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From Text to Space: A Geographical Reading of Samed Behrengi

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Abstract: Authors reflect the cultural codes of the societies they live in. When these cultural codes are decoded by the reader, it becomes easier to perceive the work in many aspects and make textual productions from the text. In this study, Iranian author Samed Behrengi's 10 story books which have also been popular in Turkey have been analysed in terms of text-space. First of all, the concept of space in the story books has been reviewed with a general screening method and then it is examined in depth. Thus, it was revealed how the dimensions of the research will be shaped. In the study, information about the space is coded and read through the texts. In this context, the contribution of space to text and text formation is discussed. In order for the spatial reading to take place, the author needs to make good observations. In this respect, Samed Behrengi, who is the subject of the research, has also objectively reflected the spaces he uses in his books as a good observer, and these places are the elements that will provide the reader with a cultural dimension. In the end of the study, 23 private spaces (living space) and 180 public spaces have been identified. Consequently, it is seen that if the students/readers who read the author's books are steered to geographical reading, their perception of space will be enriched.

Keywords: *Samed Behrengi, geographical reading, space, story.*

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Introduction

The concept of space which is a subject of discussion in different disciplines has been discussed in this study in the disciplines of literature and geography in general, and in the framework of children's literature and the concept of space in particular. The spaces in the books of the Iranian author Samed Behrengi who is the subject of this study have been categorised concurrently and this text-space relationship has been provided. While reflecting this relationship, the supporting role of the stories for secondary school Turkish and Social Studies courses, and its significance in establishing cooperation between the two departments have been mentioned as well. The authors, who describe human-space relations as the sole narrative tool through language, are the ones who make good observations (Tumer, 1984).

Studies of space are generally considered difficult. "The main reason for this is that space is the ground for everything that involves the individual and the society, and it is the prerequisite for the actualisation of every event and phenomenon on earth" (Erturk, 2013, p. 1). As a matter of fact, considering that the historical circumstances also exist on a geography/space, it can be affirmed that at the heart of almost all readings lies the impulsive role of the perception of space. This is because in every reading, the reader unconsciously feels the necessity to find a space in which the event or the situation occurs.

"Geography does not only refer to a bordered piece of earth that is lived on. Shaping the societies that are provided with a chance to live in its borders, and unifying them in some psychological and physical characteristics" (Guresir, 2015, p. 134), this concept is directly associated with literature. "Geography-oriented readings, in general terms, aim to identify the relationship between the space(s) in the text and the artist" (Guresir, 2015, p. 135). When these readings are done deliberately, the text becomes more attractive in terms of describing its own space; and it becomes easier for the reader to wander around the geography of the text. This will also provide the perception of geography with reference to the space in the text especially in secondary school Turkish courses as well as making it easier to perceive the text in reference to the space in Social Studies courses, and will lay the groundwork for an interdisciplinary study.

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“People express their feelings, thoughts and actions through literary texts like novels, short stories, or poetry. In the construction of these feelings, thoughts and actions, the environment the person lives in and its characteristics have a determinative effect. The environment the person lives in and its characteristics are also related to geography in all aspects. This relationship and interaction bring literature and geography closer to each other” (Kacmaz & Kacmaz, 2017, p. 2). One of the most significant genres in which feelings and thoughts interact with each other is short story. This genre in which real or fictive events/situations are told becomes a field of interest for students especially in childhood years, and is used by the teachers in order to develop reading skills from preschool to high school. While making a story analysis in Turkish courses, a number of important topics are emphasised so as to make it easier to comprehend and interpret within the multi-dimensionality of the text. This method saves the text from being reduced to a single meaning because when a story is analysed in terms of environment, place, or space, the text and the geography are brought closer to each other; the contribution of the text to the semantic system is discussed. “It is important for geography to examine how people are distributed in space and the reciprocal interaction between people and spaces” (Kefeli, 2009, p. 428).

