

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
Mürüvet Esra Yıldırım, Ph.D.

## Men to be Hanged in Bunches (1987)

Aziz Nesin (1915 – 1995)

### OVERVIEW

When Oğuz Akkan asks Aziz Nesin if he has a novel manuscript to serialize in *Akşam*, Aziz Nesin gives him more than fifteen manuscripts. Among them, Oğuz Akkan chooses a fifteen-page autobiographical text that has not even been titled yet. Following this, Aziz Nesin writes the first volume of his autobiographical series. He begins writing the second volume in 1975 for Kemal Bisalman's *Yeni Ortam* newspaper, but when he is disturbed by one of Bisalman's actions, he continues the work for *Politika*, owned by İsmail Cem and Ercan Arıklı. Later, Mete Tunçay asks him to write about his experiences during the September 6-7 events for publication in *Tarih ve Toplum*. As he starts writing, he realizes that what he wants to tell cannot fit into a magazine. So, he decides to publish it as a book. Summaries of his writings are serialized in *Sabah* newspaper. His work *Men to be Hanged in Bunches* is the collection of these writings. The title comes from an order given by the commander of martial law at the time, who held the "leftists" responsible for the attacks on September 6-7 and put them in detention, instructing the judiciary on how to judge them.

### PEOPLE

Faik Muzaffer Amaç	Philosophy teacher and lawyer
Kemal Tahir	Writer
Mansur Tekin	Aziz Nesin's friend
Meral Çelen	Aziz Nesin's second wife
Refik Erduran	Journalist, playwright
Sedat Simavi	Journalist
Yaşar Nabi Nayır	Writer and publisher
Yusuf Ziya Ortaç	Writer and publisher

### SYNOPSIS

Aziz Nesin proposes to Meral who, like himself, works at *Akbaba*, and sees her off to her hometown so she can take the exam necessary to obtain her high school diploma. Afterwards, he meets his friend Mansur Tekin. While having a meal together in Beyoğlu, tensions rise, and they are forced to leave the restaurant due to a crowd that storms the place. Because of the chaos on the streets, they only manage to arrive at Mansur Tekin's house in the early hours of the morning. After dropping off his friend, Aziz Nesin, worried about his two children spending the night alone, goes home. He feels relieved when he realizes they are at school.

Later that night, due to the events that had occurred, he is arrested and imprisoned in Harbiye Prison along with several other individuals with similar ideological stance. Despite having no connection to the events of September 6-7, he is held for a few months there with other people who are also unjustly arrested, such as Kemal Tahir. During this time, Meral is dismissed from her job because of her association with him. Nevertheless, she does not give up on caring for his two children.

Aziz Nesin continues to work by writing for various newspapers and magazines under different names, supporting his household even while imprisoned. He learns, a few years after his release, when he participates as a journalist in the trials at Yassıada following the May 27 military coup, that during this period he had been at risk of the death penalty, accused by government officials who claimed that the September 6-7 events had been carried out by communists. In this sense, the work conveys both his experiences of imprisonment and the manner in which the government handled the situation.

## EVENTS

### *The Issue of Cyprus*

Aziz Nesin lives in a basement flat in Harbiye with his eleven-year-old son, his twelve-year-old daughter, and their dog, Fındık. He is forty, but since he has to be both a mother and a father, he doesn't feel forty. In the evenings, he prepares dinner, then does the dishes and gets back to work. He spends his nights writing. As he drinks tea and smokes, Fındık sits quietly beside him.

On the evening of September 5, 1955, he proposes to his girlfriend. The next evening, after sending her off to Çorum to take her two make-up exams to finish high school, he returns to *Akbaba* magazine. There, he is to meet Mansur Tekin, the protagonist of Sabahattin Ali's story "The Kidney." He is a thoughtful intellectual who always prefers to stay in the background.

Since Mansur Tekin had suffered a heart attack not long ago and had one of his kidneys removed, they walk slowly from Cağaloğlu to Sirkeci. Then they get on a minibus. On the way, they see groups of people marching with Turkish flags in their hands, shouting "Cyprus is Turkish and will remain Turkish!"

At that time, Fatin Rüştü Zorlu is the foreign minister, but when the Cyprus issue first came up, the post was held by Fuat Köprülü. The person who first brought Cyprus into public discussion was Sedat Simavi, the founder of *Hürriyet* newspaper. *Hürriyet* had gained its popularity by sending correspondents to the Olympics, which was a first for Turkey back then. When it began to focus on the Cyprus question, it achieved a similar success. At that time, Foreign Minister Fuat Köprülü acted as if no such issue existed at all.

### *The Evening of September 6*

On September 6, the news that the Greeks bombed Atatürk's house in Thessaloniki is announced on the radio. Aziz Nesin does not believe it. Walking with Mansur Tekin, he thinks the people they see on the streets will gather in front of the monument in Taksim, protest briefly, and then disperse. But the number of people shouting slogans along the way keeps growing. Mansur Tekin does not want to get involved with anyone because some people have their pensions cut during their trials and that pension is his only source of income.

Soon, the minibus hardly moves because of the crowd. At that moment, Mansur Tekin whispers three things he despises: "Rudeness, ugliness, and vulgarity." It takes them more than an hour to reach Galatasaray from Sirkeci. After getting off the minibus, they go to a place called İzmir Restaurant.

As they talk to each other, around ten or eleven at night, the door is suddenly opened. A young man carrying a Turkish flag bursts in, followed by a crowd. Aziz Nesin recognizes the man from Sultanahmet Prison, where he stayed in 1944. Though he has forgotten the man's name, it is clear from his speech that he was born in Istanbul, yet his nose and hair reveal he is originally from the eastern part of Turkey. Aziz Nesin notes that the young man, unhappy with his own appearance, makes an effort to dress elegantly. During the war years, he was sentenced for corruption while working at the Coal Sales Office. After his release, Aziz Nesin saw him a few times here and there. Every time he was unemployed, yet he never compromised on his stylish clothing. The last time Aziz Nesin asked him what he was doing, the young man said he had joined a society related to Cyprus.

As the young man steps inside, the crowd behind him slowly fills the restaurant. The owner climbs onto a table in the back, and holding a large framed portrait of Atatürk like a shield, explains in a tearful voice that this is not a Greek restaurant and that he himself is Turkish and Muslim. The waiters raise various Atatürk portraits high into the air. Yet the crowd begins smashing the restaurant's windows and the plates and glasses on the tables.

