

PEDAGOGY

theory & praxis



Ioannina, December 2017 Issue 9

Defining space in Turkish literature: a semiotic analysis

MARIA DIMASI¹/EVANGELIA ARAVANI²

Introduction

In recent years, there has been an intense literary activity of Turkish writers who publish online texts, poetry and prose on the theme of Greece and Turkey. They also focus on Greek and Turkish people and their relationship, declared and under-declared, diachronically and synchronically, with the intense historical-social context. These texts are not included in the teaching material of the course of Literature.

In the first category of their works, we may identify several short stories for children and adolescents that move within the boundaries of the historical and socio-cultural, with the apparent intention of managing and with an internal optical-focus on Turkish ego, as this is identified in the Greek or Turkish environment. The space in many cases dominates the time and frames the actions of persons who, regardless of their gender and ethnicity, shape almost a self-declared but not consistent and fixed identity.

In this study we will deal with the extensive study of the space-time in the short story 'Rum Memet' unfolding on Kos and the Turkish coast in the 1990s ... until today. This text has not been translated in Greek. Methodologically, we will attempt a semiotic analysis of it, marking the spatiotemporal positions and the actions and reactions of heroes, and highlight space as the factor of narrative that contributes in shaping and potentially managing diversity.

1. Literature and intercultural dialogue of identities. The contribution of the dimension of space

The new multicultural reality is now a fact, given the mobility of large ethnic, racial and social groups, setting cultural differences at the epicenter of a broader social reflection. We may define cultural as 'what is presented simultaneously from a totality of social practices and from a totality of discourses built upon these practices' (Charaudeau, 1987: 3). 'Cultural practices and representations are built around constants, such as the relation with time, space, the metaphysical, labour, right and duty, love, and the daily habits, in a way that is different within every community that is characterized by any form of homogeneity' (Aravani, Fridaki & Raftopoulou, 2001: 5).

Research on cultural identity shows that due to powerful social mobility, this identity has the tendency to become multiple or 'plural' and, under that prism, the recognition of the

¹ Professor of Democritus University of Thrace

² Professor of Hellenic Open University

Other constitutes a central concept of modern philosophical currents as well as a desideratum of intercultural education. Besides, the term 'interculturalism' is broad. It is about the encounter and acquaintance of cultures, so as to achieve a deeper knowledge of their particularities, to develop a dialectical relationship and a mutual collaboration among them, and eventually reach their coequal recognition (Stergiou, 2014). This could be linked with the critical theorization of collective identities and cultural traditions, both the familiar and the others ones, through a reflective process of critique and questioning of the self-evident and established beliefs (Gotovos, 2002: 25).

In this context, literature has a substantial role in the management of cultural differences, suggesting the convergence of the margins of each different identity. Thus, the examination of the intercultural dimension of literature leads, through the overcoming of the criteria of literariness, to the highlighting of the text as a set of cultural experiences, ideological conflicts and social references, a fact that attaches to it a different dynamic as far as the understanding of the process of the formation of individual and social identities is concerned. That's why the teaching of the texts of literature does not serve, anymore, narrow linguistic aims, nor does it promote merely their literariness, but rather 'the coherent mechanisms of ellipsis and repetition, their multi-semantic language, their multicultural character and their emotional impact on human psyche' (Aravanis, 2005: 323), turn them 'into a privileged means for awareness, investigation and understanding of the different cultural categories, representations, divisions and values, on the basis of which we comprehend our social, historical and cultural experience, and form our social identity» (Pasxalidis, 1999: 322).

By overcoming time, space and language, the literary text helps the students-readers learn about a person or a group of individuals, whose stories, even if they are realized in a specific historical and natural setting, they highlight universal feelings, thoughts and values (Jenkins & Austin, 1987). This means that it contributes to the understanding of other lifestyles and, therefore, to the de-naturalization and relativization of their own (Berry & Candis, 2013). This is where the radical challenge of literature lies: on the fact that it constitutes an invitation to a dialogue with both what we regard as familiar and what we regard as different.

