

Introduction | Sait Faik's Utopian Poetics and the Lyrical Turn in Turkish Fiction

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If works of literature do not carry people into a new, happy, different, good, and beautiful world, what are they good for?—Sait Faik

LITERATURE FULFILLS ITS MISSION if it helps us reflect on the meaning of our lives.¹ Sait Faik (1906–1954) more than met this objective by assisting the readers in this ineluctable task. That is why it has been observed, frequently and correctly, that Sait Faik's works represent a significant turning point in twentieth-century Turkish fiction. His writings have broadened our horizons of sympathy by including people who were earlier excluded from literature. When we read his stories, we learn to appreciate the value of the natural world in which we live. They refresh our sense of place, confirming the emotional significance of our environment. The democratic transformation that Sait Faik induced in the artist's role has made us reevaluate the function of writers in the modern world. When he removed literature from its supercilious heights and placed it within the reach of ordinary mortals, promising everyone lives filled with art, our interest in both life and art was renewed. The phenomenon of Sait Faik thus has a unique place in the literary and cultural history of modern Turkey. However, criticism has yet to fathom the deeper historical and theoretical import of the transformation his work has occasioned. This task will not be complete until twentieth-

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century Turkish literature is studied in greater depth. Although there appears to be some consensus among critics about the points mentioned, the true legacy of Sait Faik may be brought to light only in the context of a larger, comparative framework whereby his works are compared and contrasted with the multifarious works of his predecessors, contemporaries, and successors. The decades that have elapsed since the author's death are too few for a sound historical perspective to emerge, especially when Sait Faik still has an enthusiastic audience in Turkish society.

Each year, on the second Sunday of May, the devotees of Sait Faik gather on Istanbul's Burgaz Island,* where he lived most of his life, to celebrate his radical humanitarianism and to remember and relearn from his ethics of love and poetics of nature. These memorial gatherings have been organized regularly since 1977, with attendance sometimes exceeding two hundred people. Such was the case on May 16, 1999, when many high school students also accompanied their teachers to the island, and the "meeting," in the words of Perihan Ergun, the devoted organizer of these events, "turned into a rally." These annual gatherings also serve as the setting for the presentation of the most prestigious short story award in Turkey: the Sait Faik Short Story Prize. Given since 1955, it is a cherished possession of its recipients. The significant number of essays that appear each year, usually in May, in literary journals and magazines, many of which are memorial pieces, is another indication of Sait Faik's enduring significance for Turkish literature. The tradition has continued since 1954, when the pages of newspapers and magazines were inundated for several months with memorial essays on Sait Faik by the prominent literary figures of the time. The first collection of essays and poems on Sait Faik was edited by Tahir Alangu, a well-known critic and literary historian, and was published in 1956. Including nearly one hundred pieces that first appeared within a couple of months of Sait Faik's death, the volume effectively memorialized this solemn moment in the history of Turkish literature. Another sign of Sait Faik's ongoing reputation is the number of entries—nearly five hundred—in the bibliography on his works, prepared and published by Muzaffer Uyguner in 1983 (Uyguner, 51–70). Although somewhat dated now, this bibliography of books, theses, reviews, tributes, and poems reads like an impressive procession of distinguished Turkish literati: Nâzım Hikmet, Turkey's foremost poet; Yaşar

Kemal, a leading novelist; Haldun Taner, a prominent playwright; and many other writers and poets, celebrated the writer with their insightful comments and memorable lines. Even Bülent Ecevit, poet, statesman, and several times prime minister, has an essay on Sait Faik. A more recent reference book on Sait Faik cites eighteen books and fourteen theses (Ergun 1996, 33), while a new questionnaire, filled out by Turkey's prominent litterateurs, has named Sait Faik as the leading short story writer of our age and placed him in the top five of all distinguished writers and poets in the Republican period ("Yetmişbeş Yılda").