Aziz Nesin helps the frozen Mansur Tekin get up and guides him out of the restaurant, not forgetting to grab his friend's gold lighter along with his pack of cigarettes. Outside, the crowd shouts, cars horn incessantly, and meters of fabric are tied to the backs of every vehicle. The debris on the sidewalks raises the ground by thirty or forty centimeters. While watching from the edge of a wall, they see a man from the crowd slip on one of the pieces of cloth tied to a car. They barely manage to cross to the opposite sidewalk. At that moment, Mansur Tekin remembers that they left the restaurant without paying the bill.

As they walk slowly, they see a woman, carrying a fur coat in her arms, looking around while walking backward and shouting: "Cyprus is Turkish and will remain Turkish!" She tugs at the fur, pulling out tufts of fur. The woman has stolen the coat from somewhere and carries it all the way. Soon, she turns into a side street and disappears. A young man, drunk after looting some drinks, shouts: "Migros is Turkish! It will remain Turkish!"

When they descend from Pera Palas to a street, they see Yaşar Kemal and Ali Rauf. Ali Rauf, like Yaşar Kemal, is a solidly built man and a journalist known for his leftist views. As soon as Aziz Nesin begins complaining about the violence they witness, Ali Rauf tells him that one cannot speak that way about "the sacred feelings of the people." At that moment, they start to argue fiercely. Aziz Nesin cannot understand why Yaşar Kemal remains silent and neutral. Mansur Tekin tries to pull Aziz Nesin away from the scene. Then Aziz Nesin addresses Ali Rauf with a sentence that makes no sense even to himself, "You know French, damn it!"

Months later, whenever Aziz Nesin sees Ali Rauf, Ali Rauf apologizes but says he still cannot understand what that sentence meant. Aziz Nesin explains that at that moment, he wanted to say so much but couldn't, and that the remark reflects that knowing a foreign language opens a person to the world, but he was astonished at how such a worldly person could interpret the things in such a way.

#### *Reported Incidents*

Later, they hear about some of the events of that night from others. For example, a group of people asks a man if he is Greek, he replies that he is Turkish and Muslim, and they say, "Let's see." Then the man pulls down his trousers to reveal that he is circumcised. In this way, he escapes the attack. The magician Abra Kadabra (Ömer Lütfi), finding that no one has come to his performance that night, sets off to go home. People who see him on the way assume he is a priest because of his beard. He also shows that he is circumcised. This time, they put him in a car and force him to do whatever they ask.

A police officer, convinced that communists are not responsible for what is happening, tries to obtain documents from the Cyprus Turkish Society. However, because the martial law commander believes otherwise, the officer is mistaken for a communist and arrested.

#### *A Quotation*

Aziz Nesin cites a piece published in *Tarih ve Toplum* in September 1986 about Atatürk's house in Thessaloniki. The excerpt mentions that two bombs were placed in the garden between the consulate and Atatürk's house, and that the explosion of one of the bombs broke some windows. It also notes that the house commonly known as Atatürk's was not actually the house where he was born. The original house had long been demolished and that this particular house belonged to Atatürk's stepfather, which he had visited a few times as a student.

#### *The Flag*

Aziz Nesin also recounts the events of that evening using Refik Erduran's memoirs, published in *Güneş* in 1987. Refik Erduran is having dinner with Sibel Göksel, who had been crowned Miss Turkey that year, at a restaurant in Şişli when the restaurant's window is broken. They leave the restaurant and get into the car. On the way to Ortaköy, a crowd surrounds the car. When Refik Erduran rolls down the window to ask what they want, someone from the crowd demands to know where their flag is. Refik Erduran replies that not every car carries a flag, and in response, the man hits him on the temple. He quickly tries to roll up the window, but the crowd begins smashing the car's windows with sticks and stones.

Eventually, Refik Erduran manages to get the car out of the crowd. In Bebek, he encounters another crowd. He turns on the car's headlights and drives through them. Because the damaged car draws so much attention, as soon as he reaches Emirgan, he goes straight to the police station to request a flag. When the officers say they didn't have any, he takes one of the two flags hanging on the building across the street and attaches it to cover the car's shattered windshield.

While driving back from Maslak to Zincirlikuyu, the road is blocked by soldiers. Martial law has been declared, and hanging flags is forbidden. Hearing this, Refik Erduran begins laughing in frustration.

The captain, seeing the condition of the car and Sibel Hanım, and after learning what happened to them, allows them to return home.

### *The Rest of the Night*

Around two or three in the morning, Aziz Nesin walks down the road leading to Unkapanı Bridge, which connects the historic peninsula to Beyoğlu, together with Mansur Tekin. Seeing the shops on the left smashed and ransacked, he thinks that the destruction is because people couldn't steal chandeliers, refrigerators, or sewing machines to take home. Mansur Tekin, however, mutters, "Saint Barthélemy." This refers to the night of August 4, 1572, when, by order of France's King Charles IX, the Catholics massacred the Protestants.

Aziz Nesin reflects that the events of September 6-7 also began under orders from the Democrat Party government against Greeks, but the violence didn't go as planned, it ended up targeting all non-Muslims and even some Turks. He attributes this to the government's ignorance of how its economic policies had reshaped Istanbul's social structure; the waves of people migrating from rural areas to the city became lumpenized and attacked the wealthy.

It takes them about an hour to descend the slope, but since martial law has been declared, the bridge is closed. People cross to the other side by boat. Around four or five in the morning, they finally find a boat and reach the opposite shore. From there, they walk to Mansur Tekin's house. Along the way, they see items like refrigerators and sewing machines being thrown out of the upper-floor apartment of a confectioner. One sewing machine falls on someone standing in front of the shop.

After leaving Mansur Tekin at his home, Aziz Nesin walks through Beyoğlu. The sidewalks are still elevated due to the things scattered across the streets. He passes a pile of old shoes stacked on top of each other and has to pinch his nose to get past. All of these were thrown out by those who looted the shoemakers.

