

## “Sait Faik and the Story of Everyday Life”

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*“The world is changing my friends. Some day you will not be able to see dark countenanced spots in the sky anymore. Some day you will not be able to see the green hair of our mother earth on roadsides. It will not be bad for us, but for you kids. We have seen the birds and grass a lot. It will be bad for you.” (Son Kuslar)*

Sait Faik Abasıyanık was born on October 23 1906 in Adapazarı. He began his primary school education in the same city at ‘Rehber-i Terakki Mektebi’ (School of Guidance for Improvement). He attended Adapazarı İdadisi (Adapazari High school) for about two years. He completed his high school education at Bursa High School (1928)<sup>1</sup> after studying at Istanbul Erkek Lisesi (Istanbul High School for Boys). He registered at Istanbul University to study literature. However he quit this education after attending courses for two years. His father who was in trade business wanted him to study economics. Therefore he sent him to Switzerland. He was not able to stay there for long either. Then he moved to Grenolde which he used in his stories and which hosted his memories. While living there he again decided to study literature. He quit his education which he did not follow up regularly and came back to Turkey in 1933. After being unemployed for sometime, although he Faik taught Turkish courses at *Halıçö □lu Ermeni Yetim Mektebi* (Halıçö □lu Armenian School for the Orphan) he also resigned from this job that he got bored quickly. He tried his chances in trade. He worked for sometime but he was not able to continue doing it for it was not adequate for his soul. He did not work after his father’s death. He lived on his income from what was left to him from his family. The writer who died on May 11 1954 because of a lung failure, did not marry. A year before his death he was elected to ‘honorary membership’ by the American Mark Twain Association for his contribution to modern literature.

Launched after his death and still going on today the ‘Sait Faik Prize for the Best Story’ is granted to the best loved story book every year. Also their manor on Burgas Island where he spent his summers with his mother has been transformed into Sait Faik Museum.

Like many other writers Sait Faik, who began his literary career by writing poetry, wrote his first stories ‘Pek Mendil’ (The Silk Handkerchief) and ‘Zemberek’ (The Spring) when he was still a student. In answer to when he began to write stories in an interview he says: ‘I was in tenth grade at Bursa High School, our literature teacher wanted us to do some homework. I wrote a story titled “Pek Mendil” and handed that.

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1- Kutlu, Mustafa, Sait Faik’in Hikaye Dünyası, Dergah Publications, Istanbul, no date, pp. 11-12.

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The next class the teacher made the whole class to read my story. I could not understand why he did so. It seems that he had liked the story so much, and then he called me and said “if you go on writing like this you will be a good writer.” That is how I began writing in the first place. My teacher was always encouraging me. I wrote “Zemberek” next...<sup>2</sup>

Sait Faik’s first published story is ‘Uçurtmalar’ (The Kites). This story which was published by Milliyet Newspaper in 1929 was followed by a story titled ‘Ya’m a’ (The Plunder). Then Hür newspaper published ten of his stories. Thus his first stories that occupy an important place in his art life and his story telling met their audience.

The most distinctive feature of Sait Faik Abasıyanık’s stories, is the coming alive of his observations in which he reflects a realistic viewpoint. Sait Faik’s life is intermingled with his protagonists in his stories most of the time. The protagonist of the narration is sometimes himself, sometimes others.

His first story book is titled *The Samovar*. This collection consists of nineteen stories including ‘The Silk Handkerchief’ that he wrote when he was still a student. When *Semaver* (Samovar) was published in 1936, its new style, with which the literary circles were unfamiliar, immediately became the focus of criticism. However, in spite of the critical turmoil, a reality, that Sait Faik initiated a new style in Turkish story telling, was accepted.

In this period, that we could call his first period, Sait Faik was influenced by the developing ‘Social Realism’ movement along with Sabahattin Ali. By giving up on his tendencies of searching for the new man, forming a new order by his values in a short period of time, he turned to the common man who can settle for less, are crude in their looks, endearing in their attitudes and lives, consenting to their fate.<sup>3</sup>

Sait Faik Abasıyanık’s protagonists are those from the lower classes, vagabond kids, pensioners, fishermen, gypsy girls etc. These common portraits of man are his friends and lovers whom he shared his loneliness with. He found his stories and their protagonists in Istanbul and in its surroundings, and he based the lives and stories that this surrounding envisaged for its common man completely on his observations. He tried to be happy in his much loved nature and forget his loneliness while writing about happy and placid lives.

