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The poetic function of the space in Özdamar's selected works

Erkan Zengin *

Hacettepe University, German Language and Literature, Beytepe/Ankara 06800, Turkey.

Abstract

The concept of space is not only one of the central concepts of philosophy; "space" is also an integral part of any analysis in literature science. Cultural studies also contributed important, new insights into this complex of problems. Since Sigrid Weigels speech of "topographical turn" the concept of space in cultural studies is not just a given location but an always reproduced space. Next to the natural and conditional perceptive recipient there is a constituted and historical alterable space as a research object of literature science with help of cultural perspective. This point of view and the bonded approach will be applied on the novels "The Bridge of the Golden Horn" and "Strange Stars Stare at the Earth" of the German-Turkish author Emine Sevgi Özdamar. Especially space quality and room image of Georg Simmel and findings of Charles W. Morris for the analysis of space in above mentioned novels and on the other hand the space semiotics of Juri Michailowitsch Lotman will be fructified to accent the altering perception of location and advert to the culture-specific development of a Turkish migrant in Germany.

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1. Introduction

A space description is one of the most basic components of a literary work. "Space" provides not only the concrete fundament of the action which takes place in the fiction, but also reflects the "cultural norms, worth hierarchies, circulating collective ideas of centres and marginality [...] as well it locates the individual between the familiar and the foreign" (Wolfgang & Neumann, 2009; p. 11).

Although the concept of space is fundamental for literary criticism, a systematic theory and newer models for space analysis are still missing today. The reason for this lies in the ambiguous usage of

* Dr. Erkan Zengin. Tel.: 0312- 297 84 00; fax: +90-312-2992030.

E-mail address: ezengin@hacettepe.edu.tr.

the concept and in the unclear definition of narrative space. So it seems that an analysis of the space concept by means of an interdisciplinary approach is inevitable.

In this context the definitions of space and its structure by Georg Simmel, the assertions of Charles W. Morris and the space semiotics of Juri Michailowitsch Lotman appear plausible and important. Our aim is to analyse two literary works (“The Bridge of the Golden Horn” and “Strange Stars stare at the Earth”) of the German writing Turkish author Emine Sevgi Özdamar, under the perspective of a space concept, which we will try to develop with the theoretical means provided by Simmel, Morris and Lotman. Thus we will try to see how the cultural experiences of the author as a migrant is reflected in her space descriptions, and, especially, how they change in time.

1.1. The Concept of Space

The German word for space (“Raum”) derives from the Middle High German “rüm, roum” and means “storage facility”, “place”, “standpoint” and “freedom” (cf. Seebold, 1999; p. 670). In the dictionary of the Grimm brothers the concept of space is understood as “territory” and as “a given place for expansion” (Grimm, 1984, 275-283). These definitions assume an absolute, territorial unity as the starting point of a relational position. Today, such a clear-cut (absolute) concept of space is challenged both in cultural studies and in literary criticism. On the one hand, space is considered to be a very concrete, physical environment (because one can enter and leave a space; i.e. one is physically surrounded by space), but on the other hand, space is seen as a very conceptual phenomenon, because it expands endlessly (Schoer, 2006; p. 10). In this regard Pascal stipulates infinite spaces (Pascal, 1997; p. 141), as can be seen in the different meanings of the English word “space”.

The contradiction between the experienced space and the imagined space has important scientific implications. According to the sociologist Schoer the concept of space has a strong tendency to define “proximity” in early tribal societies whereas in modern society the opening of new horizons stands in the foreground. This shows how the concept of space is attached to cultural settings, because space is always some kind of relational order. The same is valid for literary texts, in which persons are moving within the order of a fictional space. The formal consistence of this space creates the condition for every perception of the figures acting in the literary work (Daemrich, 1995; p. 287). Notwithstanding, space descriptions are never limited to infra-structural functions, because they are always more than just the topographical frame-work of the action. Space in a fictional text reflects at the same time the topological aspect of space, i. e. various cultural aspects including the authors own cultural background. The two novels of Emine Sevgi Özdamar which we will study under the aspect of space are especially interesting, because the meaning of space changes from one novel to the other according to the changes of the author’s attitude towards both the “other” country (Germany) and towards her “own” country as the result of her migration experience.