By the time he gets home, it is ten o'clock. The children, undisturbed by the night's chaos, have gone to school. He goes to his office at *Akbaba* in Cağaloğlu and discusses the events with Yusuf Ziya Ortaç. All he can think about is returning home, to his children. Shortly afterward, an officer arrives to take him to the police headquarters for a brief interrogation. As he says goodbye to his colleagues, he notices that no one seems particularly upset; in fact, almost none is affected.

The officer who escorts him appears more troubled than anyone else. When Aziz Nesin asks what he is being questioned about, the officer admits he doesn't know. At one point, he remarks, "Good thing I didn't study more." When Aziz Nesin asks why, he explains that if he had studied more, he too would have been taken to the police for interrogation.

At the Sansaryan Inn in Sirkeci, where the police headquarters is located, Aziz Nesin sees a few acquaintances. Soon, he and the others are loaded into a closed vehicle. Kemal Tahir is also inside. To keep his spirits up, Aziz Nesin keeps joking and singing songs throughout the ride.

### *The Newspapers*

Among the newspapers that reported on the September 6-7 events was *İstanbul Ekspres*, owned by Democrat Party deputy Mithat Perin. The September 6 evening edition of *İstanbul Ekspres* reports that officials in Athens was contacted but no new information was obtained, and it shares statements from various community representatives. *Hürriyet* and *Milliyet*, in their September 7-9 editions, report on the attacks by chanting mobs and the condition of the wounded. In response, President Celal Bayar declares that the attacks were instigated by communists, announcing that those communists have been apprehended.

### *In the Same Cell*

Aziz Nesin is taken to Harbiye Prison, which was a dining hall when he was a first-year student at the Military Academy. Initially, one person is placed in each cell. As more detainees arrive, a second person is added to each cell. Kemal Tahir is placed in the same cell as Aziz Nesin. With nothing to sit or lie on, they are forced to sleep on the filthy concrete floor. Although Aziz Nesin had endured far worse prisons in his life, that night he feels especially claustrophobic, lying so close to Kemal Tahir that their feet nearly overlap. In the tiny cell, he can feel the walls, floor, and ceiling all at once.

When Aziz Nesin shares his discomfort, Kemal Tahir assures him they will get used to it over time. Despite their frequent disagreements, Aziz Nesin remains lifelong friends with Kemal Tahir; their friendship begins in that cell. Aziz Nesin also worries about the wellbeing of his children and the financial responsibilities that marriage would bring. His earnings from serialized novels under pen names are insufficient, and major publishers refuse to publish anything he writes under his real name. He considers starting his own publishing house, which would make him the first person in the history of the Turkish Republic to do so for his own books. When he shares this idea with Kemal Tahir, Kemal Tahir offers to become a partner using the money from the sale of the family home he co-owns with his two brothers.

Aziz Nesin, who has always disliked being in debt, even to the point of putting himself in difficult situations to repay it, feels deeply moved by Kemal Tahir's offer, although he is sure that Kemal Tahir won't give him any money. Once released, he plans to establish Düşün Publishing House and partner with Kemal Tahir without ever taking money from him.

#### *An Acquaintance*

On the second night, the prisoners are allowed to have newspapers to spread on the floor to sleep on. Since reading newspapers is forbidden, they are given an old, outdated issue, which they lay beneath them.

When a prisoner needs to use the toilet, he knocks on the cell door to call the guard. The guard escorts him to the toilet and then brings him back but often forgets which cell he came from. As a result, the prisoner is sometimes left in another cell where one of his friends is being held. Later, using the toilet as an excuse again, he manages to return to his own cell.

Aziz Nesin doesn't do this. But when the guard notices that the prisoner from the seventh cell is missing, he starts shouting and searching for him. Aziz Nesin tells him that the one in the seventh cell is Namık Gedik. Upon hearing this, the guard curses Namık Gedik, continuing the search.

At that moment, the prison director, Major Muzaffer, enters. Muzaffer is Aziz Nesin's classmate from the third grade. He had been one of the two boys in the class that none wanted to be friends with. Aziz Nesin had befriended both of them, though he had always found them repulsive because they constantly had runny noses. When they meet again in prison, Muzaffer recognizes him but shows no warmth. Years later, when they live in the same neighborhood after retirement, they greet each other politely but do not talk to each other. Aziz Nesin believes that, like many others, Muzaffer is ashamed of his own past.

#### *An Unfinished Novel*

Aziz Nesin wonders what happened to his serialized novel *Posta Kutusu 69* in *Akbaba*. After his release from prison, he learns that Zahir Güvemli continued writing it. Since it was one of those novels he wrote merely to make a living, he notes that his greatest fear is for such works to be published after his death.

While still in prison, he dreams of writing a novel about his experiences there. In it, a child of a high-ranking Turkish official would have an affair with a Greek. But later, he decides it's not a good idea because, he says, while one can write poems about ongoing events, a novel requires some time to gain perspective.

#### *Mike Hammer*

After a while, Kemal Tahir is moved to another cell. One of Kemal Tahir's most distinctive traits is that he doesn't just think out loud, he *shouts* his thoughts. When Aziz Nesin gets tired of working alone in his own cell, he steps outside for a short walk. There he finds Kemal Tahir, shouting his thoughts, surrounded by a few others. They are all discussing the *Mike Hammer* novels.

Kemal Tahir had not only translated these novels into Turkish under the pseudonym *F. M. İkinci*, but had also added his own passages and even written entire sequels, presenting them as translations. When Aziz Nesin remarks that every writer has done similar things at some point just to make a living, Kemal Tahir becomes angry and starts passionately defending the *Mike Hammer* books, claiming they brilliantly expose the moral decay of American society. Aziz Nesin counters by asking whether the books sell because they reveal that corruption or because of their violent and sexual content. Kemal

Tahir insists that *Mike Hammer* novels are revolutionary. At that moment, Aziz Nesin realizes that Kemal Tahir is not a man of dialogue or debate.

The *Mike Hammer* translations are published by Çağlayan Publishing House, which has three partners: Ertem Eğılmez, Refik Erduran, and Haldun Sel. To confirm his argument, Aziz Nesin quotes a 3 August 1983 interview Ertem Eğılmez gave to *Cumhuriyet*. In it, Eğılmez recalls that at the time he dreamed of a detective that would make everyone submit in fear. By chance, he found a book titled *I, the Jury* in a bookstore and showed it to his partners. Both disliked it, calling it trashy but Eğılmez thought the protagonist was exactly the kind of character he had been looking for. He asked around for a translator, and F. M. İkinci was recommended to him. Eğılmez says he didn't know F. M. İkinci was actually Kemal Tahir, and that he even had some passages added to increase the eroticism in the story. The result sold one hundred thousand copies and, after that, many fake *Mike Hammer* novels flooded the market.

