

## ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH MYTHOLOGY AND TRADITIONAL VALUES GAINING ECO-AWARENESS IN BUKET UZUNER'S NOVEL SERIES OF *THE ADVENTURES OF MISFIT DEFNE KAMAN*

MİTOLOJİ VE GELENEKSEL DEĞERLER YOLUYLA ÇEVRE BİLİNCİ OLUŞTURMA  
BUKET UZUNER'İN *UYUMSUZ DEFNE KAMAN'IN MACERALARI* ROMAN SERİSİNDE ÇEVRE FARKINDALIĞI KAZANMA

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### ABSTRACT

As ecological awareness gains momentum in these times of climate emergency and uncertainty about future, one cannot expect fiction to turn a blind eye to vital issues such as ozone depletion, biodiversity loss, deforestation, global human population growth, violation of animal welfare, and lack of freshwater resources. Buket Uzuner, a leading contemporary Turkish novelist, prioritises ecological and social problems through the agency of Shamanism (ancient Turkish beliefs) and some traditional values in her book series of *The Adventures of Misfit Defne Kaman in Water* (2012), *Earth* (2015), and *Air* (2018). This article's main focus will be on how Uzuner's novels help readers to explore environmental consciousness through ancient Turkish value-system such as Shamanism or *Kutadgu Bilig* (The Wisdom which brings Happiness), an 11th century work. Whether or not making use of mythological/traditional values in the face of ecological awareness in a culture where its modernising efforts still continue will also be investigated as a final discussion.

**Keywords:** environmental consciousness, mythology, traditional values, Buket Uzuner

### ÖZET

İçinde yaşadığımız iklim değişikliği ve geleceğe dair belirsizliğin olduğu bir dönemde ekolojik farkındalık arttıkça, kimse kurmacanın ozon tabakasının incelenmesi, biyolojik çeşitlilik kaybı, ormansızlaşma, küresel insan nüfusu artışı, hayvan yaşamının ihlali ve tatlı su kaynaklarının tükenmesi gibi hayati sorunlara göz yummasını bekleyemez. Önde gelen çağdaş Türk romancılarından Buket Uzuner, *Uyumsuz Defne Kaman'ın Maceraları* kitap serisi *Su* (2012), *Toprak* (2015) ve *Hava* (2018)'da kadim Türk inancı olan Şamanizm yoluyla ekolojik ve sosyal meseleleri gündeme getirmektedir. Bu makalenin ana odağı Uzuner'in romanlarının kadim Türk-değer sistemi örneklerinden Şamanizm veya 11. yüzyılda yazılan *Kutadgu Bilig* (Bilgelik Bilgisi) vasıtasıyla okuyucunun çevre bilinci kazanmasına nasıl yardımcı olduğu olacaktır.

Modernleşme çabalarının halen devam ettiği bir kültürde, ekolojik farkındalık karşısında mitolojik / geleneksel değerlerden yararlanılıp yararlanılmayacağı da nihai tartışma olarak incelenecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** çevre bilinci, mitoloji, geleneksel değerler, Buket Uzuner

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Even though environmental issues and sensivity can be found in genres such as pastoral, science fiction, magical realism to a certain degree and fragmentally, ecofiction was not established as a distinctive genre until the 1970s (Dwyer 9). As more nature-oriented themes and issues have been explored or become central in literature, ecofiction has gained ground and grown into a major part of fiction in recent decades. Putting the physical environment at the center of the plot, investigating the complex relationships between the text and the ecosphere, and exploring the representations of human and non-human interactions have become a primary concern of ecofiction (Glotfelty and Fromm xviii).

