

SPACES AND PLACES OF MODERNITY AND THE MODERN ARTIST IN OĞUZ ATAY'S “RAILROAD STORYTELLERS - A DREAM”

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Abstract: *This paper examines Atay's "Railroad Storytellers - A Dream" in terms of Atay's modernist experimentation in his depiction of space and spatiality, emphasising his contribution to Turkish literature as a pioneer modernist author. Oğuz Atay's distinctive and innovative style, which forms his affinities with the early Western modernists such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, establishes his significant place as a pioneer modernist author in Turkish literature in the 1970s. The concept of 'house/home' by Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* (1957, 2014) is instrumental for me as it pertains to the predicament of three storytellers as artists in the nameless and remote railroad station. The narrator of the story and his fellow storytellers gradually sink into disconnection, confusion, misery and poverty in an environment that represents the cold and unwelcoming face of technological modernisation symbolised by the space of the train station. The narrator's quest for finding a 'home' to connect him to his readers and where he could exist as an artist comes to life in his attempt to write a letter to his readers, telling them he is still 'here' and asking them where they are. No matter how blighted that effort is since the narrator has no address to send the letters to, the endings for Atay's story imply a need for connection with his readers expressed in the impossible meeting of the 'here' with the 'where' in spite or because of the estrangement and alienation of the artist/author in the modern world. Hence, the possibility of space as a 'home' for the author/narrator dwindles in the not forthcoming answer to the letter that will never reach its destination.*

Keywords: *Oğuz Atay, modernism, space, place, home*

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Article history: Received: 11 March 2024; Reviewed: 23 June 2024; Revised: 30 July 2024; Accepted: 02 August 2024; Published: 12 August 2024



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Citation (APA): Aksoy, N. B. (2024). Spaces and places of modernity and the modern artist in Oğuz Atay's "Railroad storytellers – A dream". *Studies in Linguistics, Culture, and FLT*, 12(2), 167-184. <https://doi.org/10.46687/OQTR6968>.

Introduction: Oğuz Atay's life and unique literary output

Oğuz Atay (1934-1977) has a unique place in the Turkish literary and cultural polysystem, a position that was fully recognised nearly 30 years after his death. His literary rebirth began in 1984 with the discovery of his diaries by two literary critics and authors working in the culture department of a daily Turkish newspaper (see Ecevit, 2023). Since then, the reprints of his novels and stories have firmly established him as a pioneering and innovative author in modern Turkish literature, thanks to the current extensive studies and research on his art and oeuvre. Ecevit, who has published a book on Atay, concludes that Atay's influence extends beyond his readers, shaping the future of Turkish literature. Turkish literature encounters modernist formalism through Atay (Ecevit, 2023, p. 577, trans. mine). A Turkish publisher, author, and critic, Hasip Akgül, similarly underscores this fact in his study on Atay, stating that “the ideas Oğuz Atay brought to our societal life and experience, the new form, emotions, and sensitivities he brought to our literature, have a firm place now” (Akgül, 2023, p. 20, trans. mine).

Atay lived and wrote at a time after the Second World War when Türkiye, as a young republic, was experiencing social and cultural change into a modern, westernised nation. This landscape in which Atay lived had influenced him, sometimes to the degree of confusion, estrangement and disillusionment as an artist. This framework in which Atay produced his work, inspired mainly by Western modernists, motivated him to voice the artist's concerns in a highly distinctive and innovative way. A leading critic and world-renowned scholar at Stanford University, Marjorie Perloff describes some significant qualities of literary modernism:

the replacement of the representation of the external world by an imaginative symbol, an allogical structure and a spatial form, a term she borrows from Joseph Frank, verbal ambiguity and complexity; the fluidity of consciousness; the important attachment to Freudian notion of unconscious and the place and function of dreams, the concrete as opposed to the abstract, the particular as opposed to the general, the perceptual as opposed to the conceptual; the emphasis on the divided self, the alienated self in the urban life or among the crowd (Perloff, 1992, p.158).

For Peter Childs, “modernism is associated with attempts to render human subjectivity in ways more real than realism: to represent consciousness, tunnelling, defamiliarisation, rhythm, irresolution... and thus the modernists tried to express the new sensibilities of their time: in a compressed, condensed, complex literature of the city, of industry and technology, war, machinery and speed...” (Childs, 2017, introduction). Within this scope, space and place, and their connection in modernist fiction, are essential for the characters who live in it; since, as stated in the “Introduction” to *Literary Landscapes* (De Lange et

al., 2008) “place is an element of space. It is linked to identity, and not only to identity formation but also, under given circumstances, to a sense of threatened identity” (ibid., p. xiii).