### *Meral*

Aziz Nesin explains that the whereabouts of those arrested were deliberately kept secret from their families, and that he later learned that his girlfriend, Meral searched for him in every barracks in Istanbul for days. After taking the exam in Çorum, she returned to Istanbul and moved to his home, acting like a mother to his children. He learned where she was, but because they were not officially connected, they were not allowed to meet. With the help of Major Muzaffer, they meet a few times before deciding to get engaged. During one of their meetings, Aziz Nesin's twelve-year-old daughter, Oya bursts out laughing as they put on the engagement rings Yusuf Ziya Ortaç had bought for them. At the time, Aziz Nesin is forty and Meral is twenty-one. Oya mocks her father because he was too old for an engagement.

After the engagement, their meetings become easier. Meral, having left her job at *Akbaba* before leaving for Çorum, returned to work as a secretary at Yaşar Nabi Nayır's *Varlık* magazine. With her fifty liras salary, she supports herself and his children, and even brings food to Aziz Nesin.

One day, Yaşar Nabi Nayır calls her over and asks if she is engaged to Aziz Nesin. When she tells him she is, he fires her, claiming that police officers frequent the magazine because of her. Aziz Nesin explains that he previously recounted this in one of his books without naming Yaşar Nabi. He adds that since he was allowed to buy pen and paper in the first month of his detention, he was able to write stories for *Akbaba* and elsewhere under pseudonyms, thus starting to earn money again. Otherwise, Meral, her children, and he would have been devastated.

He also notes that the primary reason many newspapers, magazines, and publishing houses in Turkey continue to operate for so many years is that they compromise, and notes that Yaşar Nabi Nayır's ability to sustain *Varlık* magazine for fifty years is a significant achievement. He even notes that it was for this reason that he, as a member of the Supreme Board of Culture, contributed to Yaşar Nabi's being awarded by the Ministry of Culture. But he also thinks that behind this success lies acting according to the day.

### *New Cellmate*

When Kemal Tahir is transferred to another cell, Aslan Kaynardağ takes his place. Aslan is an optimist who never stops smiling. Aziz Nesin is deeply moved by a story he heard from him and writes about it. He then turns it into a children's play.

### *Faik Muzaffer Amaç*

Aziz Nesin states that Aydın Menderes had many failures, but his greatest failures were related to Turkey's entry into the Korean War without a parliamentary decision and the events of 6-7 September. He states that the government and the then Minister of the Interior, Namık Gedik, felt compelled to present both the country and the world with a culprit to absolve themselves of responsibility for the events and declared communists, whom none would dare to defend, guilty.

The lists of communists they compiled are so haphazard that when they go to the law firm to arrest Esat Adil Müstecaplıoğlu, who is on the list, they hear from his partner, Faik Muzaffer Amaç, who is there, that he is out of town for a case and will return in perhaps a week. Faik Muzaffer Amaç, a lawyer like Esat Adil, is arrested in his partner's place. Faik Muzaffer Amaç studied both philosophy and law.

While teaching high school in Anatolia, he was banned from the profession on the grounds of insulting moral values. He was forced to come to Istanbul to practice law.

Due to depression during his imprisonment, he begins crowing like a rooster. A few days later, the cell doors are opened, and prisoners are allowed to walk freely in the corridors. Because socializing with others is beneficial, he stops crowing.

By telling Muzaffer Amaç's story, Aziz Nesin clearly reveals both the government's stance and the punishments innocent people were subjected to. He also questions whom the police, after learning that Celal Benneci listed among the communists had died a year earlier, might have arrested in his place.

#### *The Consequences of Rain and Humidity*

As it rains, colorful mold begin to appear on the walls of some cells. When Aziz Nesin gets tired of working, he goes to the cells of his friends where mold have grown and becomes absorbed in watching them, wondering how they became so colorful.

However, the humid air affects Hulusi Dosdoğru and Fehmi Kurucu. Both of them suffer from facial paralysis. The first time Aziz Nesin sees Hulusi Dosdoğru speaking with his crooked mouth, he struggles not to laugh and quickly moves away.

Hasan İzzettin Dinamo, on the other hand, leaves crumbs under his bed to feed insects and reptiles such as slugs, snails, worms, centipedes, and scorpions. He even pours water into his cell to make it more humid. While some interpret his behavior as a mental illness caused by prison conditions, Aziz Nesin does not think badly of him.

#### *To be Hanged in Bunches*

After a while, the leaders of the association advocating for Cyprus to remain Turkish are also arrested. However, they are provided with blankets and beds as soon as they arrive at the prison. Three months later, Vâlâ Nurettin sends a message. The martial law commander has ordered that the "leftists be hanged in bunches" for being responsible for the events of September 6-7. Aziz Nesin does not believe this.

Five years later, following the coup on May 27, 1960, he attends the trials held on Yassıada as a journalist. During the proceedings, a judge-colonel testifies that the martial law commander at the time, Nurettin Aknoz, had ordered the leftists to be hanged in bunches, claiming they were responsible for the September 6-7 events. Aziz Nesin cannot believe that evil could reach such a level, and that he and the other detainees were actually going to be executed for nothing. He remarks that, had they been hanged, none would have believed in their innocence because none can accept that someone could be executed for no reason. People would inevitably assume that a crime must have been committed.

To document what happened, he shares the court transcripts published in the September 1986 issue of *Tarih ve Toplum*. The transcripts reveal that the martial law commander claimed the events were carried out by communists and urged the judges to sentence the leftists to death, saying he wanted to see "bunches of people hanged" in public squares. The judges, however, noted that due to insufficient evidence, they could not impose such a punishment.

#### *The Man Who Started the Events*

The incidents began with the bombing of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's house in Thessaloniki. Aziz Nesin learned what happened to the man who threw the bomb from the September 1986 issue of *Tarih ve Toplum*, which published the Yassıada trial records.