The point where literature and geography (text and space) intersect with each other is that space is significant for both of them. The grounds for the entity to show itself exist both in literature texts and in geography. In fact, from another point of view, it is seen that every literature text has its own geography. In other words, while creating their texts, every author creates the geography of that text as the entity brings to life the space where it is transformed into a product; and therefore, the text that is read becomes permanent in the reader’s mind. This situation, actually, brings along the different forms of interpreting the world as well.

Studying a text using time and space as a unit of analysis is also described with the concept of *chronotope*. These two elements are significant in terms of the construction of the text (as cited in Kantar, 2004). “Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of chronotope looks at the relationship between time and space. ‘Chronos’ means time, ‘topos’ means space, place. According to this, time and space cannot be considered separately in a work of art; they constitute a whole. This concept inserts history and geography into the work” (Esen, 2002, p. 139). Texts, particularly tales consist of determinants which demonstrate the context of text-space-time the best. “The time and space relationship of a text should always be perceived in the context of the time and space relationship of the social and historical environment out of the text” (As cited in Esen, 2002, p. 141).

As remarked by Nukhet Esen, “According to Bakhtin, at the moment of writing a text, the way the time and space that the author lives in is perceived is reflected in the text. Likewise, at the moment of reading a text, the time and space relationship that the reader is in becomes determinative for the reader’s perception of that text” (As cited in Esen, 2002, p.139). In spite of the fact that the understanding of a text is centred around time and place, this study only examines the text and space relationship. Thus, it is inspired from the concept of chronotope; yet, text readings has been made merely in the spatial context.

Authors reflect the cultural codes of the societies they live in. When these cultural codes are decoded by the reader, it becomes easier to perceive the work in many aspects (cultural, traditional, etc.) and make textual productions from the text. In order to support the idea from text to space which constitutes the focus of this study, the relationship between text-space-geography should be mentioned in the first place.

Since texts are open to different readings, it is possible that they can be interpreted numerously focusing on a topic. The study will be based on reading in general, geography-oriented reading in particular, and in the sub category, geographical reading concerning space with reference to the whole text; and the geography of Samed Behrengi’s works will be tried to be pictured through interpretation.

While constructing Samed Behrengi’s geography, the study, at the same time, aims to make inferences concerning what it leaves in the memory of the researchers. The study has been read and interpreted with textological method. “Van Dijk explains the relationship between textology and other disciplines (linguistics, poetics, psychology, sociology, law, economics, political science, history, anthropology) in his book titled *Discourse Studies (Textwissenschaft)*” (Ayata Senoz, 2005, p. 58). Textological method is an important way of analysing a text which also brings about poliphony. While a text written in any genre is associated with many texts or topics/themes, a process of questioning the text is carried out at the same time.

The Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is that it questions for what purpose the text has been written and for what purpose it gains aliveness/continuity in the spaces that have been mentioned. The study presents a detailed analysis of the following questions: Has the author used these spaces in his books with a concern or has he used his own life discourse as an expression in his works?

Method

The city names that are mentioned in the books of Samed Behrengi who is the subject of the study constitute a discourse in Barthes’s words. Barthes states that “The city is a discourse and this discourse is truly a language: the city

speaks to its inhabitants, we speak our city, the city where we are, simply by living in it, by wandering through it, by looking at it" (As cited in Somer, 2006, p. 12). The cities that the author uses as public space making mention of their names have been chosen elaborately with the purpose of understanding the texture of his works and hearing his voice. So as not to stay away from science, the spaces in the books have not been read metaphorically; they have been tried to be categorised through signs.

Research Model

A qualitative research method has been used in this study. Qualitative research is subjective. It examines subjective data such as the perceptions, feelings, experiences and thoughts of the individuals; it tries to understand and explain the phenomena and the events in the given natural environment (Gurbuz & Sahin, 2017). This method in which qualitative data collection methods such as observation, interview, and document analysis are used is a research which follows a qualitative process aiming at revealing the perceptions and events in a realistic and holistic way in the natural environment (Gurbuz & Sahin, 2017).

Population of the Study

The population of the study has been limited to ten books of Samed Behrengi. The selected population has been determined in accordance with the purpose of the study. The cluster that represents the population of this study consists of Samed Behrengi's ten stories. These books are the works that the students in our country are made read the most.