The role of space, as described in the literary text in the context of its intercultural character, should be noted. 'The narration of the situations that are described penetrates nationalities, races and religions, and seeks, into the successive layers of this palimpsest, fragments of events that constitute the daily life, the bitterness but also the originality of human beings. In this way, space turns from a geographical spot into a cultural reality; it becomes a place with identity and, primarily, with memory (Veikou, 2010) a space of subjective supervision and internal vision that now operates as the venue for the investigation of the 'self'. In this literary reality, 'the quest for autonomy and the determination of the identity of the subjects leads to the deconstruction of the characters, before they get to be redefined - this time in relation with the place of their action. The limit between the subject and the objects ceases to exist and, therefore, the 'inside' and the 'outside', the identity of the protagonists and the identity of space permeate one another' (Kastakiotis, 2010:325-326). This means that space is not restricted to its material existence or to its geometrical characteristics. It includes - and is jointly shaped by - a particular totality, a constellation of social relations that function

and interact in a given place (Lefebvre, 1974). 'Such a place is never an innocent context or scenery. In fact, it is radically different from a rhetoric of limits and delimitations of an 'inside' and an 'outside', of purity and exclusion of the foreign and the different, of a common history and roots - i.e. it is radically different from a reactionary vocabulary over the place and identity' (Vaiou, 2006: 173). Thus, the identity and uniqueness of the place are formed through the particularity of interactions, as well as by the interconnections of social relations with broader processes that may go far beyond the place (Massey, 2005).

2. Methodology

'The elementary cultural actions - like the language elements in the analysis of Saussure - do not constitute objective facts, recognizable based on intrinsic properties, but purely interactive entities, i.e. their identity as points due to differential and conflicting relationships that they develop with other items within the same cultural system' (Abrams, 2010: 95). Within this framework and with the methodological tool of The actantial model of Greimas we will try to define and identify the role of the space as a factor of storytelling. The space in many cases dominates time and frames the actions of persons who, regardless of gender and ethnicity, shape almost a self-declared but not consistent and fixed identity.

According to this theoretical model, which belongs to the broader field of Structural Narratology, the analysis of a literary text is focused on the basic principle of structure. The difference lies in the fact that Greimas refers to 'a method of semantic analysis of contents that highlights the existing system of values and allows for an ideological organization of the text' (Kapsomenos, 2008: 113). It distinguishes two levels of analysis - an external and an internal-structural one - (Bremond, 1973), introduces the semiotic square, in order to analyze pairs of concepts (Benatsis, 2010), and defines six acting forces (Subject-Object, Sender-Receiver, Helper-Opponent) (Kapsomenos, 2003: 141) with their respective roles, creating a model of analysis of textual content. The model can be depicted as follows (Greimas, 2005):

Subject - Object: the axis of desire

Helper - Opponent: the axis of power

Sender- Receiver: the axis of transmission

Narrative action is structured through the association of crucial action points that, with their mutual interconnections, achieve the formation of narrative continuity (Xanthopoulou, 2012: 3-6). The investigation of the parameters of the action of the 'characters' of the narration focuses on themselves, with the impersonated roles, the levels of evolution of actions and, consequently, the narrative plot in its space-time continuity as reference points. Essentially, the utilization of the model of acting characters allows for a semiotic analysis of the narrative text under the lenses of the special semiotic 'reading', which aims at the investigation of the semantic functions of the linguistic content (Chandler, 2014). The constructed and under construction relations create signifieds for the reader who, by receiving the literal relations literally embeds the receptions of connotations in the socio-cultural context of narration and reading (Goldman, 2005).

The application and utilization of the theoretical context is attempted with an emphasis on the highlighting of space in the short story 'Rum Memet' by Ferhan Sensoy. It is a text that

has not been published in Greek. For the purposes of this study, the text was translated by Ahmet Nizam and the translation was edited by M. Dimasi.

The narrative plot is researched through the action systems, i.e. through the relations developed by the 'characters' of narration, which secure the transformative process of the text (Tziovas, 1987). The six roles of the model are mapped in the episodes of the three scenes of the work.