According to the transcripts, the bombs were brought from Turkey to Thessaloniki on July 15, 1955, by Mehmet Ali Tekinalp, who was then the deputy consul general. The bomb was thrown by a consulate attendant, Hasan Uçar, under the order of Consul General Mehmet Ali Balin and at the instigation of Oktay Engin, a law student at the University of Thessaloniki. Hasan Uçar was sentenced to two years in prison, while Oktay Engin was detained for a time, then fled to Turkey. Although Greece demanded his extradition, he was never returned.

Aziz Nesin summarizes Oktay Engin's fate with a sentence he quotes from the magazine: "Oktay Engin is currently the Head of the Department of Planning and Coordination at the Directorate General of Security."

#### *Mustafa Börklüce*

At one point, Aziz Nesin shares a cell with Mustafa Börklüce, a man he had known from before. Mustafa Börklüce is at least fifteen years older than him. He tells Aziz Nesin about his experiences as a noncommissioned officer in a unit that was captured by the Russians during the World War. Aziz Nesin listens to him with great curiosity, but later regrets not having taken any notes while listening. When Mustafa Börklüce says that, had he stayed in Russia, he would have become a marshal, Aziz Nesin asks if he ever regrets leaving. Mustafa Börklüce replies that everyone's duty is in their own homeland.

Mustafa Börklüce's sister is married to Hüsamettin Özdoğru, and Hüsamettin's sister is married to Kemal Tahir. The four of them, along with a few others, share the food brought from outside and eat it together in their cells. One day, at lunchtime, Mustafa Börklüce says to Aziz Nesin, "Go early and get the food, so that we get the better part." Aziz Nesin is surprised, for it is the first time he has heard such a thing from him.

After being released from prison, he tells this story to Kemal Tahir, who insists that Mustafa is not that kind of person. Later, when someone else tells Aziz Nesin a similar story about Mustafa Börklüce, he reacts the same way, saying, "He is not like that." While writing these recollections, Aziz Nesin remarks that all of us are human, and that we each have many different sides.

#### *The Mice in the Cell*

Aziz Nesin tries to befriend the mice living on the roof of his cell and sometimes come down inside. He reshapes his deck chair that he had brought from home into an armchair, spreads half of his blanket underneath and the other half over himself. When the mice appear, he stays completely still, not moving an inch. When he puts breadcrumbs on his blanket, they eat them one by one. But the moment he breathes too heavily or sniffs, they vanish instantly.

Although he normally dislikes such creatures, he tries to get to know them in order to learn to love them for it is impossible to love something without first knowing it. He always recognizes the leading mouse whenever he sees it. It is braver than the others and dares to come closer to him.

Yet years later, when field mice invade the grounds of the Nesin Foundation, he tries every possible way to kill them because this time, he does not know them.

#### *The General's Visit*

One day, the prisoners are told that a general will be visiting, and everyone is locked inside their cells. They are not even allowed to go to the toilet. After a while, they begin to hear cell doors opening and closing one after another. There is no sound other than the creak of the doors. When his own cell door opens, Aziz Nesin stands up. The general appears at the doorway, as if in a colorful frame. Without saying a word, he looks at Aziz Nesin from head to toe. Aziz Nesin does the same. Just at that moment, mice start to descend from the ceiling. The general jumps back in fear as they run past.

When the inspection ends, the prisoners gather around the general and begin to question him as to why they are there, what right he has to keep them imprisoned. The general, unable to speak like a general, whispers a few words softly, like a clerk. Then he leaves.

Years later, Aziz Nesin sees this same general again in the Yassıada courtroom, standing trial for his actions as the martial law commander during the events of September 6-7. Looking at his pitiful state, Aziz Nesin reflects that some people find strength in themselves, while others find it only in their ranks. To provide a clearer picture of this man, he shares excerpts from the memoirs of Refik Erduran, who had volunteered for the Korean War and served under this same General Namık Argüç. Erduran describes Argüç as a soldier who speaks without thinking, is obsessed with authority and eager to impose his will on others. In Korea, he focuses on showmanship to earn praise from the American division commander to whom the brigade is attached. In this way, he causes the deaths of many soldiers.

During an Anzac Day celebration, an Australian officer invites them to headquarters for dinner. As he raises his glass, he says, "To our dearest friends, our former enemies." Namık Argüç bangs his fist on the table and shouts, "The Turkish nation knows how to tell friend from foe! Those who attack our homeland will always be driven back into the sea now and forever! To our victory!"

Refik Erduran, acting as interpreter, translates his words more diplomatically: "It is better to be an enemy first and a friend later than the other way around. The Turks are pleased that their relationship with you followed the second path. Cheers!"

#### *The Letter*

While sending his writings to *Akbaba* magazine, Aziz Nesin occasionally includes a few personal letters addressed to its owner, Yusuf Ziya Ortaç. Sometime after being released from prison, he goes to the newspaper *Cumhuriyet* with a novel manuscript in hand. Nadir Nadi tells him that he cannot serialize his novel, but adds that he had once read the letters he had written from prison to Yusuf Ziya Ortaç and that he found them truly impressive. Aziz Nesin cannot help but wonder why Yusuf Ziya had allowed someone else to read letters that were meant for him.

Years later, Yusuf Ziya passes away. Aziz Nesin submits his novel *The Wonderful Children of Today* (*Şimdiki Çocuklar Harika*) to a literary competition organized by Yapı ve Kredi Bank. However, the jury led by Tahir Alangu does not allow him to win. Many years later, Mehmet Seyda, who had won first prize in that contest, confesses the truth to him. He also tells Aziz Nesin that Kazım Taşkent, the bank's general manager, once mentioned his plan to publish a magazine. During that conversation, Kazım Taşkent said that he did not want Aziz Nesin to write for the magazine, but admitted that he had purchased a letter written by him years ago and was waiting for an opportunity to sell it.

Aziz Nesin wonders how that letter could have ended up in Kazım Taşkent's hands and whether Yusuf Ziya might have sold the letters that Aziz Nesin had sent him from prison. He even considers the possibility that, while he was in jail, Yusuf Ziya might have used the money from selling one of those letters to buy the engagement rings he had purchased for him and Meral.

