



AVIAN SYMBOLISM AND CULTURAL MEMORY: EXPLORING BIODIVERSITY AND URBANIZATION IN TURKISH AND AMERICAN LITERATURE

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Abstract

This article aims to examine one of the key principles of environmental philosophy, the direct relationship between cultural memory and biodiversity, in the context of three literary works selected from Turkish and American literature. These works trace a process of change in cultural texture due to rapid urbanization and population growth, as well as social transformations experienced just before and after rapid industrialization periods. Another common point is that all three of them deal with different aspects of bird hunting. Bird symbolism has been used effectively to highlight the contrast between rural and urban cultures. In addition to these symbolic relationships based on the natural characteristics of the birds, these texts use different aspects of avian life to interpret multiple layers of meaning, enriched by intercultural and intracultural references provided by history and tradition. It should be underlined that these fictional narratives, which sometimes use the natural environment for allegorical purposes, do not have didactic qualities. These ecocentric texts use birds not only in their traditional symbolic meaning, but also, either as a character or a theme, as real beings. By establishing a direct relationship between urbanization and reduction of biodiversity, inseparable role of birds in the cycles of nature, of which human beings are also a part, is emphasized. Finally, in this study, besides their cultural and historical importance, contribution of birds to the sustainability of biodiversity is discussed through the following literary works: Two of them, 'The Last Birds' and 'The Birds Have Also Gone', compare the value judgments and lifestyles of Istanbul's pre-industrial urban era with the post-industrial situation. The last one, 'A White Heron', focuses on the relationship between rural life experiences and environmental awareness. This comparison leads to the conclusion that industrial urban life poses a significant obstacle to appreciating the intrinsic value of nature.

Keywords: Sait Faik, Yaşar Kemal, Sarah Orne Jewett, Biodiversity, Avian Life

KUŞ SEMBOLİZMİ VE KÜLTÜREL HAFIZA: TÜRK VE AMERİKAN EDEBİYATINDA BİYOÇEŞİTLİLİK VE KENTLEŞMENİN İNCELENMESİ

Öz

Bu makale kültürel hafıza ile biyoçeşitlilik arasında doğrudan bir ilişki olduğu yönündeki çevreci ilkenin, Türk ve Amerikan edebiyatından seçme üç edebi eserin bağlamında incelenmesini amaçlamaktadır. Bu eserlerde hızlı sanayileşme süreçlerinin hemen öncesi ve sonrasında yaşanan toplumsal dönüşümlerin yanında kentleşme ve hızlı nüfus artışı ile değişen kültürel dokunun izleri takip edilebilir. Bu eserler arasındaki bir diğer ortak nokta ise her üçünün de farklı yönleriyle kuş avcılığını konu etmeleridir. Kuş sembolizmi kırsal ile kent kültürü arasındaki karşıtlığı vurgulamak için etkili bir şekilde kullanılmıştır. Kuşların doğal özelliklerine dayanan bu sembolik ilişkilere ek olarak, bu metinler, tarihin ve geleneklerin sağladığı kültürlerarası referanslarla zenginleştirilmiş çok

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sayıda anlam katmanını yorumlamak için kuş yaşamının farklı yönlerini kullanır. Doğal çevreyi zaman zaman alegorik amaçlarla kullanan bu kurmaca anlatıların didaktik bir nitelik taşımadıklarının altı çizilmelidir. Bu ekomerkezci metinler, kuşları yalnızca geleneksel simgesel anlamlarıyla değil, aynı zamanda bir karakter ya da tema olarak, gerçek varlıklar olarak da kullanırlar. Kentleşme ile biyolojik çeşitliliğin azalması arasında doğrudan bir ilişki kurarak, insanın da bir parçası olduğu doğal döngüde kuşların ayrılmaz rolü vurgulanmaktadır. Son olarak bu çalışmada, kültürel ve tarihsel önemlerinin yanında, ekosistemin çok önemli bir parçası olan kuşların hayranlık uyandıran ve koruma altında olması gereken sanat eserleri olarak görülebilmelerinin biyoçeşitliliğin sürdürülebilirliğine katkısı yine söz konusu şu eserler üzerinden tartışılmaktadır: Bunlardan ikisi, 'Son Kuşlar' ve Kuşlar da Gitti, birlikte ele alınarak, İstanbul'un sanayileşme öncesi kent yaşamının değer yargıları ve yaşam biçimleri ile hızlı kentleşme sonrası durumu karşılaştırıyor. Sonuncusu olan 'Beyaz Balıkçı' ise kırsal yaşam deneyimi ile çevre bilinci arasındaki ilişki üzerinde durmaktadır. Bu kıyaslama sonucunda endüstriyel kent yaşamının, doğanın içsel değerinin bilenebilmesi önünde önemli ölçüde engel oluşturduğuna ulaşılr.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sait Faik, Yaşar Kemal, Sarah Orne Jewett, Biyoçeşitlilik, Kuş Yaşamı