His second book *Sahmerdan* (The Serpent) was published in 1940, and it is a collection of stories written between 1935 and 1940. Sait Faik, who was closer to social realist vein in his first book *Semaver*, now has turned to a more observant, descriptive style. Through this kind of narration, that is through Sait Faik’s narration, ‘Sait Faik, who is able to turn each and every moment in life regardless of important-unimportant, striking-common distinctions into a story, who could renew the style of story telling on his own, who is so unique that no one can imitate, has wide opened a window in our

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2- Kavaz, Ibrahim, Sait Faik Abasıyanık, Sule Publications, Istanbul, 1999, p. 66.

3- Ibid. p. 69.

story telling.’<sup>4</sup>

He was sued for his story titled ‘elme’ (Tripping) in 1947, and events like confiscation of his first novel published in 1944 *Medarî Maîet Motoru* (Motor of Maintenance Support) had negative effects on Sait Faik. His stories with this effect do not show common men’s struggles with life, their struggle to earn a living, but their everyday life and their dreams in this everyday life.

Sait Faik collected his stories in his mature period under the title *Luzumsuz Adam* (The Unnecessary Man). His book titled *Havada Bulut* consists of his stories written between 1940-1948.

His story adventure, beginning with *Luzumsuz Adam* and continuing up to *Havada Bulut* and *Havuz Bâî* (Near the Pool), then going on with *Son Kuîlar* (Last Birds) puts forward a different kind of Sait Faik story telling with *Alemdaîda Var Bir Yîlan* (There Exists A Snake in Alemdaî) that reveals surrealist impacts. Reality and dream is intermingled in this piece. ‘*Alemdaîda Var Bir Yîlan* was published first in 1954. This was a period when Sait Faik and I (...) were very much influenced by surrealism. Especially we were very much under the influence of the “crude, pure language” that Andre Breton created.’<sup>5</sup> Sait Faik probed into the subconscious of his protagonists alongside their dreams and lives in his last period, and made a very good job in that too.

Tamer Kûtükçü, contrary to prevalent ideas and theories, argues that Sait Faik began writing modernist stories by *Lüzumsuz Adam* that was published in 1948: ‘Sait Faik has found a place in two innovative movements in Turkish story telling. One of these is the one that begins with Memduh Evket Esenal and is called “situation story” by some literary historians –specifically establishing this genre into Turkish literature- and the other is the fact that he is one of the first representatives of the “modernist” story that began after 1950. About the second one general idea is that although he is in this with his *Alemdaîda Var Bir Yîlan* published in 1954, recent research reveals that this suggestion is not that true, and the break began a lot earlier with *Lüzumsuz Adam* published in 1948. For example, Fethi Naci in his extensive research on Sait Faik titled *Sait Faik’in Hikayeciliîi* (Story Telling in Sait Faik) classes the writer’s story telling into two periods, basing the starting point of his transformation to *Lüzumsuz Adam*. *Havuz Bâî* (1952) stories, written between the period *Lüzumsuz Adam* and *Havada Bulut* and forgotten for some reason, and which did not attract criticism, are alongwith *Mahalle Kahvesi* (1950) and *Havada Bulut* (1951) are indeed the milestones of this transformation. (...) modernist story will be seen in Turkish literature in 1950s, and will be well established by story writers like Vüs’at O. Bener, Ferit Edgü, Leyla Erbil, Bilge Karasu, Erdal Z, Demir Z, Adnan Z, Naim Tirali in a movement led by writers around *A Dergisi*.’<sup>6</sup>

4- Kavukcu, Cemil, ‘Sait Faik’in Zîküçülüümdeki Zîleri,’ Bir İnsan Sevmek: Sait Faik, Alkîm Publications, Istanbul, 2004, p.49.

5- Berk, İhan, ‘*Alemdaîda Var Bir Yîlan*,’ Ibid. p. 25.

6- Kûtükçü, Tamer, ‘Modernist Zîkuye Giden Yolda *Havuz Bâî*,’ ibid. pp. 194-196.

