

# Analysis of the novel “The Mystery of the Wooden House” by Havva Tekin in terms of values and Turkish education

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**Abstract.** Literary works play a very important role in helping children gain the following objectives of the Turkish language teaching curriculum permanently: developing listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, developing imagination, reading comprehension and text evaluation from a critical perspective, and ensuring that students give importance to national, spiritual, moral, historical, cultural, and social values. Therefore, after lullabies and fairy tales, children should be introduced as early as possible to high-quality stories and novels that reflect the narrative power of the Turkish language, are suitable for their language development and needs, and appeal to their world of thought. Works produced in the field of children's literature both contribute positively to children's emotional and intellectual worlds and prepare them for life. Novels, especially those that take their subject from life and address basic values such as friendship, love, honesty, justice, patriotism, and benevolence have a very important role to play in children's development and in their future academic lives. Havva Tekin made an important contribution to Turkish Cypriot children's literature with her novels “Children of the Green Island”, “Tarajar beyond the Seas” and “The Mystery of the Wooden House”. With her novel titled “The Mystery of the Wooden House”, which is the subject of this study, the author has both shown the expressive power of Turkish to children and made an important contribution to their growth with the values she discussed.

## 1 Introduction

Education has an extremely important place in human life. Education, which is one of the most important building blocks in the development of people and society at large, not only provides individuals with knowledge and skills but also equips them with knowledge in terms of the social values and cultural elements of their society. Children, who are growing and developing beings, need care, information, and guidance. Children, who receive an adequate and successful education, especially in the first years of their lives, can live a happy life as adults who are self-confident and beneficial to their society. Bekir Bilge claims that “a well-

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organized school will ensure that children are better prepared for life and become more successful” [1]. For this reason, when writing books for children, who have an extremely important place in terms of the future of nations, writers should show great care and attention. Contrary to popular belief, writing in the field of children's literature is much more difficult than writing for adults. Authors in this field need to know very well their target audience, children, and consider their different interests and needs in each developmental process. As Özdemir and Beceren have argued, the formal and content features of children's books should meet their needs for fun, play, and learning by exploring [2]. Children's literature plays a major role in shaping these interests and needs. According to Alemdar Yalçın and Gıyasettin Aytaş, children's literature works appeal to children's growth and development, as well as their dreams, emotions, thoughts, abilities, and tastes. These books should not only educate children but also entertain them [3]. Authors need to write books with this awareness, display pedagogical sensitivity, and lead children in gaining some universal values by providing them with knowledge on different subjects. It should be remembered that a successful children's book will guide the child in getting to know himself, changing his improper behaviors, learning different aspects of life, learning about different characters, and finding out about various countries and societies [4].

High-quality children's literature works have a very important place in the education and teaching of Turkish. In Turkey, books play a critical role in children receiving proper language education. It is for this reason that it is of great importance for writers who produce works in the field of children's literature to use the language successfully. “Language and narration should be given special attention in children's stories, considering that they affect the child's universe of meaning. Necessary sensitivity should be shown regarding spelling mistakes because it may be the first time that the child sees that particular misspelled word” [5]. Children's novels and stories by authors who produce successful works in the field of children's literature fulfill a very important function in meeting the expectations of readers due to their rich narrative possibilities, interesting characters, and variety of subjects.

The author, who is a Turkish Cypriot and made a name for herself in the field of children's literature, especially with her award-winning novel “Children of the Green Island”, published her work “The Mystery of the Wooden House” in May 2024 [6]. This book is of great importance both in terms of teaching Turkish and the values it contains. As in her previous novels titled “Children of the Green Island” and “Tarajar Beyond the Seas” [7,8], the author addressed children with an educator's sensitivity by using Turkish in a careful manner.

## **2 Research Model**

In this study, the data were collected following the qualitative approach. The qualitative approach involves following a qualitative process in which qualitative data collection methods such as observation, interview, and document analysis are used, and perceptions and events are presented realistically and holistically in a natural environment [9]. This study examines Havva Tekin's novel “The Mystery of the Wooden House” published in 2024 under the titles of “Values” and “Turkish Education” using document analysis, one of the qualitative research methods. Document analysis includes the examination of written materials containing information about the phenomena targeted by the study [9].

### **2.1 Sample of the Study**

The sample of the study consists of Havva Tekin's work “The Mystery of the Wooden House” [6]. The study is based on convenience sampling, which is a type of purposeful sampling. Thus, a book that the researchers have previously examined and is familiar with was preferred.