The tradition of honoring Sait Faik in writing continues today with regularly appearing brief memorial pieces (e.g., Akova) as well as more extended reflections (e.g., Erbil, Fethi Naci, Oktay). The appraisals of these noted poets, fiction writers, and critics strongly suggest that the Turkish readers' generous outpouring of love and respect for Sait Faik is most likely to endure in the near future. It would thus be a mistake to dub Sait Faik a misunderstood artist. It is more sensible to speak of an uncommon but felicitous reciprocation of what the audiences have received from their beloved author. Nevertheless, it would have been impossible for Sait Faik to reach his potential readers if it were not for such dedicated writer-editors as Muzaffer Uyguner and Talat S. Halman. Uyguner is the author of numerous books and articles on Sait Faik, as well as the editor of his extant writings. And under the discerning leadership of Talat S. Halman, generations of translators have been mobilized to give the English-reading world more than one chance to get acquainted with this cherished Turkish author. The gathering of such a large number of readers, writers, critics, and translators on Sait Faik's behalf reminds us of a famous anecdotal story. Sait Faik once wondered skeptically if five or six stories of his would still be of interest in fifty years' time. With his typical modesty, he viewed such contemplation of posterity as an immodest wish (Erbil 1998, 62). He was certainly proven wrong as far as the Turkish readers are concerned. This second collection of his stories in English translation contradicts him even further.

The selections in the present book, which were first published in Turkish between 1936 and 1954, encompass Sait Faik's short but productive writing career almost in its entirety. They are no less representative of the author than are the selections in Halman's previous collection in English, *A Dot on*

the Map. All the stories, as well as the courtroom pieces contained in the present volume, may be read as variations on Sait Faik's perpetual theme—longing for love, justice, and utopian harmony on earth. Also ubiquitous in these selections is his distinctive prose style, which combines expressive simplicity and suggestive depth in what has usually been described as “lyrical prose.” As a whole, the volume reminds us of Sait Faik's unparalleled talent in portraying single characters rather than in contriving complex dramatic plots. Such concentration of the author's strength also defines the efficacy of the form in which he could be most productive and successful: the short story. The present volume gives us ample occasion to observe the thematic, formal, and stylistic traits of his works. Without studying these aspects of his writings, we cannot interpret properly the Sait Faik revolution in Turkish fiction and its far-reaching literary and cultural implications, some of which I will look at here.

The important (auto)biographical dimension of Sait Faik's writings and his hybridization of literary genres have generally been recognized in Turkish criticism as two significant aspects of the Sait Faik revolution in fiction. Yet, readers of his stories have sometimes been divided over whether or not his stories reflect his actual experiences or are products of his imagination. A related question is whether his first-person narrators, which Sait Faik favored increasingly over the years, represent him in person or are merely distinct personae having little to do with him personally. There are no swift answers to such sweeping questions, for Sait Faik's writings vary considerably in form and content. For one thing, the borderlines between Sait Faik's 197 stories, 63 reportage pieces, and 49 miscellaneous writings (grouped according to Sami N. Özerdim and Muzaffer Uyguner's classification in *Sait Faik 1970–89*, 15: 157–65) are too fluid to sanction any rigorous definition of a Sait Faik story. Even if we arrived at a reliable definition, we would still be left with radically dissimilar clusters of stories. Especially in the early period, there are stories that may be considered classic in form, although they, too, feature Sait Faik's favorite themes and display his matchless lyrical prose. On the other hand, some of his stories with a first-person narrator do capture the personal voice of the actual author directly, whereas in others we hear the voice rather indirectly. Some stories, obviously documentary in both intent and content, employ vivid profiles in real-life dramas, and they

combine wit, irony, and insight in a mood reminiscent of American “new journalism.” Other stories with a less obvious documentary intent, such as “Eftalikus’s Coffeehouse” in this collection, have proven to have important real-life references and connotations as well (e.g., see Birsell on Eftalapullos’s Coffeehouse, the original model for the coffeehouse in the story). Finally, there are the later stories, such as “A Man Created by Loneliness” and “Such a Story,” both included in this volume, which feature an “imaginary friend” and narrate in trancelike fashion the extended fantasies of the author. Yet, one cannot quickly deny them the status of “lived experience” just because there is an undeniable element of fantasy in them.