Story, in the western sense was adopted in Turkish literature later in comparison to other literary genres. Sait Faik wrote his stories in 1930s when ‘the story’ had been developed and reached a certain form. ‘...mer Seyfeddin, Refik Halid, Yakup Kadri etc.’<sup>7</sup> are prominent Turkish story tellers who initiated the development of story telling. With the proclamation of Republic of Turkey, story has also experienced a transformation, and writers, who are the eye witnesses of the social depression during these years, began to look for new topics for their stories. Sait Faik emerged as the messenger of novelty in this environment. He molded his stories that he created through his observations thoroughly with his own style. Faik, having chosen his protagonists in this way, wanted to become acquainted with these people’s lives, tried to know them before creating them in his stories.

‘In 1930s a classical story type linked to the techniques of Maupassant, Chekhov and Gorky was being used. (Bekir Sıkıntı, Memduh Şevket Esenal, Sabahattin Ali, et al.) All these [writers] were continuing the story tradition that evolves around a specific plot; that has a beginning, middle and end tied to specific rules, that generally ends in a surprise. Because they were realists, they tried not to interfere with the plot and tried to be objective by taking their identities behind the stage. Sait Faik, in such an environment, came up with a different technique that unifies his own identity with the protagonists, that lives with them. His stories are mostly written in the first person. This first person is mostly the writer himself, and sometimes one of the protagonists of the story.’<sup>8</sup>

Writer Sait Faik does not interfere with the lives of people whose lives he tells about in his stories. He does not attempt to correct them. He places his protagonists’ dreams skillfully into their lives while writing about the things he has seen. These dreams are in fact the expressions of the search for love and peace that are intermingled with Sait Faik’s own dreams.

He says in an interview: ‘...Moral evaluations in our society are changing. Today elder writers called the veterans, were looking at life, society from above. They still do so. They do not mingle with life, they want to correct the society only calling from above. As to us: we do not have any claims in correcting the society. We want to live the same life with our society, with our people.’<sup>9</sup>

Love that is the essence of Sait Faik’s own life and his stories come up in a very distinctive fashion in his writings in which he tells us about common people. This tendency towards telling about people from lower classes and about their lives, which is rarely seen in the stories of the elder writers, afterwards became a strong literary movement with writers adopting this view. According to Sait Faik, the only thing that will save his people and the world is love. He draws portraits of people that he chose

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7- Kavaz, Ibrahim, *ibid.* p. 76.

8- Kudret, Cevdet, *Türk Edebiyatında Hikaye ve Roman III*, İnkılap Publications, İstanbul, 1990, p. 93.

9- Kavaz, Ibrahim, *ibid.* pp. 75-76.

among fishermen, child laborers, prostitutes, pensioners, and old people. While walking through these people’s lives and dreams, we clearly see how much he loves them, how vital meanings he attaches to this feeling.

‘The most prominent source of Sait Faik’s sadness is the lack of love. Most of the time he finds himself all alone in a loveless, cruel society. He says in one of his stories: “Houses turn their backs to the sun. Streets are narrow. Tradesmen are ferocious. The rich are indifferent. Even those who are lying in gilded queen size beds are solitary. Loneliness has filled the world.”’<sup>10</sup>

The fact that Sait Faik took refuge in loneliness all his life, that incredible hunger for love did not destroy his hopes and belief in beautiful days to come. On the contrary, he keeps on telling us about these stubbornly and in an undaunted manner as if he could make this hope and dream real.

‘Let’s think that one day we will live in a world full of hearts that are beating with a feeling of duty that is made up of friendships, people and animals and trees and bird and grass. We will have such a morality that no book has never written. A morality, that looks in astonishment to what we are doing today, what we will do in the future, what we are thinking, what we will think.’<sup>11</sup>

He underlines the fact that he sees love as the sole savior of humankind in *Alemda’da Var Bir Yılan* in these words which are the essence and summary of Sait Faik’s philosophy of life:

‘Loneliness filled the world. To love, everything begins with loving a person. Here everything ends with loving a person.’<sup>12</sup>

Sait Faik’s friendship, admiration, and love not only to humankind but also to nature are clearly seen in his stories. According to the writer nature is the most incredible instructive force that teaches and supplies humankind the true ways of life even in its destruction.

‘Nature is often friendly. Even when it seems hostile, it is a discouraging father who offers mankind the opportunities to experience its might and power, he teaches mankind to swim when he shipwrecks his boat in his thunder, to find the stronger, more skillful one when he makes the roof of the hut fly away in his wind; when he makes [mankind] to come face to face with his beast he shall be testing his muscular strength...’<sup>13</sup>

Sait Faik, who displays his inner world in each story he has written, occupies a very special place in Turkish literature. He had no problem with life except for the business of writing that is the proof of his existence in his own life without letting lots

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10- Kudret, Cevdet, *ibid.* p. 93.