## 2.2 Collection and Analysis of Data

The document review method was used to analyse the novel discussed in the study, followed by the presentation and interpretation of the findings. The purpose of this type of analysis is to present the findings to the reader in an organized and interpreted way [9].

## 2.3 Importance of the Study

Regrettably, children's literature in Cyprus is not sufficiently developed. The number of studies and works published in this field is almost negligible. The examination of the novel "The Mystery of the Wooden House" by Havva Tekin, one of the most well-known writers in the field of children's literature in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, in terms of values and Turkish language teaching will enrich the studies in the field of children's literature in Cyprus, which are very limited currently, and fill an important gap in this field.

## 3 Findings

The first edition of the children's novel *The Mystery of the Wooden House* was published by Timaş Publications in May 2024, with 158 pages and a size of 21.5x14 cm on straw paper. The book, which has a colored cover, contains 20 black and white pictures drawn by Sümeyye Türk Gün. It emphasizes the values of diligence, friendship, and especially love, and has contributed to children's awareness of the beauty and creativity of the Turkish language and their language awareness and sensitivity.

### 3.1 Turkish Language Education in the Novel titled "The Mystery of the Wooden House"

The most important goals of Turkish lessons are ensuring that student love their native language, learn to use it correctly and effectively, and develop the four basic language skills, namely reading, comprehension, listening, and speaking in line with their mental development. "...In Turkish classes in primary education, the development of students' reading comprehension and speaking-writing skills is at the forefront, in parallel with the principles of Turkish education. The basis of these goals is for students to use Turkish functionally and gain the ability to read" [10]. In "The Mystery of the Wooden House", the author gives importance to the education of the Turkish language, and she created the plot of the book based on suggestions in this direction.

In the novel, Tolga, who will move to Bergama with his family, conducts extensive research by reading several books and obtains essential information about the place, which he then conveys to his father. His passion for reading and doing research is clear in the following sentences: "I did some research, Daddy. It is said that Bergama takes its name from the word "perg" which means hill, mountain, or height. It is also rumored that Bergama took its name from a hero named Pergamus who lived at that time. In addition, parchment was first found here. According to another legend, "pergamante kerte" means "paper city" and the city was named after this term (p.18) His father says "Wow!" and expresses that his son has done very good research, then asks his daughter İrem to do some research on the settlements and characteristics of the Bergama region, and İrem approves this and says that she will do some research as soon as she places her books in her room; all of these are important suggestions by the author that encourage children to read and research. Reading has a special importance among the four basic language skills. As Eda Sak has stated, reading is one of the most widely used skills for the realization or reinforcement of learning [11]. Havva Tekin constantly emphasizes this skill in the novel and makes sure that children sense

this in various parts of the book: “İrem was drawing in her room, my father was reading his newspaper attentively, and my mother had been focused on her book for a long time, not hearing anything (p.102). Another skill that stands out in the novel is speaking. Tolga’s parents give their children the right to speak, even when they think they are being naughty, as they normally should be, and they listen to them attentively. For example, İrem successfully completed her father’s research homework by reading various books, and after dinner, she excitedly and effectively conveyed the characteristics of Bergama to all the family members: “The place we live in... This is Bergama. We have heard, listened to, and read many things about Bergama so far. Today, I would like to introduce you to a region affiliated with Bergama. This is a place known and loved for its olives and olive cultivation. It is called Zeytindağı (p.52)”. In addition, Tolga, who is the main character of the novel, his sister İrem and the other children speak with great self-confidence, comfortably and properly, both to their elders and among themselves. We think that this is also extremely important in terms of speaking education. In the novel, the fact that Tolga's family listens to their children, the children listen to each other in their conversations, and Tolga's mother and father listen to their children's friends, when necessary, is also very valuable in terms of listening culture and education: “After dinner, my father listened to us again and evaluated our ideas. He said he would accept on one condition: ‘I will be informed about everything, that's number one. We will also inform a police commissioner’” (p.146).

