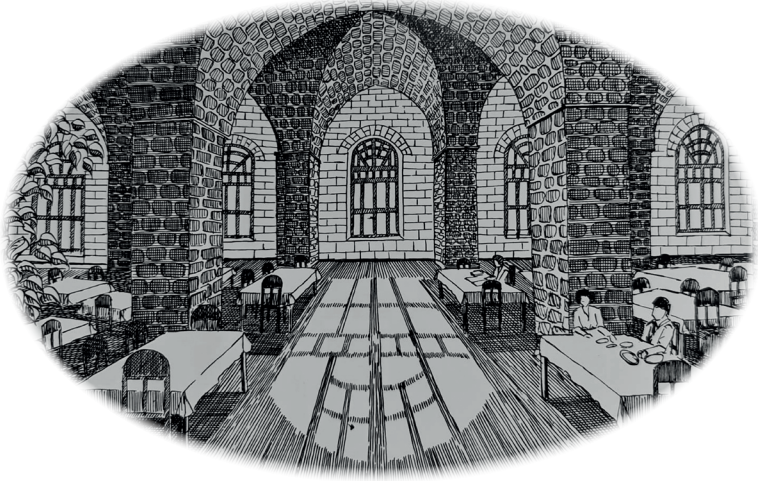


From a Salt Depot to Stone Building: İlyas Halil's Akkahve



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İLYAS HALİL

İlyas Halil is a poet and writer who loves Mersin and who was an Akkahve regular.

Born in 1930 in Adana, he spent his childhood and youth in Mersin. He graduated from Tarsus American College in 1949.

In 1964, he immigrated to Canada with his family. After serving in the United Arab Emirates for nearly 20 years, he retired.

“It is easy to come to Mersin but difficult to leave,” says İlyas Halil, who still lives in Canada.

He was one of the important figures of Akkahve, which was frequented by artists during Halil’s time in Mersin. A street in the Kültür Neighborhood is named after him.

A Lover of Mersin

A short story by İlyas Halil, a lover of Mersin, begins as follows:

“No one fell for Mersin as I did. No one’s face dampened from the wind while watching her seagulls. No one else felt such deep affection from a flimsy declaration of love alone. The city was not a sweetheart, but a whip-wielding wench... A slender bride with milky legs, who laid in bed at night smelling of lemons, in spite of

the merciless summers... Together with the cicadas, she thought of things to tell you all through the night..."

To Ebru Laledemir's question "Do you ever wish you had stayed in Mersin, Mr. Halil?" İlyas Halil, who spent most of his life outside Mersin, responded as follows: "I can take Mersin wherever I want, so no. The Mersin of my dreams is still alive."

A Virtuoso of Intensive Poems and Stories

Former Minister of Culture Prof. Dr. Talat Sait Halman describes him and his art as follows: "İlyas Halil is the virtuoso of concise poems and dense stories. Many of the most successful minimalist examples in Turkish literature have been coming out of his pen for twenty-five years. His poems, made up of three to five lines, have the distilled power of aphorisms. Some are heartwarming Turkish haikus... Some of them are lucid wisdom..."

İlyas Halil is the master of stories... These jewels, spread over a wide geography of humanity, carry universal value. There are those that break the heart, those that inspire a smile, and those that make you laugh out loud.

How many poets and writers in any language can one think of who can create a huge human panorama with such short poems and stories? The Turkish language and Turkey would be committing a great literary injustice if they do not appreciate İlyas Halil. Had he not spent two-thirds of his adult life in foreign countries, he would have been a legendary name for our country. Nevertheless, we are all grateful for the works of this extraordinary master of poetry and short stories. May he live long."

His Works Translated into Arabic and French

His poems and short stories were published in various magazines.

Some of his poems were translated into Arabic by Saudi Arabian poet Abdul Majid and into French by Canadian poet and writer Stephan Meunier.

His Works

Poetry Books: Fact and Fantasy (1950), Damson Branch (1953), A Selection of Poems by Emerson (1954), It's a Lie, Probably (1959), It Takes Sixty-Five Years of Waiting (1998), Four Droplets of Spring Rain (2000), Streak of Salt (20019), Sunday Morning Doves (2005)

Story Collections: Discontented Eye (1983), Naked Yula (1985), Dog Hunt (1987), Shoeshine Ramadan (1989), Unregulated Chicken Butts (1990), House of Cards (1991), Temple for Rent (1993), Drunken Grass (1995), White Coffee Shop Journal (1999), Wanted: Infidel Employees (2000), A Garden for the Blind (2004), Agape Flowers (2006), Foreign Soup Kitchen (2007), My Chagall Years (2007), The Pagan Eating Place (2009), Plaza Dona Elvira (2009), Ebel's Prayer (2011), Vineland Land of Vines (2012), The Garden Where I Lost Spring (2015)

INTRODUCTION

I did not imagine I would be publishing a book from the series of articles I wrote about the phases that the Stone Building, which remains the cornerstone of the city even though the area is quite run down, has gone through from the past to the present, about what happened to it and what happened within it. However, while I was writing about and researching the Stone Building, I suddenly came across the Akkahve period. Akkahve, brought me back into contact with an old friend, İlyas Halil, with whom I had been corresponding and commiserating for years, who had written poems and stories about the artist protagonists of Akkahve, the days in which those protagonists lived, and their testimonies. Would this book have come to life without the encouraging words of my Ammo? I am not sure.

What I know for sure is this:

Under the guidance of İlyas Halil's stories and poems, everyone, from those who have lived through those days to those who will breathe it for the first time, will experience that golden period of the city with all its colors, scents, ethnic fabric, rich and poor heroes, loves, disappointments and joys. They will remember and learn about that period as if from black and white postcards with fading colors, because whatever belongs to the past is fading away. I think this book will be a guide for readers—and researchers—to tell their children and grandchildren about the vanishing values of this poetic city accompanied by the melodies of the past.

Likening Mersin to a lover and writing: “No one fell for Mersin as I did. No one’s face dampened from the wind while watching her seagulls. No one else felt such deep affection from a flimsy declaration of love alone. The city was not a sweetheart, but a whip-wielding wench... A slender bride with milky legs, who laid in bed at night smelling of lemons, in spite of the merciless summers... Together with the cicadas, she thought of things to tell you all through the night...” It isn’t sufficient to call Halil “A Lover of Mersin.”

His is an infatuation worse than Majnun’s for Leyla, in all of his nearly 25 books of stories and poems, he has woven Mersin with his Mersin-scented verses, Mersin has cried and Mersin has laughed.

From the same story, *“I rewrote what I remember into my memory... I drew a garden, smelling of figs in the summer... Sounding like cicadas... In November, two orange trees stand under the rain; My hands are wet from the scent of oranges...”* After reading these lines, no simple description of him will do justice.

When I set out for this series of articles, I wanted to shed light on the Akkahve/Ak Hotel project and shed light on a very recent but relatively unknown period; the multi-party system days when we breathed the air of democracy. However, I came across so many interesting developments, so many surprising events and figures of the unknown heroes in the Akkahve axis alone, which are rarely mentioned and in fact unknown to most of us, that I realized how important it is to tell at least future generations about this period.

Let me tell you the part of the writing process that excited me the most and filled me with childish joy.

I am lucky to have experienced the happiness as well as the weight of the effort to repay the debt of loyalty of the disloyal to İlyas Halil—to my Ammo, whose presence I felt in my bones even though I found him late—to that beautiful person who, under the guidance of his poetry language, took me by the hand and made me travel, touch and smell the years and roads of this city that I have never known, which I love passionately.

Abdullah AYAN

Mersin, November 2018