1.2. The space semiotics of Juri Michailowitsch Lotman

The academic of literary and cultural studies Juri Michailowitsch Lotman is of great importance in relation to the topic of space and manages to create a fertile basis in literary studies in his work “The Structure of Literary Texts” (1972) in which he formulates his structural semiotic space theory. Important is that the space model of the live area becomes the organising element around which the non-space characteristics arrange in order. The condition for such an analysis is the existence of a so called subject. The concept of subject is in near connection with the concept of the artistic space (Dünne, 2006; p. 536), because the concept of subject grounds on an image of a happening. The happening is the smallest non-

solvable unit of the subject body, which was defined as “motive” by Veselovskij. But the subject is relate (Dünne, 2006; p. 536), because it depends on the aspect of view. These are different in every age in literary works. After Lotman the happening consists of three elements:

- a. The semantic field or the told world, which also consists of two complementary parts.
- b. The border between these part spaces. It is penetrable for the characters of the text.
- c. The actors or the heroine who performs the action and crosses the semantics fields in the work.

Furthermore the subject articulates in the complementary differences of the part spaces which consist of three levels: the topologic, the semantic and the topographic. The level which catches the space with oppositions such as big and small is the topologic one. These oppositions are connected with semantic orders: i.e. big is good, small is bad. The semantic level in the text is shown topologically by mountain and valley. Borders between text spaces are borders between subsets when they expand the topologic level by marking topologic and semantic aspects. From the division polyphony of the space can be developed:

„Der Fall, in dem der Raum des Textes von einer Grenze in zwei Teile geteilt wird und jede Figur zu einem dieser Teile gehört, ist der grundlegende und wichtigste. Es sind jedoch auch kompliziertere Fälle möglich: verschiedene Helden können nicht nur zu verschiedenen Räumen gehören, sondern auch mit verschiedenen, bisweilen unvereinbaren Typen der Raumaufteilung gekoppelt sein. [...] Es entsteht sozusagen eine Polyphonie der Räume, ein Spiel mit den verschiedenen Arten ihrer Aufteilung.“ (Lotman, 1972; p. 328)

“The most important and basic case is the one in which the space of the text is divided into two parts and every figure belongs to one of the parts. But more complicated cases are possible: different heroes could not only belong to different spaces but can also be linked to different inconsistent types of space partition. [...] Polyphony of spaces, a game with its different kinds of partitions is created.” (org. Lotman, 1972; p. 328 - Translate)

In short next to these explanations of the Lotman theories, these before indicated connecting factors are alluded: For one it was spoken that after Wolfgang Müller-Funk the essential attribute of the metaphoric meaning of a space is its borders in which it is closed. - A closeness which can be meaningfully overcome in Lotmans subject. On the other side Georg Simmel is pointed out, who sees one of the big qualities of the room as its factorability: *“For a social group as well as for artwork the border [...] has the same function: Boundary to the outside or to the environment and fusion to the inside.”* (Schroer, 2006; p. 68) In this frame Simmel will be analyzed more deeply in the next chapter.

But before this, the subjectless system will be explained because it is not enough for Lotman to name a “happening” as something that shows its character in a literary work in his allotted space. By crossing the borders the subject movement starts, “happening”, which is approved by the subjectless structure. That, which impossibility, crossing of forbidden borders, approved by the subjectless structure it amounts to the content of the subject. So an altering of the daily life or omnipresence for example is

that the subject is firstly created. This point of view is of great importance in considering the accented works, which will be explained later.

1.3. The Quality and Structure of Space after Georg Simmel and the Findings of Charles W. Morris

Georg Simmel is one of the founding fathers of Sociology, who dealt intensively with the topic of space. His essay “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (2006) is about social topics like the integration of migrant, living together in metropolis and “the first condition for successful integration”. It is accented that space is not reason of socialisation processes but a frame for all happenings, which could not happen without or could not be perceptible. The relation of content and shape is what gives the happenings meaning, while space remains ineffective shape. Next to this statement space seems to exist independently from all single things after Simmel. It is just “pure abstraction” (Simmel, 1997; p. 80) which loses its abstract character by interaction and gets concrete shape. The interaction related to space is analysed by Simmel in another perspective in his “Excursus about the Foreign”.

