

# **HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN AWARD**

**2022**



**AUTHOR NOMINEE**

**BEHIÇ AK**

**TURKEY**

**Behiç Ak** was born in 1956 in the city of Samsun on Turkey's Black Sea coast. He is a well-known cartoonist and author. He has also directed documentary films.

Ak studied architecture at İstanbul Yıldız University and İstanbul Technical University. Architectural education helped him to develop a better awareness and deep understanding of people, social life, and the world we are living in. His different way of looking at people, nature, urban space, buildings and objects - in short, everything that surrounds us - is reflected with a humorous and responsible style throughout his works.

Since 1982 Behiç Ak has been drawing a daily comic strip, "*Kim Kime Dum Duma*" (Everybody for himself!), for the well-known newspaper Cumhuriyet. His comic books have been published in Turkey and Germany. His comic strips have been exhibited in several cities throughout Turkey as well as in the Netherlands, Switzerland and Germany.

Ak has been writing and illustrating children's books since 1981. His large collection of children's books includes children's novels as well as colorfully illustrated story books for early readers. He has so far written and illustrated 38 children's books all of which are attracting attention with their philosophical background and are continuously making re-prints. His children's books are being published in Turkey by the leading children's and YA fiction publisher *GÜNIŞIĞI KİTAPLIĞI*. He also has a picture book collection of 6 titles published by *CAN YAYINLARI*. His illustrated children's books are not only published in Turkey but also in Japan, Korea, Germany and China. Being a talented and successful cartoonist, Ak's illustrations are as powerful and colorful as his stories.

Some of his picture books were first published in Japan by well-known Japanese publishing houses such as GAKKEN, FUKIANKAN SHOTEN, KAGYUSHA. To date, Ak is the bestselling Turkish author in Japan.

In addition to his books, his cartoon strip story Mau Mio Mi has also been published for a year by GAKKEN Publishing House in Yoiki No Gakhuşu Journal, Japan.

Bilingual editions of some of his children's books have been published in Turkish-German, German-English and German-Russian versions.

Behiç Ak has written a number of plays, the internationally most well-known being *Fay Hattı (Fault Line)*, staged by both state and private theatres in many cities throughout Turkey and also outside Turkey, in cities such as Stuttgart, Munich, Berlin / Germany, New York / USA, Nicosia / Cyprus, Athens /Greece, Zürich / Switzerland, Antwerp / Belgium and Amsterdam/The Netherlands.

The documentary film he produced and directed in 1994, named *Türk Sinemasında Sansürün Tarihi - Siyahperde* (The History of Censorship in Turkish Cinema – Black Screen) received the "Best Documentary Film" award in the same year at Ankara Film Festival.

In 2012, the 30<sup>th</sup> year of Ak's career, he was awarded with the "Achievement and Contribution in Architecture Prize" given by The Union of Turkish Engineers and Architects for the consistent support he has given to environmental and architectural issues through his comic strips, books and plays. Same year, *Günişığı Kitaplığı*, published a selection of his comic strips about children in a special album crowning the artist's 30<sup>th</sup> year as a cartoonist.

Behiç Ak, voiced his love for İstanbul in a documentary named "Behiç Ak and the City at the Tip of His Pen", shoot by İZ TV, the most important documentary channel of Turkey. (2013, "Faces of İstanbul" Documentary Series) He supports the preservation of historical values of the mega-city (Bosporus Ferries, Haydarpaşa Train Station, transportation to and on the Princess Islands, etc.) with an activist enthusiasm and through his children's books, he cares about making his young readers also to think about these values .

In 2019, Behiç Ak was honored by Ankara - Çankaya Municipality as an important cultural figure of Turkey, with a big exhibition opened in Zülfü Livaneli Cultural Center, covering examples from his works.

Ak is a creative author and cartoonist with a very large fanbase, who uses humor to examine even the most serious issue in his colorfully illustrated stories.

He created a unique literary style for children's books both in terms of language and visual aesthetics, thanks to his superior observation, analysis and interpretation abilities and his caricature performance of nearly 40 years. By making a qualified and continuous contribution to children's literature with his every book, he offers a common literary experience and taste to his readers growing up in different cultures.

He claims that children are capable of understanding and dealing with every issue expressed in accordance with their age, provided that they are made to ponder and question without losing hope and the joy of life. His works especially increase the empathy and curiosity of children, support their imagination to build new dreams by drawing their attention to various individual, social and universal issues.

He believes in the power of children's literature not just as a component of reading culture, but also as a strong and useful tool for increasing both intercultural and intergenerational dialogue. He says, "Children's books silently finding their places on the shelves of book stores succeeded to carry an unspoken joy to homes and to schools by bringing children and adults together in the same environment, something we had been missing for long".

Ak is very successful in narrating local social issues, while inviting his readers to question today's universal problems. In addition to the multidimensional diversity he presents in line with the prevailing issues and reflections of each period, the humanism in his stories and novels impresses readers of all ages.



To see the published interview:

<https://www.artfulliving.com.tr/edebiyat/cocugun-ozgurlesmesi-lazim-i-19957>

## **“Children Need to be Free!”**

Breaking away from nature, war, violence, limits of freedom... They don't sound like suitable topics for a children's book. But with masterly fiction of beloved author Behiç Ak, they all find their places in a book named *Notes of a Buck-Toothed Observer (Tavşan Dişli Bir Gözlemcinin Notları)*. Moreover in such a light and comfortable manner that only a bluest sky could make us feel. This book clearly shows us that children's books can go beyond the ordinary. We talked with Behiç Ak about *Notes of a Buck-Toothed Observer (Tavşan Dişli Bir Gözlemcinin Notları)*

***Notes of a Buck-Toothed Observer (Tavşan Dişli Bir Gözlemcinin Notları)* emerged as a novel that addresses many of the problems we are facing today, such as breaking away from nature, war and focuses on the anxieties of people, especially children, with themselves, such as fear of failure, not having a place in society. In this regard, among all your books, it seemed to me as the one standing most close to philosophy. What do you think about it?**

I think, my practice of writing for children improves the more I write for them. As my dialogue with children also improves in the meantime, this leads to an enrichment in my theme selections. Authors limit themselves while thinking if it's okay to go a little bit further or to handle different subjects. But when I get in touch with children, I see that they actually want to discuss and talk about very different topics. So I realized over time that many topics can get into the story. For example, violence, war and hunting issues. Children want to talk about these matters. Sometimes, especially in small villages, I observe that people give rifles as a gift to children approaching their adolescence. That boy can pick it up and go to shoot birds. This kind of behavioural patterns encourage other children as well. Especially young boys have a strong tendency to shoot birds. It is important to establish a relationship with children about violence with the help of the fiction and discuss it. I wrote many of the events taking place in my novel basing on real stories. This book had been a very interesting experience for me. The story developed itself and lots of things found their places spontaneously in the story. I didn't design too much. I let the story develop on its own.

### **Which ages did you target?**

In this book, I actually targeted children over the age of 10. Today, there is not a huge gap between a child reader and an adult one. Today's children are also interested in matters that adults are interested in. They even think on the issues that actually elders need to deal with.

### **You especially mean the environmental problems I assume...**

These problems have been continuously postponed by adults and now they became the problems of children. Children can't go out of their homes to play on the streets. They are pushed out of social life. Cities became unfriendly places for children. Children lost their connection with nature. They sit in their rooms with their tablets all day and they connect with the world only through their tablets. Once, I was talking to a villager. He said: "I am a villager. My son is a villager. They bought a tablet for my grandson, and he forgot everything about the outside world. He even doesn't go out of the house to pick up and eat a fresh plum from this plum tree. He plays games on the tablet the whole day." Even if you are living in a village, when



you buy a tablet, the children may disconnect from their surroundings and nature. They might turn into the ones we call “the indoor generation.” If even a village boy is effected like this, the situation is very serious. Especially societies like us, buy technology from outside and directly use it without thinking on pros and cons. They give their mobile phones even to their babies’ hands as a toy. Nobody thinks how harmful it is for their health. So, on one hand children are exposed to these damages while on the other hand they are being deprived of many things. Maybe, stories like *Notes of a Buck-Toothed Observer (Tavşan Dişli Bir Gözlemcinin Notları)* help children to go out of their houses and question their life styles.

**In your book, the main character is a Buck-Toothed Observer. Why did you prefer a protagonist without a name?**

Actually, he has a name, and it is mentioned just a few times in the story. Rather than his name his character is very important. He’s someone like us. He has the same emotions with us. But he doesn’t have a strong bond with formal education. In contrary to today’s indoor kids, he is an “outdoor generation”. He doesn’t want to enter even the school building. He always wants to live outside. He observes everything. He knows the names of trees and animals. If he doesn’t know the name then he gives them names.

**The first matter the book brings forward is how much we broke away from nature. Do you think that the serious environmental problems we are struggling today, our ignorance for the lives of other living beings are the consequences of living away from nature?**

Children are the ones who feel this most. As the problems are continuously being postponed, just like we are leaving our financial debts, economical problems to the next generations, we are leaving many unsolved environmental problems to them as well. Adults do not care that much and they accept the artificial environment they live in as natural; but the children are not so.

**What do you think about the school strikes for the climate initiated by Greta Thunberg and spread all over the world?**

Actually, I don’t see it as an action of Greta. It’s a worldwide action. If not Greta, Helga or Ayşe would do it. This is the attitude of a whole generation and it is awesome. People are actually trying to block Greta. Because they don’t want to hear these problems. Especially the older ones. Part of the middle-class generation that has earned a lot of money by harming nature, may not understand people like Greta. They think that children will live very happily in a technologically advanced society, but it is not the case. So children really live in serious deprivation. That’s why Greta started a very good action. And this was expected...

**In your book, your analysis about human nature are very remarkable. For example, your main character always tells about his clumsiness and incompetence. And he usually receives feedbacks from his environment which reinforce these judgements. However, he is a very good observer. Did you want to point out the importance of getting to know yourself and realizing your qualities as well as deficiencies?**

He is not a stereotypical character, but a child who is aware of his emotions. For example, he doesn’t say how exciting it would be to go for hunting and kill a rabbit. A child who embraces his own feelings and thoughts. Such a character actually exists in all children. Children are always directed to be successful and resourceful, leading to failure and incompetence. Because, the successes we ask them to achieve are very cliché and stereotype.

### **Don't you think today's children are brought up by infusing a lot of artificial self-confidence?**

Education system pushes children to failure while trying to make them successful. We want them to have a “good” profession, to have high scores in their exams. We don’t care much about the development of their personalities, or the relation they are building with nature. We find it sufficient if they are successful in corporate statuses. However, those institutional structures do not offer this confidence to the child. And eventually, the children successfully graduate from educational institutions, find good jobs but they fail in life. Because they feel unhappy. In order to be successful and happy in life, it is necessary to establish a very balanced relationship with nature. To build this relationship first of all we need nature exist around us. We cannot expect the child to be successful, while being deprived of all these.