Buket Uzuner, a leading contemporary Turkish author, explores ecological themes through ancient Turkish belief system of Shamanism, *Kutadgu Bilig* (The Wisdom which brings Happiness), an 11th century work written by Yusuf Has Hacib, and mythological/traditional values in her book series of *The Adventures of Misfit Defne Kaman in Su (Water)* (2012), *Toprak (Earth)* (2015), and *Hava (Air)* (2018).<sup>1</sup> I will argue that Uzuner's book series of *The Adventures of Misfit Defne Kaman* suggests an alternative way of building environmental consciousness through mythology and traditional values in a culture where its modernising efforts still continue.

## 2. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS

What environmental consciousness means or what elements it involves is crucial before investigating it in fictional works. I will suggest a three-phase consciousness building process for ecologically responsible behaviour. The first stage of this consciousness building is composed of "recognition". The sheer awareness of our surrounding and its existence have been addressed by Gairn as follows: "The recognition that humans are part of the world of nature affecting and affected by it" (2). This recognition is based on the understanding that we are not superior to nature and its entities but an integral and dependent part of it.

The second stage of consciousness building necessitates "love and respect" for nature. The sole awareness of our environment and humans' position as a subordinate should be followed by what Nayar expresses as "appreciating Nature and its life forms" (3). The reverence towards nature is manifested for species not our own and the love is formed for the charms and glories of all natural things around us.

The third and final stage of consciousness building for environment is more elaborative than the others. It includes the idea that as co-dependent agencies, humans' existence on Earth should not be based on a simple utilitarianism which undermines non-human agencies<sup>2</sup>. As Smouts suggests, even human exploitation "should be sustainable, capable of being continued from generation to generation without diminishing the delightfulness of the natural world" (218). In addition to garnering eco-responsibility, this stage requires a willingness to act to respond to any type of environmental degradation.

The three phases of "recognition, love and respect, and developing moral obligation for sustainability and taking action" are what constitute to be environmentally conscious behaviour. In the books series of *The Adventures of Misfit Defne Kaman* by Uzuner, how environmental consciousness is addressed and illustrated through mythology and traditional values will be central in this study.

<sup>1</sup> From now on, English name of the novels will be used.

<sup>2</sup> actors other than human beings

### 3. WATER

*Water*, the first book of the series of *The Adventures of Misfit Defne Kama*, was published in 2012. The journalist Defne Kaman, the main character of the novel, disappears after she boards an Istanbul ferryboat one summer evening. The police officer Ümit and the secondhand bookstore owner Semahat struggle to find the missing Defne with the help of codes and symbols of ancient Turkish belief system and traditions. The novel makes use of the Shaman tradition<sup>3</sup>, refers to ancient books such as *Kutadgu Bilig* and *Epic of Manas*, presents folk tales embedded in Turkish mythology. While placing the plot of the novel into an ancient values of codes, symbols and stories, the author hopes to draw the attention of the reader to environmental themes and issues and invites them to see the planet through the lenses of ecological awareness.

As the name of the novel suggests, *Water* prioritises indispensable component of nature and essential part of life in general: water. In addition to water, the book highlights various non-human ecological elements on our planet. One of the pivotal non-human agencies in the narration is the “hurt dolphin” and its rescue process by numerous people. Apart from the fact that dolphins are mammals that can live in “water”, they are described as “strong beings with sophisticated emotions” and “animals with fragile hearts” (195). They are also depicted as “sacred animals which can save lives of people” (318).<sup>4</sup>

The “hurt dolphin” at the Kadıköy Pier plays a significant role in solving the mysteries of the novel. The missing of Defne Kaman and the discovery of a hurt dolphin at the pier take place simultaneously. The whole plot circles around these two important events. At the end of the novel, it is revealed that the main character Defne Kaman is identified with the hurt dolphin and the perpetrator of the horrible acts is actually a character called Savaş Neşeli who behaves violently towards his wife and his family.