Data Collection Tools and Data Analysis

Document analysis has been used as the data collection tool in the study. Document analysis in qualitative researches is the process of collecting and analysing the data concerning the research by gathering documents, archive records and various materials. The research topic determines what type of document should be used (Silverman, as cited in Gurbuz and Sahin, 2017). This reviewing technique which is also named as 'documentary review' in some sources "involves finding, reading, noting down and evaluating sources for a certain purpose". If the process carried out in every study, namely, 'literature review' is considered to be a documentary review, it will be clearly seen that this is a commonly used data collection technique (Karasar, 2017, p. 230).

Since "interpretation" is the core of researches and the data collection is done for interpretation, it should be accepted that original scientific researches can also be conducted with documentary review. The data collected can almost always be discussed in different interpretations (Karasar, 2017).

The most important characteristic of documentary review is that there is a communication between the researcher and the document. The communication is successful to the extent that the deviation between what the document wants to tell and what the researcher understands reduces. That is why knowing the shared rules of good reading and good writing is the principal key to success in written document reviews (Karasar, 2017).

Documents reflect on the researcher as a shadow of the reality. They give an idea to the researcher concerning the perception of the reality; yet, perceiving the reality in the truest way is related to the approach of the researcher's own. In order to provide reality and reliability, instead of simply analysing the documents, it will be to the purpose to interpret them regarding their source and the way they are formed; to confirm them from different sources; to use other methods than document analysis if necessary; thus, to try to view the field of research entirely (Seggie & Bayyurt, 2017). Documentary reviews are tried to be understood by general review or *content analysis*. General review is a method which is generally followed in every research.

Content analysis is a review which is done for the purpose of understanding and telling the unseen concepts, principles, and features in the content of a certain text, book, or document. The features of the documents such as point of view, philosophy, language, narration, etc. are tried to be understood by elaborate analyses. In content analysis, "what to look for" can be decided on beforehand; or it can as well be determined during the analysis of the text. Deciding on which concepts are expressed by which words or expressions beforehand allows the document to be analysed in the light of certain expectations (points of view) (Selltitz, Wrightsman & Cook, as cited in Karasar, 2017).

As for the document analysis in this study, the chosen 10 stories of Samed Behrengi have been analysed in terms of text-context. First of all, the concept of space in the story books have been reviewed by general review method, and then, it has been analysed in depth. Hence, how the research would be shaped has been revealed.

Validity and Reliability Analysis

Researchers separately compared the concepts classifying them under the titles of private space (living space) and public space. The prepared category codes were presented to another scholar working in this field and got analysed again.

Findings

The information concerning space has been coded by reading the texts in the study. In this context, the contribution of space to the text and to the construction of the text has been discussed. For the spatial reading to be actualised, the author needs to make good observations. In this respect, Samed Behrengi who is the subject of the study reflects the spaces he has used in his books objectively as a good observer; and these spaces are the elements that can provide resources for the reader in the cultural sense.

Spatial narrations are often included in the aforementioned works of Samed Behrengi. In his books, the events change depending on spatial situations and continue with spatial relationships. We see that the author has reflected his view of life or his standpoint in life on some spaces in a discursive dimension. For instance, in the work titled *Kucuk Kara Balik* (The Little Black Fish) 'the sea' is the expression of freedom and of the tendency to freedom. It is possible to see the traces of Samed Behrengi's life and his political identity in these reflections in his works. The political and social events of the period of Mohammad Reza Shah in Iran had an impact on the language and the literature of Iran. Many prominent authors and poets emerged in this period. Samed Behrengi is one of these Iranian authors who penned in this atmosphere.