#### *His Birthday*

On December 20, 1955, Meral sends a meal to Aziz Nesin, along with a photograph of herself. On the back, she has written: "A birthday gift. Kisses. Meral." Since Aziz Nesin does not know his own birthday, he assumes that December 20 must be Meral's. He even wonders why she would give him her photograph on her own birthday. But when the visiting day arrives, he learns that December 20 is, in fact, his birthday.

#### *The Extent of Arbitrariness*

One day, while Meral is leaving his meal, she says something to Aziz Nesin through the bars, and he responds. At that moment, the guard outside pushes Meral away, saying that talking is forbidden. Seeing Meral being shoved, Aziz Nesin starts shouting furiously. About half an hour later, Major Muzaffer's assistant comes and takes him away. He has nicknamed this officer "the mulberry seller."

In his childhood, when he lived in Mecidiyeköy, there used to be mulberry trees where apartment buildings now stand. The mulberry sellers would pile the fruit onto large trays, about a hundred kilos at a time, and carry them on their heads. Most of these sellers were rough men. They wore white shirts with black vests, red sashes around their waists, left their collars open, and had shoes with thick heels. Since cannonballs and bombs were once made in Gülhane, they would advertise their mulberries by shouting, "*These are the cannonballs from Gülhane!*" As they walked, they moved with a kind of springing motion, half running, half hopping, their hips swaying side to side. The captain walks exactly like those mulberry sellers.

They leave the prison building together and go behind it. Ahead of them stands a squad of armed soldiers. When the captain orders, "*Load!*" the soldiers fix their magazines into their rifles. Facing the rifles, he shouts that if he wants, he could have Aziz Nesin executed right there on the spot. Aziz Nesin says nothing but feels deep disgust toward the man before him. Later, when he returns to his cell and his friends ask what happened, he recounts the incident without going into detail.

#### *How Yusuf Ziya Remembers It*

Aziz Nesin quotes Yusuf Ziya Ortaç, who recounts those days in his own autobiographical work. At the time, Yusuf Ziya is staying on Büyükkada. On the evening of September 6, he has too much work to do at *Akbaba*, so he decides to spend the night at his house in Istanbul. On his way home, he becomes frightened by the angry crowds walking down the streets.

The next day, when Aziz Nesin does not show up, he learns that he has been arrested. While Aziz Nesin is in prison, Yusuf Ziya buys his engagement rings and sends them to him so that he could get engaged.

Although Aziz Nesin himself remembers being taken away from *Akbaba* on September 7, he notes that Yusuf Ziya's version of events differs slightly. This is how Yusuf Ziya Ortaç chooses to remember it.

#### *Children of the Republic*

İlhan and Turhan Selçuk brothers publish a humor magazine called *Dolmuş*, and in its first issue they feature an article titled "A Conversation with the Reader." The article states that the magazine was founded by young people who are "children of the Republic" and that no one over the age of thirty-two works in it.

Aziz Nesin, noting that the phrase "child of the Republic" implies being a "centrist," sees that the article was written by Refi Cevat Ulunay. In response, as a forty-one-year-old humorist, he writes a sarcastic letter to the magazine.

Because publishers are too afraid to publish anything he writes under his own name between 1948 and 1957, this letter is published in the following issue under the title "A Letter from Someone." In it, he asks which "thirty-second year" Ulunay is in and mocks the magazine by suggesting that its republic must be founded long before 1923.

#### *Writing Poems*

Aziz Nesin publishes his first poetry book, *From End to Beginning (Sondan Başa)*, at the age of sixty-nine. During his time in prison, whenever he meets with Meral, she asks him every ten minutes if he wants anything from outside. Inspired by this, he writes a poem titled *Ten Minutes*, responding each time, "Bring me freedom in your eyes."

However, Meral shows no interest in this poem or in any of his other writings. Even the critics who see his poems find it unusual that he is writing poetry and are skeptical of his efforts.

#### *"Damn Ox Carts!"*

No matter how harsh his conditions, Aziz Nesin always clings to life through work. While his fellow inmates discuss when they might be released or what their sentences will be, he continues to write and work. When he cannot find paper and pen, he takes notes on the walls with the burning tip of a match or the point of a needle. During this period, he occupies three different cells, scraping off the phlegm, mucus, and various filth stuck to the walls with the soles of his shoes.

Items sent from home are often wrapped in a clothesline, so he writes on the wall with the clothesline, "Damn ox carts!" This nonsensical phrase is something prisoners occasionally say. One day, Major Muzaffer, the prison warden, sees the writing and smiles before walking away. A little later, he returns with another officer, they look at the writing together, and then leave, still smiling.

#### *Escaping*

Aziz Nesin is a man who has lost faith in justice and the legal system because of what has been done to him. Moreover, almost no newspaper defends him or the other detainees; only *Forum* magazine speaks out for their innocence.

Despite his innocence, he contemplates what he would do if he were convicted and decides to consider escaping. Climbing to the roof would make this relatively easy. Yet, if he fled, he would be seen as guilty even though he is innocent, and the friends he leaves behind in a difficult situation would likely think poorly of him. Furthermore, in hiding, he would not be able to take care of his children. He ultimately gives up the idea.

In fact, until the age of thirty-five, he dreams of fleeing Turkey and even attempts it several times. In the end, he comes to the conviction that staying in his country is the right choice.

#### *A Man Whose Kindness Must Be Handled with Care*

Aziz Nesin greatly appreciates the kindness of Yusuf Ziya Ortaç and feels deep gratitude toward him. Yet he also regards Yusuf Ziya as a man whose goodness could sometimes be harmful. For instance, when Turhan Selçuk falls ill and Yusuf Ziya ensures he receives treatment, he says, "I have a claim on his lungs, dear Aziz, I have a claim on his lungs!" and refuses to accept that Turhan Selçuk does not want to draw cartoons for *Akbaba*. Similarly, regarding Oğuz Aral, who also does not want to draw for *Akbaba*, he remarks, "Dear Aziz, when he comes to me, he was shivering from the cold. No overcoat. I gave him my own child's jacket and coat."

Journalist Hakkı Devrim becomes Aziz Nesin's neighbor when he establishes a farm near the Nesin Foundation in Çatalca and invites Aziz Nesin to dinner. At the meal, he recounts a memory of Yusuf Ziya Ortaç. At one point, he considers starting a magazine together with Yusuf Ziya. To discuss the matter, Yusuf Ziya invites Hakkı Devrim to a luxurious restaurant, a tactic often used by well-off journalists and writers to impress and persuade a younger collaborator. During the dinner, Yusuf Ziya describes how much Aziz Nesin humbled himself to ask for work. After hearing this, Hakkı Devrim decides not to work with him. Recounting the events, he comments, "At that time, you were already Aziz Bey!"