The hurt dolphin in the novel is epitomised as the “love and respect for all living beings” and its significance dates back to ancient times where prophets were rescued by dolphins miraculously or Turkish folk poets and sufi mystics such as “Yunus Emre” gets his name from. As a 13th century born poet who has immensely influenced Turkish culture, Yunus Emre’s name has been associated with love and tolerance for all living creatures. Keeping this feature of the poet in mind, Uzuner points out the inseparable bond between developing “love and respect” for all and forming a sensitivity towards nature and literature. To illustrate, Defne Kaman writes an article in her newspaper titled “Those who do not like dolphins cannot understand Yunus Emre” (196). In this article, she raises her concern about the brutal mass killings of dolphins in Japan’s coastal towns every year.

The hurt dolphin is recovered and Defne Kaman is rescued at the end of the novel. The co-dependency of human and non-human agencies is underlined and manifested as the sole way of building a sustainable future for the planet. This bio-centric attitude is felt in scenes where Semahat and the hurt dolphin experience an intimacy which will lead to the sudden recovery of the dolphin: “The human-dolphin embrace which no one would like to disrupt lasted about half an hour. Eventually, the dolphin cried cheerfully and moved its body” (197).

Another feature related to water is Defne Kaman’s “water journal” in which readers can find passages about the significance of “water” in life with references to ancient Turkish traditions and beliefs. The irreplaceable and ubiquitous nature of water is emphasized through ancient Turkish mythological characters such as Dedem Korkut and Umay Nine. Besides, “water” is presented as the “raison d’etre” of our living/remaining on the planet:

“Water has seen the face of God,” said Dedem Korkut. Water has become a mirror. Water is pure, Water is blessing. There wa no blessing before Water. And there will be no blessing after the Water.

<sup>3</sup> A system of religious practice which is associated with indigenous and tribal societies

<sup>4</sup> All translations from Turkish are my own from now on.

Water is the most transparent line which separates good from evil. “Water knows no death!” uttered Dedem Korkut. Water washes and cleans evil. “Seven out of ten particles in humans and the universe is composed of water.”said Ninem Umay. We are created out of Water, Water is our essence. (92)

“Beech Tree”, a sacred type of tree in ancient Turkish traditions, resonates with Uzuner’s text. “Beech tree is beautiful, it brings luck and our voice of thousands of years” says Umay Bayülgen, the grandmother of Defne Kaman in the novel (210). According to the Turkish mythology, Tengri Ülgen and his wife Umay Ene have a fight in the skies, and a result of this dispute, lightning flashes appear in the sky. The angry Ülgen starts throwing flashes on the ground and when they hit the beech tree, the common people collect a piece of the broken parts of the tree in order to protect themselves against the evil energy (210). It is claimed in the text that this ancient tradition still lives in some Anatolian villages, indicating the idea that nature has a sacred place in the minds of the Turkish people and beech tree is presented as an archetype of this respectful tradition towards nature (210-11).

The figure of “Hızır/Hıdır” who has great wisdom or mystic knowledge in ancient Turkish and Middle Eastern mythologies is presented as an entity who can turn into human or non-human forms to help people. The two-way transformation of forms supports the posthuman idea that human and non-human agencies have no precedence over one another and they are equal parts of ecology on Earth. In addition to this non-anthropocentric view, the “Hızır” figure is associated with water which as an object takes the shape of the container in which it is kept (201-202).

Another powerful component of the narration is the use of codes and numbers selected from *Kutadgu Bilig* (The Wisdom which brings Happiness), an 11th century work written by Yusuf Has Hacib<sup>5</sup>. The missing Defne Kaman is found through the use of these codes and numbers and they contribute to the novel as elements of mystery, suspense and adventure. These codes are provided by Defne Kaman and the police officer Ümit Kaman and the second hand bookstore owner Semahat try to figure out what they mean to solve the mysterious missing of the main character. The codes are written on a piece of paper such as “C:386-6515, B:28-211, B: 28-212” and later it is discovered that these codes are taken from *Kutadgu Bilig*, which is seen as the book of wisdom leading to happiness.