Behrengi's primary purpose was to bring about a change in the education system. This has been presented to the reader by the themes he used in his works depicted between the poor and the rich, the village and the city, the illiterate and the literate. In this regard, as an education scholar, Behrengi tirelessly defended the radical and distinctive reforms. He took a stand against the understanding parroting the values and ideals of Americanism. As an intellectual, he criticised the feudal structures that had been out-dated and intermingled with religious motifs; and exhibited the order of repression and exploitation of the bourgeois state apparatus with what he wrote. He reflected the hope in the Azerbaijani people concerning their language who had been subjected to socioeconomic and cultural exploitation for more than two hundred years. As a man of letters, he penned tens of books to be inherited by the children of the world as a gift. His books have such an artistic power that can mesmerise even the adults, and such simplicity to get through the mind of a child. Blending all these, Behrengi was able to create a unique universality; and consequently, he has managed to exist with what he wrote for a very long time... Despite his many contributions to the development of Persian literature, Behrengi's stories and tales were banned in the beginning of seventies by the state government. However, during the short period of freedom after the revolution in 1979, his books were published in great numbers. Yet, it did not take long for the new rulers to understand how dangerous he was; and his name was listed among the banned names again. Behrengi was a man of free thought. His free thought constituted a threat also for the new repressive order. Either in the repressive era of the Shah or in the regime of the mullahs, the rulers were always scared of the dreams of equality and fraternity sprouting in the minds of the children growing with the tales of Behrengi. As a matter of fact, that is why the rulers always hated his tales the most even though he had produced so many works about education and of literature (Ertan, 2011, p.166).

As in many forms of reading, the life of the author and the way he/she perceives the world is quite important in space-oriented readings as well. Since the writer documents his/her semantic world that reveals his/her existence in the background while building up the human-space relationship, the life of the author and his/her attitude towards the world is determinative for the reader's understanding.

There is no space limitation in Behrengi's works. The spaces show variety depending on the flow of the plot. In the living space or the private space which is called 'the space in the house', the plot is partially left out whereas in 'the space out of the house' or the "public space", there appears a structure in which the plot is invaded.

While some of the spaces in the book make references to a limited area, others make it possible to produce different perceptions/spaces. At many points, the author has used metaphors concerning the spaces as he especially tried to cover the signs of the repression of the government in his stories. The author has given the socio-cultural structure of the places where he lived metaphorically in his stories; this situation is reflected in the spaces he has necessarily/on purpose mentioned.

"When a place is used it transforms into a space. To give an example for this, a street which has been described geometrically by the planners is transformed into a space by the people who walk on it... For instance, "an empty house is made a 'space' by the family who starts to use it" (Isik & Senturk, 2009, p. 16).

Similar uses of spaces are seen in Samed Bahrengi's works as well. To exemplify, the 'pool' which does not have much visibility in the work is transformed into a space as a place where the protagonist stops by in the story; and therefore, it is transformed into a significant space. The author makes use of the dynamics of his plots in producing, experiencing

and using the spaces. Moreover, by repeating some of the spaces in his stories, he makes the memory of the space the intersection point.

Table 1. Ulduz ve Konusan Bebek (Ulduz and the Talking Baby)

| LIVING SPACE/PRIVATE SPACE | PUBLIC SPACE |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Storage room | Butcher Shop |
| Kitchen | Tehran |
| | Brick kiln/shop |
| | Yard |
| | Under the mulberry tree |
| | Between the mountains |
| | Sky |
| | Housetop |
| | Hillside slope |
| | Passage |
| | Forested area |
| | Lakeshore |
| | Carpet weaving shop |
| | School |
| | Barn |

In this story, the concept of 2 habitats and 15 public spaces were determined. It is seen that public spaces generally consist of concepts that help to shape the story outdoors.

Table 2. Sevgi Masali (The Tale of Love)

| LIVING SPACE/PRIVATE SPACE | PUBLIC SPACE |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Palace | Palace yard |
| Dressing room | Mountain |
| Kitchen | Mountainside |
| | Mountain top |
| | Grave |
| | Foothill |
| | Fold |
| | City |
| | Forest |
| | Meadow |
| | Passage |
| | Desert |
| | Hill |
| | Lowland |
| | School |
| | Pool |
| | Country |

In this story, the concept of 3 habitats and 17 public spaces were determined. These public spaces consist of concepts that help shape the story outdoors.