One characteristic feature of Atay’s work that forms his affinity with Western modernists is his specific attention to the representation and construction of space and place. Manifestly, he is preoccupied with the spatial dimensions of the fictional world he creates. Hence, this study examines his depiction and use of space and spatiality in one of his works, contributing to his becoming the earliest modernist author of modern Turkish literature. How Atay’s story oscillates between a sense of place and a sense of space, in other words, a sense of location as depicted in the remote railroad station, and a sense of movement and mobility as represented by the passing trains in the story, may be regarded as an essential feature of modernist literature. I argue that Atay’s story “Railroad Storytellers-A Dream” (1976-77) shows this oscillation on the part of the first person narrator by way of creating the spatial and temporal dimension which is possibly taking place during the Second World War and illustrates Atay’s complex response to literary modernism, a response that is embodied in the oscillation between space and place. Andrew Thacker (2009) explains his views on “the opposition between space and place” in modernist literature as follows: “To several geographical theorists, *space* indicates a sense of movement, of history of becoming, while *place* is often thought to imply a static sense of location, of being, or of dwelling. Much modernist writing oscillates between these twin spatial visions, often in ways that complicate any sharp division between a conservative sense of place and a revolutionary sense of space” (ibid., p. 13).

Hence, in this paper, Atay’s last short story, “Railroad Storytellers-A Dream”, will be examined and interpreted in light of the abovementioned views. About the opposition between space and place as demonstrated in this story, Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) interpretation of space, mainly a ‘social space’, and George Bachelard’s (2014) concept of ‘home’ and ‘intimate space’, which will be discussed by and large further in this paper are also the fundamental theoretical inspirations for the examination of place and space in the story.

A contextual approach to the story “Railroad Storytellers – A Dream” given its affinities with Western literary modernism

Before delving into the discussion of this paper, it may be worthwhile to provide information on the story, Atay’s last, before his untimely death. The story appeared in the 1987 edition of the book *Korkuyu Beklerken*, a compilation of his stories (Ecevit, 2023, p. 506). Its appearance in translation came late. Finally, in 2021, *Korkuyu Beklerken* came out under *Waiting for Fear*, translated by Fulya Peker and published by Contra Mundum Press. The story appeared in this

translation, titled “Railroad Storytellers – A Dream”. Sadly, after the 1st edition, the book became out of print and inaccessible due to some publication issues. Nevertheless, although the assessment of the translation’s quality is outside this paper’s scope, I take the liberty to say that the translation was materialised with great care, devotion and attention, recreating Atay’s unique style in English as closely as possible.

The story takes place in an unnamed railroad station on a mountaintop in a remote town. The story’s background is assumed to be the first half of the 20th century, with unprecedented developments in the global capitalist societies happening economically, socially and technologically. Geographically, the town and the story’s location are unnamed, just as all the three storytellers who live in this station make a living by writing stories and selling them to the passengers on the trains that seldom pass that station. The story also includes the stationmaster, a peddler, and a few more insignificant characters. The three storytellers live in dire conditions and must comply with the condescending attitude of the stationmaster and the passengers, who scornfully undermine their art and stories. Gradually, as time indefinitely moves on, trains stop passing by that station, and conditions become unbearable for the three storytellers. One of them, the poorly young Jew, dies, the young woman leaves, and the third one, the unnamed narrator, sinks into a state of total loneliness, disillusionment, foggy-mindedness and despair. His feelings of estrangement from the place he lives in and the space he exists in finally make him incapable of producing stories. Additionally, no one can buy these stories and read them. Thus, the narrator rambles not only into physical loneliness but as a writer; he is also cut off from readers. Although the significance of the ending of the story will be discussed later in this paper, to summarise briefly, tired of being unappreciated as an artist and writer in his physical environment, the narrator clings to his art eventually by way of trying to send his imaginary readers a letter, which is ironic, devoid of an address. Towards the end, although he has sunk into total immobility and isolation in that remote and deserted railroad station, which is ironically and metaphorically a representation of 20th-century mobility and movement, in other words, an ‘oscillation between place and space’, he takes action by deciding to write and send a letter to his readers, asking them where they are. The irony in the end is that in that unspecified deserted railroad station, the letter, symbolically an act of connection for the narrator, has nowhere to go, no address whatsoever.