Introduction

It is all too common to believe that literary works often reflect the physical, spiritual, and ideological conflicts of their cultures, because “like the rest of us, authors are influenced by the ideological tenor of the times” (Tyson, 2006: 122). Literature lies beyond being merely a branch of art that reflects aesthetic pleasure: according to many it “adds to reality, it does not simply describe it” (Holmer, 1976: 28). Besides, literature is probably the most consciously politicized form of art which mirrors social changes, deals with all kinds of problems concerning the individuals, and speaks for the ideologies and wider social movements. It is possible to follow the traces of this ideological content throughout literary studies. Towards the end of the 20th century, ideological debates (concerning the tensions of postcolonial and post-Cold War eras) greatly influenced the content of literary analysis, and as Glotfelty famously reminds that race, class, and gender became the hot topics of professional literary criticism (1996: p. xvi). At that time, along with a series of global disasters that brought the environmental issues, like climate change, to the top of the agenda, a new trend in literary studies had begun. Since then, this movement, ecocriticism, has become the meeting point of the academic concerns for the role of human experience in literary studies that does not ignore the inherent value of nonhuman nature.

In this study, the selected literary works will be subjected to an ecocritical analysis, focusing on the exploration of shared themes and motifs. Adopting this approach, the present paper asserts



that these texts illuminate the intricate challenges posed by urbanization processes within societies. These works accomplish this by depicting the emotional and philosophical landscapes of individuals, contextualized within the framework of environmental degradation, the loss of avian life, and their interconnectedness with biodiversity. All selected narratives use bird symbolism to highlight an intensified opposition between the county and the city, as an outcome of industrialization. In addition to these symbolic relations based on the natural characteristics of birds, these texts use different aspects of avian life to construe multiple layers of meanings enriched with intercultural and intracultural references provided by history and traditions. It should be underlined that these fictional narratives are not of a didactic nature that use natural environment for allegorical purposes. These ecocentric texts use birds not only with their traditional symbolic meanings but also, either as a character or a theme, as real beings. By establishing a direct correlation between urbanization and reduction of biological diversity, they emphasize the inseparable role of the birds for the natural cycle, of which human beings are also a component. They also reveal that this situation is related to a loss of cultural memory, in a sense that evokes admirable works of art or the missing artistic treasures that need to be protected. Two of them, ‘The Last Birds’ and *The Birds Have Also Gone* compare value judgments and lifestyles of preindustrial urban life and the situation after rapid urbanization in Istanbul. The last one, ‘A White Heron’ emphasizes the inherent value of nature and rural life through their basic contrasts with the urban environments.

An often-cited quote from Estok (2005) refers to the contribution of ecocritical studies to the social and political aspects of literature:

Ecocriticism is not simply the study of Nature or natural things in literature, that is any theory committed to effecting change by analyzing the function-thematic, artistic, social, historical, ideological, theoretical, or otherwise-of the natural environment (or aspects of it) represented in documents (literary or other) that contribute to material practices in material worlds (16-17).

Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* stands as a monumental work within the realm of environmental literature, serving as a prime example of Estok’s argument. In a way, it has so successfully effected ‘change’ that Estok speaks of, today it is generally believed that modern environmental movement was launched with its publication in 1962. According to Kuzmiak (1991), Carson is “credited with making ‘ecology’ a household word” (270) and is thus one of the main actors in the formation of “the modern environmental consciousness” (270). Carson’s book