The aim is to show how the complexity of characters' relations and the setting influence their identities' formation by creating the prerequisites and the main cause for the plot's outcome and how the typological features of Greek and Turkish culture, at the end, manage to penetrate the same culture, to transcend space and to provide cross-cultural orientations.

3. The text

'Rum Memet' A short story

Writer: Ferhan Sensoy, 2002, Istanbul

Origin: Samsun Çarşıamba

Area of studies: Theatre in France and Canadian, writer and director with international distinctions.

Who is Rum (Greek) Memet... A short summary of the story³

The Rum (Greek) Memet Foytsoymiadis Tsizmetzis is a kid with Greek and Turkish names, restless, hyperactive and very enjoyable to hang out with. As he has been born and grown up in Kos, he speaks Greek fluently and isn't different at all from a respective Greek kid. Realizing the dream of his mother, however, he goes to Turkey to study in their own language, Turkish, on the occasion of his sister's marriage. At first he finds it hard to adjust in Nazilli.

Soon, he becomes known for his football ability and is invited in the qualifying matches by the Turkish youth national team. Extremely happy, he starts dreaming of a brilliant career, but is inhibited due to the Greek surname and although he follows all the procedures to become a Turkish citizen, eventually he is deemed as suspicious or a Greek spy. So, he returns to Greece (Kos), where he wants to play soccer in a Greek team, but there they call him from the Recruitment Service to enlist to the Greek army as a Greek citizen. Also, because of his Turkish name, he is considered suspect or Turkish spy. At the end of the day, who is Memet? Where is his own home? Where is his space? The author ends by saying that "his address is the sea that does not know borders between Greece and Turkey and every wave that hits the beach is his voice".

4. The analysis

a. Spatiotemporal levels

The narrative plot evolves into four spatiotemporal levels, which jointly shape narrative developments:

³ The short story is accessible on the webpage http://utopia.duth.gr/~mdimasi/cv/Rum_Memet.pdf

A. place: Kos - Greece

time: the narrative present

A1. place: Kos - Greece

time: retrospective narration: the protagonist's adolescence

B. place: Nazilli - Turkey

time: retrospective narration: adolescence - adulthood / the realization of the protagonist's dreams

Memet sets his foot in Bodrum..., kissed the soil, weeping.

B1. place: Nazilli - Turkey

time: retrospective narration: the protagonist's coming of age - when dreams are hindered by his identity

At the same time, a correspondence developed with the anchor and the case was serious Tucked into a boat from there and leaves from our hometown as tourist Memet and returns in Kos confused and unspoken.

C. place: Kos - Greece

time: retrospective narrative: the claimed 'self-awareness' of the protagonist / search for identity

C1. place: Kos - Greece

time: retrospective narrative: the quest for identity / findings

So, we did not manage to appear good – worthy for both sides! Rum Memet fills his glass with ouzo.

D. place: Kos - Greece

time: the narrative present (time acceleration)

b. The identity in the context of narrative management of space and time

A. Retrospective narration:

The summer that Memet finished high school in Kos ... returned to Kos, thoughtful and silent.

• AXIS OF DESIRE

Subject: Memet's mother → Object: stay- studies of Memet in Turkey

• AXIS OF POWER

Helpers: daughter - groom - agreement - Memet's dream- talent

- Opponents: bureaucracy and prejudices

- AXIS OF COMMUNICATION

Sender: mother → Receivers: daughter - groom - Memet

Initial outcome: successful

- AXIS OF DESIRE

Subject: Memet → Object: Studies at the Lyceum of Nazilli, learning - use of the Turkish language, football in the national youth squad of Turkey

- AXIS OF POWER

Helpers: mother - sister - groom - talent - national - religious identity

- Opponents: the city, bureaucracy, prejudice, country of birth - previous residence

- AXIS OF COMMUNICATION

Sender: Memet Receivers: bureaucrats in administration

Outcome: initially successful

Finally: unsuccessful

- Utterances concerning the identity of Memet at that particular time:

...He takes the Turkish school books. He is mad with joy. On the first day, weeping, he says the national anthem in front of the Turkish flag in the courtyard of the school.