When the codes are deciphered, Ümit and Semahat are surprised to find that the lines address the police officer Ümit (literally means “hope” in English) directly: “Oh, my hope; you are my only hope / Oh, my hope, I will never give up on you” (129). The following lines give a hint regarding where to find the missing Defne Kaman: “The heart of the human is like a bottomless sea / The knowledge is likened to a pearl lying in the deep”, “Unless the pearl is taken out from the sea / The pearl and the pebble are treated the same way there” (120). The reason of her missing is revealed in the following line: “This time it is my own fault / How come I have gave my secret to another person” (120). From the deciphering of the codes and numbers, the reader finds out that Defne Kaman is hiding under water and she is hurt just like the dolphin at the Kadıköy Pier. The human-animal association and the connection between human/non-human entities and the environment are once again brought to the forefront in the narration.

Another illustration of the use of ancient traditions for the sake of raising environmental consciousness is incorporating folk tales into the narration. One example mentions an old Turk who has to cut down a tree in order to protect his family from cold. The man is depicted as a figure who utilises a tree while making sure that it will grow back or can be replaced with other things: “The man first apologizes to the tree. He promises not to cut down more than he needs, and to plant the seeds of the tree in the same soil, and finally he prays to the soul of the tree and the powers which have created it” (36).

<sup>5</sup> an 11th-century Central Asian Turkic poet, statesman, theologian and philosopher

Another related folk tail is about another ancient Turk who has to hunt an animal to feed his family and himself. Before killing the animal, he apologizes while looking at its eyes and promises not to kill more than he needs and to give some of the parts to other animals around. This moderate and considerate approach to the environment finalises with prays and dance to the powers of nature: “After feeding themselves and getting warm, these children, women and men dance together around a fire by playing a drum and pray to the heavens, the moon, the sun, water, air, earth, and fire” (37). By reminding the reader how ancient people were in harmony with nature and all non-human entities used to be perceived not as inferior but equals, the author juxtaposes this respectful approach to nature with today’s greedy and insatiable attitude and consumer society. In chapter four titled “No More Hes!”<sup>6</sup>, she criticizes the escalating number of hydroelectric power plants built across the country. In other words, the third stage of conscious building is materialised with this up-to-date development.

#### 4. EARTH

*Earth*, the second book of the series of *The Adventures of Misfit Defne Kama*, was published in 2015. The story is set in Çorum, a central Anatolian city, where the main character Defne Kaman is taken hostage by historical artifacts smugglers. Besides Defne Kaman, two more characters are lost in the city. The governor, the chief of police, an archaeologist, the second hand shop owner Semahat, the police officer Ümit Karan, Defne’s grandmother Umay Bayülgen and many more struggle to find the the mysterious missing of these people in such a small city while tracing the smugglers who desire to steal historical artifacts from the national museum. The novel makes use of the Shaman tradition, refers to ancient books such as *Kutadgu Bilig* and *Tabiatname* while presenting folk tales rooted in Turkish mythology. The codes and symbols from *Kutadgu Bilig*, wisdom words and advice from “The Earth Journal”, mythological figures/objects such as “Erlık Han”, “deer”, “Yada stone” become the focal point of the novel.

As the name of the novel suggests, the importance of “earth” for ecosystem is emphasized with stories. The “dolphin” in the *Water* is replaced with a “deer” in this book. “Erlık Han”, a figure from Turkish mythology, appears in relation to the central motif of “earth”. The codes and numbers from *Kutadgu Bilig* continue to help those who are missing in the city. Last but not least, “The Earth Journal” reminds the reader of how valuable it is to safeguard the earth we live on and its inhabitants.

The sacred animal of the narration is chosen as “the deer” which plays a central role in the Shaman traditions of the Turks. Korkut Bayülgen, the grandfather of Defne, describes it as follows: “The deer is a blessing of God. Ancients Turks used to care more about the deer than the wolf and the lion... Ancient Turks could both survive thanks to the deer, and they could integrate it with their legends, folk tales, songs and poetry” (114-15). As in the example of “the dolphin” in the previous novel, “the deer” is presented as a sacred animal. It is reminded to the reader that the setting of the novel, Çorum, used to be a heaven for the deer, whereas it only hosts more or less a hundred now.