Despite these variations from one piece of writing to the next, the debate is nevertheless pertinent, not for settling once and for all whether or not Sait Faik *always* reported on his actual experiences, but for understanding why he increasingly favored doing so and how he did it when he did. By slightly changing the terms of the debate, we may thus concentrate our attention on a more crucial issue in interpreting Sait Faik’s works, namely the problematic relation he had with literature and the act of writing. This issue has not been examined in depth despite numerous instances in his writing that suggest that he repeatedly posed to himself the questions of “why write” and “how to write.” Among the translated works, “A Dot on the Map,” in Halman’s earlier collection, and “The Gramophone and the Typewriter,” in the present one, are two significant cases. In previous criticism, this issue has been overshadowed by the emphasis on Sait Faik’s stance on “what” or “about whom” to write, the overused yet accurate answer being: the underprivileged, the dispossessed, and the marginalized people of society. Nevertheless, we have a writer who, perturbed especially by the possibility of unwarranted social distinction that writing might procure, poses the question in broader terms, questioning the use and function of writing, and trying to deal with it in ethical and aesthetic terms. The fact that Sait Faik always saw as problematic what ordinary writers usually take for granted must be seen as an important sign of his distinction and originality. But we cannot expect prescriptive formulas about “how to write” from such true originals. Although he made a number of strong statements, such as the one that appears in the epigraph to this essay, that express his views on the mission of literature, his solution to the question of “how to write” in a way con-

sonant with the general mission he proposed for literature is left for the readers' independent investigation.

I will suggest that Sait Faik's novel treatment, or "mistreatment," of time-honored generic divisions (or his genre bending), his apparent shortcomings in novel writing, his opting for open-ended plots, and his gradual abandonment of the third-person narrator in his stories may be interpreted as inevitable outcomes of his search, in the medium of writing, for ethical transparency, that is, for sincerity and authenticity, his chief virtues as a person and a writer. Hence, the radical transformation he induced in the classic story format, namely his intermixture of disparate genres, which we encounter as a problem in classifying his works, may be thought to have resulted from exposing the realistic short story to the kinds of writing that are not (like the novel) "constitutively" but only "conditionally" literary (for the distinction between the two literary regimes, see Genette 1993, 1–29).

No matter how belated the emergence of the novel and the short story in Turkey in the late nineteenth century might be vis-à-vis the West, by the time Sait Faik started producing his works, these genres had already gained the status of "serious literature" in Turkey. Replacing earlier genres based on oral and semi-oral modes of production and reception, these modern forms in a way "guaranteed" literariness within the new system of modern literature, or the literature of the print age. This sweeping change in literary production in Turkey may be thought of as analogous to the preceding transformation in Western letters. As Terry Eagleton notes in *Literary Theory*, "in eighteenth-century England, the concept of literature was not confined as it sometimes is today to 'creative' and 'imaginative' writing. It meant the whole body of valued writing in society: philosophy, history, essays and letters as well as poems" (1996, 15). Eagleton's "valued writing" calls to mind the root of the Turkish word for literature: *edeb*, or manners, and the whole gamut of cultural, ethical, and emotional investments the term historically signifies.

With that background in mind, Sait Faik's literary practice may be considered a resistance to what Eagleton views as a confinement of literature to "creative" and "imaginative" writing, or to "fiction" in the strict sense of the term. Sait Faik's practice not only draws upon but also reminds us of such potentially literary forms as the memoir, the diary, the essay, the character