In the story, there are innumerable themes and stylistic devices that Atay unconventionally uses for the first time in Turkish literature to foreground the artist’s alienation amid a capitalist and technologically advancing society. The title “The Railroad Storytellers – A Dream” is essential. The dream is what Oğuz Atay saw before writing this story, and he said that the story was inspired by an earlier dream (Ecevit, 2023, p.507). The dream motive symbolically

implies the confusion the narrator experiences in the course of the plot. The space where the story occurs and where he lives no longer offers him shelter, security or warmth. This theme of insecurity and confusion may be interpreted from the perspective of one of the modernist literary critics, Gaston Bachelard's concept of 'home' as a place of affirmation, which is expressed as the following in his own words: "Indeed here we touch upon a converse whose images we shall have to explore; all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home... He experiences the house in its reality and in its virtuality, by means of thoughts and dreams" (Bachelard, 2014, p. 27).

In the story, the railroad station fails to sustain the narrator and his fellow storytellers as an affirmative home, leaving all three of them in a vast and hostile space where survival becomes challenging. The deprivation of the 'home', which signifies the warmth, connection and security filled with dreams and good memories, does not exist for the characters in the story (Bachelard, 2014). The narrator in the story expresses his feelings and his sense of loss in the following manner:

What kind of wind had brought us here to this town? We were working in such terrible circumstances. Dealing with food sellers, train attendants, hunger and poverty, we weren't able to perform our art properly. Above all, we didn't even have the proper amount of books. We didn't even have the money to get train tickets to go to the big city to buy books. What could be expected from us under such circumstances? The more I contemplated, the more I comprehended the desperation and wretchedness of our situation: Actually, by giving us these box-like rooms attached to the station building, the railroad administration hadn't done something for the benefit of us. (Atay, 2021, pp. 251-252)

Atay's presentation of the struggles of the modern artist amid this deprivation is the dilemma and the confusion of the artist facing the challenges of modernity. This predicament of the artist and its being taken up in the story through metaphors of space, place, and time is as personal as societal for Atay (Şahin, 2018). The attributes that make him so unique in Turkish literature are also expressed by the Turkish author Füsün Akatlı, underlining her observations that Atay has been an author preoccupied with characters who are disconnected and estranged and that he brings forth a social criticism conspicuously embellished with the portrayal of the disconnected. Akatlı says that "his subjects are the defects caused by the disruptive relationship of the individual with his community. Economic conditions, political climate, subjective and societal opportunities or shortcomings, the society is the gist of his stories" (Akatlı, 2018, p. 44, trans. mine).

As highlighted by the critics, researchers and reviewers of his works, this use of modernist concepts to voice personal and collective challenges is, among others,

Atay's contribution to the development of modern Turkish literature. Although later than the high modernists of the early 20th century, Atay's new style and his perception of the individual as an alienated and traumatic being estranged from society and himself have been taken up from a modernist perspective. His place as a modernist author in the Western tradition has been questioned and explored in some significant works by academics and researchers in Turkey, among whom Berna Moran (1991), Hasan Baktır, Yiğit Sümbül (2015), Yıldız Ecevit (2023) become prominent in terms of the extent and spectra of their studies. Sümbül and Baktır write the following:

He is in search for a new and powerful narrative to excavate and write about the current political turmoil of Turkey. This search for and experimentation of the Western modernism in literature becomes the most remarkable achievement with Atay's publication of *The Disconnected*. Influenced by Joyce, Kafka, Dostoyevsky, Nabokov and Proust, Atay develops his unique style and becomes one of the forerunners of the stream of consciousness technique in Turkish literature (Sümbül & Baktır, 2015, pp. 856-857).

Berna Moran (1991), an eminent Turkish literary critic and scholar, comments on the modernist Turkish novel and Atay's place in it, saying: "Atay is the earliest Turkish author who left behind the conventional Turkish novel and tried a brand new one" (ibid., p.197, trans. mine).

What he means by a brand new novel is the modernist novel, having affinities with the Western models in terms of themes and technique. Moran, in his book *Türk Romanına Eleştirel Bir Bakış II (A Critical Look at the Turkish Novel, 1991)*, gives an account of the social, political and technological changes in the West and their effects on the perception of art and the individual, drawing similarities with the case of Turkish modernity following the founding of the Republic which brought along sweeping social and political as well as economic and technological changes leaving their mark on the artist and the individual. The novelist who, on a personal scale, assumed a doubtful look on these changes no longer felt the traditional realist fiction writing satisfactory in voicing these personal doubts similar to their counterparts in the West, and Atay becomes the earliest novelist to try his hand in a new genre and style, thus paving the way for the modernist Turkish novel which was to be developed and carried over to a new level with the advent of postmodernist and other experimental fiction techniques (Moran, 1991, pp.198-199).