### **In your book, we recognize through your protagonist how important it is to make observations. But, taking today’s social media into consideration, don’t you think we’re already observing too much?**

Today, communication is more dominant than observation. Communication is one-sided, whereas observation is a two-way relationship. Communication has an authoritative aspect. When it comes to social media, the moment you start to observe something, you also start to think about how to post it on Instagram or Twitter, or how to transfer it in the most humorous way. So, you observe accordingly. It’s a one-sided relationship. But for example, observing the life of a blue crab is not something like that. It requires labour. It requires watching them for hours, maybe days. You need to go back and forth to their homes several times. It requires an in-depth life style. So, I think there is a difference between relationship and communication. I worked a lot on this subject in my other books as well. This unilateral form of communication makes children unilateral as well. It’s same for adults too. Once, a psychologist friend of mine told me a story. He sees a patient suffering from heavy depression. They review the patient’s Facebook page together. She has shared incredibly happy moments and her wall was full of her smiling photos. "Then let's start like this," says my psychologist friend, "Let's delete all these photos and close your Facebook page." Because there is an unreal situation there. Sharing those photos is something done to communicate. Because, what is approved in communication is being happy. And she has some criteria like being smart, shining all the time, dressing well, having experiences that others do not have. Why someone who always matched these criteria, who smiled all the time and who photographed such beautiful moments is so unhappy? Because it is necessary to reveal the “unreal”. By presenting themselves as always happy, people impose happiness and build an authoritarian relationship with society. I am happy, you be happy too. This is also a pressure. Being unhappy is considered as a shame. However unhappy people should be able to express and share their unhappiness. This is real relationship. If we take this chance away from people, then what is left is the seemingly happy and angry human profile in the world of communication.

### **We see that freedom is also an issue you want to be considered. Does being free without knowing the meaning of freedom can bring us a real freedom?**

In stereotype education, the child is always put into a certain pattern and is not free. Also, the teacher is not free in that relationship. They remain stuck in stereotypes and behavioural patterns and they think they’re educating children by applying those patterns. If the child fits into those patterns he/she is considered as educated. However, the child needs to get free. Maybe we all need to discuss the meaning of getting free. In my book, students are very surprised when the teacher says: *“You are free to choose a subject you like and work on it in the way you like. You are free to copy, to get help from any book you like and you are free to do it with your friends if you like.”* And they ask to the teacher: *“Are we also free to break the windows of school or to stomp on our desks?”* However, this is not going out of the mould. To get out, you should push that mould aside and develop something completely different. I think once the mould is removed, there can be a completely different education. For example, there are many institutions that provide certificates and diplomas, but there are very few institutions that provide experimental education. Training is always done in a number of patterns. How much children can develop themselves this is not questioned much. There is a

constant repetition of routine processes. Yet freedom is something that needs to be discovered and built. It requires experience, knowledge and acquisition. The child should enjoy doing something, should discover that he enjoys it and this pleasure should emerge as an important element in education.

**At the end of the book, you are introducing the concept of human brotherhood through animal brotherhood and it takes place in space! Does this also symbolize a longing for a place and time where there are no borders, no nations and no countries?**

Science fiction stories often take place in the space and always include a war. However, there has been a very interesting development in today's world. Human beings do not kill each other in space, on the contrary, they cooperate perfectly. You see this when you observe the international space station. Many countries established this station together. There are Canadians, Chinese, Russians, and Americans. Because the space is an absolutely extreme environment and people cannot live there without combining all the information they collected. So, the space is becoming the place of peace for nations, not war. Humanity developed this and the counter-utopian science fiction became rubbish and lost its meaning there. But the stories about this peace aspect of space were not written much either. I wanted to show peace at the space. There is another reality there. You exist there just as a human being.



To see the published interview:

<https://gunisigikitapligi.com/haber/cumhuriyet-kitap-cocuklari-kitapla-kurulan-iliski-gelistirir>

## **IN ORDER TO MAKE CHILDREN HAPPY...**

**“Their relationships with books help children to improve.”**

Behiç Ak, recently added a new one to his children’s novels enriched with his masterly drawings, all of which are reflecting the rich inner worlds of children, their curiosity and their way of questioning the life: “Notes of a Buck-Toothed Observer” (*Tavşan Dışli Bir Gözlemcinin Notları*). Based on his new novel, we talked about children’s literature with him.

**In your latest book “Notes of a Buck-Toothed Observer” (*Tavşan Dışli Bir Gözlemcinin Notları*), you are again unifying children with animals and nature. This is quite a different fiction though. Besides being quite up-to-date with the problematic it is focusing on, it’s written with a somewhat sharp language. How did you decide to set up your story this way?**

Actually, I always like to write multilayered stories. Just like the life... I’m inviting my readers to situations which include many complicated problems intertwined with each other, but easy to perceive; just like the life itself. The realities of daily life which seem simple and ordinary but filled with questionings and abstractions as you create the psychological changes, are attracting my attention. And of course, our relationship with nature is the most fundamental reality.

Nowadays, the relationship we establish with nature turns out to be the relationship of a barbarian with the civilization. In my book, I tried to tell the the violence caused by moving away from nature, by using the themes of hunting and war. I fictionalized that the relation between hunting and war is not as innocent as we think. Eventually, a very fun story came out, extending from hunting to war, and to the space which is turned into a cliché by anti-utopia.

## **MY PRIORITY IS IMPROVING THE READING PLEASURE**

**What is your priority while writing children’s books?**

On top of all, I pay importance to improving the reading pleasure of children. We don’t have the right to make early readers read boring books. At the same time we need to treat them as real intellectuals. Not like a culprit to whom we are continuously giving advices. Making the reading experience creative and promoting is possible only by taking the readers seriously.

The most useful education is to let the children to improve themselves. Children literature feeds the faith in children that they can be the “masters of their own lives”. If the story you wrote for children is close to being a piece of art in terms of its literary value, the child reader establishes an intellectual connection with it.

Of course accepting the reader as an individual brings along the need of accepting their criticisms. I strongly believe that the world needs today more than ever those criticizing eyes wandering along the lines of a book. An individual is not a loneliness monument who is taking a backseat with the belief that he/she cannot change the world, but just on the contrary, is the one who knows he/she can change the world. It’s the



relationship they build with the books is what improves children. There is no doubt that presenting this opportunity to children saves them from becoming anonymous patterns and helps them to become individuals.

## **WRITING FOR CHILDREN MEANS WRITING FOR ADULTS TOO**

### **How your approach of writing for children while at the same time calling out to adults developed in time?**

Writing for children means writing for adults too. And just the opposite has right sides as well. Writing for adults means writing for children too. Many literature books written for adults are based on childish thoughts.

My children's books story has started in 1980's by making picture books for preschool kids. For this age group, a book is something they consume many times, just like a toy. A world that is changed and renewed every time. Sometimes adults have difficulties in understanding this world. They may feel bored of having the same book at hand several times again and again, and they lose touch with the child. That's why I always tried to find stories and perspectives which will be enjoyed by adults as well. When I started to write and illustrate books for the age group of 9-14, I continued with the same approach. Adults who read my books always tell me how much they are surprised when they read and like my books a lot! Some adults do it to understand how their book-hater kids began to enjoy reading books and just out of curiosity they take and secretly read their books. When they find out that the story is appealing also for them, they are really surprised.

The art which creates a relationship medium between the child and the adult has a liberating function here. Children's literature is opening a new door for both children and adults by freeing them from stereotypes. This is an unbelievable "growing up" opportunity for adults!

## **CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IS A PART OF EDUCATION**

### **What are the criticisms you receive from children?**

They usually criticize the fact that here is an end to the story they liked. I mean, ending the story at one point. They always ask me questions like, "Will the story continue?" "And, what happens next?" "What did the characters do afterwards?" Some children on the other hand are never interested in the story, but rather in finding a practical problem, a mistake. What makes me most excited is to see that my books are encouraging children to write stories.

### **In your opinion, how does the primary education system in our country effect the children's perspective about books?**

Unfortunately, the quality of primary school education is continually decreasing due to political conflicts. Luckily, children can still get something out of this system thanks to idealistic teachers. Furthermore, something very important has happened during the last 10-15 years. It's understood that children's literature is a part of children's education. In the past, it was seen as you can educate the children only with educational books. Those were the kind of books giving advises rather than knowledge. This understanding is over now. Those students who have qualified teachers are tending towards children's literature. This is a very important development for Turkey. In a society of adults who are afraid of reading, the increasing number of children who enjoy reading is what makes us hopeful about future.

To see the published interview:

<https://gunisigikitaplgi.com/haber/notos-yeni-bir-dunyanin-olabiliriligini-dusundurmek/>

**Children’s literature books are not written for educational purposes, but when you read them you are being trained indirectly.**

Interview

**Making the readers to think about the possibility of a whole new world...**

**A modern times narrator who thinks by writing and illustrating, from caricatures and plays to children’s books, but who hasn’t decided yet to be an “author”: Behiç Ak.**

**You have a versatile productivity based mainly on examining our communal living. In your caricatures, you handled issues like relations between men & women, father & child, grandparents & grandchildren in a way nobody could afford to do before and in the beginning you’ve been considered a bit strange. Can we say your never-ending curiosity and hard work have led you to writing and illustrating for children?**

During my university education and also afterwards, I’ve always been interested in social dimensions of architecture. I was publishing an architecture magazine and besides writing articles I was sometimes drawing and designing the cover pages. My article about housing problem was published in a newspaper. Although I didn’t have the intention to work as an architect, I found a job by chance and I took it just for the sake of earning some money. But in 1980, with the military cope of September 12th, all of my social endeavors vanished off in the blink of an eye. What is called as democratic mass organizations in those years were completely prohibited after the cope. Then I was left with two options. As I wasn’t able to keep on social struggle, I shall continue my life either working as an architect or doing something else. Eventually, we turned out to be a defeated generation and that was a big defeat. We were obliged to make a fresh beginning and start all over again. While starting from scratch, I chose a challenge for myself and decided to write and illustrate for children. One day, with a sudden decision, I left my job at the architecture firm which actually didn’t mean anything to me except for making money. I was unemployed and I started to write and illustrate children’s books although nobody asked me to do so! I wrote and illustrated a picture book, *The Plane Tree with High Blood Pressure* (*Yüksek Tansiyonlu Çınar Ağacı*), and I made a silent book, *Story of a Pencil* (*Bir Kalemın Öyküsü*). I was doing all these just for myself. One day, I saw an ad saying “We want to publish children’s books”. I contacted the publishing house. The editorial team liked my stories but they were quite surprised when they learned that I am an architect with master’s degree. The editor asked me why I am doing children’s books although I have such a valuable profession. And I decided not to give my books to them.

This interview made me to exactly understand that children’s books field is not yet open to improvement. In the meantime learning that daily newspaper Cumhuriyet is planning to publish a children’s magazine, I had suggested my picture book to them. But the coupe rulers who closed professional associations and banned cultural events like International Mimar Sinan Architecture Week organized by TMMOB (Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects), did not allow Cumhuriyet newspaper as well to publish a children’s

magazine. I ran out of money and I was not able to survive anymore. So I suggested to draw daily caricatures for Cumhuriyet newspaper. I showed my caricatures and the newspaper management really liked them. However, they were hesitant because in those years, it was unusual to draw caricatures for criticizing the daily life. For example, the relations between women & men, mother & child, the fact that everyday life is actually political itself was not realized in Turkey then – and this was the biggest problem of our generation. As daily life is not deemed to be important, people who had authoritative, even puritanical thoughts in their daily lives were on the other hand defending revolutionary rhetoric and presenting themselves as defenders of democracy. Actually, this was the tragedy of our age.

This tragedy was actually what we have been criticizing in our minds and my daily caricature strips filled a huge gap in this respect. Newspaper's top management -during those years Okay Gönensin and Hasan Cemal were in charge- really appreciated my drawings and after a couple of months they said OK for more than 100 strips I had already drawn, and so my daily newspaper caricature series with the name "*Kim Kime Dum Duma*" has started. In the beginning, my caricatures received too much reaction. People even called Nadir Nadi, the owner of the newspaper and asked why I am drawing such caricatures. Actually Mr.Nadi as well was not able to understand what I was criticizing in my drawings and asking his colleague Ali Sirmen what I was trying to tell. Thanks to Ali Sirmen who is a great journalist with a strong sense of humor, he was explaining my caricatures every day to the owner of the newspaper.