provides invaluable insights for ecocritical studies, and it also deals with the central discussion of this paper: bird life and biodiversity, so it deserves a brief mention here. While incorporating fictional and semi-fictional elements, *Silent Spring* fundamentally constitutes a nonfiction exploration of environmental science. Throughout the book Carson explained how certain agricultural chemicals will lead to an environmental apocalypse in the future by presenting scientific data in plain English. In the introduction part of the 1994 edition of the book, former US vice-president Al Gore writes that, "...Rachel Carson's landmark book offers undeniable proof that the power of an idea can be far greater than the power of politicians." (Gore XV, in Carson 1994). Gore, by comparing the impact of *Silent Spring* to that of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* which provided vital contributions to the antislavery movements in the USA, highlights the role of literature in creating social change. Shortly after the publication of *Silent Spring* a strong opposition against that particular type of chemicals (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane, commonly known as DDT) appeared not just in the USA but in almost all over the world, in such a way that prohibitions and new regulations came into effect². Carson was originally a marine biologist and though she had no formal expertise in agrochemicals, she managed to make an intricate scientific issue, the environmental risks caused by agricultural chemicals, accessible to ordinary readers. Besides, she successfully used literary narrative skills which probably has made *Silent Spring* one of the most influential books of all time. The short chapter at the beginning of the book called 'A fable for Tomorrow', which is essentially a fictional narrative and an example of postapocalyptic dystopia about loss of birdsongs in American towns, is quite a remarkable piece that prepares the readers perfectly for the following scientific explanations. In this section, Carson makes a physical description of the natural environment of a fictional future town that has lost its vitality and beauty due to human activities:

There was a strange stillness. The birds, for example—where had they gone? Many people spoke of them, puzzled and disturbed. The feeding stations in the backyards were deserted. The few birds seen anywhere were moribund; they trembled violently and could not fly. It was a spring without voices. (Carson, 1994: 10)

In *Silent Spring* the connection between the literally depicted loss of birdsongs and imbalances in nature that can lead to an environmental apocalypse has such strong political and social effects that ecology scientists and people from other disciplines who devoted themselves to

² The use of DDT was restricted in Turkey in 1980, and totally banned in 1985.



the protection of natural environment began to see literature as an important tool to communicate their messages – not less important than scientific studies.

1. Birds, Literature and Loss of Biodiversity

German physicist Albert Einstein once said, 'If the bee disappeared off the surface of the globe, then man would only have four years of life left.' Just like many of the good stories, this one is likely to be a fabrication: There is no reliable evidence that the famous scientist really said this. However, like many good stories, it gets about easily, because the statement conveys a clear message about the unshakable laws and regularities of nature: without bees, many plants cannot pollinate, and no more pollination means extinction of some animal species that cannot survive without these plants. The quotation also draws attention to a striking fact: if environmental degradation and climate change are not addressed urgently and correctly, humans will most likely be among those extinct species. A similar story can be made up about the birds, though there already are more fictional stories about them. Birds are essential animals for the natural systems, like bees. They provide pollination for both forest vegetation and agricultural plants. Birds carry the seeds of the berries they eat to other places through their excrement, thus contributing to the vitality and diversity of vegetation. Certain bird species feed on insects and rodents that are harmful for plants and trees. In this way, they provide population control and prevent damage to agricultural production and forest ecosystems (Tabur & Ayvaz, 2010: 561-562). Birds also play an active role during the recovering process of a forest fire (Souza-Alonso et al., 2022: p. 7). In addition, because of their sensitiveness to environmental changes, birds are regarded as one of the most important bioindicators. Therefore, they are frequently used in scientific studies on calculating the negative effects of human activities on nature and environment. Easy for scientists to reach, birds are almost ubiquitous and can make important contributions to scientific studies³ on environmental problems as habitat loss and degradation, pollution, and extinction (Egwumah et al., 2017: 199). After all, just as humans need forests, forests need birds.

Animal rights groups and numerous environmental organizations place significant emphasis on the detrimental effects of scientific exploitation of birds and nonhuman nature in general, particularly in close proximity to human settlements, even when executed with good intentions. Carelessly anthropocentric human activities pose a substantial threat to nearly all bird

³ This expression refers to the observational studies on bird populations and migration routes, not vivisection.



species. The situation becomes more complex for bird species that have adapted to urban environments. Mason's essay delves into the interplay between poetry and avian aesthetics, offering a comprehensive analysis of the underlying dynamics while suggesting a nuanced approach to foster proximity with birds while safeguarding their survival. His definition of the problem draws attention to complex nature of the issue:

Distance between humans and birds is necessary for bird conservation because it enables birds to live away from human disturbance. Proximity is also necessary for their conservation because humans have much to learn from avian biology and culture that might prevent us from intervening too destructively. (Mason, 2009: 156).

Mason argues that this obvious dilemma can be resolved by recalling and reemploying an attitude taken by many ancient nations along with artists inspired by nature since the ancient times: "If we stop thinking of birds as tools, like an old typewriter or toaster we relegate to the attic or garage, and... What happens if we consider birds as works of art?" (157). He does not ignore the fact that the ontological difference between humans and birds leads an othering process, but what if we count birds as works of art that are protected in galleries and museums? Not to exhibit like in natural history museums where plant and animal samples are exhibited, but only to admire and protect. In fact, Mason's metaphorical suggestion is satirical at heart. It is a critique of appreciating the concepts that birds represent, rather than the birds themselves, free of human intentions, a separate animal class *aves* characterized by wearing feathers.