Havva Tekin did not adopt a completely pure Turkish approach in *The Mystery of the Wooden House*. In sentences such as “Dinner time was not really a good time for guests or a meeting with friends... That’s the main issue, but is there another one? I had been involved with boxes during the move and had learned this job a little, but once Emir, who was skilled at preparing boxes, showed us, we managed to do it easily... The sound of the hammer was firmly etched in my memory...” (p.90, 91, 140, 143), the author used the Eastern-origin reciprocals of the words hospitable, matter, skilled, and memory (which are *misafirperver*, *mesele*, *marifetli* and *hafıza*, respectively). However, in phrases like “We have no evidence. Murmurs, words, and sentences were heard from the guests confirming these sentences” (p.140, 153), she used Turkish words and did not prefer their Arabic-derived equivalents. In *The Mystery of the Wooden House*, it is seen that the author sometimes prefers words of Western origin. Words such as “plaque” and “detective” used in the novel have roots in the French language. It is known that some authors aim to raise awareness among children for the Turkish language by using pure Turkish words instead of words of Eastern or Western origin. However, it is a clear fact that the words given as examples above are used extensively in daily life and have become Turkish as Ziya Gökalp emphasized. There are almost no spelling, punctuation or grammatical errors in *The Mystery of the Wooden House*. Some errors that we think might be caused by printing mistakes are as follows: in the sentence “Yerleştirmeye çalışırken de bi yerlerini kesmiş olmalılar” meaning “they must have cut themselves while trying to place it” on page 140 of the novel, the word “bi” was supposed to be written as “bir”, and in the sentence “Hep beraber olay yerine gitsek yi olacak” meaning “It would be good if we all went to the scene together” (p.140, 158) on page 158, we think that the word “yi” (meaning good) should be written as “iyi”. The fact that the book is almost flawless in terms of spelling rules also supports Turkish education in a positive way.

### 3.2 Values Education in “The Mystery of the Wooden House”

As is the case all over the world, educators in Turkey and Cyprus constantly put forward different views on the values that students should be taught in schools. This issue is also frequently brought to the agenda in terms of education policies. With values, which are one of the most important parts of human life, individuals gain respect in society and their lives become easier. “Several social values such as respect, friendship, loyalty, cooperation,

justice, and tolerance are universal and do not vary from one society to another. The process of learning and teaching these values is called “values education”. UNESCO defines values education as educational efforts carried out for children and young people to discover and develop positive values and to progress based on their own potentials [12]. The societies in which people live, their lifestyles and the experiences they have gained have huge impact on the formation and shaping of values. As Emine Meliha Kurdaş emphasizes, psychological and sociological factors act together in the formation of values. For this reason, while values are formed and shaped, the psychological worlds and social environments of individuals gain meaning as a whole. Their values are controlled by their psychology as well as the social environment [13]. Values play a critical role in children acquiring positive behaviors and their growth as individuals with national and universal character. “For this reason, it is necessary for children to gain experiences related to positive behaviors during the preschool education period for their personality development and to learn values accurately” [14]. These values, which have a very important place in terms of individuals and therefore societies living a healthy life and are included in the curriculum of the Ministry of National Education, are also supported by UNESCO within the scope of the Living Values Education Program. “The Living Values Education Program supported by UNESCO is one of the comprehensively prepared values education practices. This program includes activities related to the values of peace, love, respect, cooperation, happiness, honesty, modesty, responsibility, purity, tolerance, freedom, and life for unity. The program has been implemented in more than 60 countries in Asia, the Americas, Europe, and Africa. For this program, books for children aged 3-7 and 8-14 and guides for educators have been prepared. Educators in many countries where this program has been implemented give feedback that students have gained positive social skills” [15]. As is known, high-quality children's books play an extremely important role in shaping the lives of individuals and helping them succeed in their future academic lives. The books mentioned contribute to children's preparation for life, especially thanks to the universal values they contain. Havva Tekin's novel *The Mystery of the Wooden House* is rich in terms of values education. The author begins the novel with the phrase “My mother's loving voice” (p.7). The most striking value in the book is love. In addition, several values such as respect, diligence, cooperation, responsibility, empathy, cleanliness, honesty, security, and creativity attract attention. The author, who prioritizes love for humanity in the novel, also considered imposing love for the country on children. At the very beginning of the novel, the author describes a family of four who are fond of each other. Tolga and İrem are adored by their mother and father. Similarly, Tolga and İrem love their mother and father very much and respect them. “Well done, my son. You did a good research, but İrem has been put on hold in this case. This situation needs to be balanced. What do you say, Madam? Should we give İrem a research topic?” “You can, daddy,” said İrem. “I will prepare it right away” (p.19) These sentences are a clear indication of love, respect, and the trust that family members feel for each other. Havva Tekin successfully makes the reader feel the love that mothers and fathers show for their children in Turkish society through the characters of Tolga and İrem. “Oh, my emotional daughter. How full of love she is” (p.34).

Another value that draws attention in the novel is love for people, animals, and the homeland. In the novel, İrem is very upset about Ayşegül, who is afraid that her grandmother will not get better. Ayşegül and İrem had wandered around for a long time after the kitten they found in the field (p.34, 72). At the end of the novel, police commissioner Ümit, who caught the criminals, said, “These kinds of people do not care about the historical values of the country, the only thing care about is money. Yet, it is our civic duty to protect our historical values that have been in these lands for centuries” (p.154). In that way, he advised the children to love their country and protect their historical values.