### **Were readers also surprised by your style?**

Readers quickly perceived what I wanted to tell. My drawings were not usual types of jokes like clumsiness jokes, but there was a different language and perspective which is embraced by the readers. Of course, there were readers who didn't find any funny side in daily life -but my major intention was to reach those people. I never made a compromise. I wrote plays to show how absurd are the things that seem normal to us in our daily lives. I developed a sense of humor without any rules for criticizing the rules of everyday life. Till that time however, humor was based on looking and laughing at irregular things from the perspective of regularity. But my purpose was making people to look from an irregular perspective and laugh at the regularity.

There was a huge difference between these two perspectives. After a little while, readers perceived it, and they began to find themselves in my drawings. There were such people who thought I was criticizing them personally and didn't like this at all. They were angrily calling me and saying "Who told you all these? You can't use my personal details in your drawings," and they were hanging up on me; I was receiving many letters as well... My humor style was well understood by a group of intellectuals and perceived as a self-criticism. *Kim Kime Dum Duma* had an effect on people.

### **And you internalized this sense of humor and focused so much on it that, I think, it strongly effected your style as well. You had an enormous accumulation of intellectual depth.**

Yes, I had to read much, and observe much in order to keep that simple yet intellectual level in my works. I was spending most of time by thinking rather than drawing. Drawing is a technical act, but thinking for several days about what to draw and drawing afterwards, doing two things at the same time... This was so much tiring for me. When I was in military service in 1984, I felt like I am having holidays.

Children's books were always in my mind during those years. In the beginning of 1980's I sent the illustrations of *The Plane Tree with High Blood Pressure* (*Yüksek Tansiyonlu Çınar Ağacı*) to an international

exhibition in Asia (Asia Culture Centre). I didn't know that it was actually a competition. I wouldn't send my illustrations if I knew it, because I don't like competing, I am one of those who completely tongue-tied in such situations. My illustrations received an award there and then exhibited in Japan. Japanese publishers wanted to publish my book. I received a letter from a big Japanese publishing house, and the publishing adventure of my book in a distant land has started. Of course, it was quite difficult to have your book published in Japan. There were no digital opportunities to make things easier, all of the illustrations and texts were coming and going between us by post.

### **But they eventually published your story...**

Yes, they did. Actually, we shared a couple of culturally traumatic details between us. For example, in one of my illustrations there was a poor looking boy receiving a gift. They told me that Japanese children have ambivalent feelings about taking presents. "Why someone is giving us something, are we poor?" kind of feeling... Then I remembered that in my childhood when someone I didn't know gave me something, I was feeling like I was being helped, rather than being rewarded. So we changed these details in the book. That was a quite different experience for me.

### **In the meantime, there was cinema in your life...**

I continued my relation with cinema in those years. Besides drawing, I had to take part and have experience in different areas of life so that I can make observations that feed my drawings. As I was after criticizing the behavior of people from different areas of life and build my humor on these observations, I always tried to be in different fields of life. I worked as an art director, and wrote critics about movie scenarios. And I never stopped reading. Eventually, I succeed to have some of my children's books published in Turkey. Actually, children's books were not popular in Turkey during those years. I was famous in Japan, but was unknown in my own country. And there were no channels that lead people to children's literature and there was no link either between children's fiction and education. A memory I still remember today: A teacher gave a homework to one student for making an interview with me. The child came and he asked me how could I write a book? He was thinking that books are produced in factories rather than being written by an author. In those days, authors writing books for children, teachers recommending books to their students and inviting the authors to their schools were unusual.

**In the beginning of 1990's Children's Rights Declaration was accepted. Accordingly, children's literature gained speed, first in the western world and then in Turkey. Günışığı Kitaplığı was founded in 1996. Being totally aware of the necessary changes and the modernity imposed by the acceptance of children's rights, our vision was to publish good books for children that are well illustrated and written appropriately for children's world. We decided not to do educational books for children but publish genuine literature for them. From our first day on, we told and tried to convince people that children's literature is actually a big and important field of creation under the big umbrella of literature and it's a very important and necessary part of culture.**

Unfortunately, however, in those years, even my editor at Yapı Kredi Publishing didn't believe in children's literature and he was frankly telling this to me.

**Yes, the authorities in literature circles were making similar comments which were affecting the editors as well. Such approaches made things difficult for you and for all of us of course. But I sincerely believe that,**



**the main idea behind such comments was this: genuine literature is for everyone. Unfortunately however they just didn't think well enough on the issue of being suitable for children.**

For example, what I always try to do in my picture books is to build a bridge between adults and children; and I think this should be the standard. With these books especially targeting pre-school ages, children can make a connection between symbols, concepts and real life. They see a clock illustration, and connect it to the idea of a real time. A child does it in contact with an adult while reading a story. This is an experience which develops the thinking process in a multilayered way. That's why I pay importance to use many details in my illustrations and try to create hidden meanings. I like my illustrations to contribute to the visual reading of children, help children with changing the story in their own way, and consider these details as functional instruments to help children to create new layers in the story.

**In your illustrated books, the story and the illustrations flow together and sometimes, as you said, the text stays behind, even vanishes. What about your books without illustrations, children's novels?**

In the past, I wasn't writing children's novels, because my main purpose was making books that build a bridge between adults and children. And actually I was thinking that the picture books are the only and last intellectual relationship between children and adults. And this relationship ends when children grow up, learn to read themselves and choose which book they like to read. That's why I targeted at pre-school ages and I wanted to write stories that both children and adults like to read. Children like to listen to the same book over and over again, maybe hundred times. Adults are tired of reading the same book and they naturally hate it. My picture books, *The Cloud That Came Indoors* (*Gökdelene Giren Bulut*) and *The Plane Tree with High Blood Pressure* (*Yüksek Tansiyonlu Çınar Ağacı*) were actually written for adults too. I always tried my picture books to surprise adults too and tried to have the adults on that bridge between the books and the child. It actually worked, and adult readers loved to read my books again and again. I was paying importance to the wish of the child readers to change the story as they like, for example giving new names to the cats in the story and adding new layers related with them, creating small new stories... and I placed plenty of details in my illustrations to allow this creation process. This is really a special and huge effort, but unfortunately however, it was impossible to pay my rent or to make a living with its returns. When it comes to returns, almost all the fields I preferred to put my efforts in were similar -caricatures, theatre... Famous actor Genco Erkal wanted me to write a play related with my daily caricature strips "*Kim Kime Dum Duma*". I tried to do it but I was not satisfied with the result. Language of caricatures is far more different than the language of theatre. 10 years later, I wrote my play *Bina* which received Ministry of Culture Award and staged in State Theaters with famous actors. That was the first absurd play written in Turkey and attracted a huge attention, many reviews were written about it. *Bina* was the work I definitely wanted to do. It was the reflection and at the same time abstraction of what I've been experiencing in my daily life. It was not like pointing out and criticizing every detail one by one, but rather extracting their essence and abstracting it all in a new meaning. It had many traps inside I specially placed not to fall in the traps about what *Bina* really symbolizes.

Then I wrote my plays *Ayrılık* and *Tek Kişilik Şehir* but with a long time period in between. And after the big earthquake, I wrote *Fay Hattı*. In those years, play writers were disrespected as if they were not existing. For example you were unable to learn why the play you sent to city theatre is rejected. So, I decided not to send my plays to city theatres and publish them instead as a book.

And one day my play *Ayrılık* is staged in city theatre and received the most prestigious theatre award Afife Jale. I was chosen as the best play writer. Theatre is a field of art with many ups and downs which make you

feel happiness and sadness at the same time. For example, shortly after the rehearsals of my play *Fay Hattı* started in state theatre -Sumru Yavrucuk was the leading actress- it was cancelled. Refik Erduran called me and said it is impossible to stage this play because it is making fun of the earthquake. I told it's not making fun, but a different way of confrontation using humor.

The first person who wanted to put this play on stage was a municipality officer who lost all of his family in the earthquake and this was one of the most interesting experiences I had in my lifetime. He called me and said: "I read a play named *Fay Hattı* and thought if I can perform and put it on stage? I lost my whole family in the earthquake and I feel that this play will heal me." I was touched and excited. But later I learned that he developed a phobia of being outside and so he couldn't come to İstanbul, and we couldn't meet.

This play attracted too much interest in Europe. It was translated to several languages and staged in Germany, Belgium and Greece. In Turkey however it was banned for long years. Eventually a few years ago, the ban is lifted and it's staged in Van. But not in İstanbul... Directed by Genco Erkal, Genco, Sumru and Erdem Akakçe performed: Three master actors and an excellent director... They travelled the whole world, from Canada to New York, to Kars, they performed everywhere and gathered huge crowds together. It is not easy at all to open all these areas.

**You mentioned about 'opening areas'. That's exactly what we have struggled for in the field of children's literature. When our paths crossed with you, some of your books were already being published by Yapı Kredi Publishing and Oğlak Publishing, but were not known widely yet. Those working in the field of children's literature didn't know the name of Behiç Ak then. As you said, you had a quite different and unusual style, that's for sure. A style based on the experiences you told and naturally a bit ahead of your time. Those working in the field of literature were not paying importance to children's literature. Actually, they are still the same today. When I recommend one of your books to them, they first hesitate but once they read they say that it's genuine literature which makes them excited and wonder about the end. I knew many people whose minds were stuck at the 'children' part of children's literature. Looking at the really bad examples in marketplace they are underrating the children's literature field. For long years we had struggled to break this prejudice. I believe that we succeed to come to a good point, and your works is one of the strongest ring in the chain of children's literature in Turkey.**

When I met Günışığı Kitaplığı, I started to write for early readers as well. "Cheerful Stories" was a project I really wanted to make and also in these books I continued to write both for children and adults. The first book of the collection *The Man Who Repaired Even the Sun* (*Güneşi Bile Tamir Eden Adam*) was really liked by adult readers and the others books continued in the same way. Sometimes I see parents who borrow *The Cat that Misunderstood Everything* (*Her Şeyi Yanlış Anlayan Kedi*) from their kids and finish before them. I don't know if it's the same for all children's books, but my books are bringing families together.

**Naturally, times are changing and people's perception of children's literature is different than before. They pay importance to reading books with their kids. Children's literature is a serious field now, an important part of literature... Unfortunately, parents still expect literature to teach something to their children, however literature does not have such intentions.**

Yes, children's literature is not written for educational purposes but when you read literature, you are being educated indirectly, opening the window of literature in your mind carries you to a whole new path. I meet many people from different sectors, neither they nor my architect friends read literature. They don't go to theatres, they don't read plays. I find it really interesting. They're content with the intellectual capacity they

have in their own fields. In fact this situation makes them incompetent in sensing many things, but they're not aware of it. It's the situation in many sectors. I was quite angry when I realized this fact; those people were able to write very good articles about their professional fields but never read a book of John Steinbeck or George Orwell. A huge deficiency! The big gap of our education system! Maybe it's the same all over the world, I don't know. But it's terrific to have the literature door opened in your mind, it's a way of education both for children and adults.