sketch, the journalistic report, the chronicle, and, above all, the letter. Those are forms that do not guarantee literariness automatically, as do modern fictional genres, including drama. Their literariness depends upon the rhetorical qualities of the individual pieces of which they are composed. Since, for Sait Faik, the evocative and communicative functions of literature prevailed over other functions, it is not surprising that the letter, or the idea of it, especially served for him as the quintessential model for literature. Sait Faik adopted this format as a whole or in part, in form or in substance, for several of his stories (e.g., “Waiting for Love” and “Love Letter” in Halman, *A Dot on the Map* 1983, 167–70, 193–95). Hence, what is viewed as Sait Faik’s radical innovation in the classical story format may be seen as an attempt to recover the literary potential in those forms that are excluded by an excessively narrow definition of literature in terms of the fictional alone. Therefore, remembering the roots of the short story as a genre may help us better interpret the significance of Sait Faik’s practice. As Helmut Bonheim says, “The short story genre itself may be thought of as the result of a confluence of earlier genres: the essay, the sketch and the tale” (1982, 13). Hence, Sait Faik’s preferred mode of writing invites a connection with literary history, with earlier notions of literature, which may be viewed by itself as a form of resistance to the ostensibly self-enclosed world of modern fiction. When placed in such a context, Sait Faik’s chief trepidation about writing and literature appears to be with impersonal modes of storytelling, including literary realism and certain forms of modernist writing, which have reduced the authors to narrator functions and characters to inauthentic projections of their authors’ unfulfilled and, in some cases, vainglorious selves. Sait Faik’s literary practice, which may be summarized in terms of an ethics of love and poetics of nature, presents, in contrast, a deep awareness of the existence of everything alive, no matter how the status of natural beings might be marred by the ideology of possessive individualism and widespread prejudice against those who are seemingly unlike us. Therefore, in Sait Faik’s reluctance to forego historical forms of literature and in the (auto)biographical disposition of his writings, we may detect the reflection of his desire to be true to himself, and, in his proverbial proclamation, to be “with the readers” (excerpted in Ergun 1996, 60) rather than beyond and above them as certain works of literature insinuate. Hence, whatever one may think of

the unity, the completeness, or the realistic probability of Sait Faik's literary works, their personal authenticity, rhetorical persuasiveness, and lyrical quality are beyond doubt.

It is perhaps not so fortuitous that the frequent use of the term "lyrical" in assessments of Sait Faik's work reminds us of one highly relevant employment of it in literary theory. In Käte Hamburger's *The Logic of Literature*, an ambitious and elaborate attempt at circumscribing the literary field in transhistorical fashion, one of the two basic realms of literature is defined as the "lyrical genre," the other being the "fictional or mimetic genre." In Hamburger's rigorous classification, which is also taken seriously by the literary theorist Gérard Genette in his preface to Hamburger's work, the power of "creation" in the strict Aristotelian sense (*poiesis*) is granted to the "fictional or mimetic genre" only, a resolution that entitles the "lyrical genre" to heterogeneous expressions and aesthetic evaluations of all kinds of personal information, opinion, feeling, and the like, including lyric poetry.

This theory proffers interesting help in our venture to define Sait Faik's concept of art. First, it accounts for Sait Faik's increasing predilection for the use of the first-person narrator and the lyric feeling this use communicates. As Hamburger maintains, "we only experience a genuine lyric phenomenon where we experience a genuine lyric I" (1993, 291). Her emphasis is meaningful for alerting us to what Sait Faik, a person always motivated by his concern for ethical transparency, might have felt regarding the use of third-person narration, for in this technique, while the narrator gives the impression of being absent from the story, he or she may also be overly present to the point of knowing what a person cannot normally know, such as other people's thoughts and feelings. In contrast, a person who is overtly present in a narrative cannot possibly engage in such pretence; and, in the absence of a persona's hidden veil, he or she cannot transgress the human limitation regarding the inaccessibility of other people's inner selves. Respecting other beings' privacy is not only a way of maintaining one's integrity, but it is also the very principle on which a deeper awareness of others' independent existence is built. Given Sait Faik's preoccupation with the questions of "why write" and "how to write" without compromising the dignity and the authentic existence of the self and others, his increasing preference for the use of first-person narration in his stories may, therefore, be viewed as an aes-