Modernist approaches to place and space manifested in "Railroad Storytellers – A Dream"

Modernist writing evolved to its indisputable stand in the first half of the 20th century. The century following the First World War was mainly concerned with space, place, and movement, and it was influenced by the new concept of

Bergsonian time and the Jungian notion of memory and consciousness. Space and place were regarded as symbolic representations that signified a connection, a link with the social, material and individual space and place in the modern daily life of persons and societies. Wesley A. Kort writes in his book *Place and Space in Modern Fiction* (2004) that nineteenth and twentieth-century cultural history, while it gave a temporal orientation to modernity, was also a history of changing places, relations to place, and spatial understandings (ibid., p.2). He asserts that history must also be understood as marked by place changes, spatial dislocations, and reorientations (Kort, 2004, p.4). From a historical perspective, Kort (2004) puts forward that while much on the surface spoke of confidence and optimism, there was also a growing sense of foreboding. It became difficult for some to read this history as a story of progress... (ibid., p.4).

Like Western modernists, Atay also creates characters who question and challenge the norms and conventions of their society and thus fail to develop affinities and closeness to his physical environment. Our narrator in the story, who rejects and defies the conventionality of the stationmaster or the passengers who expect of him traditional stories and conventional themes, voices his feelings as such:

For some reason, these long stories of mine were not selling at all. I was hoping for more sales probably because I was out to sell stories only once a week. It couldn't be said that the stories were pellucid... One day-I mean sometime after- a passenger heavily criticized one of the stories I had sold to him before-some time before. The page numbers were mixed up as well... He wasn't listening to my stories which I was trying to read out loud to him. Yet still I had a sense that they were progressively becoming more valuable, from a point of view that was progressively becoming more difficult to express (Atay, 2021, p.257).

For Sümbül and Baktır (2015), “The current situation leaves the artists in a state of complete hopelessness... Thus, contemporary writers celebrate this situation using alienation, social isolation, depression, spiritual paralysis, lack of communication and search for meaning” (ibid., p. 6).

This is precisely how, in Atay's story, place and space manifest themselves as the symbolic representations signifying the complex interrelation between these situations and the individual and how personal and social discontent and disillusionment are voiced and dealt with under the prism of modernist use of space, place and time. (Ecevit, 2023). Railroad Storytellers ... possess a more modernist structure than his novels... They carry the estrangement and the chilly world of loneliness to a landscape of images (ibid., p. 488, trans. mine). Sümbül and Baktır (2015) go on to explain Atay's proximity to 20th-century modernist writers as such:

Modernist authors like Joyce and Atay write about subjects and themes with a strong emphasis on individuals' spiritual paralysis, isolation from society, feeling of 'nothingness', existential questionings, lack of communication and consequences of urbanization. In particular, such themes are also celebrated by Woolf, Proust, Faulkner, Kafka and Dostoyevsky despite the geographical and cultural differences. Joyce has been a leading figure of influence on many modernist authors from different nations. For instance, Oğuz Atay, much under the influence of Joyce, creates intellectual characters with an emphasis on the intellectuals' isolation from society and social institutions, though with different preoccupations (ibid., p. 853).

Conclusively, Atay's "Railroad Storytellers – A Dream" metaphorically materialises space as an unnamed railway station on an unnamed town's mountaintop in an indefinite time. Thus, this symbolic space becomes a modernist space employed to voice Atay's themes, which all modernist writers share.

Lefebvre and Bachelard: Social space and intimate space manifested in "Railroad Storytellers – A Dream"

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the dichotomy between movement and immobility, as well as place and space, is interpreted in terms of the modernist tendencies in Atay's writings. Atay uses the moving train and the static train station metaphors to express his concern about the modern author facing the challenges and problems of the modernity of his times and the ensuing loneliness, estrangement and traumas of the artist as a modern man in an indifferent environment and society. At this point, it may be necessary to refer to Henri Lefebvre and his interpretation of space. To him, "any space implies, contains and dissimulates social relationships – and this despite the fact that a space is not a thing but rather a set of relations between things (objects and products)" (Lefebvre, 1991 p.83). Thus, Lefebvre underlines social space as opposed to Bachelard's intimate space (Thacker, 2009, p.16). According to Lefebvre, there are three dimensions of social space, among which "representational spaces embodying complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art (Lefebvre, 1991, p.33). For Lefebvre, representational space refers to space directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of "inhabitants" and "users", but also of some artists... the "dominated... space which imagination seeks to change or appropriate" (Lefebvre, 1991, p.39). The focus on the symbolic qualities of representational spaces can be directly applied to modernist writers who attempted to capture the new spaces of modernity in their works and "thus emphasises how a spatialised reading of modernism must always

consider relations of power and geopolitics” (Thacker, 2009, p. 20). In Atay, the manifestation of the symbolic social space is depicted in the train station with all its cabins, sheds and rooms, as well as in the person of the stationmaster, who represents authority and the train passengers. It must also be noted that although the station is unspecific, it is administered by rules and regulations as well as a stationmaster who works there as a civil servant:

The stationmaster wouldn't care about the things we had written; but for some reason, he would certainly take a copy of each one of our stories, file them with care and hide them in a separate cabinet; It was required by regulations, apparently. And apparently, since they were written on the property of the railroad administration, our case was covered by article 248. Whenever he spoke of the articles in law, I would get angry despite myself: Weren't there any laws that would fix our case; that would give an honorable status to us in the property of the railroads. (Atay, 2021, pp. 249-250)

The narrator's critical attitude towards the established bureaucratic order and the stationmaster's unappreciative and undermining attitude expected from an authority who always follows the book are other features of the storytellers' further estrangement and discontent within that social space.

The critical position of railroads for the modernist writer is a suitable device to voice modernist concerns. In *Moving Through Modernity* (2009), according to Andrew Thacker, “the significance of railroads and train stations and movement between various spaces is a key feature of modernism, and one significant way of interpreting this is via the emergence of modern means and systems of transport such as the motorcar, the electric train or bus, or the underground railway or the railways on the ground” (Thacker, 2009, p. 7).

Spalding (2012) also talks about how the development of transport systems enabled man to experience the freedom of moving around, which resulted in a change in the perception of time and space and “ways of knowing and experiencing the world” (ibid., p.193) which provided the author with new and experimental forms of reflections of those concepts in writings, leading the way to modernist tendencies and sensibilities. “Modernist writing, ...is about living and experiencing ‘new times’, not in the abstracted location of literary history, but in specific spatial histories: rooms, cities, buildings, countries and landscapes” (Thacker, 2009, p.13).

In Atay, the significance of railroads and train stations parallels this new perception of movement, mobility and immobility. It subtly reveals the modern man's dilemmas and confusion in the face of contemporary society, which becomes increasingly estranged from the individual and the artist. The railroad station at the beginning of the story manages to provide the storytellers with a meagre amount of money to keep them alive since few trains come and go and the passengers are not too keen on reading; however, this mobility and

movement gradually declines; bringing along a sharp deterioration in the lives of the fellow storytellers and the narrator, leading him eventually to a total confusion of identity:

Trains don't pass by here any longer. Lately for some reason, I haven't been seeing the stationmaster around, either. He's on leave I guess-because he hasn't been taking a vacation for years. His outfit is on me now. He must've left me behind to cover for him. For some reason, trains don't stop by, either. Whatever, these are insignificant details (Atay, 2021, p. 258).

As mentioned previously in this paper, the story's location, the space it occupies, and the narrator's conception of this situation are indefinite but not in the least insignificant in the structure of the story. The opening paragraph, which focuses on this indefinite but significant space in detail, is as follows:

In a mountaintop town, far away from the big cities of the country, we were three storytellers working at a railroad station. We had three cabins side by side attached to the main building. A young Jew, a young woman, and I. We were working as itinerant storytellers. It couldn't be said that our sales were great, because the trains would seldom stop by at our station (Atay, 2021, p. 244).

Against the outer space of the mountain top, the inner place where they stay is created as a problematic space vs place dichotomy since both terms represent imagined and metaphorical entities and fail to provide the storytellers with a home of the Bachelardian sense. In Atay's terms, the storytellers live at a train station where there are somehow and curiously enough, writing cabins for residing storytellers: "If we were to be thrown out of here, where were we to find a train station like this, with storywriting cabins?" (Atay, 2021, p. 253) says the narrator, while describing the enforced and confined living space they were permitted to live in, within the outer space of the railway station which does not offer them any solace, warmth or security, contrary to what is expected from a "home" or a "house" in the Bachelardian sense. As already mentioned in this paper, Bachelard, in his *The Poetics of Space* (2014), equates place with the house, where people are born and grow up, comprising several components such as rooms, kitchens, cellars, attics and argues that inhabiting means being located in the house. He suggests that "all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home" (Bachelard, 2014, p. 27). However, as observed in the "Introduction" to *Literary Landscapes* (De Lange et al., 2008), "if your characters are deeply alienated from other people and from the places where they find themselves, then all places share the quality of 'not home' for you" (ibid., p. xi). Hence, "Those boundaries between the self and the world, those boundaries that reduce all spaces to 'not us' and thus homogenize them, have often served as one of our litmus tests of modernism" (ibid., p. xi).