**You're creating powerful characters. While reading your books we are always wondering where the story is going and how it will end. I know that you don't previously plan on the themes you will include in the story, you just start to write and the story finds its way... Otherwise, why children shall go to buy especially your books even if their teacher did not tell them to do so! It's for sure that they really enjoy reading your books, but there are further things...**

I tell what we are deprived of today. Today's problems. It's very difficult to write something about today. Because current times are full of contradictions. It wasn't so difficult for Dostoyevsky to write something about his period. Today, the world is so much fragmented that you can rarely find someone who can criticize our daily life looking from today's perspective and still telling something which belongs to current times. It's the same for cinema as well. I am searching for a movie which belongs to current times, but at the end, I always find myself watching a movie which tries to tell about the future or the past. I try to do something which belongs to current time by paying attention to today. It's the same in my children's books too. I like all issues of today –either positive or negative- pass through my stories; it can be the relationship between a mother and a child but of course without breaking apart the child's nature. Because children want to become integrated with the world, and this integration is their primary right. Children want to go into the broken realities of the world without breaking apart but rather keeping their integrity. And our aim should be not to destroy their integrity. Not to hurt them, in the sense of approaching even a negative issue without preventing them to look from a positive perspective. When we write for adults however, most of the time we tell negative things in the most negative way, deliberately hurting readers' souls; but we can't do this for children. Children and the world... They are very new to each other. Who the hell are we to break their world apart? They are already living in a fully urbanized world, we need to write stories which won't hurt them, stories enriched with arguments that will help them to understand and interpret the world.

**Today's children are not able to play in streets, they can't climb on trees, they don't play street games, and they lost themselves in their tablets.**

Digital life is a trap for children. I am feeling very sad for the children who live in big cities. The situation is not as bad for the children living in small cities. I live in Muğla for part of the year and I observe that, children there are using urban space. They are riding their bicycles around, they walk to their schools. In İstanbul there is almost no children who can do these. When I was a kid –as a secondary school student- I used to walk to Kurbağalidere from Yeldeğirmeni, I was then renting a boat and was rowing to Fenerbahçe. It was very normal for my generation, so my family was okay with that. But now, when I tell this to any parent, they find it impossible. I understand what they think from their eyes, they are worried for their child as if they will die if they do something like this. This huge change in city life and ever-increasing population led to security problems and especially children disappeared from the scene in big cities. The number of children walking on the streets decreased. Now we have a new definition called *indoor generation* and lots of kids go outside virtually now. You know, when you tell them to go and have a little walk outside, they prefer to have a little walk on the internet. It's like, they are locked down forever which points out a sick society.

**You spend the year living in İstanbul and Muğla, and sometimes in other places. How these different cities, various locations and streets effect your thinking and writing?**

I spent part of my childhood in Samsun. And then, we moved to İstanbul because İstanbul is my father's hometown. In those years, İstanbul's population was about 7 millions. Today it reached 20 million and I think it's really traumatic. Kids are unable to find a places for themselves outside the buildings. This is not normal at all. Children's inability to be in the public areas on their own is a serious problem and we need to raise our voice to criticize this. I put all of my critiques in my children's stories, because it deeply hurts me when I see a child who cannot go out and enjoy playing outside. We need to find solutions for children to play safely in the streets and using public places.

**Being an architect, you are handling social issues from that perspective, and of course we can follow the clues you are giving in your stories. For example, you give details about houses, there are wooden houses or old streets in your stories. Sometimes I draw simple plans while reading your books, trying to figure out where is the entrance located when the kid leaves the kitchen and turns left...**

In literature, sometimes the place might be misleading. For example, you can't draw Kafka's *Castle* because it's actually a psychological castle. Or the court place at *The Trial*... While you're reading the book, you see audience watching the trial when you look to right and on the left you see another person, a cleaning lady sweeping the floor... The dream world in author's mind comes in fiction and the place continuously metamorphoses so you cannot talk about an integrity of place. Therefore, in literature, we should consider places not as architectural places, but rather as literary places.

**Your characters are very real but somewhat fantastic at the same time. You have characters which make us think how a child can do such things. But you never made sexist choices. There are marketing strategies recommending to promote different types of books for girls and boys for example, both in Turkey and abroad...**

There are some marketing strategies which especially target girls, and I think it's horrible. Some stories are making sex discrimination by showing the girls or women in general as weak, fragile characters with limitations in social life. Most Turkish authors find this approach wrong I believe.

**Your stories are generally told by a third person and you rarely use the voice of first person. In general, stories told by the first person are easier for children to identify with themselves but on the other hand it's very difficult to tell scenes in which the first person doesn't exist. However, you wrote *The Planet in the Attic (Çatıdaki Gezegen)* from the eye of your protagonist because you needed his inner voice...**

Actually it's very nice to be able use the first person as the story teller. However, there are cases you cannot do that. For example, in my novel *The Cat that Misunderstood Everything (Her Şeyi Yanlış Anlayan Kedi)* there are several layers of the story some of which are told by the cat. So it was really a tough decision for me to make...

**Animals always have an important part your stories, and your animal characters are usually more commonsensical than your human characters. You keep on encouraging children to do so, but do you really believe that the days we share the world and the nature with other creatures will come, or is this just an utopia?**



Actually, there are too much to say about animals and the deprivations we caused for them. When people use animal's habitat for urbanization purposes, they start to confront with wild animals in their daily lives which they wouldn't meet otherwise. For example, a family domesticates a fox, wild boars attack a house, and bears come close to human beings... In my opinion, eventually a law will be created between human beings and animals, it will be a written law not just an ethical one. So, I keep on telling to children in my stories that, there is no difference between a cat, or some other animal and human beings. Our relationship with animals shall not be built up on an idea like, 'it's a bear and I have a gun; so, I can kill it'. I deeply feel that, a law between people and animals will be made sooner or later and there is an ever-rising demand for this all over the world.

**There are still savage people who harm animals badly. Although we can't completely defeat them we continue to struggle with them and in this respect I believe children's books are very important and useful, because adults are reading them too. I hope these messages in children's books are also disturbing those people who adopt a pet just for having a privilege and abandon them afterwards. Maybe they think about what they did to that animals.**

Exactly, just like I told in my book *The Dog in the Fridge* (*Buzdolabındaki Köpek*). When you try to have Siberian husky in your home in Antalya, of course the dog tries to enter and sit in the fridge. And as you know this is a real story. I didn't make up a story to tell about the problem, but the actual story carries the problem in itself and children easily recognize it.

**I hope adults will also understand. I started to think that, children's books are actually written for adults. That's why I keep on telling that children shall leave their books on their desks for their parents to find, wonder and read them.**

Actually, I am searching for the paradigms of a new world through my children's books. Instead of being against something, I try to give my readers some hints and make them to think about the possibility of a new world. My books create new thoughts about the possibility of a whole new paradigm. Maybe, literature does not have the power to change anything, but at least it can present the idea that creating a new world we're all missing is not that difficult.

In the meantime, the difference between child reader and adult reader is getting very small in my eyes. I'm considering children as intellectuals anymore. They have their intellectual world, they approach the books they read intellectually. I try to relate to their intellectual world. Once children start to think on the stories and go deeper, the questions they come up with might be very surprising. Seeing all these, I realize that the topics/themes which we think children can't understand can easily go into a children's fiction. Writing for adults or children is same. You need a multi layered fiction in both. There are some authors who think easy and simple stories are enough for children. I really can't read what they write.

**Lately, self-censorship began to wander in the minds of children's authors like a nightmare. Not feeling free to decide about what you will write and having to take into consideration the prejudices of adults with plain logic and without any imagination, is limiting the creativity of children's authors. What do you think about it?**

Generally, those people who don't have a taste of literature and who don't read books, are not capable of evaluating the literary language and enjoying it. Their criteria for evaluating a book is not related with the literary value but rather with the typo in the text, like a comma is missing here and so forth. For example,

only comment such people can make after reading a book of Kafka is about the correctness of the text, they can't go beyond this because they don't have a taste of literature. They think that, finding the mistakes of the editor is the most important criticism; because they don't know how to criticize a fiction, they have no idea on how to build a connection with the text! In children's books such adults search for mistakes, they react to a character smoking in the illustration without looking at what's being told there. This is because they can't relate themselves to the story.

**You don't use accents and idiomatic characters in your stories. However, it has always been an easy and frequently used tool for children's books.**

I don't like using accents neither in my books, nor in my plays. It damages the literary power of the text. There are some patterns used to make fun of those people living in certain geographies, but I don't find them funny. Maybe jokes related with the people of Black Sea region can be told in their own accent, that can be funny and lovely but when it comes to literature, I find it meaningless to use accent, it doesn't add any value to the text. Once, an actor who found my play named *What Newton Knows about Computers* very realistic intended to perform it with an accent. I told him not to do it. I told him that as an actor the reality he created on stage has nothing to do with the reality out of the stage. This point needs to be understood well. Using accent shows the two realities as same however it's not the case. What we do on stage is an abstraction and even the most realistic abstraction on stage is different than the reality in the outside world.

**What do you think about e-books? In Turkey, e-book sales are slightly increasing recently. Do you think e-books will be more attractive for today's children in the sense of using technology and because of the advantages it offers in terms of carrying and storing?**

First of all, I don't find it right health wise to give tablets to small kids and expose them to internet. There are many scientific researches showing that it negatively effects the newly developing cells. In the second place, if we are talking about preschool children, for example taking the book and tearing it down into pieces is an important need of small children, it's an act of making the book yours. They need to crumple some pages, maybe color some pages... With e-books, we are taking this chance out of their hands.

I doubt if we can call e-books are really as carriable? It's like the child is carrying it as an idea not as an object. On the other hand, I believe, carrying a printed book as a real object is nice and pleasant. A book is not only content. Of course, e-books are useful for older kids and adults but not for preschool and early ages.

**You're right, but I guess we are on the verge of a big change and it seems transformation of our age will not stop here.**

Technological development is not equal to scientific development. Those two are different paradigms. Sometimes these two are not related too much with each other. Children or adults should develop scientifically. We usually see that those who use high technology has no relation with science. For example, building up a nuclear power station is a result of scientific development, yes, but today the same scientific look prohibits these stations which also is a result of scientific improvement. I mean it's totally incorrect to accept technological development as scientific development. Furthermore, transforming everything to a technological dimension downgrades people, cutting their bonds with their culture. Monoculture, people developing ideas just to communicate with each other rather than expressing their real opinions, all of these are downgrading. It's hurting for people if communication takes the place of relationship. Communication

doesn't mean building up a relationship, it only means speaking in some specific patterns. Relationship is something that happen between two people. Reading is a relationship between the reader and the book... It's an individual activity, you don't read for telling anecdotes to others, you read for yourself.

For example, when cinema was born, they said theatres wouldn't survive; but cinema could never take the place of theatre. Cinema halls are located in shopping malls, people watch the movies in dark halls and leave the place afterwards. Whereas theatres turned into places of city culture where you can establish dialogues and can socialize in the foyers. So technological progress is actually a decline in some other sense.

**You said, "Children's books silently finding their places on the shelves of book stores succeeded to carry an unspoken joy to homes and to schools by bringing children and adults together in the same environment, something we had been missing for long". We as Günışığı Kitaplığı, completely agree with you. We need joy more than ever and reading with children, remembering childish feelings through children's literature create warm feelings. I guess you are happy about writing for children.**

I both write and illustrate for children, and being able to do both is making me happier every passing day. Children's books is the only field where I can use my both skills. I consider my daily caricature strips just as drawings. I want to continue with writing and illustrating for children. In the past, when my books were being published only in other countries, I was feeling incomplete. It was like throwing a stone into an empty well. Just a distant sound and you are not able to meet your readers in your real life. But now, I everyday meet many people who read my books, I am living in the same world with them and it makes me very happy.