In the “Excursus about the Foreign” Simmel is searching for the answer which structures a migrating group lives in contrast to native and what influence migration has on the “shapes of socialisation”. He continues the thoughts in his excursus with accenting the connection to space. Herein Simmel accents not only the connection to space but also to humans in this frame. So two concepts of space can be accented: For one the physical space and the “social” space.

But the migrator is not dependant to a space and the conceptual opposite to the native is fixed at a “given space point”. Even if he settles in a place later, he can’t deny that he has come from another space. Because indeed he has settles in a place and has not pushed along but he can’t deny he has come from another environment. He did not belong there a priori. This can be seen from the attributes he has brought with him. Especially the attributes which were not there at this point before. The foreigner embodies a unity of both spaces. He is physically near but because of the special attributes he has brought with him and which were unknown to the natives he is distant. Even this statement can be seen as a difference between the physical space and the “social” space. So the foreigner lives isolated from the natives in an utterly different socio-cultural environment.

As one can see from the space theories of Simmel, he is of great importance in space analysis of literary texts. Space and time get a deeper insight and new meaning respectively. In this sense, a place apart from its actual value can get a higher or lower value, which is closely connected with the physical and “social” space.

Even if the findings of Charles W. Morris don’t seem to have any connection with the theory of space, in my opinion the three dimensions of his indication (Pragmatics, Semantics and Syntax) usage can be used for space questions. Dünne understands these three dimensions as follows: Pragmatics = culture pragmatic space, Semantics = semiotic space and Syntax = technical space (Dünne, 2004; p. 16). Furthermore Dünne accents the “culture pragmatic space” of Morris and connects human practices and medial techniques or the space, while the question appears in which inherent interdependency space, media and body stand to each other (Dünne, 2004; p. 17-18). It is characterized after Dünne by the space structure which does bear fruit neither in technique causality nor in semiotic space representations. These three dimensions are insufficient for the determination or displaying of space after Morris. From the semiotic point of view the “sign” should be added. Here, it’s not about questions like why or the sense and value of a sign for the society and an individual but about the reaction of the recipient. Morris accents

this with the reason that a sign is relevant when it makes an attitude change for the recipient. After Morris there are two elements important for reasoning of a sign: The semiotic medium which he understands as means-aim-relation and the sign usage which he reasons as behavioristic (Nöth, 2000; p. 92). The approach of Morris is very relevant in consideration, because the foreign space is full of new sign which impact differently on the migrant.

2. Analysis of Emine Sevgi Özdamar's Novels "Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn" and „Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde“.

The author Emine Sevgi Özdamar writes about her own experiences in a foreign country. She caused a stir with her first volume of stories "Mutterzunge" (1990). Germany and Turkey, Europe and Asia are the arenas of life and work of Emine Sevgi Özdamar. In her mostly autobiographic texts, she shows the readers her experiences she made on her trips between the two worlds; she makes "migration her content and aesthetic programme".[†]

The novel "The Bridge of the Golden Horn" which I want to analyse under the aspect of poetic space is the continuation of "Life is a Caravanserai". In this novel she compresses her different migration experience and tells the story of a migrant in the 1960s who travels between Istanbul and Berlin. The act of the novel which bases on real actualities of the life of the author is accomplished with terms like Homesickness, factory work, acting school, political awakening, nightmare and homelessness, whereas the life story of the protagonist is closely connected to the political happenings in Berlin and Istanbul. Here it is mainly about an economic motive of migration and an involuntary migration. This migration is, like we have seen in our dispatch about Lotman, that the migrator enters a foreign space which has a subjectless structure in her/his eyes at beginning. That's why spaces; here places or buildings in Berlin can get a new meaning which can be captured in language:

„Dann hörte sie die Glocken einer halben Kirche, und weil sie diese halbe Kirche kannte, ging sie hinter den Glockenstimmen her, fand die halbe Kirche, von dort aus konnte sie die Bushaltestelle, die sie zum Wonaym brachte, wiederfinden. Sie nannte diese halbe Kirche gebrochene Kirche, eine Hälfte war im Krieg zerbombt worden. Die halbe Kirche half ihr jedesmal, ihren Weg wiederzufinden.“ (Özdamar, 2006; p. 500)

