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**Intensity of Perception:  
Thresholds of Seeing in Vüs'at O.  
Bener's Stories "Dost," "Kömür" and  
"Yazgi"**

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**Intensity of Perception: Thresholds of Seeing in Vüs'at O.  
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**Abstract**

In Vüs'at O. Bener first collection of short stories *Dost*, written in 1952, narrators of stories in this book works like a recording machine. That recording machine works like an intense membrane, like paranoid machine like Orhan Koçak tells. This works with the perception itself. What appears or is seen, what is recorded by this machine brings the knowledge about Bener's works. It gives the possibility to ask what is there to be seen by the narrators. Or let us say, what is so intense so that it can go beyond the threshold to make a perception? In his stories "Dost," "Kömür," and "Yazgı," this is dirt, the appearance of dirt or symptoms because of dirt. The appearance of dirt in different ways in each story shapes the characters' position and this position shapes the subjectivity of protagonists. Hence, in this paper, by looking at the differences in the position of protagonist and/or the narrator with their relation to dirt, I will try to show how position that is assembled by crossing the threshold for perception creates the subjectivity and what the boundaries of this subjectivity are.

**Keywords:** Dirt, Position of Narrator, Appearance, Perception, Threshold

## Introduction

Standing there, the building rests on the rocky ground. This resting of the work draws up out of the rock the mystery of that rock's clumsy yet spontaneous support. Standing there, the building holds its ground against the storm raging above it and so first makes the storm itself manifest its violence. The luster and gleam of the stone, though itself apparently glowing only by the grace of the sun, yet first brings to the light the light of day, the breath of sky, the darkness of the night. The temple's firm towering makes visible the invisible space of the air.<sup>1</sup>

In his work "Origin of Work of Art," Heidegger describes the Greek Temple as work of art by telling how it rises upon the ground. It is an object such that it makes its *earth* be seen by its very own presence. It has the power to make seen by shaping the visibility. Hence, there is knowledge which comes with the appearance of the things. The concept of things as appear is important when we think about the Turkish Vüsat O. Bener's modernist fiction. In his literary works, there seems a recording machine that keeps a detailed account on *earth*, which sets up its *world*. For instance, in regard to Bener's short story, the prominent Turkish literary critic Orhan Koçak says that the narrator in the story associates this recording machine to a seismograph and records every detail about his moral life.<sup>2</sup> Yet, the process of recording is not a passive phase. It works like an intense membrane, like a paranoid machine. It feels the both the inner motion of the subject and the intensity of message coming outside of the subject.<sup>3</sup> Feeling, in the case of Bener's fiction, can be related to the process of seeing, the phases of the perception. Hence, the position of the narrator, the one who perceives, will give the idea about the art work itself. Therefore, like in the Greek Temple, there is the need for a spectator, the one who looks at the object, who perceives it. From this point, there will appear the question of who perceives or what is perceived. Maurice-Ponty considers this a question of temporality, which is to say that the spectator is always in the process of something which makes it to see differently in each time. In other words, the one who perceives is always alive.<sup>4</sup> There is no fixed appearance but shifts and turns in the perception that allows the object seen differently in each case. Shifts and turns are being seen from the very position of the subject. In his/her potentiality, the subject makes the assemblage of the perception by putting himself/herself to different position in each time. Orhan Koçak says

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language and Thought*, "The Origin of work of Art," (New York : Perennical Classics, 2001), 41.

<sup>2</sup> Koçak, *Bir Tuhaf Yalvaç*, "Kendi Kendinin İğo'su" Prepared by Alpagut Güntekin. (İstanbul: Nogunk Publishing, 2004), 76.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>4</sup>Maurice-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Translated by Routledge & Kegan Paul (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), 235.

this situation “inner rift.”<sup>1</sup> Hence, this gives the possibility of different assemblage of the self which makes shifts its position by crossing different threshold in regard to the intensity of message coming outside of the subject.