**Thanks, Behiç Ak. It's always pleasant and inspiring to work with you. Let's finish with the hope of reading your new books soon.**



## Awards

- 1991 Association of Journalists' Comics Prize.
- 1996 Association of Journalists' Comics Prize.
- Bina (Building) - 1993 Ministry of Culture Special Prize.
- Türk Sinemasında Sansürün Tarihi - Siyahperde (The History of Censorship in Turkish Cinema – Black Screen) 1994 Ankara Film Festival, Best Documentary Film and Ministry of Culture Special Prize.
- Ayrılık (Separation) - 1996 Afife Jale Theatre Awards, "Best Writer" Cevat Fehmi Başkut Special Prize.
- Tek Kişilik Şehir (City of One Person) - 2003 Afife Jale Theatre Awards, "Best Writer" Cevat Fehmi Başkut Special Prize.
- 2004 Ankara Arts Institution "Best Author" prize.
- İki Çarpı İki (Two Times Two) - 2010 X. Lions Theatre Awards, "Best Author" prize.
- 2012 The Union of Turkish Engineers and Architects - "The Achievement and Contribution in Architecture" Prize.
- Hurray for the Brotherhood of Ç! (Yaşasın Ç Harfi Kardeşliği!) – IBBY- Turkey, Children's Novel of 2013 Award
- Hurray for the Brotherhood of Ç! (Yaşasın Ç Harfi Kardeşliği!) – 2014 ÇOGEM (Ankara University, Children's and Young Adult Literature Research and Application Center) Children's and Young Adult's Literature Award.

## Other Distinctions

- In 2012, the 30th year of Ak's career, he was awarded with the "Achievement and Contribution in Architecture Prize" given by The Union of Turkish Engineers and Architects for the consistent support he has given to environmental and architectural issues through his comic strips, books and plays.
- In 2019, Behiç Ak was honored by Ankara - Çankaya Municipality as an important cultural figure of Turkey, with a big exhibition opened in Zülfü Livaneli Cultural Center, covering examples from his works.



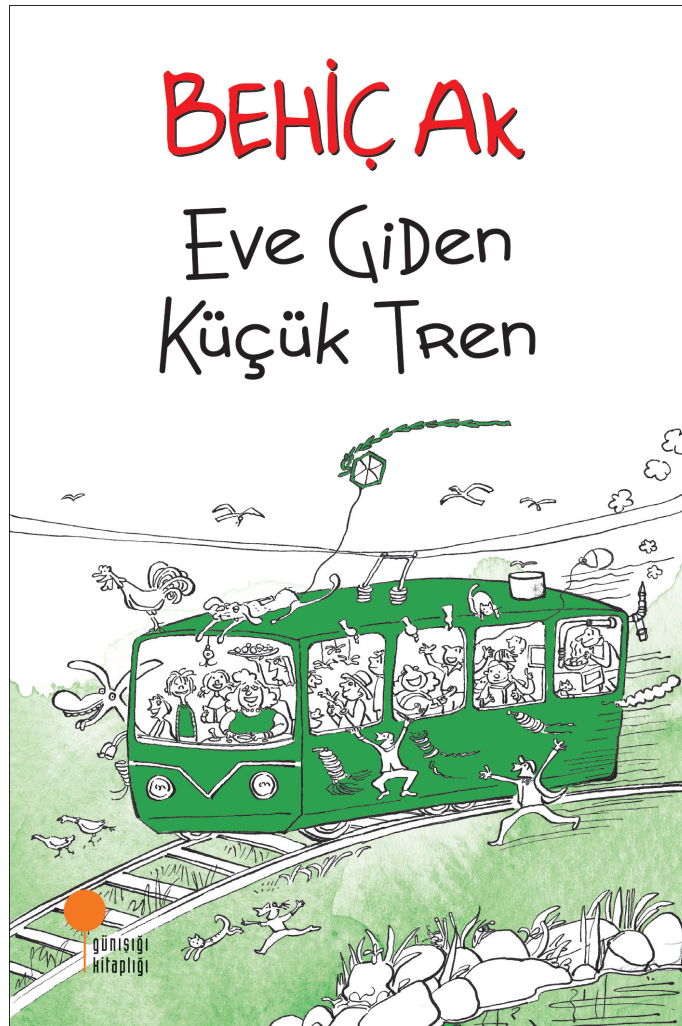


## Children’s Books

### Original Name (English Translation) – Publisher’s Name

- “Gülümseten Öyküler (Cheerful Stories)” Series - *Günişığı Kitaplığı, TURKEY*
  - ~ *Güneşi Bile Tamir Eden Adam* (The Man Who Even Repaired Even The Sun)
  - ~ *Alaaddin'in Geveze Su Boruları* (Alaaddin’s Chattering Waterpipes)
  - ~ *Kedilerin Kaybolma Mevsimi* (Cats’ Season of Disappearance)
  - ~ *Vapurları Seven Çocuk* (The Child Who Loves Ferries)
  - ~ *Havva ile Kaplumbağa* (Havva and the Turtle)
  - ~ *Pat Karikatür Okulu* (Pat Cartoon School)
  - ~ *Galata'nın Tembel Martısı* (Galata’s Lazy Seagull)
  - ~ *Akvaryumdaki Tiyatro* (The Theatre in the Aquarium)
  - ~ *Buzdolabındaki Köpek* (The Dog in the Fridge)
  - ~ *Geçmişe Tırmanan Merdiven* (Stairway to The Past)
- “Tombiş” kitapları (Chubby Books Series) - *Günişığı Kitaplığı, TURKEY*
  - ~ *Benim Bir Karışım* (How Long is My Hand?)
  - ~ *Bizim Tombiş Taştan Hiç Anlamıyor* (The Many Ways of a Stone)
  - ~ *Bizim Tombiş Fiyonk Makarnayı Çok Seviyor* (Chubby Adores Bowtie Pasta)
  - ~ *Ben Ne Zaman Doğdum?* (When was I born?)
  - ~ *Tombiş Maskeli Baloya Katılmak İstemiyor* (Chubby doesn’t Want to Join the Masquerade)
- Picture Books
  - ~ *Yüksek Tansiyonlu Çınar Ağacı* (Plane Tree with High Blood Pressure) – *Kagyusha Press, JAPAN; Jieli Publishing, CHINA; Günişığı Kitaplığı, TURKEY*
  - ~ *Gökdelene Giren Bulut* (The Cloud That Entered a Skyscraper) – *Gakken, JAPAN; Günişığı Kitaplığı, TURKEY*
  - ~ *Bilyeler* (Marbles) – *Günişığı Kitaplığı, TURKEY*
  - ~ *Büyükannem ve Miyop Ejderha* (My Grandma and The Short Sighted Dragon) – *Fukiankan Shoten, JAPAN; Can Çocuk, TURKEY*
  - ~ *Doğumgünü Hediyesi* ( Birthday Present) – *Can Çocuk, TURKEY*
  - ~ *Karadenizdeki Yunus* (Dolphin in the Black Sea) – *Can Çocuk, TURKEY*
  - ~ *Kedi Adası* (Cat Island) – *Gakken, JAPAN; Can Çocuk, TURKEY*
  - ~ *Rüzgarın Üzerindeki Şehir* (City Above the Wind) – *Gakken, JAPAN; Can Çocuk, TURKEY*
  - ~ *Uyurgezer Bir Fil* (A Sleepwalking Elephant) – *Gakken, JAPAN; Can Çocuk, TURKEY*
- Children’s Novels – *Günişığı Kitaplığı, TURKEY*
  - ~ *Yaşasın Ç Harfi Kardeşliği* (Hurray for the Brotherhood of Ç!)
  - ~ *Postayla Gelen Deniz Kabuğu* (The Sea Shell that Came by Post)
  - ~ *Eve Giden Küçük Tren* (Little Train Goes Home)
  - ~ *Bebek Annem* (Mommy is My Baby)
  - ~ *Çatıdaki Gezegen* (The Planet in The Attic)
  - ~ *Bulutlara Şiir Yazan Çocuk* (The Child Writing Poems for the Clouds)
  - ~ *Her Şeyi Yanlış Anlayan Kedi* (The Cat that Misunderstood Everything)
  - ~ *Tavşan Dişli Bir Gözlemcinin Notları* (Notes of a Buck-Toothed Observer)
  - ~ *Altı Kırk Dört Dalgası* (The 6.44 p.m Wave)
- *Karikatür Kitabı* (The Book of Cartoons - for children) - *Günişığı Kitaplığı, TURKEY*

- Children's Books Published Bilingually, *Anadolu Verlag, GERMANY*  
<http://www.anadolu-verlag.de/behic-ak/>
  - ~ *Güneşi Bile Tamir Eden Adam* (The Man Who Even Repaired Even The Sun)
  - ~ *Alaaddin'in Geveze Su Boruları* (Alaaddin's Chattering Waterpipes)
  - ~ *Kedilerin Kaybolma Mevsimi* (Cats' Season of Disappearance)
  - ~ *Yüksek Tansiyonlu Çınar Ağacı* (Plane Tree with High Blood Pressure)
  - ~ *Gökdelene Giren Bulut* (The Cloud That Entered a Skyscraper)
  - ~ *Büyükannem ve Miyop Ejderha* (My Grandma and The Short Sighted Dragon)
  - ~ *Kedi Adası* (Cat Island)
  - ~ *Rüzgarın Üzerindeki Şehir* (City Above the Wind)
  - ~ *Uyurgezer Bir Fil* (A Sleepwalking Elephant)
- Children's Books written for special projects
  - ~ *Ayşe'nin Bulut Projesi* (Ayşe's Cloud Project) – *WWF, Turkey*
  - ~ *Dikkat Su!* (Attention, Water!) – *İSKİ, İstanbul Water and Sewerage Administration, İstanbul*
  - ~ *İstanbul'un Suyu Nereden Geliyor?* (Where does the water of İstanbul come from?) – *İSKİ*
  - ~ *Dikkat Dünya* (Attention, The Earth!) – *Borusan, İstanbul*



## Children's Books

### Original Title – Language of Translated Edition – Publisher of Translated Edition

- Picture Books which are first published in Japan, later published in Turkey.
  - ~ *Yüksek Tansiyonlu Çınar Ağacı* (Plane Tree with High Blood Pressure) – Japanese – *Kagyusha Press, JAPAN*
  - ~ *Gökdelene Giren Bulut* (The Cloud That Entered a Skyscraper) – Japanese - *Gakken, JAPAN*
  - ~ *Büyükannem ve Miyop Ejderha* (My Grandma and The Short-Sighted Dragon) – Japanese- *Fukiankan Shoten, JAPAN*
  - ~ *Kedi Adası* (Cat Island) – Japanese - *Gakken, JAPAN*
  - ~ *Rüzgarın Üzerindeki Şehir* (City Above the Wind) – Japanese - *Gakken, JAPAN*
  - ~ *Uyurgezer Bir Fil* (A Sleepwalking Elephant) – Japanese - *Gakken, JAPAN*
- Picture Book whose rights sold to China after being published in Turkey.
  - ~ *Yüksek Tansiyonlu Çınar Ağacı* (Plane Tree with High Blood Pressure) – Chinese – *Jieli Publishing, CHINA*
- Children's Books Published Bilingually (German & Turkish) by *Anadolu Verlag, GERMANY* <http://www.anadolu-verlag.de/behic-ak/>
  - ~ *Güneşi Bile Tamir Eden Adam* (The Man Who Even Repaired Even the Sun)
  - ~ *Alaaddin'in Geveze Su Boruları* (Alaaddin's Chattering Waterpipes)
  - ~ *Kedilerin Kaybolma Mevsimi* (Cats' Season of Disappearance)
  - ~ *Yüksek Tansiyonlu Çınar Ağacı* (Plane Tree with High Blood Pressure)
  - ~ *Gökdelene Giren Bulut* (The Cloud That Entered a Skyscraper)
  - ~ *Büyükannem ve Miyop Ejderha* (My Grandma and The Short-Sighted Dragon)
  - ~ *Kedi Adası* (Cat Island)
  - ~ *Rüzgarın Üzerindeki Şehir* (City Above the Wind)
  - ~ *Uyurgezer Bir Fil* (A Sleepwalking Elephant)
- Cartoon Book originally published in German
  - ~ *Was kümmerts mich* (What makes me busy?) – *Migro Verlag, Germany*