“The deer” in the novel is epitomised as the “love and respect for all living beings” and the rescue of the missing people, especially Defne Kaman, is associated with the appearance of a wild and talismanic deer in the middle of the city. The ancient belief that an animal can be a person in disguise is vocalised by Umay Bayülgen, Defne’s grandmother. The intimacy between Umay Bayülgen and the deer, her affection towards the deer and the mysterious communication between them (as she is a Shaman and she performs shamanistic rituals) brings forwards the issue that the deer represents the existence of Defne Yaman and if there is any harm to the animal, it will be disastrous for the missing Defne. Through a mystic connection between a human being and an animal, the author stresses the possibility and significance of cohabitation on earth.

<sup>6</sup> HES is the abbreviation of hydroelectric power plants in Turkish.

Another feature related to earth is Defne Kaman's "earth journal" in which readers can find passages about the significance of "earth" in life with references to ancient Turkish traditions and beliefs. Being a similar version of "the water journal", "the earth journal" contains precious wisdom words about the importance of the earth in our lives. It also gives the list of all endemic plants and seeds of the Anatolian region. The central role of the "earth" or "soil" for Earth-entities<sup>7</sup> is presented with a poetic depiction:

In the beginning there was earth. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. We are the renters of earth who cannot pay their dues. Earth is mother. It is birth. Earth is the womb of the planet. It is the home and mother of water. It is the land, the world. It is base and ground. Earth is seed, blessing and prosperity. It protects and preserves. Earth is life, it is vitality. It means field, root, sprout, tree and forest... (132)

While portraying the fundamental role of the earth for ecosphere, the author attributes humanistic features to the earth rather than describing it as an independent entity: "Earth is patient. It waits. It disappears when it gets offended. It commits suicide when it gets offended..." (135-36). Furthermore, forces of nature are illustrated as vengeful in the face of injustice of humans: "If the greedy person who has no respect for food and tree disregards nature, the earth takes all the things back from humans, which is also called: The flood!" (135).

In the thirtieth chapter titled "Thinking Like a Mountain", a line taken from an article written by Aldo Leopold, the reader is able to read more from the earth journal (Leopold 2-5). In this part of the journal, the author puts an emphasis on the co-dependence of human and non-human lives. The mutual respect and responsibility between species and the rights of non-human entities are underlined. The concept of "the ethics of the earth" is introduced and all people are invited to recognise this ethics and act accordingly. The salvation and emancipation of humans cannot be considered independent from the salvation and emancipation of the earth/nature. According to the author, the solution to the sufferings of the earth is "to think like a mountain", which means thinking objectively and fair and developing a non-discriminatory ethical system (367-68).

The use of codes and numbers selected from *Kutadgu Bilig* (The Wisdom which brings Happiness) takes place in tracing the missing Defne Kaman once again. The codes are found in the palms of the wounded Karaca, the son of the tourist guide Kemal Yörüklü. The codes describe a deer and makes a comparison between happiness and a shy deer: "Imagine happiness as a shy deer / If she ever comes, hold it tightly, tie its feet" (388).

The novel also refers to *Tabiatname* (The Nature Book), a 14th century healthy life and healing herbs guide which was published under the pseudonym of "Tutmacı" and the author exemplifies the respectful relationship between ancient Turks and nature by making references to such works (87-88). A similar reference can be found in the example of the pray to nature in the khakas language, an ancient Turkic language. In this pray, Umay Bayülgen, the grandmother, prays to the forces of nature to help them find Defne Kaman (278-280).