Table 3. *Koroglu Geliyor (Koroglu is Coming)*

| LIVING SPACE/PRIVATE SPACE | PUBLIC SPACE |
|----------------------------|------------------|
| (The door of the) House | Azerbaijan |
| (The window of the) Palace | Mansion |
| | Lowland |
| | Mountain |
| | Hill |
| | Stream |
| | Camlibel |
| | Region |
| | Highland |
| | Barn |
| | Hillside slope |
| | Mill |
| | Tent |
| | Flour Tub |
| | The Kaf Mountain |
| | Palace |
| | Chiefdom |
| | Forest |

In this story, the concept of 2 habitats and 18 public spaces were determined. In this table, there are more geographical terms under the name of public domain.

Table 4. *Ah Masali (The Tale of Curse)*

| LIVING SPACE/PRIVATE SPACE | PUBLIC SPACE |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| (The front of the) Window | Over the trees |
| The room with a mirror | The toilet (in the patio) |
| Guest room | Yard |
| Kitchen | Yard wall |
| | The Caspian Sea |
| | Sea |
| | Sky |
| | Earth |
| | The city of Tabriz |
| | Village |
| | Turkish Bath |
| | Cottage |
| | Patio |
| | Sofa |
| | Basement |
| | Palace |
| | The palatial house |
| | Threshold |
| | Stream |
| | Market |
| | Goose pen |
| | Gas oil tank |
| | Town |

In this story, the concept of 4 habitats and 23 public spaces were determined. As it can be seen in this table, the concepts belonging to the public sphere are mostly composed of home-related outdoor elements.

Table 5. *Kel Guvercinci (The Bald Man Who Sells Pigeons)*

| LIVING SPACE/PRIVATE SPACE | PUBLIC SPACE |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Tandoor | Cottage |
| Sofa | Chimney |
| (The window of the) Cottage | Yard |
| | Desert |
| | House(top) |
| | Palace |
| | Balcony |
| | Village |
| | Mansion |
| | Weaving shop |
| | Patio |
| | Pool(side) |

In this story, the concept of 3 habitats and 12 public spaces were determined. The special space concepts of the living space reflect the elements of the geography in which the story is formed.

Table 6. *Kucuk Kara Balik (The Little Black Fish)*

| LIVING SPACE/PRIVATE SPACE | PUBLIC SPACE |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Sea | Mountain |
| Stream | Rock |
| Brook | Forest |
| Creek | Village |
| Waterfall | World |
| | Bottom |
| | Black shore |

In this story, the concept of 5 habitats and 7 public spaces were determined. The place where the fiction of this story is shaped is the wetlands of Kucuk Kara Balik (The little Black Fish). Therefore, the concepts used are sea, stream, river, tea and waterfall.

Table 7. *Bir Seftali Bin Seftali (One Peach and a Thousand Peaches)*

| LIVING SPACE/PRIVATE SPACE | PUBLIC SPACE |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| | Yard |
| | Stream |
| | City |
| | Pool |
| | Street |
| | Moorland |
| | Hill |
| | Valley with snakes |
| | Mother earth |
| | Underground |
| | Shore |

In this story, there is no concept of living space but 12 public spaces were determined.

Table 8. *Puskullu Deve (The Tasselled Camel)*

| LIVING SPACE/PRIVATE SPACE | PUBLIC SPACE |
|----------------------------|--------------------|
| | Iran |
| | Azerbaijan |
| | Tehran |
| | Village |
| | Region |
| | Homeland |
| | City |
| | Province |
| | Hut |
| | Bank building |
| | Underground |
| | Main Street |
| | Shop |
| | Crossroads |
| | Restaurant |
| | Waterfront mansion |
| | Summer house |
| | Manor house |
| | Pool |
| | Yard |
| | France |
| | Switzerland |
| | Northern Tehran |
| | Southern Tehran |
| | Street |
| | Hasirabat |
| | Nazirabat |
| | Haji Mahmud Street |
| | Store |
| | Basement (floor) |
| | Pavement |
| | Park |
| | Cinema |
| | Water channel |
| | Naderi Street |
| | School |
| | Class |
| | Hospital |
| | Park |
| | Water-duct |
| | Bus terminal |
| | Garage |

In this story there is no concept of living space, whereas 42 concept of public spaces has been determined. This also shows that; this story is shaped in the public sphere.