## Children’s Books

### Original Name (English Translation) – Publisher’s Name

- From the “Gülümseten Öyküler (Cheerful Stories)” Series -*Günişığı Kitaplığı, TURKEY*
  1. *Güneşi Bile Tamir Eden Adam* (The Man Who Even Repaired Even the Sun)
  2. *Kedilerin Kaybolma Mevsimi* (Cats’ Season of Disappearance)
  3. *Galata’nın Tembel Martısı* (Galata’s Lazy Seagull)
  4. *Buzdolabındaki Köpek* (The Dog in the Fridge)
- From the “Tombiş” Series (Chubby Books Series) - *Günişığı Kitaplığı, TURKEY*
  5. *Benim Bir Karışım* (How Long is My Hand?)
- Picture Books
  6. *Yüksek Tansiyonlu Çınar Ağacı* (Plane Tree with High Blood Pressure) – *Günişığı Kitaplığı, TURKEY*
  7. *Bilyeler* (Marbles) – *Günişığı Kitaplığı, TURKEY*
- Children’s Novels – *Günişığı Kitaplığı, TURKEY*
  8. *Yaşasın Ç Harfi Kardeşliği* (Hurray for the Brotherhood of Ç!)
  9. *Postayla Gelen Deniz Kabuğu* (The Sea Shell that Came by Post)
  10. *Altı Kırk Dört Dalgası* (The 6.44 pm Wave)





**Original Name (English Translation) – Publisher’s Name**

From the “Gülümseten Öyküler (Cheerful Stories)” Series – Güneşiği Kitaplığı, TURKEY

1. *Güneşi Bile Tamir Eden Adam* (The Man Who Even Repaired Even the Sun)
2. *Galata'nın Tembel Martısı* (Galata's Lazy Seagull)

Picture Book

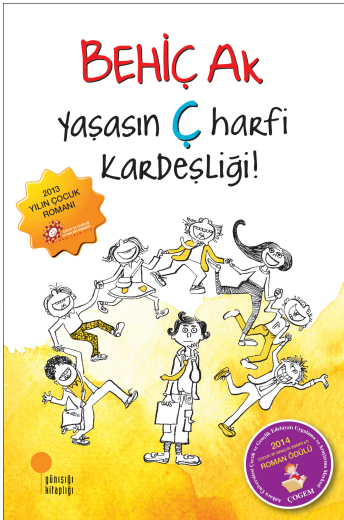
3. *Yüksek Tansiyonlu Çınar Ağacı* (Plane Tree with High Blood Pressure) – Güneşiği Kitaplığı,

Children’s Novels – Güneşiği Kitaplığı, TURKEY

4. *Yaşasın Ç Harfi Kardeşliği* (Hurray for the Brotherhood of Ç!)
5. *Postayla Gelen Deniz Kabuğu* (The Sea Shell that Came by Post)

**English translations provided in the appendix:**

1. *Güneşi Bile Tamir Eden Adam* (The Man Who Repaired Even the Sun) – **Full translation**
2. *Galata'nın Tembel Martısı* (Galata's Lazy Seagull) – **Chapter translations**
3. *Yüksek Tansiyonlu Çınar Ağacı* (The Plane Tree with High Blood Pressure) – **Full translation**
4. *Yaşasın Ç Harfi Kardeşliği* (Hurray for the Brotherhood of Ç!) – **Chapter translations**
5. *Postayla Gelen Deniz Kabuğu* (The Sea Shell that Came by Post) – **Chapter translations, Summary**





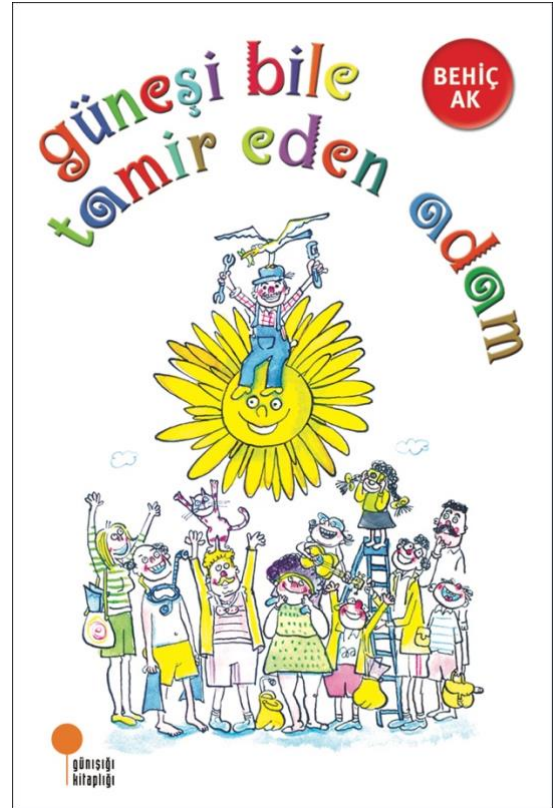
To see the published interview:

<https://gunisigikitaligi.com/haber/birakin-tamir-edilsin-her-sey/>

## Let Everything be Repaired!

Think of a repairman who can fix anything, even broken hearts. Moreover, he does this using the materials at hand and does not ask for any workmanship fee. On top of that, he also tells the history of the item, which adds value to it. Who wouldn't want such a repairman! However, the residents of the island he lives in, want to get rid of him just for a while. Throwing away their old belongings and buying new ones is all they want; obviously they need to renew their lives!

Whether the islanders could get rid of the Repairman Mr. Kadir and their old belongings; whether the Repairman Mr. Kadir won the last bet he made with his assertive and feisty brother, the Butcher Mr. Muammer; the speech of cat Mestan that started a little ridiculously, but ended meaningfully; whether the islanders could not renew their lives; the diary that the children keep for their old belongings; the thoughts of the very knowledgeable Melisa and little Selo on this issue and much more ... All in Behiç Ak's new book, *The Man Who Repairs Even the Sun*.



*The Man Who Repairs Even the Sun* is a humorous story about the consumption frenzy which makes us to forget the real value of what we have. With his elaborate use of Turkish and creative, fascinating narration style, Behiç Ak is the same Behiç Ak we all know. Only this time, he's writing for older sisters and brothers: for primary school 1st, 2nd and 3rd graders! Let's give another good news immediately; *The Man Who Repairs Even the Sun* will not be left alone, new stories will follow. Ak will continue to write for this age group.

***The Man Who Repairs Even the Sun* must have a special importance, right? We know you as the creator of children's picture books, after all ...**

Yes, it is very important to me because the books I made before were for preschoolers or early readers. They were the books that adults and children consume together; this is important because that relationship disappears later on. Parents and child do not come together when the child is able to read the book alone, and the parents prefer not read the book together if they don't have to. These books

have to tell something to the adult as well, since the adults and the children consume these books together. Also, the child should be able to change that story. Because the preschool child is more interested in the details rather than the whole story. With these books, the child reader establishes the first relationship between abstract figures and objects and concepts in the outside world. Thus, the child reaches a level of abstraction. The child wants to open different spaces in that story; he/she wants to be able to name objects or people in the story and wants to establish a connection between them and the outside world. That's why there are always lots of details in my stories.

**After so many beloved picture books, writing for those children who started reading is what kind of a step for you?**

I very much love writing, under all circumstances. I wanted to connect more with the world of those children who can read by themselves.

**Apart from its literary value and story it tells, the relation between text and illustrations in this book is very different than those in your picture books. What kind of a relationship is this?**

In this book, illustrations are more in the secondary place as something that's complementing the text. There are many illustrations in this book as well, but when children start to read by themselves, they also want the illustrations to be pushed to the second plan, because they react like, I'm grown up now. The illustrations in this book are the contents that will affect children in the long term and they are in the background, meaning the child will be interested if only he/she wishes. Because at this age group, the child is able to perceive his/her own dramatic fiction and is capable of relating not only to a single detail of the story, but to the whole. In order to express that integrity to the child, the visuality needs to be pushed a little to the secondary place.

**You worked the side characters just as beautiful as the protagonists. They add richness to the story. In fact, each one of them is a different story!**

There are several intertwined stories here. On one hand, a story about a repairman, on the other hand, a story about people wanting to renew their things ... These two different stories complement each other. In the meantime, there is a bitterness between the repairman and his butcher brother. There is cat Mestan, there are children, there are other stories that children construct within this story ... I wanted to combine all these stories in a simple manner on the same theme. As an idea, there is an attitude behind against the consumption ideology. This book is written also for children to perceive today's world in a different way.

**You are also referring to the fact that relationships and lives may need repairs in time. How did this beautiful idea enter your story?**

Today's world is based on continuous renewal. Nothing is allowed to get old. That's why people always live on the borderline and there is a great tension that comes with it, which also applies to children. We can't consume anything, that's the real problem. In order to consume something, one has to be able to spend time on it. So are human relationships. If you don't spend time on those relationships, you're not using them. There is a generation of unsatisfied, borderline, nervous people. This consumption word has

entered the world of children too much, whereas the world of children is just the opposite. Because children are creatures who have a lot of time, can spend a long time on something, who can have more fun compared to the adults. However, children live in a system that wants to take advantage of their consumption motives by constantly pulling them to this borderline. There is an opinion against this in the book. I wanted to particularly emphasize this in the story.

**I think when the children finish reading this story, they will think about what kind of a history they have with their belongings ...**

The system is built on throwing away before it wears out, to buy a new one. This is also one of the main environmental problems.

**The white goods dealer, the furniture seller, and other dealers of various goods and services... They do not like the fact that repairman Kadir fixes everything and nothing is thrown away. They believe that he's killing the economy so they decide to send him away for holidays and revive the economy during his absence. Still, the book has a happy ending for all ...**

Actually, I tried to explain this: People do not have to renew their belongings to renew themselves. They just need to renew themselves! People think when they change their things, they will renew their lives, but it is not the case. And I tried to make the reader think that being new does not necessarily mean being of good quality. Just the opposite may be valid.

**How is your relationship with your belongings and the old?**

I am conservative in this matter. I love my stuff and don't want to throw them away. I'm not a "new" fan at all. For example, I still use the armchair in my house that was taken as my mother's dowry. It is a very important thing to me; I can't look at that armchair as an old armchair. The important thing for human beings is meaning, things that give meaning to your life should be protected. Otherwise, people jump into a life where they feel very lonely and meaningless. That's why the relationship I build with things in my own life is important. Moreover, I don't like the consumption frenzy. Actually, if something hasn't worn out so badly, I don't feel the necessity to go and buy something new.

**Well, do you want children to get this feeling the most from this book?**

First of all I want them to have fun while reading the story. I want them to get the taste of the story and a taste of literature. All the things I'm telling in the story are traces for them to follow later, if they like. If those traces remain in their lives and minds, of course that's beautiful.

**With your books, you are offering an awareness of our dialogue with the world, people, our lives, and with the living and non-living things in those lives. In this sense, *The Man Who Repairs Even the Sun* has a lot to offer ...**

This is my view of life and naturally it is also reflected in my books. It is very difficult for me to write a war story; I can't manage to write one. And if I write, it will probably be a very funny war story. We have to convey a sense of freedom to children. This is really important. Often what is done in formal education is to rub off children's sense of freedom. It is very important for the child to perceive things

with a sense of freedom. That's why I would like to make books that entertain the child, and that relate to them without damaging their feeling of freedom, without reminding them continuously about the horrible bad aspects of life. For this reason, my point of view is reflected in my books. The child must be freed from "success" in the first place. By grading them, comparing and categorizing them as better or worse than the others, we are pushing them into a system which destroys their and gradually the adults' sense of freedom. And when these children reach puberty, we are brooding on how we raised these grownups from those children. If we force them to be successful by placing them in a wrong education system, wrong human relationships, putting them in a constantly competitive environment, these children are not free. Whereas they should care about themselves, pay no attention to anything beyond their own freedom.