Historically birds have been used as symbols of human feelings and thoughts. Migratory birds, for example, fly long distances and are used by writers as messengers, bringing news from people they do not know, from countries they have never been to. Birds have always inspired poets with their accuracy and secrecy, their ability to fly to the vast seas and oceans around the highest snow-capped mountains. Literature is full of unforgettable birds: "Noah's dove, Macbeth's rooks, Horace's swans, Omar Khayyam's pigeon, Theocritus's nightingale, Count Fosco's canaries" (Gibson, 2005:17). Since ancient times, societies have attributed symbolic meanings to birds. They are the universal symbol of freedom and peace. Besides, almost in all cultures they are seen as mystical creatures: they can walk and swim like humans, but they also have the ability to escape gravity and to reach the level of the angels. Accordingly, bird motif has been frequently used in both religious and secular literature. In ancient Celtic stories and Native American myths birds are seen as God's messengers. Buddhists believe that birds represent Buddha himself. Christians believe that birds are souls living in heaven. According to Islamic tradition when birds warble, they actually pray to



God. In other words, bird songs are spiritual invocation to the Creator. Birds are also frequently featured in symbolic narratives produced by pre-Islamic Turkish and Chinese cultures. In these narratives, the phrase “fly like a bird” was used to express the soul’s ascent to the sky after the death of a human. All these examples show that birds “are no longer birds but usages of birds, feathered with words and meaning” (Gibson, 2005: 17). After all, given their importance in the cultural context, the hostile attitudes towards the physical existence of birds seems incomprehensible, besides it shows how the dilemma mentioned by Mason (2009) is an intrinsic cultural flaw that must be considered.

1.1. Loss of Cultural Memory in ‘The Last Birds’ and *The Birds Have Also Gone*

In the context of Turkish Literature Sait Faik’s ‘The Last Birds’ (1952) is one of the earliest environmentalist texts and its writer is accepted as a premier master of the genre. Due to his holistic (he does not position himself and his characters apart from nature) and sensitive (by displaying awareness towards the multifaceted nature of environmental issues) approach to nonhuman nature, Sait Faik’s short stories have been frequently discussed by environmental critics lately (Yıldırım, 2021: 24-25). Throughout ‘The Last Birds’ the narrator denounces two evil characters, Constantine Efendi and Engineer Ahmet Bey, both are respected citizens, according to the prevailing moral standards, but also thoughtlessly harmful to natural environment. Constantine Efendi is a wealthy grain merchant who is loved by his neighbors and acquaintances. Considering his general characteristics that the narrator has given, he seems like a proper family man, so “you couldn’t really make a negative judgement, not even with his gross size, his sloppiness, his thick accent, his simple but carefully calculated ideas, and the plain but not unattractive jokes he would crack if he had a couple of drinks.” (Sait Faik, 1983: 275). But, when autumn comes and birds begin to migrate, Constantine Efendi’s mask that shows him as a good father and respectful citizen drops: “he would turn into a monster” (275). He kills hundreds of birds, each of which is “a miracle of nature”, by breaking their necks with “his chrome-plated teeth” (275). The narrator complains about the recent scarcity of migratory birds and attributes this situation to the existence of people like Constantine Efendi and says: “But Constantine Efendi is a stumbling block. Anyway the birds don’t come around anymore. Maybe they’ll be extinct in a few years. There must be so many Constantine Efendis in all countries” (276). Despite living in the 20th century urban environment, Constantine Efendi appears to have traversed through time, reminiscent of our hunter-gatherer ancestors from



the prehistoric era. During those ancient times, the distribution of living organisms on Earth was comparatively more balanced than it is today. Hunting for sustenance had no adverse impact on animal populations and certainly did not contribute to species extinction. However, as emphasized by the narrator, in the modern era, the proliferation of individuals akin to Constantine Efendi worldwide, representing unregulated hunting practices, undoubtedly poses a severe threat to the survival of avian species, which serve as integral components of the natural cycle alongside numerous other species.