...He is indescribably happy for being in Turkey. In a short period of time, he begins to speak Turkish like Greek.

...He has passion for football from a very young age.

...- If the surname is the only problem, I immediately change it with a court decision, sir!

B. Retrospective narration:

He sat lying on the roof of his house ... Rum Memet fills his glass with ouzo.

- AXIS OF DESIRE

Subject: (Rum) Memet → Object: Soccer in Greek team

- AXIS OF POWER

Helpers: talent - dream → Opponents: military service, frustration, sadness, rejection, prejudice

- AXIS OF COMMUNICATION

Sender: (Rum) Memet → Receivers: Greek society - state representatives

Outcome: unsuccessful

- Utterances concerning the identity of Memet at that particular time:

...He sits lying on the roof of his house, gazing at the sea...

...They call Memet from the Recruitment Service to enlist him to the Greek army. He goes heroically. One way or another, this military service must be completed somewhere.

...So, we did not manage to appear good – worthy for both sides! Rum Memet fills his glass with ouzo.

C. Narrative present: beginning and end of the short story

a. Acquaintance with the author

A restless child ... he says, smiling slyly at me.

- AXIS OF DESIRE

Subject: (Rum?) Memet → Object: acceptance, identity, communication

- AXIS OF POWER

Helpers: experiences, common linguistic and racial identity with the author

- Opponents: experiences, transgender identity

- AXIS OF COMMUNICATION

Sender: (???) Memet → Receivers: the author, residents of Kos

Outcome: positive at the level of the development of self-awareness

- Utterances concerning the identity of Memet at that particular time:

...A restless, hyperactive and very cheerful child. He continuously makes jokes.

...It is obvious that he is happy that he speaks Turkish.

...He turns back towards the Greeks by-passers, introduces me and tries to explain who I am. The Greeks do not understand much, but he tries to explain.... - They are illiterate, my friend, he says, smiling slyly at me.

b. The epilogue of the author

A warm evening of July and this wind that is blowing is yours, Rum Memet ...

- AXIS OF DESIRE

Subject: author → Object: contact - support of Memet

- AXIS OF POWER

Helpers: common (declared) linguistic racial identity, (connoted) religious identity

- Opponents: experiences, shaped beliefs

- AXIS OF COMMUNICATION

Sender: author → Receiver: Memet

Outcome: positive - values of equality, self-determination, freedom and peace

- Utterances concerning the identity of this period:

...The sun sets in the name of all peoples, the united ones and those that were unable to unite, the sun of all of you, like saying I'm the sun of you all, there is no other sun and he declares this in Greek, Turkish, Russian, English, German, French, Spanish, Italian and Ugandan.

...I thought that the politicians should be ashamed, don't worry Memet, that they divide two peoples in the same space,

- Your address is this sea, here!

... Every wave that hits the beach is your voice. All these pebbles, these starfish, these mosses, these mussels, all this fish, these diabolical shells and this wind that blows are yours, Rum Memet....

Discussion - Conclusions

In the short story Rum Memet, space and historical and narrative time frame and define the protagonist's attempt to move between two worlds that confine him at a personal and experiential level, as well as at a social level in relation to citizenship.

Space, in each case, seems to define his identity while the present time constantly leads from the temporary satisfaction of expectations to frustration and the removal of the certainty of 'belonging' (Anderson- Lain, 2017).

The 'circular' narrative allows the reader as well as the protagonist and the author to submit personal versions of the narrative progression in a clear context of projection of inter-cultural objectives (Martens et al, 2015).

Bibliography

Abrams, Lynn (2010). *Oral History Theory*. London.

Anderson-Lain, Karen (2017). Cultural Identity Forum: Enacting the Self-Awareness Imperative in Intercultural Communication, *Communication Teacher*, 31, 3, 131-136.