**I wonder how long it took to create this book ...**

For long years, I have not done anything by working hard, but I always do it lazily. Eventually, I may have worked hard, but I do it in a way of spending time rather than working. This is a story that I have written slowly, thinking on it for a long time. So I really don't know its duration. I want the story to write itself. If the author writes everything, then the story can be tasteless. The characters should also be allowed to form themselves, so a waiting period is needed.

**I assume *The Man Who Repaired Even the Sun* will not be the only book you have written for this age group ...**

They will continue as such small story books. Not the same characters but same type of different stories. They will be books that make children to look at life in a different way and to think about daily life in a different manner.

**Your picture books were first published in Japan, before Turkey. You had a nice and continuing dialogue with Japanese children, and it's still going on. Are Turkish children also showering you with letters like Japanese children did?**

No, very interestingly, they write to me but very rare. Many children don't even know that children's books are made by somebody. They don't even know that there is an author and an artist involved; they think children's books are anonymous. Once, I had a very interesting experience. In an elementary school, they assigned a homework project of meeting with the author of one of the books they read, to 1st/2nd graders. The little boy was quite surprised of his homework. He was calling me with his father in order to recover from that shock. What he said on the phone were sentences like: "I have a book, and they say you wrote it! Did you really write it?" He tried to learn the truth from me with big amazement. Afterwards they came to visit me with his father, and the boy still couldn't believe... He kept asking questions like "How come children's books are written by real people like you?" This is a cultural thing, as the individuality of children develops, so does the idea that other individuals can produce something for them.

*(Translator's Note: This situation has changed a lot positively since 2008, when this interview took place. Currently children are more aware of children's authors and publication processes of children's books.*

*Like many other authors, Behiç Ak is also being invited to many gatherings at schools and being contacted by thousands of his young readers.)*

**Apart from this example you gave, there seems to be something sad about being a children's writer. I mean, the kids may be glued to your books right now, but one or the other day in future, they will not remember. For example, I do not remember the books I read during my early childhood.**

When you give birth to a child or start to live with a child one day, that child will make you remember all... Your whole past will come back.

**I hope the good parts come back! This is one thing I always find saddening about children's writers. Although new children, new potential readers are always following the existing ones ...**

What you say is actually quite true. Making children's books is something which involves a kind of disappointment. For example, I once talked to Selçuk Demirel (*Translator's note: Famous Turkish caricature and illustration artist*). He used to write very nice children's books which were published then. He said to me, "I don't make children's books anymore. Because sometimes it feels like it doesn't matter if you do it or not." You really feel like this sometimes. The child puts the book aside one day, totally forgets it and grows up. It's in the nature of this business. That's why there may be little disappointments. There can also be disappointments related with publishers because many publishers do not attach much importance to children's books. Recently, publishing houses who are specialized only in children's books started to appear; there are editors thinking on children's books, talking to the authors, having a publication policy ... These are new things for Turkey. Although it happened out of a coincidence, my first books were published in Japan in 80s, because I couldn't find a publisher in Turkey in those years ... Today there is a gradual improvement in this area.

To see the published article:

<https://gunisigikitapligi.com/haber/mahallenin-martisi-murtaza/>

**A magnificent creator who opens doors and who makes people jump with joy. He is a flawless master. It must be a great pleasure for a publisher to work with him. A miracle-like character from Behiç Ak: Seagull Murteza...**



### **Murteza, the seagull of the neighborhood**

When I picked up the book "Galata's Lazy Seagull" written by Behiç Ak, I looked into my head.

I had to look. My brain kept telling me to stop. "Stop and listen to me!" I listened. Because he was saying things that would never go unnoticed, which put a stupid smile on my face. Was it possible for me to be not happy whenever I read a book of Behiç Ak or see one of his drawings? Behiç Ak is such a magnificent author and illustrator. A magnificent creator who opens doors and who makes people jump with joy. He is a flawless master. I thought it must be an inexpressible happiness for a publisher to work with him. If it is such a great thing to be with him as a reader, to love his books even before reading them, to know how good and unforgettable his drawings are even before you see them ...

The world that Behiç Ak has built for himself is so beautiful that it takes you in without hesitation. He is such a big hearted person with no limits about sharing his talent. He perfectly writes and draws whatever comes to his mind. There are a few details in the book "Vanilla Scented Letters", one of my favorite books written by Sevim Ak and illustrated by Behiç Ak, that I will never forget. Heart patterned trousers, a tap which is opened with flowers, the beauty of the covers grandmother produced from pieces of clothes ...

I looked into my mind for a little while, then I stopped. I was excited to read the book, and a stupid smile was already on my face waiting. Here is the first page: It's raining. A seagull with his back turned to us, with an open umbrella, and we will obviously love him very much soon. My heart was already beating with excitement. First, I met with Mr. Rafet, Emre, Hülya and florist Mr.Oktay, who lives in a junk car. It was such a pleasure to meet them all. Cause I had never met such people before. Seagull Murteza got on the stage later. As I follow the the story, I started to review the illustrations over and over again. Each



and every illustration was a sweetness that was nurturing the story but standing upright on its own, so to speak.

I was fascinated by the adventure. I was excited, I read the book with great curiosity to see how it will end. The birds in the Galata Tower, this seagull going to the bar and drinking, the story of Mr. Oktay. It was such a pleasure to see how all these stories were connected to each other skillfully. I was faced with another book that I cannot forget and whose loveliness I would rarely come across. I started to hear the voices in my head again, bragging about what they said turned out to be true.

Sometimes you cannot break away from the characters you watch, or somehow, you start to imagine what will happen after the movie ends ... For me, this book is not over. The characters are so real that they will continue to live even after when the book is over. They settled inside my mind. They will stop me in a new Behiç Ak book and of course will stop and listen to them. Then I wished every place to be always full of such beautiful voices. It is impossible for me to explain how happy I am. To understand me, leave all your work for a short while and read this book, and of course all the other Behiç Ak books.



To see the published article:

<https://gunisigikitaligi.com/haber/buyuyup-kendi-yollarina-gittikleri-zaman/>

### When They Grow Up and Go Their Own Way...

Blacktown is 50 minutes away from the city center by train. As I usually walk the way, I know that my house is 30 minutes away from the train station by walk. Poet-lawyer Ata Karazincir and his friend Serhat Yıldırım are in Sydney for 6 days. Thanks to Ata, everytime he comes, he brings me all the books and magazines I order, and all what poet Mehmed Arif B (Mehmet Bacaksızlar) sends to me. This is his tenth visit to Australia. He has so many relatives here, that I'm happy he could share some time for me too. I'm sure that he brought figs for me, because he knows I am addicted. I put the things I want to give him in my backpack (giving the list here would be inappropriate) and I set off.

My left knee which I injured during my football years, started to ache again. So, I had to use my right foot to climb the stairs. Moreover my inguinal hernia on the right side didn't allow me to run for the bus. My doctor told me that I am too old for an operation. My son who lives in New York is also a doctor and he didn't like my doctor's style. Hey, doctors! I feel like I am only eighteen, but I am eighty years old! That's the problem. Fortunately, I can still walk. Furthermore, as I don't have a smart phone (internet connection, camera, GPS), there is no risk of stumbling and falling on the street while trying to look at the screen.

Almost everyone in the train has a smart phone, tablet or laptop. It seems like they are not in a train but in an office. There is an Indian style dressed man sitting opposite to me, having a chat with two ladies at almost his age. Travel friendship even for a short distance. He doesn't have an accent. When I listen in, I hear that he is an USA citizen...

### When I look at people around me...

I took my book, Behiç Ak's *The Sea Shell That Came By Post*, out of my bag. The cover illustration said hi to me and we smiled at each other. Sude is a student whose father is a mime artist frequently travelling abroad and whose mother is a lawyer. They are unable to spend time with their daughter as they both are very busy. Out of boredom, Sude asks for a tablet to relieve. In time, Sude begins to spend all her time with her tablet and her parents start to worry about their daughter becoming a computer addict. While reading this part of the story, I glanced at the people around me... Oh my God!

The closest friend of protagonist Sude, computer geek Fikret asks her "What pantomime is?". Her answer is: "You want to see everything. My father makes you feel all you want to see, without showing you. Actually, we can say that, he shows the visible things by making them invisible and silent." There is of course more, but sorry I don't have enough space here to tell.



Her parents are too much bothered about Sude who lives stuck to her tablet. In order to be able to communicate with their daughter, they were almost obliged to enter her computer and call out from there! Isn't it funny? Sude looks around only through her tablet's camera. She runs in a completely different world than her parents. Everything gets more complicated once she gets hooked on a computer game.

I recalled our talks with our family doctor Murat. Before he says anything, he first checks from Google and he builds his talk with what he gets from there. Not his own ideas but Google information are more dominant in his talks. Computers are machines which express an opinion using the pre-loaded information. A machine content with patterns, without any creativity, unable to produce freshness. In my opinion, computers may dull creativity.

I couldn't enjoy the view of Opera Building which reminds me of Bosporus. Because I was thinking about *The Sea Shell That Came By Post*, wondering what will happen next? Although I was together with friends I like, I couldn't stop thinking about it. And the question gained power as I looked around. Because majority of the people I see around are those type of people who look around through their tablets. Wavy sea, hooting ferries, and Aborigines with their didgeridoos... Hey! Have a look around. I am talking to tablet-busy ones! I was so carried away by *The Sea Shell That Came By Post* that I didn't feel the shakes of the train, I didn't hear the opening and closing doors all way long. I finished the book on the way back home, hoping it will not finish.

### **Who did Behiç Ak write for?**

Sude gets hooked on a competition game named Gogoluku (author inspired by the name Google). In a short time she proves herself and finds her place among the top scorers. Being unable to communicate with her daughter, Sude's mother eventually buys a tablet for herself and joins the Gogoluku game with the username, Tarator. In the meantime, the producer company of Gogoluku game offers a job to Sude's mother, as their lawyer, to fight against the hackers. She takes the job and begins to deal with password breakers, hackers and online piracy. The virtual reality glasses distributed by the producer company to the Gogoluku players makes mime artist father very angry. Because those who put on these glasses can continue their virtual life as if their real life. Those who participated in an international pantomime show wearing these glasses perform much better than the real mime artists. Eventually when the mother meets a hacker named Octopus, things get really complicated...

One of the biggest and internationally known Turkish authors, Yaşar Kemal once said: "I just make up things and I write." Behiç Ak does the same too. And he makes up so beautifully. I have been following his daily cartoon strips in Cumhuriyet Newspaper with admiration. Now I became an admirer of his children's books too. When I finished the book, several questions piled in my head. What is the main theme of the text? Could I really recognize the underlying point? Did parents succeed to rejoin with their daughter or did Sude succeed to make her parents to share more time with her with the help of her agreement with Octopus? Hey, parents! Spend time with your kids! If you don't, you regret when they grow up and go their own way! Is this what the book trying to tell? Is there much more I missed or could not recognise? And is this just a children's novel? No way!

### **I Told You!**

Did I tell you before? Fresh figs cost 1-2 dollars each here. And those are not very sweet ones. It's so difficult to grow figs here because of the bats which eat fruits. I can not eat a basket full of figs with cheese here at one go, as I used to do in Aydın. Ata brought me a 1 kg box of dried figs. I was just intending to taste but I ate them all on my way back to Blacktown. Behiç Ak has a unique voice which makes readers to feel that he is a part of their own family. I believe Behiç Ak's modern voice and universal themes will be welcomed by all open-minded families and educators.