In ecological science, the holistic nature of ecosystems is always a priority. This is one of the most important principles inherited to ecocritical studies. According to ecologist Barry Commoner's first rule of ecology, as summarized and restated by Egan (2007), "Everything is connected to everything else. There is one ecosphere for all living organisms and what affects one, affects all" (141). The environmental content of "The Last Birds" in many ways fits with this holistic perspective. As the story progresses it becomes clear that the main concern of the narrator is not only the migratory birds. In fact, he pursues the approach as formulated by Commoner and used by modern science-based ecologists: "Now, after the birds, they have launched their attack on all the green things that belong to people" (276). Engineer Ahmet Bey is the other evil character in the story. He has the poor islander children remove grass blocks from the roadside and carry them to the garden of a rich Netherlander merchant. Even though the narrator informs the local police about this situation, municipal laws do not provide any penalty against removing the grass on the roadside. Without confronting the consequences of his evil acts, any damage to his reputation, Engineer Ahmet Bey could keep harming environment because the society and the authorities are not even aware of the threat their behaviors pose. They were "abuse[ing] land because [they] regard it as a commodity belonging to [them]". (Leopold, 1989: xxii). Here, Sait Faik strongly emphasizes the need for holistic awareness and respect for nature not only as an inner experience but also through conscious action. The narrator openly despises the behaviors of the others that are not compatible with land ethics, and instead of turning a blind eye to this situation, he even officially asks for help from law enforcement. Because "when we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." (Leopold, 1989: xxii). In terms of environmental ethics and activism, his decision represents an exemplary attitude.



Canadian environmental activist David Suzuki expresses an opinion shared by many modern environmentalists: “The environment is so fundamental to our continued existence that it must transcend politics and become a central value of all members of society.” (Suzuki, 2007: p. 6). Regardless of our acceptance, the future is undeniably dependent upon the level of societal awareness regarding nature and the environment. Consequently, the ecological movement must inevitably permeate the political realm, necessitating public support to attain success. In this context, literary works that encapsulate potent notions concerning environmental degradation and the significance of conservation serve as instrumental agents. The ecocritical approach recognizes the imperative role of cultural products in disseminating the inherent value of biodiversity within the collective cultural memory, viewing their contribution as pivotal for fostering transformative cultural shifts. At the end of ‘The Last Birds’ the narrator reveals the relationship between biodiversity and cultural memory. Besides, by reminding the power of storytelling and its function in the context of social responsibility, the narrator’s final remarks legitimize the main aim of environmental criticism:

They strangled the birds, plucked out the turf and left the roads deep in mud.

The world is changing, my friends. One day you will no longer see dark dots in the sky in autumn. Someday you won’t be able to see the dark green hair of our mother earth stretching along the roads. Well, children, it’s going to be pretty bad, not so much for us, but for you. We have already seen so many birds and so much green. It’s going to be bad for you. All I can do is telling you the story. (Sait Faik, 1983: 277)

Sait Faik’s fiction was mostly about people and landscapes of Istanbul during 1940s, prior to the effects of rapid urbanization emerged. History of industrial urbanization in Turkey is similar to the urbanization processes of most developing countries in terms of its general characteristics: associated with technological innovations affecting the agricultural rural population. In Turkey, population movements from countryside to cities formed the basic dynamics of urbanization, that is also closely related to The Marshall Plan⁴ (officially the European Recovery Program) in the 1950s. In this period, mechanization in medium and large enterprises, caused mass unemployment of the villagers especially the shareholders and the tenants. Until the mid-1980s, there was a dynamic population movement towards big cities⁵. Due to the usual reasons, - unplanned

⁴ The United States provided economic assistance to restore the economic infrastructure of postwar Europe. During the program, which started in 1948 and lasted for four years, financial and equipment aid was provided to the allied countries (US. National Archives).

⁵ In 1927 the population of Turkey was only 13.6 million. After a slow rise from World War II years to 1950s, there was a boom between 1950-1960, and it reached 27.7 million. In 1970, the population was reached 35 million, and 50 million in 1985. Although



urbanization, ghettoization and pollution, the situation of the cities became exactly as Sait Faik's prophecy in 'The Last Birds'. Birds were not completely extinct; yet their population density and most importantly their meaning and importance for humans have undergone a serious change. The city dwellers of this period witnessed the deterioration of the above-mentioned balance of distance and proximity, which, according to Mason (2009), ought to be fine-tuned by mankind. From this point of view, surviving birds were probably the ones who evolved to keep the distance from humans, either by flying higher or farther away. Human beings, 'as rational animals', wrote an epic of industrialization, created their own built-environments and self-made conditions. However, nature is indifferent to human purposes, and "does not recognize national borders or identity, though biotic life adjusts or reacts to walls erected by humans to contain it or keep it out" (Fortuny, 2019: 12) As in the rest of the world, the social problems caused by rapid urbanization were quite evident. People who attribute certain levels of holiness to the 'black dots in the sky' or see them as 'works of art crafted by mother nature' no longer exist.