thetic solution to a fundamentally ethical dilemma. It is not incidental that a profound awareness of people from all walks of life, especially the humble and the unacknowledged, a sensitive concern for ecology and locality, and a personifying interest in all forms of life, are the typical characteristics of Sait Faik's works. As Halman observes in "Fiction of a Flâneur," his introduction to *A Dot on the Map*, "empathy is the dominant attitude of Sait Faik as narrator and protagonist" (1983, 7). Even in his bleakest moments, his affirmative view of life, his passion for connecting with people and nature do not abate. His capacity for emotional identification with people, with places, and with animate and inanimate objects in nature is in fact so great that it is impossible for readers not to feel the contagion of emotion emanating from his poetic prose. Sait Faik's texts invite readers to make strong evaluations, to avow sympathies and antipathies at all times. In other words, readers are never asked to forget about the dimension of "ought" in human conduct as they are told to do in certain forms of literature carrying the imprint of nineteenth-century literary naturalism and philosophical positivism. Yet, even in its most agitated moments, Sait Faik's prose continues to carry its lyrical touch, never turning aggressive or irate. Therefore, what might initially appear as merely technical choices in Sait Faik's writings may be thought to result from his view of art as a "form of conduct," to use the words of Wayne C. Booth, a well-known theorist of ethical criticism. As Booth puts it, "when art and criticism are viewed as forms of conduct, they lead us into the very battles that we may have hoped to escape by turning to art in the first place" (1988, 137). From what has been stated so far, I hope it is clear that Sait Faik did not view art in escapist terms but as the very field for the ethical battles that humans fight daily throughout their lives.

The fact that we can relate Sait Faik's works more easily to Käte Hamburger's "lyrical genre" than to her "fictional or mimetic genre" is reminiscent, interestingly, of another frequently made observation on Sait Faik's art—that his prose often borders on poetry. What generations of Sait Faik readers have chosen to emphasize in their reflections on the author calls to mind, in turn, the words of the late Cemal Süreya, a prominent Turkish poet, who drew attention to the conjunction between the lyrical I and the almost unavoidable presence of (auto)biographical elements in poetry. Cemal Süreya maintained that "autobiographical elements play a large role in all

art. But I think they play a larger role in the art of poetry” (1992, 61). His pithy words to describe the association between life and art in poetry have since become an expression among Turkish readers: “The poet’s life is included in poetry” (61). Therefore, it would not be far-fetched to conclude that Sait Faik’s life is likewise included in his work, but certainly in a special sense. As Hamburger says, “The lyric I transforms objective reality into a reality of subjective experience, for which reason this still persists as reality” (1993, 286). Hamburger’s use of the term “subjective” is again felicitous, for it too has been a widely used term in assessments of Sait Faik’s work (e.g., the remarks of Nurullah Ataç in Alangu 1956, 50). Critics have found his works “subjective,” especially when contrasted with those of social realists, particularly with the works of Sabahattin Ali (1907–1948), a highly accomplished contemporary of Sait Faik’s. The sense of lyrical subjectivity conveyed by the stories of Sait Faik is in fact so famous and so unique that Ayla Kutlu, herself a recipient of the Sait Faik Short Story Prize in 1991, has remarked: “Sait Faik is the only person who started with a central I and was successful throughout. But don’t forget that no one has yet captured [the spirit of] his storytelling” (1999, 42).

In addition to elucidating for us the function of the lyric I in Sait Faik’s work, Hamburger’s theory also helps us appreciate how Sait Faik’s idea of storytelling involved more of a sense of the discovery or unearthing of life’s stories and reflecting on them than inventing or “originating” them in god-like fashion, acts that are better suited to Hamburger’s “fictional or dramatic genre.” Sait Faik’s celebrated words in “In Search of a Story,” translated by Ellen Ervin, effectively epitomizes his general outlook: “Each day hundreds of trains were bringing in thousands of stories and carrying away thousands of stories” (Halman 1983, 100). These words may be taken to summarize not only Sait Faik’s view of the relation between art and life but also between his art and his life: stories are not to be made; they are to be discovered, for life never fails to present remarkable stories to the keen perception of the genuine writer. Hence the affinity between Sait Faik’s life and work as has been captured in Halman’s exquisitely worded observations:

Sait Faik wrote the way he lived—spontaneously, sensually, impressionistically, experientially, always stressing the authentic touch and the ring of

truth. He probably felt that a story is a microcosm or slice of life and cannot be, should not be, any more perfect than life itself. Above all, he was conscious of human frailty, foibles and follies. In exploring human situations, his stories reflected, not only in substance but in form as well, the flaws of life. (1983, 9–10)

A celebrated passage by the famed playwright Haldun Taner also effectively reflects most readers' impressions:

Sait Faik was not taking up a subject but a section of life. He was not defending a thesis, but reflecting an experience. His heart was full of love for men and love for nature. Whatever he gazed at reflected the warmth and radiance of this love. Only after he took them as subjects would we learn to appreciate the people and objects that first seemed the least significant.