*Sydney 2014*

11.05.2019 | Star Newspaper  
Interview by Soner Can

To see the published interview:

<https://gunisigikitapligi.com/haber/cocuk-mizahin-kaynagidir/>

## Children are the source of humor

The book *Yüksek Tansiyonlu Çınar Ağacı* (The Plane Tree with High Blood Pressure) written by Behiç Ak, who is as famous with his beloved children's books as is with his caricatures, is republished 15 years after it is first published in Japan. Behiç Ak says, "Children are the source of humor... Humor and children's literature leads us to be amazed at and curious about everything as if we are seeing them for the first time."

The first children's books of Behiç Ak, who is famous as a cartoonist, theater play writer, art director and documentary film producer, are *Yüksek Tansiyonlu Çınar Ağacı* (The Plane Tree with High Blood Pressure)

and *Gökdelene Giren Bulut* (The Cloud That Came Indoors) were published in Japan. *Yüksek Tansiyonlu Çınar Ağacı* (The Plane Tree with High Blood Pressure) which received Noma Concours Mention Award in 1986, is re-published in Turkey by Günışığı Kitaplığı. Behiç Ak continued to write new award-winning children's books and gathered his cartoons together in his comics books. We talked about humor and children's books with Behiç Ak, who's known for his deep love for cats.

**You're a humorist and a children's books author at the same time. Do you think there is parallelism or oppositeness between children literature and humor?**

Sure, there are. The main purpose of humor is to laugh at rules. In short, questioning life. In order to be able to do this, we need a childish point of view. I can't think of children's books without humor.

**Do you think these two have aspects feeding each other? Especially for you as an author or in general?**

Humor and children's literature leads us to be amazed at and curious about everything as if we are seeing them for the first time. Only when you are writing for children you absolutely believe that you're actually doing something for yourself.





**Are there names you model yourself on from Turkish or world literature who reconciles humor and children’s literature?**

There are names from world literature of course. I recall names like Marcel Ayme, Calvino, Gocsiny. Turkish literature is also very rich in humor. Rifat Ilgaz, Sevim Ak are the first names coming to my mind. There is not a single name I model myself on. I took all of those people who do only what they really want, as a model.

**What about the relation of child with humor?**

The child is already the creator of humor.

**You are also illustrating the books you write. Have you ever experienced the danger of one overshadowing the other?**

I’m able to think sometimes by writing and sometimes by drawing. For me, drawing is a way of thinking, not illustrating a written idea. Illustrations are especially important for preschool books. These books are the intellectual products of a period where letters and visual symbols intervene with each other. The child meets with the concept of a “cat”, how this concept is written, and how it is illustrated, for the first time in these books. So, the child can build a relation between symbols, signs and the real world. He/she can interpret the illustration as an intellectual concept and can visualize the written texts. Actually, I never thought if there is any competition between the text and the illustrations.

**Do you think humor magazines provide any contribution to reading culture?**

Reading humor magazines surely forms a habit. But such habits are not always turning into what we call a reading habit.



To see the published article:

<https://gunisigikitapligi.com/haber/yil-sonu-armagani-behic-aktan/>

## New Year Presents are from Behiç Ak...

Something very interesting happened this year for the first time in the field of Turkish children's literature. Juries of two different prestigious institutions, who are more valuable than another, joined on the same book. *Yaşasın Ç Harfi Kardeşliği!* (Hurray for The Brotherhood of Ç!) written by Behiç Ak and published by Günışığı Kitaplığı is selected as the work deserving the awards given both by ÇOGEM (Ankara University, Children's and Young Adult Literature Research and Application Center) and IBBY- Turkey.

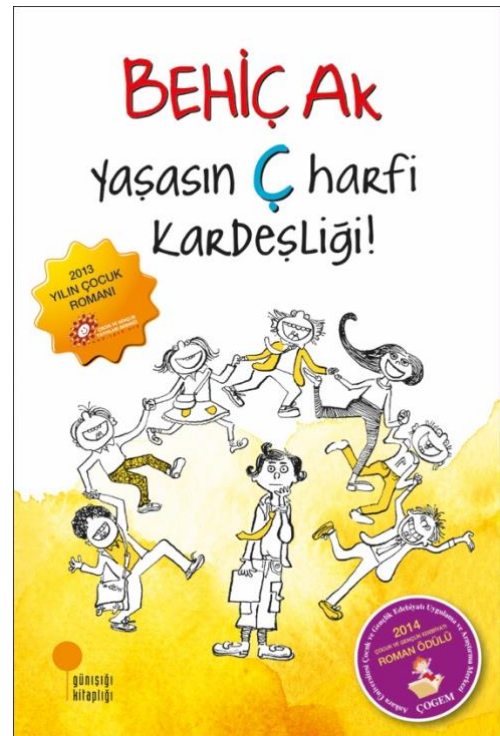
ÇOGEM Jury members were Muzaffer İzgü, Gülten Dayıoğlu, Yalvaç Ural, Adnan Binyazar, Emin Özdemir, Prof. Selahattin Dilidüzgün, Prof. Sedat Sever, and IBBY-Turkey Jury members were Prof. Ali Gültekin, Dr. Necdet Neydim, Sevin Okyay, Zarife Biliz, Rana Alpöz.

Therefore, in my last article of the year, I decided to introduce you the award-winning book *Yaşasın Ç Harfi Kardeşliği!* (Hurray for The Brotherhood of Ç!) and last book *Postayla Gelen Denizkabuğu* (The Seashell that Came by Post) of Behiç Ak, with the intention of helping you with your selection of your new year presents.

**Yaşasın Ç Harfi Kardeşliği! (Hurray for The Brotherhood of Ç!)** is loved very much by 8-12 years old children as I'm holding already the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the book which is first published only last year.

The book strongly criticizes the consumerist society in a fluent and joyful manner with humor, with its interesting characters and noncomplex setup. Main character, 5<sup>th</sup> grader Ali wants to put the photo of his ID on the cover page of his homework. Ali has a father who tries to correct every mistake by writing a note. Mr. Rıza Hoşgörü (Mr. Tolerance). The house was full of small notes like "Turn off the facets tightly", "If you put off the lights, you extend the bulbs' lives". His wife Ayla on the other hand, was kind of a person who never speaks unless she's asked to. Ali's homework was to tell about a subject using interviewing method, and as Ali likes asking questions much more than giving answers, instead of storytelling, filming or photographing techniques he had chosen the interviewing technique. When Mr. Rıza learns through the questions of his son, that his wife uses roof water to water the lime tree, and puts carrots on the garden wall for hungry rabbits; he decides to give his old laptop to his son, for him to be able to ask more questions, so that Mr.

Rıza can learn whatever is taking place at home. However instead of completing his homework faster with the help of his laptop, Ali slows down as he spends too much time in Facebook and Twitter. Fortunately, after last two interviews he would have with his uncle and grandpa, Ali's homework





would be finished. Before he could complete the last two interviews, the ID crisis climbs up, because Ali's last name had become Hoşgörüş in official records. Moreover, a court decision was needed for his last name to be corrected as Hoşgörü again. At this point, Ali announces that he's not willing to give up the extra Ç letter at the end of his last name.

Ali thinks that he's a different person, so it's fine to have also a different last time. His father flares out and teases him asking "Do you need a Ç letter added to your last name by mistake to prove that you are different?" but it was useless. To start with, Ali changes his name in his Facebook page. When this change attracts too much attention, he starts a Facebook Group named "Brotherhood of Ç". His father makes a counter move by putting a note on the shoe cabinet, saying "You cannot increase your IQ by adding an extra letter to your surname". While all these were taking place, the interviews with the uncle and the grandpa were still to be made. Being two opposite characters, it is as if they are created to reflect two completely different points of view to consumption frenzy. While the grandpa was a saving monument, who's getting ready to celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> year of his refrigerator, the uncle was a throwaway champion who doesn't live in the same house for more than one year. The expertise of Mr. Sedat, who describes his profession as "Life-Draining Engineer", was finding new ways to shorten the expected lives of items so that new ones can be sold. Ali's interview with his uncle reveals the fact that he's not only after new items, but also after new friends. Ali starts to feel disappointed. While interviewing with his grandpa, Ali's laptop goes out of order. What happens afterwards shows everyone that relying on pen and paper is a cleverer idea. Unfortunately, however, what happened has happened and Ali's homework was lost. And there was no way of compensating, as all the information was erased.

Will Ali be able to overcome this situation? Will the Brotherhood of Ç continue? Will Ali change his last name? Will Uncle Sedat change his mind about Life-Draining Engineers?

Behiç Ak is a master of creating strange and funny characters. Using these characters, he created a fiction which criticizes the consumerist society. A fiction which is never to be forgotten, which will make his 8-12 years old readers to stop and think on some of their habits and which deserved two awards in one year. What is left to you is to read and to give it as a present to your loved ones.

### **Postayla Gelen Denizkabuğu (The Seashell that Came by Post)**



In his new book published by Günışığı Kitaplığı, Behiç Ak this time puts on his criticism goggles for computer addicted children and for their parents, whom he points out to be a contributor to this addiction. Due to very busy work schedules of her mime artist father and his lawyer mother, Sude hardly finds time to spend with her family. Out of boredom, Sude tries to relieve by spending time on beach running freely, collecting seashells and writing on the beach. The smell of the wind, the sound of the waves and the seagulls, all make Sude very happy, but there are no friends left around to share her joy. Her friends were locked down in their homes, spending all their time on the internet, instead of playing on the beach with her. Eventually, Sude asks her parents to buy her a tablet, as something to mess around during their absence. As Sude starts to spend time in this virtual new world, she feels that she

lives whatever she wants to do, but can't do in the real outside world.

She feels she's freed from the burdens of real life. It was not necessary to read in order to know and to be talented in order to do. It was enough just to say "I know", or "I do". Sude starts to look at everything around her through her tablet's camera and over time it turns into an addiction. On a Sunday they are spending time together, Sude's mother finally realizes the severity of the situation. Her daughter was watching TV by looking at her tablet's screen. The discussion between mother and the daughter amazes the father as well. Even during their discussion Sude was looking at her mother through the screen and insisting that she likes the screen images more than the actual images. The father, on the other hand, tries to explain that humans are not just images but living beings with feelings, made of flesh and blood.

As time goes on, the situation gets worse. It was as if Sude lives her entire life to gain her virtual identity as quick as possible. Real life becomes meaningless, virtual life takes the place of reality. The only meaning of life is reduced to playing the "Gogoluku" game in the virtual world. Meanwhile, lawyer mother Sevda receives a call from Tokuda. This was the company producing those online games which Sude is passionate about. The company wants to benefit from Ms. Sevda's expertise to overcome the information thieves who disrupt their relations with their customers by accessing their company information. Learning the game is "Gogoluku", Ms. Sevda decides to accept the job offer. While Ms. Sevda goes after the information thieves on one hand, she tries to build an on-screen relationship with her daughter with a virtual identity on the other hand, by learning the game. As she gets more involved in the details of online gaming business, she sees how the companies make profit on communication expenses, and how the addicted gamers who are always online increase the companies' earnings. An even worse development was underway. Tokudo company has developed a new type of googles and those who put on these googles start to think that what they are watching is reality.

Will Ms. Sevda be able to find the information thieves? Will she be able to save her daughter from being a computer addict? The seashell that came by post one day would play a key role in solving this puzzle. What was this role? All these questions constitute the main excitement at the heart of the story. And all the answers are hidden in the book. This book, which can be read by all family members, gives important hints to parents. It reminds us that the more time we spend time together with our children in nature, the more we will contribute to inter-family communication, children's imagination and their relationships with their friends.

