Nesin feels pleased. He realizes he is a student who is liked by both his teachers and his peers. Unlike the top two students, the so-called “nerds,” who only study and show no interest in sports or other aspects of life, he has a more balanced life.

He does not invite his father to the graduation ceremony because he does not find him worthy of being there. Instead, he invites Salim Bey, his mother’s stepfather. He wants to be a cavalryman but is rejected because he is too short. When his friend named Ragıp offers to become an engineer, he joins the engineering class with him. He does an internship in Kepsut district of Balıkesir for 6 months before starting the Military Academy.

He writes a poem about dreaming about his friend Selim, who has passed away. Selim is a German-born boy who speaks German, French and English and whose father is an engineer. He dies of meningitis two months before graduation. In the poem, he asks Selim what happens to all the languages and mathematics he knew after his death, and reflects that once he himself dies, there will be no one left to remember Selim.

According to Aziz Nesin, it is not important for a person to have a life so smooth that he can tell his story without ever telling a lie. What matters is the ability to recount one's experiences honestly, even when they involve shameful or embarrassing moments. Because in this case, the person has moved far beyond what he or she used to be. Moreover, in order to understand the works of an author, it is important to know that person's life down to the smallest details.

Finally, Aziz Nesin states that as he lives, he has come to realize that he owes only to society but also to the world.

THEMES

RELATIONSHIP

Attraction In Aziz Nesin's story, we can identify two kinds of attraction: one class-based, the other romantic. His interest in not only Reşit Süreyya Gürsey's professional life but also his private life reveals the kind of person Aziz aspires to become. He desires to be a groundbreaking and influential man just like Reşit Süreyya Gürsey, and he expresses his desire to be a "great man" at every opportunity. It is only because the only way for a boy in his circumstances to become a "great man" is through military school he becomes a military man. This class-based attraction points to where he wishes to arrive in life. His romantic attraction to the girl studying at Kandilli Girls' High School is not independent from this class attraction. Indeed, her beret, elegant earrings, and transparent nail polish signify a lifestyle and a class identity that deeply appeal to Aziz Nesin. His interest in her is, in essence, an extension of his desire to belong to the refined, urban, and intellectually cultivated world she represents.

Friendship Although Aziz Nesin is a successful student, he wants to be appreciated by his less successful friends. Not being seen as a "nerd" is as important to him as being hardworking. For this reason, he schemes to help his friends in the exam of his teacher Reşit Süreyya Gürsey, whom he respects very much, and finds himself in a difficult situation. And when he graduates third from the school, he learns that he was made third because of his mischief, and he is glad that he is not placed too far away from his "unsuccessful" friends.

SOCIETY

Conflict Aziz Nesin explains that he likes his military position because it allows him to educate young people, who do not even know how to read and write, in many subjects for two years and that he enjoys seeing how much they have changed as they are discharged. However, when he later encounters these young people in their villages, he sees that they have forgotten everything they learned in the military and have reverted to their former habits. This situation points to the root of his conflict with society. According to him, a person should be accessible to everyone he can be useful to. And the person to whom he is accessible should appreciate this accessibility. This requires a constant struggle. For the same reason, the short English reply from the secretary of the famous professor enrages him. The soldier who, instead of passing on what he learned in the military to the people in his village, reverts to being an ordinary peasant, and the professor who cannot even be bothered to respond to someone politely requesting academic support represent different forms of insensitivity.

Class Aziz Nesin feels ashamed of the limited opportunities of his poor father and feels that he belongs to a more refined community. He takes great pride in having earned this sense of belonging through his own efforts rather than inheriting it. Years later, during one of his hospital stays, as he hears that a young girl, one of the people to whom his friend, Mustafa Onaç had distributed leftover school meals years ago, had come to visit him as a physician, and that she reminded Mustafa Onaç of herself, he feels proud for her as well. Just as he can write his memoirs without hesitation

despite all his embarrassing moments, that physician can remind others of her poverty without hesitation, because both of them have managed to move themselves to a different place in life.

Gender Aziz Nesin states that military service demands men to perform a certain type of masculinity. Accordingly, men should be free from any behaviors and curiosities that could be “feminine.” For example, they should not read or write novels or poetry except for books authorized by the military. Men raised in this homosocial environment do not know what to do when they come together with the opposite sex. The fact that Aziz Nesin and his friend Nihat Aytek seek help from a piece of chewing gum against two girls stems from this segregation; they act as if they are not curious at all about a world they are very curious about. As a result, throughout his life, Aziz Nesin cannot see women in the banality required to be human. He always imagines them as superhuman beings, materially and spiritually pure.

PSYCHOLOGY

Shame The more Aziz Nesin sees that another kind of life is possible for him, the more he is ashamed of his father and his limited means. He does not even bring his best friend Nihat Aytek to his house and introduce him to his father. Because he only shares “beauties” with Nihat, namely theater plays and beautiful music. He invites his mother’s stepfather Salim Bey, not his father, to the graduation ceremony. This sense of shame pushes him to connect with the outside world by creating a community of people who enjoy the same things and have similar skills. His experience with Ali from Bursa exemplifies this clearly, and the Nesin Foundation represents a similar undertaking.

DEFECT

Grandiosity Aziz Nesin’s statement that he feels indebted first to the state, then to the people, and then to the world indicates not only his strong ethical values but also the significant meaning he attributes to his own power and influence. Above all, the only goal that attracts him to school and the world of education is to become a “great man.” This also explains why he has no genuine respect for any neighbor except the one who takes pride in his showcase. He wants to find a profession and grow within it, but he tends to overestimate his own influence and power. Since all the “great men” in Turkey’s history have had military backgrounds, it is natural for him to consider himself worthy of greatness. For example, former colleagues involved in the May 27, 1960 coup believe they can redesign the country based on a book that influenced them. It is highly likely that their upbringing in a militarist culture that does not accept defeat and resorts to violence even in friendly matches against civilian teams nurtures this belief. However, Aziz Nesin’s belief in his own influence extends beyond the military context. It is only possible for him to position himself morally under ever-increasing, growing and more inclusive burdens by seeing himself as stronger and greater than he really is. In other words, Aziz Nesin places superhuman burdens not only on women but also on himself as a human being, but in different contexts.

HEALTH

Illness The illness he suffers when he is alone at home, his subsequent hospitalization and the anecdote he shares about the death of Ulvi Uraz show that Aziz Nesin only accepts that he is a limited being when he is ill.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which aspects of our social identities, such as social class, gender, ethnicity, are related to the things Aziz Nesin hopes do not continue as usual? How?
2. Military figures have played a major role in the modernization history of the Republic of Turkey, and modernization efforts based on European Enlightenment initially started within the military. In this context, as a writer with a military background, which values does Aziz Nesin represent in Turkey’s modernization process?
3. In Aziz Nesin’s three-volume autobiography, we also see Turkey’s anthropological culture, which is intertwined with a specific form of Islam and based on hierarchies of age and gender. In this sense, to what extent does Aziz Nesin, who is more often identified by his atheist identity, differ from Turkey’s anthropological culture? Or in other words, to what extent and in which ways has Aziz Nesin rejected this anthropological culture? Why?