Mansur Tekin also recounts that after Aziz Nesin's arrest, Yusuf Ziya said to him, "He has done it, he has done it, you do not know him... He must have managed it behind the scenes," which surprised Mansur Tekin.

For these reasons, Aziz Nesin says that he likes Yusuf Ziya Ortaç and that "his goodness is pure white, yet his darkness is pitch black."

#### *Hasan from Of*

Hasan Cevahir, better known as Hasan from Of, is a "big boss" figure whom Aziz Nesin met in 1948 at the Harbiye Military Prison. After being released, Hasan repeatedly invites him to his secret gambling club, but Aziz Nesin never goes. One day, upon hearing that Hasan has arrived, Aziz Nesin immediately rushes to the corridor. Hasan is there with a few of his men. They greet each other with hugs and kisses. Soon after, several flamboyantly dressed women arrive to visit, and bedding sets are brought all the way to his silk-faced quilt. Baskets of nuts and chocolates are also carried to him.

The next day, Hasan complains that sharing a cell with communists deeply offends his dignity. He repeats these complaints not only to Aziz Nesin but also to everyone in the prison, including the sergeant and the major. As a result, he is moved to a separate unit and is released a few days later.

#### *Inescapability*

Prison is a world entirely different from the outside. Inside, no one can truly avoid anyone else. As a result, everyone inevitably witnesses nearly everything about each other. Aziz Nesin notes that while fights often break out for various reasons, the underlying causes are usually things that cannot be openly expressed. By "things," he refers to seemingly trivial acts such as snoring while sleeping, picking one's nose, or lying down for minutes to brush one's teeth after a meal.

One day, he hears Veli and Örfi getting into a confrontation. Veli is a good friend of his, though he always speaks sharply and rarely seeks compromise. Between 1953 and 1954, Aziz Nesin runs the Oluş Bookstore, which incurs losses, prompting him to also open a photo studio. He decides to publish an album called *Istanbul Mosques*, listing forty famous mosques with photographs and information in Turkish, English, and French. Since his own name is effectively banned, he lists the bookstore as the preparer. The album does not sell as well as expected, and he barely manages to cover his debts. However, seeing Aziz Nesin selling the mosque album, Veli accuses him of being reactionary.

Örfi, on the other hand, is a loud man who suffers from a deep sense of inferiority because he could not continue his education beyond primary school. Easily offended, he is difficult to befriend. Aziz Nesin avoids him due to both his sensitivity and involvement in illegal activities.

He does not try to understand the true cause of the prison fights, because it is obvious: there are only four or five taps for the detainees and prisoners, and a line always forms in front of them. When Örfi takes a tap, he rarely lets go, continuously wetting his bare, hairy body while making nauseating noises as he cleans his nose and throat. Enduring his behavior is difficult for everyone. Aziz Nesin retreats to his cell and plugs his ears to avoid hearing these sounds. Thus, no matter what the fight appears to be about from the outside, he knows the real reason lies in such annoyances.

#### *Release*

As New Year's Eve approaches, the detainees are interrogated and then released in groups. When Aziz Nesin is questioned, the prosecutor asks where he was on the evening of September 6. He replies that they must first explain what crime he is being held for. The prosecutor has his words recorded, not verbatim but in an appropriate official tone.

Those who remain in custody on New Year's Eve celebrate among themselves. Later, Aziz Nesin returns to his cell and continues working. In the first days of 1956, he is released without any explanation.

#### *Fındık*

A short time before his release, Meral comes to visit and tells Aziz Nesin that they threw his dog Fındık out of the house for misbehaving. This is the first time Aziz Nesin feels hurt by Meral. After his release, he looks for Kâmil Efendi, the dog keeper to whom they had given Fındık, but finds that he has died and the dogs he lived with have all run away.

#### *What Was Said in Parliament*

In the September 1986 issue of *Tarih ve Toplum*, parliamentary records are cited to recount what was said in Parliament. Speaking on behalf of the CHP parliamentary group as a deputy from Malatya, İsmet İnönü states that the attackers acted without encountering any obstacles, meaning that the security forces did not intervene. Mehmet Özbey, a deputy from Burdur, claims that the incidents were carried out by communists, who taking advantage of the presence of many foreigners in Istanbul for various international congresses put the country in a difficult position. Similarly, Burhanettin Onat, a deputy from Antalya, asserts that educated communists were behind the events. Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver, a deputy from Istanbul, says that newspapers in both Greece and Turkey published articles that pitted the two nations against each other, and that political debates should be banned because the youth were not yet mature enough.

Aleksandros Hacıopolos, also a deputy from Istanbul, states that on September 8, *Ulus* newspaper published a story claiming that priests had set fire to churches, condemning the press for playing an incendiary role. He recounts that on the night of the events, five or ten boats carrying two to three hundred people arrived at Büyükdada that the police saw them but did nothing, and that some were seen trying to break into the doors of the Zapyon Church in Taksim while the police again stood by idly. He tells how looters entered his home, located next to a police station, threw his elderly parents out of bed, and left the house in ruins. In Yenimahalle, he says, when a group of thugs were about to break into a house, a police officer approached them and told them it was too early, instructing them to come back an hour later. Moreover, he mentions that graves were dug up, corpses were stabbed and burned, and some clergymen were beaten and killed.

Deputy Prime Minister Fuat Köprülü says the government had prior knowledge that such incidents might occur but did not know the exact timing. He insists that "red forces" were behind it, that Turks would never burn places of worship, and that this was a communist tactic. He notes that the destroyed buildings belonged not only to Greeks but also to Turks, Armenians, and Jews, and that the fact the events took place not only in Istanbul but also in Ankara and İzmir indicated an organized operation. Prime Minister Adnan Menderes adds that the police force managed to arrest three thousand people in a very short time. He remarks that since "the devil had taken on a divine guise," it had become difficult to recognize him, and that at first they did not know what to do.