Table 9. *Ulduz ve Kargalar (Ulduz and the Crows)*

| LIVING SPACE/PRIVATE SPACE | PUBLIC SPACE |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| (A room of the) House | Pool |
| Kitchen | School |
| | (Under) The mulberry tree) |
| | Chicken coop |
| | Street |
| | Yard |
| | Trash dump |
| | Prairie |
| | Housetop |
| | Brick kiln |
| | Mosque |
| | Patio |
| | Sands |
| | City |

In this story, there are 2 concepts of living space, whereas 14 public space concepts have been identified.

Table 10. *Pancarci Cocuk (The Kid Who Sells Beets)*

| LIVING SPACE/PRIVATE SPACE | PUBLIC SPACE |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| (Class) Room | Village |
| Class | School |
| | Carpet weaving shop |
| | Cattle range |
| | City |
| | Carpet loom |
| | Country |
| | Stream |
| | Hill |
| | Sea shore |
| | Sea |
| | Ocean |
| | Shop |
| | Town |
| | Field |
| | Mountain top |
| | Lowland |
| | Sky |
| | Highland |

In this story, there are 2 concept of living spaces and 19 public spaces has been determined.

Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

The geographical space that has been emphasised in this study is the social space that is categorised as private space and public space. The author uses these social spaces as the production space of the plot and the story. In order to describe the space, he emphasises and highlights the descriptions within the plot. The space the author uses is put into production again with the reader's geographical background and demolishes the limitations of spatial perception. From another perspective, the geographical spaces mentioned in the stories are experienced by the reader over and over again.

The author gives the reflections of everyday life with cultural codes (community codes) about community life. While using the codes of space in his tales, he gives the real and imaginary in a whole within the fiction smoothly. Thus, in terms of the reader / student, the tales of Samed Behrengi make it easy to make geographical readings and make them enjoyable. The functions of the fairy tale spaces produced on the non-realistic plane, rather than the physical characteristics, are emphasized in the shaping of social relations. This formatting function should be considered as the formation and use of public and private spaces. Considering that the fairy tales are texts constructed in the common memory of the society, it is necessary to consider the relations between the spaces revealed in these texts together with the relationship and space models produced by the geography in which they are living (Olcer, 2003). The relationship

of the living space with the space is shaped depending on the geography. In this way, spaces emerge as an integral part of the relationship between living and life. Living also expands the area of being by giving new dimensions to the space. (Yazici, 2002).

In the text titled *Ulduz ve Konusan Bebek* (Ulduz and the Talking Baby), 2 private spaces and 15 public spaces; in the text titled *Sevgi Masali* (The Tale of Love), 3 private spaces and 17 public spaces; in the text titled *Koroglu Geliyor* (Koroglu is Coming), 2 private spaces and 18 public spaces; in the text titled *Ah Masali* (The Tale of Curse), 4 private spaces and 23 public places; in the text titled *Kel Guvercinci* (The Bald Man Who Sells Pigeons), 3 private spaces and 12 public spaces; in the text titled *Kucuk Kara Balik* (The Little Black Fish), 5 private spaces and 7 public spaces; in the text titled *Bir Seftali Bin Seftali* (One Peach and a Thousand Peaches), no private spaces but 12 public places; in the text titled *Puskullu Deve* (The Tasselled Camel), no private spaces but 43 public spaces; in the text titled *Ulduz ve Kargalar* (Ulduz and the Crows) 2 private spaces and 14 public spaces; and in the text titled *Pancarci Cocuk* (The Kid Who Sells Beets), 2 private spaces and 19 public spaces have been identified.

A study like this is significant in terms of forming selective spatial perception in the students/readers who read the stories, and fostering the text and space relationship.

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