Aravani, Evangelia, Evangelia Fridaki and Aglaia Raftopoulou (2001). 'Literature in the service of the cultivation of intercultural consciousness', Electronic presentation of the Proceedings of the 10th International Conference of the Pedagogical Society of Greece, 1-5.

Aravanis, Spyros (2005). 'The literary text as a means for learning Greek and as a channel of intercultural communication'. In Georgogiannis, P. (ed.). *Intercultural Education - Greek as a second or foreign language*. 8th International Conference, volume III, University of Patras, Department of Primary Education, KEDEK, Patra 318-328.

Benatsis, Apostolos (2010). *Theory of literature, structuralism and semiotics*. Athens: Kalentis (in Greek).

Berry, Theodorea Regina; Candis, Matthew Reese (2013). Cultural Identity and Education: A Critical Race Perspective. *Educational Foundations*, 27, 3-4, 43-64.

Chandler, Daniel (2014). *Semiotics for beginners*. Accessed February 25, 2014. <http://www.mcm.aueb.gr/ment/semiotics/semiotic.html>

Charaudeau, Patrick (1987). 'L' interculturel: nouvelle mode ou pratique nouvelle ?'. *Les Français dans le monde no special*, vers un niveau. Paris.

Fridaki, Evangelia (2003). *The theory of literature in the praxis of teaching*. Athens: Kritiki (in Greek).

Goldman, Nelson (2005). *Languages of art*, transl. by Panos Vlagopoulos. Athens: Ekkremes (in Greek).

Gotovos, Athanasios (2002). *Education and difference. Issues of intercultural pedagogy*. Athens: Metehmio.

Greimas, Algirdas, Julien (2005). *Structural Semantics. In Quest of Method*, ed by Eratosthenis Kapsomenos, transl. by Giannis Parisi. Athens: Patakis.

Jenkins, Esther & Austin, Mary (1987). *Literature for children about Asian and Asian Americans*. New York: Greenwood Press.

Lefebvre, Henri (1974). *La production de l' espace*. Paris: Anthropos.

Kapsomenos, Eratosthenis (2008). *Narratology. Theory and methods of analysis of narrating prose*. Athens: Patakis (in Greek).

Kastakiotis, Giorgos (2010). 'Searching for identities in the Istanbul of Petros Markaris. In Dimadis. K. (ed) *Identities in the Greek world (from 1204 to the present day)*, 4th European Congress of Modern Greek Studies, Proceedings, 317-327. Granada: 9-12 September, 2010.

Martens, Prisca; Martens, Ray; Doyle, Michelle Hassay; Loomis, Jenna; Fuhrman, Laura; Furnari, Christie; Soper, Elizabeth; Stout, Robbie (2015). *Building Intercultural Understandings through Global Literature*. *Reading Teacher*, 68, 8, 609-617.

Massey, Doreen (2005). *For Space*. London: Sage.

Pasxalidis, Giorgos (1999). 'General Principles of a New Programme for the Teaching of Literature'. In Apostolidou, B. and Hontolidou, E. (eds.). *Literature and Education*. Athens: Typothito (in Greek).

Stergiou, Lida (2014). 'Empathy and Intercultural Pedagogy: Theoretical approach and applications'. In Baros, B., Stergiou, L. & Hatzidimou, K. (eds.). *Issues of intercultural communication and education*. Athens: Diadrasi (in Greek).

Tziovas, Dimitris (1987). *After Aesthetics*. Athens: Gnosi (in Greek).

Vaiou, Dina (2006). "Identities / Differences of women in the city". *Indiktos*, 21, 171-183 (in Greek).

Veikou, Christina (2010). 'Cultural layers of a polyphonic world - the successive contrapuntal identities in the work of N. Themelis, The truths of the others. In Dimadis. K. (ed.). *Identities in the Greek world (from 1204 to the present day)*, 4th European Congress of Modern Greek Studies, Proceedings, 225-235. Granada: 9-12 September, 2010.

Xanthopoulou, Irene (2012). 'Who was the killer of my brother: A semiotic approach with the model by Greimas', *Mare Ponticum Conference Proceedings*, 1-16 (in Greek).