In 1978, twenty-six years after the publication of 'The Last Birds' and at a time when it becomes clear that urbanization infects the cultural fabric, Yaşar Kemal published *The Birds Have Also Gone*. In his lifetime, Yaşar Kemal personally expressed his admiration for Sait Faik and his works on many occasions⁶. However, unlike Sait Faik, Yaşar Kemal's political views dominate his works that usually convey the socioeconomic and cultural conditions of his period. Storylines of his prominent novels are knitted around the problems of the people of Çukurova region. Though a relatively small number in his oeuvre, Yaşar Kemal also wrote novels about life in the outskirts of Istanbul, which was undergoing a rapid population growth due to industrialization and immigration. *The Birds Have Also Gone*, often seen as the novelist's response to 'The Last Birds', belongs to this group. This novel depicts a different facet of bird hunting; however, the unsympathetic portrayal of Constantin Efendi in 'The Last Birds' is replaced by three homeless boys who are subjected to an ordeal in order to test their survival abilities in an industrialized metropolis.

the urban and rural population growth rates were very close to each other during this period, a decrease was observed in the total rural population due to the intense migration from rural to urban areas (Avcı, 2005: 3-5).

⁶ Yaşar Kemal interviewed with Sait Faik a few times while he was working as a reporter, and then the friendship between the two writers continued until the storyteller's death in 1954.



In *The Birds Have Also Gone*, Semih, Hayri and Süleyman, who used to live in small towns and move to İstanbul for some reason, use snare to catch hundreds of migrating birds to sell them in front of mosques, churches, and synagogues. The boys do this to make money, and the people buy them to set free following a common tradition (azat buzat), which dates back to ancient Byzantium. By freeing the captured birds, people believe that they will get emotionally close to God and earn a place in Paradise. Unfortunately, the boy's entrepreneurship adventure comes to a bad end. After a short while they bitterly realize people no longer want to buy the captured birds and thus, they could not gather the money they need immediately. Besides many beauties of the former world, the architectural texture and natural vegetation, the tradition of freeing birds is on the verge of extinction. As the city grows, the plains where they catch birds, begin to be covered with ugly modern buildings. This is closely related to the destruction of green areas where birds can perch: "Ugly concrete apartment blocks began to crowd the lonely dale of Florya where violets used to grow. And now only this small tract of land between Menekse and Basıncıkoy, between the sea and the wood, is left for the birds" (Kemal, 1978: 85). Due to urbanization people became increasingly distanced from nature, bird songs and old traditions. Here the novel draws a parallel between the growth of the boys, their exposure to the harsh realities of life, and the city's growing up and losing its old innocent characteristics. Loss of cultural memory that the society lived through is also seen in the dialogues of the kids with their potential customers: "A person in the crowd asks, "You commit sin catching the birds, we will do a good deed by setting them free do we" (Kemal, 1978: 62). As it is understood from this short dialogue, the tradition of azat buzat is no longer a part of the cultural fabric of this city.

Penniless and hungry, the boys became so desperate that "they have nothing to eat but these little birds" (Kemal, 1978: 118). At the final scene, the narrator witnesses "a heap of bird's heads, hundreds of heads, rising as tall as the thistles. Yellow ants swarmed over these heads with the open lackluster eyes" (122). As the novel concludes with this tragic ending, "it is understood that according to the narrator the disappearance of this deep-rooted tradition is the sign of social and moral corruption in the urbanized modern world." (Akyol, 2018: 238). The narrator gives the following reaction to this situation, which he symbolizes with the dead birds: "There rose a memorial to the callousness and decadence of İstanbul town, to the oblivion of its past, of all that was human, to the loss of many many things, a memorial made with the heads of hundreds of tint birds" (Kemal, 1978: 122). It becomes clear through the end of the story that environmental



degradation not only destroys the physical nature but also has adverse effects on moral values of human communities.