When Sait glanced at them and told their stories, a screw shell, a watermelon stand, a brazier and a chair, an embowered tomb, a shoeshine box, a searchlight operator, a fisherman, a waiter, a priest . . . all suddenly gained a special appeal. (1983, 138)

These reflections prompt us to take another look at those aspects of Sait Faik's art, which are sometimes characterized as its shortcomings. If his works seem to lack perfection, unity, and dramatic intensity in conventional senses, readers may first ask what is meant by these very words. Likewise, if "literature" has come to connote mainly "dramatic intrigue" and "suspense" at a considerable distance from "ordinary" life, we may as well question the sagacity of such progress in literary production and consumption, as well as forms of writing whose impact derives principally from the titillation of intrigue, secrecy, and revelation. Sait Faik's works demonstrate that such manipulation of audience interest is not a necessary component of literature per se. And if Sait Faik were unwilling to pursue such elevated notions as artistic autonomy, perfection of the work of art, and impermeability of art to life's concerns, conceptions associated at times with literary modernism, it was because he implicitly resisted the separation of art from life in the first place. As Halman emphasizes regarding the connection between the writer's life and art, Sait Faik could not have tried to compensate for life's imperfection with the presumed perfection of art, for art could not be any more or less perfect than life. That is perhaps why, even in his expressions of bore-

dom, loneliness, and despair, there is nothing of the narcissistic disdain for life, or moral cynicism, which is sometimes viewed as the hallmark of “serious” or “high” literature.

Clearly, Sait Faik did not subscribe to a generic notion of literature as defined by others. He did not opt for creating an aesthetically autonomous and socially impermeable fictional universe. Nor did he see literature as an extrinsic tool for achieving immoderate private or public goals. As he conformed to the end to the sublime goal of writing only for his own pleasure and taste, this radically personalizing practice transformed literature into an almost private affair. But this was far from a voluntary confinement in one’s private world. What Sait Faik did was to resist gratifying the demands of an increasingly impersonal public, with its endless invitations for writers to sacrifice their integrity. He kept writing as if he were writing for his friends only, for the “company he kept” (cf. Booth), never surrendering his highest ideals and never losing touch with his deeper self.

There is certainly more than a touch of romanticism in all of this, and we should not refrain from using the term “romantic,” lest it be understood in a pejorative sense. This term may serve as an important literary point of reference, denoting, at the same time, the cultural framework from which Sait Faik’s illustrious work springs. His ideals of bringing down the walls between humans and nature, humans and humans, and humans and their moral selves, strictly echo, across time, the pantheistic, egalitarian, and utopian impulses of such romantic visionaries as Rousseau, Blake, Wordsworth, and Thoreau. The spirit of the discovery of nature, of folklore, of the supernatural, of the child, or of what previously fell behind the borders of “civilization”—or “outside the city walls,” as Sait Faik articulated it—before the age of revolution in the West, reverberates, distantly yet equally strong, in his work. Therefore, the term “romanticism” remains meaningful as a literary-cultural designator of values that are still relevant, such as environmentalism. When used in a circumspect manner, it may have the additional benefit of opening doors for meaningful comparisons in literary history among different writers and across diverse literatures. For instance, it would be interesting to compare the work of Sait Faik with that of another “romantic,” namely John Steinbeck (1902–1968), who was both a contemporary of Sait Faik and was possibly his closest literary compeer, sharing an

inspiring vision of a nonalienated community on earth (see Parini 1995 for a whole array of possible comparisons).

The age of revolution was also the age of nationalism in the nineteenth-century West as it had been in Turkey in the twentieth century. Yet Sait Faik again deserves credit for being more than sensitive to what has been recognized as nationalism's universal blind spots: its class, gender, and ethnocentric biases. As an antibourgeois writer and fierce democrat, Sait Faik always sided with the underdog, as evinced by many of the pieces in this collection that display his distinctive talent in single character portrayals. Therefore, labeling his people "ordinary" or "common" would go against the democratic spirit in which they are conceived, for no characters remain "common" or "ordinary" once they enter Sait Faik's stories; his piercing gaze and thoughtful vision transform them lovingly into unique beings.