“Then she heard the bells of a semi church and because she knew this semi church she followed the bell sound, found the semi church and from there she could find the bus stop which brought her to the Wonaym. She called the semi church a broken church, because half of it was bombed in war. This semi church always helped her to find her way back.” (org. Özdamar, 2006; p. 500 - Translate)

As one can see from this quotation, she alienates the language by thinking Turkish and writing German; so she integrates and dissolves her mother tongue into the German language, and thus traces of her migration can be seen on stylistic level (Konuk, 2001; p. 91-93). She changes the German language

[†] <http://www.goethe.de/ins/es/bar/prj/lit/aoz/oez/deindex.htm> (April 2012)

and the medium, through which culture is conciliated. The change creates the subject-system in the eyes of the migrant. The construction of such a subject system can be seen in the next example in concrete:

„Aus dem rechten Busfenster sah ich die Zeitung, aus dem linken Busfenster sah ich den Anhalter Bahnhof, der wie das Hebbeltheater gegenüber unserem Wonaym stand. Wir nannten ihn den zerbrochenen Bahnhof. Das türkische Wort für »zerbrochen« bedeutete gleichzeitig auch »beleidigt«. So hieß er auch »der beleidigte Bahnhof.«“ (Özdamar, 2006; p. 456)

“From the right bus windows I saw the newspaper; from the left bus windows I saw the Anhalter railway station which is located just like the Hebbel-Theatre just in front of our Wonaym. We called it the broken railway station. The Turkish word for “broken” at the same time means “offended”. So it was called, too, the “offended railway station.” (org. Özdamar, 2006; p. 456 - Translate)

The adjective “broken” is a demonstrative, existential or perceptible adjective which gets a new metaphoric meaning from the Turkish language. Sölçün accents in his essay, that the translation of the Turkish-thought into the German creates an alienation for the reader and at the same time a stand-off from the perspective of the narrates (Sölçün, 2002; p. 96). But it is to be added that the protagonist adds a space order or that by this means an order is being created in the space. So the protagonist tries to get along in the foreign environment and acquire perceived friends by “attributive personalization”. By giving the topologic level a new meaning, it gets connected with the semantic level. This connection is created with language, while the direct translation from the Turkish plays a meaningful role. In the next example a call box is accented, which not only has its pragmatic functionality as a communication medium, but also it is a widening of the space. However, the protagonist does not leave the place she is at, but just images the other space:

„Wir sprachen aber weiter laut, wenn wir an unserer Telefonzelle neben unserem beleidigten Bahnhof vorbeingingen, damit uns unsere Eltern in der Türkei hören konnten.“ (Özdamar, 2006; p. 471)

“We spoke aloud when we went past the call box next to our offended railway station, so that our parents in Turkey could hear us.” (org. Özdamar, 2006; p. 471 - Translate)

The call box is not only a widening of the life space which reaches even Istanbul in this case,[‡] but also embodies like we accented with Simmel, the foreign. So the protagonists are near in terms of space but because of the special attributes they brought from their own country they are in terms of space away. This experience space which is created in abstract united near and far and illustrated the feeling of the protagonist to be in both places at the same time. The settling in a foreign space results in an altering in the space perception and as we can see in the quotation, an altering in the relations to the fellow men (that means to the Germans) which is especially connected with the foreign language:

[‡] <http://kgg.german.or.kr/kr/kzg/kzgtxt/kzgtxt106/106-16.pdf> (April 2012)

„Wir waren drei Mädchen, wollten bei Hertie Zucker, Salz, Eier, Toilettenpapier und Zahnpasta kaufen. Wir kannten die Wörter nicht. Zucker, Salz. Um Zucker zu beschreiben, machten wir vor einer Verkäuferin Kaffeetrinken nach, dann sagten wir Schak Schak. Um Salz zu beschreiben, spuckten wir auf Herties Boden, streckten unsere Zungen raus und sagten: »eeee«. Um Eier zu beschreiben, drehten wir unsere Rücken zu der Verkäuferin, wackelten mit unseren Hintern und sagten: »Gak gak gak.« Wir bekamen Zucker, Salz und Eier, bei Zahnpasta klappte es aber nicht. Wir bekamen Kachelputzmittel. So waren meine ersten deutschen Wörter Schak Schak, eeee, gak, gak, gak.“ (Özdamar, 2006; p. 449)