Another crucial component of the narration is the portrayal of "Erlik Han", a character in Turkish mythology, an equivalent of Hades in Greek mythology. Erlik Han is illustrated as the master of the underworld and Kemal Yörüklü, the tourist guide, meets him in a magical scene. He is described as a five-meters long, black snake with blood filled eye sockets and a beard. They have a conversation regarding all the creatures living above and under the world and Erlik Han preaches about the equity of all living things:

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<sup>7</sup> This is a phrase Rosi Braidotti uses in her article titled "We May Be in This Together..." which means all living and non-living organisms on Earth (27).

I am Erlik Han and I am responsible for all the creatures of the underworld and the dead of the Middle Earth since the universe was created. In our universe, there is no difference in religion, race and/or gender. All Middle Earth creatures are equal. Those who have committed the crimes of misdoing, theft and evil are separated from the others!" (377-78)

This fantastical scene with Erlik Han finalises with Kemal's returning to the world as a result of the consent of the giant snake. Kemal is provided a "Yada stone", a sacred gift from Erlik Han, to remind him of the underworld, the conversations they have had and the power to help find Defne Kaman. The speech and attitude of Erlik Han towards Kemal becomes a clear embodiment of "love, respect and equity" principle of environmental consciousness.

## 5. AIR

*Air*, the third book of the series of *The Adventures of Misfit Defne Kaman*, was published in 2018. The story is set in Kayseri and Nevşehir, two central Anatolian cities. The novel begins with an opening scene including Defne Kaman, her family and close friends in Kayseri where the main character needs to appear in court for her articles about nuclear power plants and their harm for nature. The lawsuit takes place in this city because of security reasons according to the officials. On the trial day, Defne disappears and is said to be seen in a hot air balloon in Cappadocia. Her family and friends search for her but they fail to find her. The story ends with the missing main character in a mysterious way. The book mainly focuses on issues such as nuclear energy, renewable energy sources, veganism, and the importance of keeping the atmosphere clean in general. The codes and symbols from *Kutadgu Bilig*, wisdom words and advice from "The Air Journal", mythological figures/objects such as "the eagle", the close connection between the Shaman tradition and using music for healing become the central point of the novel.

As the name of the novel suggests, the significant role of "the air" is brought to the forefront in the story and the events revolve around it. As each central topic of the book is represented with an animal, "the eagle" becomes the dominant figure whose root can be found in ancient Turkish belief. This sacred animal is presented as the symbol of liberty and justice according to the ancient Shaman tradition and it is believed that all shamans are brought to the world by eagles (30). From the scene where Defne and the eagle encounter for the first time in her dream to the last scene where Defne disappears mysteriously, "the eagle" is described with strong and beautiful features.

The eagle Defne meets is also illustrated with fantastical elements. For instance, the eagle has iron wings, just as the eagles in Turkish mythology. It is defined as the "protector of the pioneer, the sign of our root in the sky, the essence of ourselves..." (192). In this dream-like scene, the eagle takes Defne with him and flies into the sky. Furthermore, the connection between "uçmah"<sup>8</sup> (flying) and the heavens (cennet) is explained according to the Turkish traditions. The ancient belief that "a soul" can fly to the heavens under the guise of a bird is also given with relation to this context.

No, no, Defne didn't want to die yet. Nor did she want to go to heaven. She wanted to wake up and go back to the Middle Earth. Despite all the troubles, life was beautiful and she still loved the paradise on earth. However, the eagle had no intention to leave her, and just at that moment, they flew into a giant cloud, everything became all white. (194)

It turns out that Umay Bayülgen, the grandmother, has seen the same dream with Defne. It is claimed that it is a rare case that two shamans see the same dream. Umay Nine interprets the eagle in her dream as follows: "Seeing an eagle in dream means justice, power, victory, and luck" (203). The "love and respect" principle of the conscious building process for environment becomes

<sup>8</sup> heaven in Turk and Altaic mythology

tangible in the image and story of “the eagle”. Umay Bayülgen’s final words at the end of the book regarding the appearance of the eagle and how people should be sensitive towards all creatures on the planet resonate with the environmental conscious formation:

My dearest Defne won’t come back. You should all go home now. Go to your homeland. Never forget that this planet is your home! Look after your home. Protect it. Protect your earth, water, trees, and air. No matter where you live, where you are from, never bow down to betrayers and sinisters. Hold your head high, never lose your hope, and fight for your rights! Hold on to yourselves, fight back, and act with solidarity! (322)

Even though there are people who see Defne flying up in an hot air balloon with some tourists in Cappadocia, no one is able to find her when the balloon lands. At the end of the novel, people witness an eagle flying circles above them. The eagle comes down, taps the glass of the hot air balloon guide’s car three times, screams three times and then flies up in the sky and revolves above him three times. These fantastical scenes imply that justice and liberty are two essential traits we have to preserve and fight for. For the justice to take place, we have to strive and make progress.

Apart from the mythological eagle character and its ecological implications, “the Air Journal” makes a significant contribution to the conscious building process throughout the novel. As in “Water and Earth” journals in the previous books, the air we breath and its role in the ecosphere for all Earth-entities are underlined and illustrated. The Air Journal begins as follows: “In the beginning there was air under the globe. There was just air. Air has become breath and soul for the trees, birds, mountains and stones...”(247). The role of clean air is explained in the following passages while describing the connection between polluted air and the diseases. Furthermore, the escalating magnitude of the human impact on air is elaborated and readers are invited to take serious action about it. The human figure who distorts the nature balance is defined as “foolish” and human pride or hubris and greed are presented as the potential culprits of all troubles (252-53).

“The Air Journal” also becomes the source of *Kutadgu Bilig* codes and number which will provide clues about the disappearance of Defne Kaman. The codes written in the journal by Defne recently describes the a black bird, obviously the eagle, and preaches people to act in the face of injustice and pessimism.

Veganism/vegetarianism, the importance of decreasing the amount of animal protein in our diet; the connection between musical therapy and the shaman tradition, the legacy of a Seljuk princess – Gevher Nesibi<sup>9</sup> – and her belief in healing patients with music and water, the disastrous effects of nuclear power plants for the planet, the prevalence of genetically modified food are some of the other issues which help to build environmental consciousness for the reader.

## 6. DISCUSSION

The first systematic and decisive modernisation efforts which began with the Tanzimat Reform Era in 1839 under the Ottoman rule was consolidated and became widespread during the first two decades of the foundation of the Turkish Republic. Various reforms ranging from the adopting the Latin alphabet to social and legal reforms were practised and established traditional institutions were abolished (Landau 57). Even though the pace and scope of the reforms slowed down, steps for being a modern and democratic country were taken as in the example of multi-party system which took place in 1945.

While Turkey has made great progress in its modernising efforts and westernisation of its institutions over the decades, its modernity project is still incomplete (Kahraman 28-29). On the other hand, some scholars believe that countries like Turkey go through a non-western modernity

<sup>9</sup> An early 13th century princess of the Sultanate Rum, the daughter of Kilij Arslan II and sister of Kaykhusraw I.

process as modernity is not a monolithic phenomenon (Göle 162). Whether it is an ongoing process or a different type of modernisation, it is evident that Turkey experiences a blending cultural atmosphere of both modernity and traditional values. In other words, apart from modern/contemporary practices in social and daily lives, conventional practices and values still play a major role in forming most people's mindset. Therefore, this blending can be considered 'harmony' or 'cacophony' depending on the situation or the cultural context we refer to.

In a cultural atmosphere where tradition and modernity live side by side, it is a wisely act to engage people's sensitivity to environmental issues by triggering the impact of embedded ancient values in their culture. Reviving and reminding figures and voices from their past, enabling them to make new connections with present, eliciting awareness for current issues leave a more visible and impactful output. Buket Uzuner's the book series of *The Adventures of Misfit Defne Kaman in Water, Earth and Air* are the first example of ecofiction which prioritises environmental issues and aims to build eco-consciousness through mythology and traditional values.