11- Faik, Sait, ‘Haritada Bir Hikaye,’ *Alemda’da Var Bir Yılan*, Bilgi Publications, Ankara, 2000, p. 16.

12- *Alemda’da Var Bir Yılan*, p., 32.

13- Faik Sait, ‘Haritada Bir Nokta,’ *Son Kuşlar*, Bilgi Publications, Ankara, 2000, p. 62.

of positions and titles surround himself with what he has written. In his story titled 'Haritada Bir Nokta (A Spot on the Map)' he takes sides with a young fishermen who experienced injustice, but cannot remove this injustice. Because of this he becomes angry and runs out to write.

'I had promised myself; I even wouldn't write. Writing too, was it something more than greed? I was going to wait for death to come calmly here among virtuous people; what would I need greed, anger for? I couldn't. I ran to the tobacco shop, bought a pencil and paper. I sat down. I took my jackknife out which I was carrying in my pocket in order to chip little sticks while wandering about on the desolate roads of the island in case I feel bored. I chipped the pencil. After chipping it I held and kissed it. I was going crazy if I didn't write.'<sup>14</sup>

Why does Sait Faik write, why does he narrate people's dreams and lives? We find the answer for this again in a story by Sait Faik: 'Here they are talking. What are they talking about I wonder? A ship projector soaks the semi-lighted room into light. The girl I love doesn't become uglier while she is eating. She is so merry, so healthy that she is not even aware of that she is eating. There are always cheerful things on my friend's face. Has things to say in his mouth. I wonder what he is saying.

This is the reason why I write stories. Because of this wonder I say I am a story teller. They don't like my stories, I become sad. They do, I get furious. I myself like them, become a fool. When I don't, I don't feel like eating.'<sup>15</sup>

Stories of Sait Faik, who was able to make use of each and every opportunity that Turkish offers, have a poetic style. From his choice of words to his sentences, he places each detail on language. This is why, even in his carelessness his poetic style stands in distinction. Renowned Turkish poet İlhan Berk says about the writer's language he uses in his works: 'Sait Faik, just like Wittgenstein, was applying the credo that "philosophy should be constructed like poetry" in his stories. (...) In poetry how words carry the image, multi-layered meaning, words depart with a multi-layered meaning in his stories too.'<sup>16</sup>

To the extent that words, sentences and stories, becoming poetic, have transformed into reality, Sait Faik's narrators/himself, protagonist come alive, become all blood and flesh and seem real-genuine to the reader to that extent. Apart from language and imagination, in his stories there is only and always the humankind, and he becomes the narrator of humankind's dreams and lives; while doing this his heart full of love never lost its faith in the unlimited hope that beautiful days shall be reached by 'love.' He tells us about the world that he wanted us to live with these hopes, what kind of a world he would like in these words: 'A world where there is no injustice. Where all people are happy, at least all have jobs, all are full... A world where there are no thefts, no violation

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14- 'Haritada Bir Nokta,' p. 182.

15- Faik, Sait, 'Kıralada'da Bir Ev,' Mahalle Kahvesi, Bilgi Publications, Ankara, 2000, p. 62.

16- Berk, İlhan, 'Alemdagda Var Bir Yılan'da Dil,' Bir İnsani Sevmek: Sait Faik, Aklım Publications, İstanbul, 2003, p. 24.

of other’s rights ... (...) a world where a young girl can go out with a chaste young man, chastity, modesty, morality, life, night, and day cannot be sold for money... A world where there are no miserable people on the streets... A world when the head and the brain can work the person absolutely earns his living, entertains himself... A world where a man authoritatively striving to say good things in himself, to say right things, without fear and wrongfully judged is able to say these sorts of things.<sup>17</sup>

In Sait Faik’s stories we see that common people from Istanbul and its surroundings do not live lives full of love which they are striving for, in spite of that they cling on to their hopes and dreams in order to continue their broken, poor lives. Each time the feeling that we get from Sait Faik’s stories with his unique style, that some day everything will be beautiful in the world warms us.

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1- Faik, Sait, ‘Ay İ s[ı]’, Havada Bulut, Bilgi Publications, Ankara, 2000, p. 151.