Diligence and cooperation come second in the novel after love in terms of values. At the beginning of the novel, the family members who had to move due to the father's job

completed their preparations in a very short time by helping each other. In the novel, the father's words "We will get packed, my dears, don't worry. We will get ready together" (p.13) are a clear indication of love and cooperation. In addition, the author emphasized the value of diligence with the following statements: "When we woke up the next morning, both İrem and I were surprised. We couldn't understand when my mother and father woke up, how they had done and finished so much work." On the other hand, the mother emphasized the value of cooperation with the words "Now, if you put your books away, our work will be much easier. Let's start taking care of the remaining chores with your father." Responsibility and empathy are among other values introduced to children in *The Mystery of the Wooden House*. In the novel, the following words spoken by her father to İrem are a clear indication that younger children should be responsible: "My daughter, this is your room. Even your mother doesn't come in most of the time. You always tidy up your room yourself" (p.57). While children develop their own feelings over time, they also try to understand the feelings of others through empathy. In the novel, İrem empathizes with her friend Ayşegül and feels very sorry for her. One of the values emphasized by the author in the novel is friendship. At the beginning of the story, Tolga and İrem are sad because they are leaving Ankara and their friends. Even though they made new friends in Bergama, they didn't give up calling their friends in Ankara. "After breakfast, I decided to do what I had been thinking about since yesterday: I was going to call my friends in Ankara. The phone was answered as soon as it rang. Burhan was talking excitedly. "We are with Selim and Murat," he said. We relieved our longing through a long talk" (p.53). Cleanliness and safety are among the other notable values in *The Mystery of the Wooden House*. In the novel, the children wash their hands with soap when they come home from outside. Family safety is one of the important topics covered by the author. In the book, the family reported to the police the blood stain they saw in their apartment which they could not understand. In addition, due to some strange events, Tolga's mother and father decided not to leave their children alone and made them feel safe. "They had recently decided not to leave us alone at home" (p.125). "Honesty is a value concept that includes concepts such as trust, respect, equality, justice, revealing the truth, and taking righteousness as a basis. When a child comes into the world, he does not know the concepts of right and wrong or the rules he must follow. These concepts find their true meanings over time with the development of moral awareness in the child" [16]. Havva Tekin touched upon the importance of being an honest person in the novel. The following statements in the work inculcate in children the importance of being an honest and truthful person: "No matter what, we should not hide anything from our family", "I actually did not want to lie, I later regretted it." (p.109-130).

Another value that stands out in *The Mystery of the Wooden House* is creativity. Every child has a unique world. Being able to adapt to their individual world is a function of their ability to use their creativity skills. Teachers in schools try to discover children's creativity; in addition, high-quality children's books should support this purpose of education. In the novel examined, it is seen that children brainstorm and come up with interesting ideas to solve some mysterious events. "Ideas flew in the air for a while. Interesting ideas... Emir came up with the most interesting one" (p.99). In addition, Tolga's sister İrem solved the mystery of the blood stain found in the house during a brainstorming session (p. 137).

When the universal values included in the novel are taken into consideration, it can be argued that the author, Havva Tekin, successfully imposed the mentioned values on children by using a suggestive style. It can be claimed that the author easily succeeded in creating sensitivity and awareness in children in terms of values education.

## 4 Conclusion

The novel “The Mystery of the Wooden House” gives wide coverage to universal values such as friendship, diligence, responsibility, cooperation, cleanliness, honesty, security, empathy, respect, and love. In the book where curiosity is at the forefront, children try to solve some mysteries while having fun. The author managed to draw children into the adventure by keeping the sense of curiosity at the highest level, thus introducing them to several pieces of information and skills. The fact that Havva Tekin is also an educator enabled her to convey what she heard and thought to the reader more easily and with concerned sensitivity. Although the author did not adopt a completely pure Turkish approach to language, she successfully presented some values that play a critical role in preparing children for life. With the idea that reading skills are more important than other language skills, the author emphasized the necessity of reading in different sections of the book and aimed to impose a love of reading on children. In addition, the author gave extensive space to listening and speaking skills and wrote an almost fool-proof novel in terms of spelling rules. Educators who constantly emphasize the correct use of Turkish can easily recommend the novel “The Mystery of the Wooden House” to children, which makes a significant contribution to children’s native language development and addresses universal emotions and ideas.

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