The concerns over the increase of global environmental degradation and its hazardous impact on both human and non-human agencies are meshed with folk tales, mythological stories, and fantastical scenes and figures to engage the reader into a "nature-oriented" narration and create a bond between the critical issues and the surrealist content of the novel. The animal symbols such as the dolphin, the deer, and the eagle chosen from the Turkish ancient belief system do not only serve as imaginary figures to create pleasure or delight for the reader, but they also enable the reader to make connections with the ecological issues we are experiencing today. Through these animals and many more in the narration, an environmental subtext is formed and the author promotes notions of non-anthropocentrism<sup>10</sup>. In all three books, the subordinate position of non-human agencies is refused and codependency of all earth entities is recommended.

Instead of creating a story set in the future or constructing a totally imaginary world, Uzuner prefers to use the contemporary Turkish society and cities as a setting while adding fantastical elements and traditional values to the narration (Cengiz 3).The worries about human mistreatment of the planet along with other social issues such as the abuse of women's rights are successfully inserted into a world of myths and tales. To illustrate, the importance of the preservation of the earth/land is associated with the introduction of *Erlık Han*, the master of the underworld and the reader is exposed to a conversation between the mythological character and a modern-day character. These types of encounters create a 'teach and delight' effect in the narration.

In the book series of *The Adventures of Misfit Defne Kaman in Water, Earth and Air*, Uzuner manages to raise ecological awareness by adopting a different approach. Three essential elements of conscious building – recognition, love and respect, developing moral obligation for sustainability and taking action – are all present with various examples. Recognition is provided with physical settings and concrete ecological issues while "love and respect" resonates with symbol animals from mythology or traditional stories. Finally, the last element of forming eco-responsibility and taking action is manifested in the examples of Defne Kaman and her circles' struggles and adventures in order to bring harmony and justice to all earth-entities.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In an age of growing interest in environmental fiction which brings critical and topical issues to the forefront for the public, Buket Uzuner's book series of *The Adventures of Misfit Defne Kaman in Water, Earth and Air* introduce a different approach of ecological conscious building by means of mythology and traditional values. In order to garner the reader's attention to environmental degradation and human-made disasters as a result of greedy and irresponsible human interference, the author makes use of ancient stories and figures along with fantastical elements. The problems in

<sup>10</sup> granting moral standing to non-human organisms such as animals, plants, and landscapes

relation to human and non-human interactions are questioned and offered new insight with the help of symbol animals. The anthropocentric idea which preaches the centrality and dominance of humans over non-human agencies is rejected based on the examples of ancient tales and values. The idea which considers human as the master of nature is ridiculed with Defne Kaman's journals and Umay Bayülgen's speeches. The solution to the problematic human-non-human relation is the mindset that humans should see themselves as the integral part of the ecosphere, sharing the same rights and privileges with non-human agencies. A co-dependence or inter-dependence is suggested for the current predicament and a strict hierarchy among all living creatures is dismissed.

For the Turkish society whose attempts to modernise itself still continue along with the already established traditional values, Uzuner's approach of blending the ancient and the contemporary to raise ecological awareness and garner the reader's attention to environmental and other social issues seems a unique way of ecofiction in the context of Turkish literature. As the literature and ecological issues have been gaining more and more momentum worldwide in the last decades, Uzuner's attempt to establish eco-narratives and her goal to transform the way we think about human- non-human relations referring to ancient tales and myths pave the way for building environmental consciousness among readers. She not only contributes to the ecological awareness for public with environmental subtexts, but she also helps to remind and revive the ancient images of human-non-human harmony and interdependence. With the books series of *The Adventures of Misfit Defne Kaman in Water, Earth and Air*, Uzuner illustrates an example of consciousness building process of recognition, love and respect, developing moral obligation for sustainability and taking action.

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