Though the novel obviously suggests that the extinction of this tradition refers to loss of innocence, end of sentiment, love, and humaneness in modern societies, ecologically speaking, selling captured birds “has nothing to do with nature but it is completely anthropocentric activity serving only on behalf of human needs” (Akyol, 2018: 238). Long-term harmful effects of such activities to nonhuman life would be undeniable. The novel appears to be defending an anthropocentric ideology by encouraging the continuation of capturing migratory birds. This tradition unquestionably belongs to the times when there was not enough social awareness about the global dimension of environmental problems and from an environmentalist perspective it is no longer relevant for modern societies. However, as the narrator strongly implied that the new traditions of the city dwellers that replaced the old ones are not eco-friendly either; especially in the context of their high level of indifference that instrumentalizes nature. The boys and the narrator do not want the birds to die, but rather to live. As the children of poor families who migrated from the countryside to the city, Semih, Hayri and Süleyman are trying to adapt to the urban life. They are trying to survive in this big city in which life is almost as tough as living in a jungle. The tradition that they are trying to perpetuate seem not to be inherently environmentalist, however, it is worth remembering that this tradition belongs to the pre-industrial period and cannot be associated with alienation from nature concept in industrial societies. Even if it is possible to mention a process of alienation here, given their socioeconomic conditions, those children are not the subjects, but the objects of this situation. Therefore, the loss of this tradition aligns with the loss of a certain part of cultural memory, as urban culture is gradually moving away from nature. From this perspective, the boys’ attitudes can be seen as harmonious with various forms of love and sympathy—pastoral, romantic, or modern—towards nature. In *The Birds Have Also Gone*, a clear parallelism is drawn between the bird flocks leaving the skies of Istanbul, where the natural environment is rapidly deteriorating due to the destructive effects of urbanization. Furthermore, it has been revealed that the indifference of urban crowds towards natural life can be as harmful as that of individual bird hunters, such as Constantin Efendi.

1.2. ‘A White Heron’



Though its setting is rural New England rather than a metropolitan area, ‘A White Heron’ is in many ways similar both to ‘The Last Birds’ and *The Birds Have Also Gone*. The protagonist of the story is a 9-year-old girl named Sylvia, who lives with her grandmother in an isolated farm deep in the Maine woods. Sylvia’s world, as her name implies⁷, is adorned with idyllic landscapes that are idealized in Yaşar Kemal’s and Sait Faik’s fictions. However, it soon becomes clear that the adult male narrators’ concerns about nonhuman nature in these works may also be true for Sylvia’s semi-utopian world. The little girl’s peaceful life, who escaped from the noisy and crowded city for a spiritual and physical sanctuary, is shaken by an urban bird hunter. In this respect the story reflects the tension between the industrializing cities and the countryside of late 19th century North America; the threat of urban expansion over natural habitats. The contrast between these two worlds is not only physical, but also spiritual. It is not only ontological, but also epistemological: “While the country demonstrates a subtle, profound, recondite, and communal exercise of power, which produces spiritual knowledge, the city demonstrates an officious, ostentatious, divisive, and obtrusive exercise of power, which produces temporal knowledge.” (Jamil, 2017: 67). Sylvia’s first encounter with the hunter includes a foreshadowing that reflects this conflict: “Suddenly this little woods-girl is horror-stricken to hear a clear whistle not very far away. Not a bird’s-whistle, which would have a sort of friendliness, but a boy’s whistle, determined, and somewhat aggressive.” (Jewett, 2001: 2) The aggressive whistling that accompanies the friendly bird chirps indicates a hostile encounter. In many ways it represents two hostile sides in conflict: the sensitive country girl versus the destructive urban hunter.

The descriptions of nature in ‘A White Heron’ reveal the contrast between urban and rural settings. Similarly, the contrast between Sylvia’s and the hunter’s worldviews draw attention to another dimension of instrumentalization of nature for human purposes. While Constantin Efendi hunts birds for food and the boys in Yaşar Kemal’s novel captures them only for setting free in exchange of money, the bird hunter here kills certain types of birds for pleasure, just for collecting their dead bodies: “I am making a collection of birds myself. I have been at it ever since I was a boy.” (3). To explain the conflicting worldviews here, it may be helpful to recall Mason (2009)’s

⁷ Her name, ‘Sylvia’, comes from the Latin ‘silva’ meaning ‘wood’ or ‘forest’. This name is traditionally associated with nature, especially wooded areas. It is also the name of a nymph living in the forest in Ancient Roman mythology. Throughout history, this name has been used to evoke a sense of natural beauty and peace, inspired by the abundance of the forest (Name of the Week: Sylvia, Sylvie, 2018). Besides, Sylvia (also known as Sylviidae) is the name of the songbird family, which includes many common European birds (britannica.com: Sylviidae, 2017).



avian aesthetic. From this point of view, one thing Sylvia and her grandmother know very well but the hunter who also treats birds as ‘works of art’ is totally unaware is that birds are inseparable parts of natural cycle. When humans ignore this fact, maintaining proximity with the birds will jeopardize their existence. Sylvia’s grandmother, who has spent her whole life in the countryside, cannot at first understand what the hunter means: “Do you cage ‘em up?” (3) she asks. The young hunter who purports to be a harmless passer-by finally reveals his intentions: “Oh no, they’re stuffed and preserved, dozens and dozens of them and I have shot or snared every one myself. I caught a glimpse of a white heron a few miles from here on Saturday, and I have followed it in this direction.” (3). This contrast between Mrs. Tilley and the bird hunter also underlies the ideological discourse of ‘A White Heron’. It reinforces the environmentalist view that brings up the negative effects of industrialization and urbanization on the natural life perception of societies. While presenting the inconsistencies between industrial and preindustrial values, the story also reveals the advantages of living in harmony with nature.