The position of the narrator and his/her focus of interest are important from the very beginning of Vüs’at O. Bener’s (1922-2005) writing. His first collection of short stories *Dost*, published in 1952, includes 12 stories, and each story narrator’s position gives substantial significance to the stories. Therefore, this force us to ask following crucial question: What is there to be seen by the narrators in Bener’s short stories? Or let us say, what is so intense such that it can go beyond the threshold to make a perception? In those stories, narrators choose to focus on the physical dirt, the appearance of the dirt or symptoms because of the dirt. This obsessive recording of physical dirt both on places and people are told by the narrators. In *Dost (Friend)*, other than story “Yazgı,” (“Destiny”) and like in the stories “Dost” (“Friend”) and “Kömür,” (“Coal”) first person narrator is used. It makes the protagonist narrator a subject who has the power to tell he or she sees. Other than that, by choosing this kind of narrator, the distance between narrator and the protagonist is cleared off. However, in story “Yazgı,” this distance manifests its presence by the beginning. It creates a different kind of position for the protagonist. This position is also related with the usage of dirt on those stories. The appearance of dirt in various ways in each story shapes the characters’ position, the position that shapes the subjectivity of protagonists. Hence, in this paper, by looking at the differences in the position of protagonists and/or the narrators with their relation to dirt, in stories “Dost,” “Kömür,” and “Yazgı,” I show how position that is assembled by crossing the threshold for perception creates the subjectivity and what the boundaries of this subjectivity are.

In the story “Dost,” the position of the narrator shapes the story and the characters/subjects in the story. The story opens with narrator’s going to see his friend, his dost Kasap Ali, who is a butcher and this story takes place Ali’s workplace and home. The story takes place among three people- narrator, Kasap Ali and his wife. As the one who tells the story, narrator is the one who designates the positions of all character. This is done by narrator’s choice of record- that of which he inclines to see, to make a perception. After going to see his friend Kasap Ali, narrator says: “[...] He cuts beef as well as chopping liver of ten kuruş for penniless women while delivering his raki into his throat after wiping his bloody hands on his apron.”<sup>2</sup> And immediately after that, he says: “Wiping his mouth backhandedly, he invites him in.”<sup>3</sup> Here, what becomes important is the dirt that is recorded by the narrator. The detailed description supported by the physical dirt seems to draw a position about Kasap Ali. This situation shadows forth itself when it comes to focus on the thoughts of Kasap Ali. Let’s look at some examples about this. After the death of narrator’s wife, Kasap Ali says: “As far as I see you’re somehow content

<sup>1</sup> Koçak, Bir Tuhaf Yalvaç, “Introduction” Prepared by Alpogut Güntekin. (İstanbul: Nogunk Publishing, 2004) 22.

<sup>2</sup> Bener, Vüs’at O., *Dost-Yaşamasız*, (İstanbul: YKY 2011), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 9.

with your very life. Yours is the good one. See my wife with nine lives. Four bastards of mine, as well. What the hell can one do other than drinking?”<sup>1</sup> Narrator doesn't respond to this but he turns his head into something that calls for dirt: “Blood is dripping onto the soil from the heart of an ox which is attached to a hook.”<sup>2</sup> Like a camera, narrator turns to heart of an ox and shows us its action. This camera works as a reaction to the stimulus coming from outside the subject. Stimulus is Ali. This seems to turn into a moral judgment about Kasap Ali. Let's look what Kasap Ali says in the story in more detail: “Mercy is evil, something to get rid of,”<sup>3</sup> “Woman means burden, yes burden. It is better to send her,”<sup>4</sup> and after death of narrator's wife: “That's good. The dead will decay quickly.”<sup>5</sup> As the one who makes those kind of judgment, Kasap Ali is a man who doesn't have a heart from the eyes of the narrator. By doing that, narrator seems to draw a hygienic line that separates him from Kasap Ali morally. However, this position waits for its interruption and it comes by shifting the position of the narrator. When Kasap Ali asks to him if he is a good person or not, he says probably both of us are not a very good person. Here, being both doesn't only imply Ali and narrator. Other than that, it seems to signify the ambivalence of the narrator. On the one hand, there is self that position himself against Ali and on the other hand, there is the self that emphasizes the sameness of each other. Orhan Koçak names this situation as an “inner conference.” Subject feels the heaviness of each self in himself, he doesn't believe any of them and he flows in this heaviness of different emotional and moral positions<sup>6</sup>. This flow of the position of narrator is seen in the scene where Naciye, Kasap Ali's wife, and narrator start to get close sexually. On the one hand, narrator tries to seduce Naciye and on the other hand, he does not approve what he does. At one point, he pities Naciye and another time, he mocks her naivety. In this ambivalence of narrator, Kasap Ali doesn't become the one that is put against narrator. Narrator falls into sameness with Kasap Ali. So, the moral position starts to shake, what seems concrete becomes to be broken, with the flip flopping of narrator in his ambivalence. The climax of the falling into the sameness is when the dirt turns its face to narrator. The day after he gets close to Naciye sexually, he wakes up and he senses glue flavor in his mouth. In other words, the dirt itself appears on the narrator. This clearly confirms his sameness with Kasap Ali. This is because like Kasap Ali, he becomes the one who carries the dirt on himself. Then, he says that he feels a weird regret. This regret is weird because the self who regrets and the self who thinks it is weird is the same subject. Those selves don't have a possibility to talk, to make an agreement, to make a synthesis from each but they have to stay in the line of conference.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, 11.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, 10.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, 11.