On the other hand, Zehra Zambak observes that during war times, which is the implied time in the story, the living space, which was functioning as an economic space to survive, had its toll on daily life as well as on the artistic space (Zambak, 2017, p. 337). In outer space, the events in the railway station in Atay's story touch upon the challenges of art in the face of social realities and the artist's alienation due to the struggles to overcome these challenges (Zambak, 2017, p. 336). Consequently, the narrator in the story and his fellow storytellers are deprived of that intimate space in Bachelard's terms and move into the abyss of topographic uprootedness, which leads to each of them's gradual mental and physical dismal and eventual outward journey towards disappearance and being wasted away. The irony is that trains and railways are modernist symbols of development and movement. Also, the freedom they brought to the 20th-century man becomes the prison of the characters in the story and symbolises their immobility. The ensuing mental and physical decline and confusion of the narrator is expressed in his own words:

I was spending my days half hungry, half full. One day- I mean some time after- a passenger heavily criticized one of the stories I had sold to him before- some time before. The page numbers were mixed up as well. I told him that I had been hungry for a week. No, I didn't tell him. I told this –some time after- to another passenger. I tried to tell the passenger from sometime before that I had done everything on purpose. I was forgetting a lot of things (Atay, 2021, p. 257).

Similar to those modernist writers in the West, as mentioned by Sümbül and Baktır (2015), the artist's dilemma accounts for Atay's restlessness in his life and career, moving around from one place to another and feeling dissatisfied with the society of those times in the face of rapid modernisation, and artistic and literary climate. Turkish author and literary critic Sadık Yalsızuçanlar in *Oğuz Atay İçin Bir Sempozyum* (2018) describes Atay's concept of authorship in the following manner: "Eshrefoglu Rumi, an important name in our traditional literature says 'I talk about my troubles and nothing else', similarly Atay is an author who talks about his own, personal truth..." (ibid., p. 94, trans. mine). Consequently, it may be argued that the predicament of the nameless narrator and his fellow storytellers represent what Oğuz Atay knew in his life and how he felt about it. Yıldız Ecevit, in her review of "Railroad Storytellers", writes the following:

This is a story that significantly alludes to the existence of an artist. In this imagined world which is confined to a train station, the storyteller sinks deep into the problem of being an artist: he consumedly experiences the conflict between artistic creativity and the material world; he can't write correctly because of his financial issues; he profoundly feels the pressures of the system that is embodied in the stationmaster, he is worried about

his creativity, he does not get the attention he expects, of the reader, at the grasp of desperation, he hits bottom, he is lonely. This story of Atay is one of the most beautiful stories in world literature, and it deals with the problematic place of the artist. (Ecevit, 2023, p. 509, trans. mine)

Hence, in the story, his delving into the exploration of the complex relationships among his characters and between particular spaces and places pertain to Atay's own experience of pangs of modernism as an artist and a deep sense of homelessness, which deters him from the articulation of "the topography of his intimate being" (Bachelard, 1994, p. XXXVI). This idea is created in the story by the characters' inability to write and produce short stories that could sell and be an outlet for their own "intimate being" in that particular space and time. In the story, the narrator writes,

I was feeling that I was exhausted deep inside. My sleep being cut halfway through every midnight, the whistles of the trains, the necessity to find new stories for the inconsiderate and ignorant or comfortable and arrogant crowd of customers, the young Jew progressively becoming worse, and our stationmaster progressively becoming more peevish... I didn't know which demands to meet (Atay, 2021, p. 254).

The modernist concept of time in "Railroad Storytellers – A Dream"

Kearney says, "Bachelard's poetics of space entails a poetics of time" (Kearney, 2014, p. XXII). He adds, "Bachelard, the temporality of an image is dependent on the instant" (ibid.). Kearney goes on to say that "Confronted by the successive antithesis of ordinary time, the poet refuses to comply, resisting the habit of chronological sequencing by transmuting opposition into instantaneous 'ambivalence' (where contraries coexist)" (Kearney, 2014, p. XXIII). He concludes, "The poetic imagination thus substitutes simultaneity for succession" (ibid.). Memory also becomes very important in the modernist conception of space, in its conception of time, where many simultaneous time flows occur.