“We were three girls and wanted to buy sugar, salt, eggs, toilet paper and toothpaste from Hertie. We didn’t know the words. Sugar, salt. To describe sugar, we made like we drank coffee in front of the seller and said Schak Schak. To describe salt, spit on Hertie’s ground, pulled out our tongues and said: “eeee”. To describe eggs, we turned our backs to the seller and bounced our backs and said: “Gak gak gak.” We got sugar, salt and eggs but it didn’t work with toothpaste. We got cleansed tile cleansing agent. So my first German words were Schak Schak, eeee, gak gak gak.” (org. Özdamar, 2006; p. 449 - Translate)

The onomatopoeic way of communication adopts a relieving function for both sides in understanding. The social integration happens on the linguistically lowest level, which also has a big influence on the space perception. The protagonist lives like the other migrants isolated from the natives because of her differences and that’s why in utterly different socio-cultural environments. This can be seen in her work through words like “Frauenwonaym” which is consciously orthographical wrong.

The work “Strange Stars Stare at the Earth” by Emine Sevgi Özdamar describes a latter, last phase of her migrant live. Berlin is a preliminary terminal in her life and in this spirit embodies a new beginning. Emine Sevgi Özdamar talks about a different Berlin compared to “The Bridge of the Golden Horn”, a city which was not accented so much in her works until then. At the same time the protagonist is a migrant, who can resocialize in society and tries to build a good relation to her environment. So she is being accepted by the Germans:

„Reiner, der die AA-Kommune herausgeprügelt hatte, sagte: »Morgen muß ich für eine Woche nach Frankfurt, du kannst in meinem Zimmer schlafen.« »Es kann aber drei Monate dauern, bis mein DDR-Visum da ist«, sagte ich.“ (Özdamar, 2006; p. 859)

“Reiner, who thrashed the AA-Commune out, said: »Tomorrow, I will leave for Frankfurt for a week, you can stay in my room. « »But it can take three months until my GDR-Visa comes«, I said” (org. Özdamar, 2006; p. 859 - Translate)

The life in the metropolis creates “the first condition for successful integration” after Simmel. The space is not cause of socializing processes but it is the frame of all happenings, without which the processes could not take place. What gives the happenings its meaning is the interpersonal relation. In the work “Strange Stars Stare at the Earth” the wall separates the lives of the migrants and the natives into two: So it can be seen, that the Turkish men for one pursue the main goal of their migration and work in West Berlin to earn money and to eventually to return home later, and on the other hand that they build a new identity in East Berlin. In this sense the migrants are not dependent on one space, which shows that

they are not fixed at a given space point like the natives. Next to this the author shows how the Turkish migrants try to usurp the strongly indoctrinated environment, which is reflected in a distant way by the author:

„Am Sonntag zeigte mir Peter den Wedding. Die Türken lagen unter ihren Autos und reparierten sie. »In den sechziger Jahren haben die Deutschen genauso unter ihren Autos gelegen. Damals schüttelten die deutschen Frauen ihre Bettlaken aus dem Fenster, genau wie die türkischen Frauen heute.« Ich hörte, wie sich zwei türkische Männer unterhielten, die sich lange nicht mehr gesehen hatten. »Hattest du beim letzten Mal nicht einen Opel?« »Ja, und du den Audi.« Peter sagte: »Die Türken verwandeln sich in Deutsche.«“ (Özdamar, 2006; p. 878)

“On Sunday Peter showed me Wedding. The Turks were lying under their cars and repairing them. “In the sixties the Germans also lied under their cars. Back then, the German women shook their bed sheets out of the windows just like the Turkish women today.” I heard two Turkish men who had not seen each other for while talking. “Didn’t you have an Opel the last time?” “Yes, and you had an Audi.” Peter said: “Turks convert into Germans.” (org. Özdamar, 2006; p. 878 - Translate)