In the end, martial law declared in three provinces is extended for six months, and the opposition's proposal to postpone the extraordinary parliamentary session until November is rejected.

#### *After the Government Was Reestablished*

Following the resignations of several deputies, ministers, and finally Adnan Menderes himself, the government has to be reconstituted. On December 16, 1955, a new government is formed once again under Menderes's leadership. Debates in Parliament continue. On January 13, 1956, while a proposal for a parliamentary inquiry into the Prime Minister and the Minister of the Interior regarding the events of September 6-7 is being discussed, CHP deputy from Malatya, Nüvit Yetkin, states that the government had been aware of the impending incidents since August 26. Before the events, some local headmen had been asked to provide the addresses of people whose homes and workplaces would be attacked. Night watchmen had told certain residents to make their door numbers more legible. Indeed, when a hotel on Büyükdada was attacked, the hotel manager called the district governor, who told him that his hotel "was not on the list" and that he would prevent the attack. At the time of the events, different crowds organized in various parts of the city acted simultaneously.

Osman Bölükbaşı, deputy from Kırşehir, quotes from the *New York Times* dated September 17, 1955, which reports that the security forces did nothing in response to the incidents. On the same date, Allen Dulles, then the CIA chief in Istanbul, writes to Major General Behçet Türkmen, head of the National Security Service, stating that the destruction was carried out in accordance with communist techniques and methods.

#### *A Note from Aziz Nesin*

Aziz Nesin believes that he and others unjustly imprisoned like him were saved thanks to İsmet İnönü. Indeed, İsmet Pasha knew these tricks well, which is why he did not trust the government of Adnan Menderes.

Finally, on September 5, 1987, he criticizes the headline "The September 6-7 Uproar" published in *Hürriyet*. The article refers in an unpleasant tone to an event organized by Istanbul's Greeks, who had been forced to migrate to Greece, through their association in Athens. Aziz Nesin notes that every nation has moments in its history to be ashamed of, that the September 6-7 disaster should not be downplayed as an "uproar," and that it is an event from which lessons must be learned.

## THEMES`

### JUSTICE

**Injustice** Aziz Nesin and others are arrested as responsible for the attacks of September 6-7 without any evidence. Moreover, their closest relatives are kept uninformed about their arrests. Aziz Nesin, whose two children are left alone, is forced to endure a tiny, cramped cell in despair. While held here for months without any justification, he witnesses the stories of others as well.

For example, Faik Muzaffer Amaç, who had been dismissed from teaching for allegedly insulting national and moral values and had started practicing law, was arrested in place of a partner who was not in his office that day. While they were imprisoned, parliamentary debates noted that the attacks could not be fully understood because, according to Adnan Menderes, they had been carried out by the "devil" in "divine disguise." It was also recorded that law enforcement did not intervene in attacks against non-Muslims because the perpetrators were Turkish and Muslim. Indeed, Oktay Engin, who instigated the attack on Atatürk's house in Thessaloniki that triggered the events, later attained high positions in the General Directorate of Security.

After the May 27 coup, during trials held at Yassıada, Aziz Nesin learns that Nurettin Aknoz, who was the martial law commander at the time, had ordered that he and his fellow detainees be "hanged in bunches" for being "leftists," but that the judges had opposed this order.

### POLITICS

**Oppression** Aziz Nesin states that those branded as "leftists" are deemed deserving of all forms of mistreatment and injustice, regardless of whether they are guilty or innocent. They are treated no more humanely than a professional criminal like Hasan from Of. Because Aziz Nesin is discredited and criminalized in this way, Yaşar Nabi Nayır, concerned about the future of his own business, fires his fiancée, Meral. While imprisoned, Aziz Nesin, responsible for supporting his household, begins working in the prison and is forced to publish his writings under pseudonyms, knowing that otherwise no publisher dares to work with him.

## RELATIONSHIP

**Loyalty** After his arrest, his fiancée Meral both takes care of his children, who are left alone, and brings him meals in prison. She even brings him a birthday gift when Aziz Nesin himself forgets his own birthday.

**Hypocrisy** After hearing what his employer Yusuf Ziya Ortaç said about the people he supported, he expresses that it is not easy to get help from him. Indeed, Yusuf Ziya expects those he assists to feel grateful and in return, do something for him. Aziz Nesin even suspects that the letters he wrote to Yusuf Ziya from prison were sold, and that the rings Yusuf Ziya had gifted to him and Meral may have been purchased in this way. Years later, in a conversation with Hakkı Devrim, he learns that Yusuf Ziya had portrayed him as pathetic, like the other people he supported.

## QUEST

**Curiosity** When Aziz Nesin is tired of working, he goes to the cells of some prisoners to examine the mold growing on the damp walls and becomes absorbed in observing it. When he notices mice entering his own cell, he does not chase them away but quietly feeds them and watches them closely. In other words, even under the worst conditions, he constantly seeks out and discovers new things to explore and encounter.

## CHANGE

**Transformation** The prison where Aziz Nesin is held was the dining hall when he was a first-year student at the Military Academy. This is one reason he thinks climbing onto the roof to escape is an easy task. He knows the place well. The cells are much smaller than normal for the same reason. At the age of forty, as the protagonist of an entirely different destiny, Aziz Nesin returns to a space that belongs to the years when he was preparing for a different future as a military student. Yet he is not the only thing that has changed; the space itself has transformed as well.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Considering the events of September 6-7 in the context of Turkey's recent history of injustice, in what ways does confronting what happened on that day at the political and social level contribute to the establishment of law and justice?
2. Aziz Nesin's narrative offers a dark example of how individuals associated with leftist ideology in Turkey are declared "usual suspects" under all circumstances. Based on this example, what can be said about the institutionalization of right-wing ideology in Turkey? What type of right-wing polity is at play, and how is it related to institutionalized violence?
3. We can say that Aziz Nesin, who considered leaving the country until the age of thirty-five, nonetheless managed to establish a form of respect in this country, a type of symbolic capital that is not easily relinquished. In this context, can symbolic capital be considered one of the factors that tie individuals to a country where the injustice against certain identities is structurally entrenched?
4. Culture and art are among the resources that can provide symbolic capital to individuals outside the mainstream. In this sense, what does the gradual shrinking of the cultural and artistic sphere, which also nourishes those outside the mainstream, mean for identities that are structurally subjected to injustice?