A telling anecdote about the original publication history of the sixth story of this collection, "*The Stelyanos Hrisopulos*," in early 1936, during the heyday of Turkish nationalism, reveals Sait Faik's attitude toward his characters. A letter from him to Yaşar Nabi Nayır, the founding editor of *Varlık*, the longest-lived (since 1933) literary journal in Turkey, and the first publisher of Sait Faik's works, discloses that when Sait Faik first sent his story to the magazine *Yücel*, it was not published for several months. We learn that it was not printed because the publishers of *Yücel* found the story "too cosmopolitan" for their readers' taste. What we have here is an interesting use of the word *kozmpolit* in Turkish, which stands in this context as a euphemism for "non-national" or "non-native." The charge implies that Sait Faik's story fails to cater sufficiently to Turkish national interests and sentiments for the sole reason that it featured Greek nationals as principal characters. Upon hearing this, Sait Faik withdrew his story, asking the publishers to leave the fishermen of a small island (Burgaz) and himself alone. Defending fundamental human equality and emphasizing the humane viewpoint and the local color of his story, he requested, in his letter, to have his story be published in *Varlık*. Yaşar Nabi published the story shortly after he received the letter (Yaşar Nabi 1972, 89–90).

The corpus of writings on Sait Faik is full of such anecdotal stories, which repeatedly reveal his radical humanitarianism as encompassed by his romantic vision. When, for instance, someone he knew asked him, half jok-

ingly perhaps, to get rid of the sea, the fishermen, the unfortunate people, and Greek nationals as subjects of his stories, Sait Faik responded: “I live in Istanbul, which consists of what you have just enumerated” (Alangu 1956, 65). His words in the short-short story “Robinson” have also become proverbial: “I love people more than flags” (trans. Murat Nemet-Nejat, in Halman, *A Dot on the Map* 1983, 155).

I have so far emphasized the uniqueness of Sait Faik as a writer, but it is far from being the case that his utopian-romantic poetics flourished in a historical vacuum. Although it is true that Sait Faik is a true original in the field of the short story in Turkey, the democratic principles of his art are echoed in the poetry and prose of many of his contemporaries, including other such originals as Halikarnas Balıkcısı (1886–1973), Nâzım Hikmet (1902–1963), Orhan Veli (1914–1950), and Yaşar Kemal (b. 1922), to name only a few. Especially in the first part of the twentieth century, they and other writers and poets pioneered and represented the strong paradigm of a rising literary and cultural romanticism in Turkey. These writers and poets emphasized, in their unique ways, the interconnectedness of humans with one another and with nature, resisted the detachment of artists from their audiences, and induced much of today’s egalitarian, multicultural, and ecological thinking. No matter how strongly they were resented when they freely associated with fishermen, porters, seamen, peasants, and the like (see, e.g., Ayda 1984, 199), with their efforts, Turkish literature ceased to be the preserve of the aristocratic elite that it mostly was during the previous centuries. Among them, Sait Faik is one whom we still recognize as a pioneer in many ways. He is the one who beckons us to see the universal in the local, all of humanity in one human being, the poetic in the mundane. By limiting his environment almost purposefully, he gave us a literature of depth, the best specimens of what is today called “regional writing.” He chose not to look at people but into them, and there he found works of art.

It is best to conclude with Oktay Akbal, a prominent man of letters, and a former winner of the Sait Faik Short Story Prize, whose words remain as fresh today as they were when they were published in 1973:

For me Sait Faik is in the top three or five of all story writers in world literature. . . . He also has a very firm standing in Turkish literature (both today

and in the future). He leads the company of the few writers we have [in Turkish literature] who will live on in the future. Sait Faik ushered in a new perspective, a new sensitivity in our literature, including such themes as love, compassion, and friendship for and among human beings. He established a new, personal atmosphere for the short story. He had enormous influence on writers succeeding him. He taught us a great deal. That is why his influence still endures. (Alptekin 1976, 213)

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