<sup>6</sup>Koçak, Ibid, 22.

Like the story “Dost,” in the story “Kömür,” the position of the narrator determines the subjectivity. In this story, the first person narrator decides to go to coal yard to find a young porter to carry his coal to his attic. On his way, he sees some porters fighting and he decides to watch them. After the fight, he goes on his way and he sees a little porter who has been on the fight. The story focuses on the narrator’s observation of porters and his relation with this little porter. Hence, contrary to “Dost,” in this story, the narrator does not attempt to see a friend, *dost* but to find a stranger, or let’s say an outsider. This outsider is a porter and there is a commercial negotiation between the porter and the narrator. Therefore, narrator knows that there is a distance in the beginning of their relationship. He puts himself into a position that separates him from all the porters who are not “clean” and have dirt on themselves. The dirt and line of separation in short descriptions, yet these descriptions have various implications. He depicts the porters in the following way:

A black cloud of dust was rising through the air [...] Swearing, outcry... (37)

Just at that moment, they started snatching. Kicks, slaps, spits were one after the other. (37)

With his “white coat and dress like a gentleman”<sup>1</sup>, he knows that he is different from them. Hence, by just drawing the difference about physical appearance, he separates himself from those porters. At this time, unlike the narrator of “Dost,” narrator does not need any moral judgment for the separation. This is done by knowledge that porters are different from him in their lifestyle. This knowledge shapes his situation, too. After meeting with the little who takes part in the fight, he says: “The blood leaking out of his nose gets dried up.”<sup>2</sup> After that, he feels pity for him. This is a significant moment. By the knowledge of what is outside, what is distant, he makes the assemblage of his feeling; he pities this porter who gets beat up. However, being distance brings the very possibility of the feeling himself under threat. Threat can be thought with Orhan Koçak notion of paranoid machine. Koçak contends that the narrator of “Kömür” works like a paranoid machine. It records every detail from outside that calls for the threat. In his notion, the word paranoid is also important. It comes from Greek *paranoia*. *Noia* comes from *noos* which means mind and *para* means beyond<sup>3</sup>. Hence paranoid means beyond mind, it means that which mind passes through to reach. This is a place to pass the limit, the boundary. Then, we can ask what is to cross or to reach? This reminds us Deleuze and Guattari’s formulation of the paranoid regime. According to Deleuze and Guattari, paranoid regime thinks that it is always ahead of something, it thinks that it can understand and know what others know<sup>4</sup>. In the

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<sup>1</sup>Bener, Ibid, 37.

<sup>2</sup>Bener, Ibid, 36.

<sup>3</sup>Online Etymology Dictionary, [http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=paranoia&allowed\\_in\\_frame=0](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=paranoia&allowed_in_frame=0), accessed in 30.06.2014

<sup>4</sup>Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 586.

story, narrator thinks that he can understand what porter thinks. After porter says “This coal belongs to me, bro, look look”, he says “This is a calculated remark, sarcastic one. You stole, you say. You mean you are not expected to show mercy, I suppose.”<sup>1</sup> He tries to read what porter has meant to say in his way and is sure that he can understand, know, and interpret the right meaning. As the one who learns the place of coal bin and who know its lock is broken, porter is a threat, he can give damage to narrator’s life. This time, narrator flips and flops in the position that pities the porter to seeing him as a threat. Again, there is the ambivalence of narrator. He cannot feel comfortable in any of his positions; he cannot make his selves speak to each other. Other than that, there is a certain threshold which makes him shift his position from one self to the other, and appear in different assemblage of feelings.