A similar notion of time is present in Atay's story. His creativity and experimentalism in his stories evolve around the problematic notion of identity and estrangement as time and space move in flux, and this attitude brings him forth to the modernists of the early and mid-20th-century Western writers such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and many others. In "Railroad Storytellers", time is intertwined into the movement and immobility dichotomy in the story, which encircles the train station space as confusing as the memory and mind of the character. Time does not flow chronologically, echoing Bachelardian and the modernists' concept of time, and sometimes becomes the foundation where the narrator experiences his flashbacks, troubled inner dialogues and gradual

confusion, which is apparent in the narrator's words towards the end of the story:

I had a sense that my thoughts were becoming blurry. My relation with the world outside the station was weakening too. I wasn't any longer able to keep track of how the days were passing. My old aptitude in finding current topics for my stories, in connecting people and adventures, was no more. Most of the time, I wasn't able to hear the significant news. Yes, I knew some of it: The war was over. Trains full of homecoming soldiers flooding from the front lines were passing by. Collecting some ramshackle information from them, I had written war stories for a while. In the meantime, I was not able to remember many things: Had the war taken place in our country? Or had they battled in far away deserts? Had our lands expanded or narrowed? The young Jew was responding with his weary smile: Given that our station remained where it was, did such matters have any significance? (Atay, 2021, p. 254)

Structural and experimental innovations about modernism in “Railroad Storytellers – A Dream”

Atay's similarity with the modernists is not confined only to his conception of space and time; his use of symbols and metaphors to signal the deeper meanings of modern man's dilemmatic relations with his environment and his experimental and unique narrative technique are among many other elements that bring him closer to the modernists.

Moving on to the story's structure, similar to Hemingway's “iceberg principle” in his stories, Atay's story has an “iceberg principle” where the underlying meanings are left to the reader to understand. Although Atay's narrative technique and his choice of writing style are not as economical as Hemingway's, the story operates on many levels in the subtext. The indefiniteness of the space in which they exist and lead a miserable life and the absence of a specific place without an address (the readers can not answer the narrator's letter) along with a moving but uncertain time both as a spatial metaphor and as a moving sequence as the trains come and go, require a modernist reading in order to find out what lies beneath the iceberg of the narration. In *Moving Through Modernity* (2009), Thacker argues, “The focus on the symbolic representational spaces can be directly applied to modernist writers who attempted to capture the new spaces of modernity” (ibid., p. 20). In terms of Hemingway's “iceberg principle”, the indefiniteness of time and place and the nameless characters create a space of uncertainty and point out Atay's search for a metaphorical sense of belonging which will link the characters to reality and to life itself. The railway station is a significant metaphor for modernity on several levels. First, it signals the advent of technological development that reaches even the remotest place.

Second, the railway is where mobility is most felt by the trains arriving and leaving. Third, the railway station's turning into a gradually deserted place is metaphorically a symbol of the desertedness and gradual decline of the storytellers and, principally, the narrator himself. Bachelard's concept of home may help to interpret the choice of the railroad station as the space for the story. For Bachelard, the primary function of inhabiting is located in the house." All really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home" (2014, p. 27). According to Thacker, "It is a kind of 'place-world or a world of places' where the exploration is not so much geometrical or architectural as imaginative or poetic" (2009, p. 15). For Bachelard (2014, p. 30), "of course thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are housed". Thacker (2009) highlights Bachelard's argument that "this imaginative realm is the closest, to that of dreams and the unconscious, where our most intimate memories of inhabiting early childhood places are stored, or 'housed'" (ibid., p. 15).

Bachelard's view is "to illustrate the metaphysics of consciousness we should have to wait for the experiences during which being is cast out, that is to say, thrown out, outside the being of the house, a circumstance in which the hostility of men and universe accumulates" (Bachelard, 2014, p. 29) and corresponds to what Atay's narrator goes through; when he finds himself deserted, in a way cut off from the "house" he endeavoured to integrate himself in, his downfall begins. As Bachelard states, "The house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind" (2014, p. 28). Atay's calling the story title "A Dream" suggests a Bachelardian explanation of the space where they live, correspond, or fail to correspond to the 'house' they search for but cannot find.

Metaphorically, the railway station's other essential function in the story is twofold: One is it is a metaphor for a Bachelardian sense of home, and secondly, it is a place of travelling and making journeys outwardly in the physical and materialised sense; hence serving as the Lefebvrian social space, as well as inwardly as a spiritual journey the narrator makes, in search of giving and finding answers for his existence, thus creating the Bachelardian intimate space. The first function fails to be materialised; the narrator and his peers are never blessed with a home in the Bachelardian sense; they do not even have an address in the railway station; the second function of outward physical travelling has not been realised since the station stops functioning, while the inward journey of the narrator ends in his traumatic confusion and decline, stripped of his memory and creative imagination. Atay's occupation for his restless quest for identity and belonging amid the facts of modern life, such as economic and bureaucratic workings, are conspicuous in his description of how they were producing their stories:

Yes, in a way we could've been regarded as the civil servants of the railroad administration. Our cabins had been constructed on the area allotted for the station building; moreover, they were identical to each other and had the same architectural properties as the main building. The stationmaster was sarcastically calling us 'civil servant storytellers'. Then would begin that everlasting argument: No, we couldn't have been considered for civil servant positions... Actually I wanted to be regarded neither as a civil servant nor as a tradesman; we were artists. (Atay, 2021, pp. 245-246)

This, in a way, symbolises the struggles of an artist in an unappreciative environment, voicing the artistic incapacity due to harsh living conditions and lack of enough stimulus for the artist to produce works that will be lucrative and worthy. As the story advances, an inner journey of the narrator's life starts for the reader. The place of art and the artist in society, a criticism of the disregard for the storyteller's efforts and output reflected by the stationmaster's jokes, form another layer in the story's subtext. The modernist writers have discussed and inquired about the place of art and the artist's role in modern and disenchanted society. The relation between art, the artist and the new realities of social life, such as economic conditions, technological advancements and the isolation and disillusionment of the individual in a mechanised and technology-driven world as modernist themes and concepts are also in Atay's story. The stories that are not sold, having to compete with apple and cold beverages sellers on the train, and trying to write according to the expectations of the train passengers are the realities that contribute to the deterioration of the characters in the story. These are some of the issues the storytellers have to deal with. The space where the stories are written that is, the cabins in the train station as the earliest loci of the story, gradually enlarges and expands into a loci of the destinations of the trains and in tandem with the physical journeys of the trains and the passengers, the inner journey of the narrator also expands into a space of vast loneliness and search. Hence, the link between place and identity is symbolised in the story as identity-search, estrangement, and disconnection between place and the space the place occupies.

Concluding Remarks

What is described as "the difference between a relatively fixed term 'place' and the more indeterminate 'space'" (De Lange et al., 2008, p. XV) is seen in the story as the railway station and the small cabins being the place where characters stay, and from where the trains leave for open and unknown spaces. The gradual physical and mental decline of the living conditions of the narrator and his fellow storytellers and his confusion of place, space and time leads the narrator to the inevitable identity crisis and total disconnection with the

environment: “I had a sense that my thoughts were becoming blurry. My relation with the world outside the station was weakening too” (Atay, 2021, p. 254).

Trains stop coming to the station now or maybe long before, but the narrator has become cut off from time and place and seems lost in space; he does not know its address. However, his determination to connect or survive through writing leads him to yearn to write a letter to an address he does not know. What is more, he does not know his own address. Hence, he can neither send nor receive a letter.

I wanted to write a letter, however I didn't know an address. I mean I didn't know any addresses. They wouldn't have believed this, for that reason I was feeling embarrassed to ask. Could you tell me an address, any address? I couldn't have said that. Yet still any address would be enough for me. There was another hardship back then. There still is-I mean although it has been some time now. The issue of writing my own address on the letter makes me ponder, as well. Even if the express or mail trains are not passing by any longer- or may be just for a certain period of time- if I could still find a way to deliver this story of mine to my readers- I've no customers left any longer- how would I say where I am? This issue makes me ponder, as well. Yet still, I want to write to, always write for, keep telling, keep informing my reader of where I am.

I am here my dear reader, I wonder where you are? (Atay, 2021, pp. 258-259)

Here, the concept of “home” in Bachelard's view may also help clarify the story's address motif. Thacker writes that Bachelard sees the house as a kind of body or body space (Thacker, 2009, p. 15). Hence, the address the narrator tries to find is his self and his space. The narrator is physically stuck between the station and his confused body or being. Similarly, and in parallel with this situation, his cabin is also stuck between other cabins and the railroad tracks. He cannot free himself, such as jumping on a train to a new place where he can start a new life. As the story title suggests, it is “a dream”; the spatial relation between the characters and the railway station no longer encompasses a “home” for the characters. The eventual desertedness and the disruptive amnesia of the narrator, however, do not lead him altogether to his devastation or give up writing. He longs to connect to his readers despite the lack of addresses to share. This is not impossible for the writer and his readers, where his call is indeed an intellectual invitation rather than an actual correspondence. According to Ecevit's interpretation, “He is desperately lonely, his yearning for correspondence is at its height, and no one could have expressed these emotions as lucid and as sincerely as Atay's narrator has done” (Ecevit, 2023, p.511).

Writing has become the narrator's Bachelardian "home", the only place he can regain his existence. Consequently, we can witness in Atay's story a new space consisting of an imaginative place where he waits, as if staying put in the modernist sense, for his readers to reach him and read his stories: I am here, my dear reader. I wonder where you are?

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Ms Fulya Peker, the translator of the book *Waiting For Fear*, who kindly sent me a copy of the story "Railroad Storytellers – A Dream", which was out of print and inaccessible.

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