The Author does not accept the presentation of the stereotypes and does not apply them or only in a restricted way. She goes beyond that and portrays the gradual adaptation of the Turkish migrants into the German society. “Integration” which is the mostly debated topic today, is not very easily abstracted away from “assimilation” in its scientific usage. In this sense the adaptation of the Turkish migrants was accented only from a distant perspective and the topic was not examined to its depth. Here you can see that the migrants overcome the subjectless structure and as Morris accented, they live an altering of attitude and adopt the norms, culture and values of the society. The adaptation to a society and in this sense to the space they are in impacts on their language world as well. Also the altering of the protagonist concerning the space perception, the relation to society and connected to this, her approach to a foreign language can be seen in the two works. For this one can show a comparison:

„Die Berliner Straßen hatten viele Lücken, hier stand ein Haus, dann kam ein Loch, in dem nur die Nacht wohnte, dann wieder ein Haus, aus dem ein Baum herausgewachsen war. Wenn wir in den Nächten in den Berlinlöchern herumliefen, verloren wir unser Leben. [...] Wenn wir gesprochen hätten, hätte vielleicht die Nacht, die in diesen Löchern wie eine große Rasierklinge stand, unsere Körper zerschnitten.“ (Özdamar, 2006; p. 492)

“The streets of Berlin had many breaches; there was a house, then a hole, in which only the night lived, then again a house from which a tree had grown. If we had walked in the Berlin holes during night, we would lose our lives. [...] If we had spoken, the night, which stood like a big razor blade in the hole, would have cut our bodies.” (org. Özdamar, 2006; p. 492 - Translate)

The depiction of the night by the protagonist constitutes the tension between house and night. This quotation from the work “The Bridge of the Golden Horn” shows the abstract part of the city and reflects how foreign she is to this space by the rhetoric figure “metaphor”. In this sense, even if the

protagonist can move freely, the topography confines her and influences her space perception. As an example this quotation from the work “Strange Stars Stare at the Earth” can be accented as a comparison:

„Heute fuhr ich mit der Straßenbahn durch Ostberlin. Die Straßenbahn spielt an vielen Plätzen die Hauptrolle. Plötzlich steigen viele Menschen aus und rennen zu einer anderen Bahn. [...] Wind auf dem Alexanderplatz. Die Häuser stehen vereinzelt, und der Wind bläst durch die Lücken, Alexanderwind. Heute schob mich der Wind von hinten, so war ich schneller am Theater.“ (Özdamar, 2006; p. 893)

“Today I travelled through East Berlin by tram. The tram plays the main role in many places. Suddenly many people get off and run to another tram. [...] Wind on the Alexanderplatz. The houses stand scattered, and the wind blows through the breaches, Alexander wind. Today the wind pushed me from my back, so I was faster at the theatre.” (org. Özdamar, 2006; p. 893 - Translate)

On one hand, in her works the tram or the train is the most important connection medium of different cultures, living conditions and here especially accented, the spaces, which she states by “The tram plays the main role in many places.” The permanent movement of the protagonist for example with the tram is to be seen as a cause of the physicalness in her curious naturalness, in advance as appearance of education and this brings experiences of supernumeraries and statics with it. On the other hand, it has to be said that the description of her environment is very concrete, which is related to her advancing education. Here, the space, which was received as foreign, is now hers. It gives her the feeling of comfort, through which she can concretize her environment.

3. Conclusion

As could be seen in our analysis, semiotic theories of space are very helpful in determining the meaning of space motives in literary texts. On one hand we can cope with the descriptive level by means of a topographic approach, which shows how language provides the base for the characters to act and to experience; on the other hand we can also determine by means of a topological approach certain structures of meaning that go beyond the topographic level of description. It is important to apply both approaches, for if we leave out one or the other aspect, we will not cover all structures of meaning inherent in the text. Most important is also the fact that both levels of meaning, i. e. both the topographical and the topological level, are constituted through language. In this sense space in a literary text is not only concretized by language, but the language itself, as a system of signs and of signification, creates the space in a fiction. Language not only is at work in a literary text, but determines also the way in which space is perceived. What is effective in forming our beliefs according space in literature: Experience or education? This question is central, which means that experience and belief influence each other basically. On one side, experiences can be accumulated in any space and they give a value about knowledge at the same time. The way of learning (i.e. a language) is provided by space and influences the language itself with its experiences. Out of this reason, the understanding and learning of a language has a permanent connection with space[s] which are bounded to culture[s] of every society and cannot be excluded.

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