Like in the story “Dost” and “Kömür,” the story “Yazgi” is shaped by the position of the narrator. However, different from the other stories in regard to the situation of the narrator. This is the only story written by using third person narrator in the *Dost*. This shows the distance between narrator and the protagonist from the very beginning of the story. The story centers upon a situation that has happened the day before when the protagonist, Macit, is not at home. That day, Macit’s brothers and his friends have had a party in the house. What becomes important is Macit’s position against this accident.”Yazgi”, like the other stories “Kömür” and “Dost,” starts with dirt:

He entered into one of the two rooms having opposing doors. Immediately, left the room: He seemed as he was to retch. He quickly puts his hand into the pocket of his jacket. He took a small bottle from behind the handkerchief. Turning the bottle cap with one finger hurriedly, he brought it close to his nose.<sup>2</sup>

Here, again, there is dirt. However, different from the other stories, dirt is not the one that is described, seen, shown. It becomes such that the effect of dirt who is exposed to it is described. Therefore, dirt becomes symptoms of dirt. There is nothing left to description- dirt itself becomes unspeakable. Now, there is only the reaction against it. This reaction is described like the following: “He got up. He hesitated. He walked to the bathroom then changed his mind. He entered the room once again..”<sup>3</sup> The room is the place where the symptom has the ability to take place. It is the place that is wanted to be escaped from. However, there is no escape. There is an action that has to be done. The dirt has to be removed. There has to be a place to feel comfortable. Hence, the protagonist goes to open the window by trying not to step on vomit. After opening and breathing the weather, he says: “Oh, what a relief!”<sup>4</sup> The reason for this reaction is the fact that the protagonist feels that he escapes from this dirt, that which is abject. What is abject is outside of the subject and has

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<sup>1</sup>Bener, Ibid, pp 36.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp 95.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp 95.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp 95.



the power to cause symptoms on the subject. Subject feels the threat. This threat is such that it attempts to cross the boundary, the limit of the subject. At this time, different from narrator of "Kömür," there is no paranoid machine. The protagonist does not try to be ahead of something, he doesn't try to make any interpretation of somebody. Other than that, there is a reaction against a situation which shows itself in his body and his movements. It waits on the limit, or let's say subject feels that something is on the limit waiting to cross, to invade. This something becomes abject. This can be related to Julia Kristeva's conceptualization of abject. In her book *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva talks about abject and how to get rid of it in the following way:

Loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung. The spasms and vomiting that protect me. The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck. The shame of compromise, of being in the middle of treachery. The fascinated start that leads me toward and separates me from them.<sup>1</sup>

In this case, there is an experience of what is abject, what is waste. This produces a reaction, a symptom to protect the body. Vomiting here works as a protection mechanism. It perceives waste, that which has to be outside and something not threatening. In "Yazgi," protagonist doesn't vomit but there has already layed a vomit, which is a waste for him and which is in the house, the place where he lives. After getting relaxed by opening the windows, he puts the vomit into the trash. So, the mission is completed, what is waste is suspended. However, the origin of having this waste is also in the house. Macit, the protagonist, learns that there is a 17-year-old girl who Macit's brother and his friend have party during the night. The party comes with its own problem. This girl, like the vomit on the floor, is something that has to be got rid of. The one who comes from outside, Macit is sure that she has to go. He appears with his concreteness. He doesn't have any ambivalence, which is seen in protagonists of other stories. He knows what he has to do and does accordingly. As the one who knows what he has to do from the beginning, this protagonist is told by third person narrator, unlike the other two stories. This point is important. By the use of the third person narrator, he is not allowed to speak by his own voice except the dialogues. He is always a translation, translation of the narrator. He is banished from describing what he sees. Now, he is the object to be seen, his symptoms are to be seen, not his voice. As the one who doesn't have any ambivalence, he is punished. He becomes distant, a distance that doesn't allow to see.

Having already told what I would like to say, let's turn back to Heidegger's descriptions of Greek Temple. In its concreteness, in its visibility which shapes everything that surrounds it, which makes everything seen differently so that it reveals some kind of truth, it manifests itself, or set up

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<sup>1</sup>Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.

itself. This is the assemblage of things by it, which waits its spectator to see. In Bener's modernist fiction, those spectators, which are already in the work of art itself, makes us see the different assemblages by the intensity of their perception and by their position. By punishing the concreteness, concreteness which doesn't let the waste, the abject to get close, by digging its voice into silence, Bener makes the protagonist of "Yazgı", in a way, the abject itself. It seems that Bener wants to hear the question of "which of us is good" like the narrator of "Dost" asked so that he can rupture the concreteness, he can smash the stone-being of this subject so that he is able to dig what is absolute into peaces, or let us say, he can interrupt the holy creature of this Greek Temple, which was absolute holy in a time, and yet lacks its absoluteness as it has no longer has its spectator

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