‘A White Heron’ is 19th century regionalist writer Sarah Orne Jewett’s best-known story. She was born in 1849, so a part of her childhood and youth coincides with the post-Civil War period, in other words, the period when the negative social and moral effects of industrialization and urbanization began to be seen intensely. In this sense the timing of ‘A White Heron’, first published in 1886, accords with the examples of romantic responses to industrialization. Jewett’s story describes a period in which a radical change was taking place in the background. Before the Civil War, USA was a developing country with a largely rural population. It was an agrarian economy where industrial steel production had not yet begun. However,

Within twenty years after the Civil War, it had become one of the giants of the international steel industry; the number of factories within its borders had more than doubled; and it had an industrial investment of over four billion dollars. Not only that, it had developed the most extensive railway system in the world, binding East and West together in one vast economic unit. Nearly half the railway mileage in the world was in the United States, and that mileage represented one-sixth of the nation’s estimated wealth. (Gray, 2004: 246)

This rapid economic growth caused industrial cities to face a wave of both internal and external migration. Popular frontier myth and eastward migration came to an end, and urban areas, starting from the east coast, became centers of attraction. During her childhood, Jewett made countless trips to the towns and villages around Maine with her father, a doctor, and “she observed the isolation and decay of the dwindling farms and depopulated towns of the locality” (Gray, 2004:



262). Throughout her professional writing career, she traveled frequently to the east coast, yet she spent most of her life in small towns and farms. Thanks to her travels she had firsthand knowledge of how migration changed cities: how people from all over the world destroyed their cultural fabric, memory and their natural environment while feeding the cheap labor-hungry industries. For Jewett who could handle such universal and timeless issues without diverging from the local color tradition of American realism, Gray argues that “she weaves together the great theme of pastoral, that the best days are the first to flee, and a major theme in American thought and writing at the turn of the century, that an older, simpler form of society is dying.” (264). The quote draws attention to the fact that the setting of ‘A White Heron’ coincides with a period of significant changes in demographics and urbanization, reflecting the ongoing process of industrialization.

When compared with the hunter in Jewett’s story, the bird massacre in the end of *The Birds Have Also Gone*, at least to some extent, may be seen excusable because of the boys’ obvious socioeconomic disadvantages. From this point of view, the hunter who taxidermizes the dead bodies of birds for displaying them as the visual symbols of human power appears as the antagonist of Jewett’s short story, whereas the poor children in Yaşar Kemal’s novel, who capture the birds only to set them free, could only be the victims of industrialized urban culture. Undoubtedly, the circumstances surrounding the boys serve as an example of the sharp vulnerability experienced by socio-culturally disadvantaged groups in the face of environmental degradation. Their situation is essentially the same as emphasized by Fortuny (2019) as “the abuses of urban development on marginalized populations” (15), regarding the public insensitivity towards natural environment. The surrounding factors finally led the boys into a social and psychological disruption, however, Sylvia of ‘A White Heron’ who consciously preferred to escape from the city life and took refuge in the countryside proved to have a similar level of consciousness as the adult male narrator of ‘The Last Birds’. Unlike Semih, Hayri and Süleyman who were deprived of the emotional and mental nourishment of natural life, Sylvia left her family estate a year ago to live with her grandmother on a rural farm. As the text informs us, she was not comfortable living in the crowded and noisy city: as her family members have also confirmed she was “afraid of folks” (Jewett, 2001: 2). She feels much better in the countryside and finds her own identity by integrating with environmental conditions: “Sylvia whispered that this was a beautiful place to live in, and she never should wish to go home” (2). In fact, it was a great luck for Sylvia to be a member of a family that noticed her situation and supported her decision:



Everybody said that it was a good change for a little maid who had tried to grow for eight years in a crowded manufacturing town, but, as for Sylvia herself, it seemed as if she never had been alive at all before she came to live at the farm. She thought often with wistful compassion of a wretched geranium that belonged to a town neighbor. (1)

Sylvia is in many ways an exemplary character with a high level of eco-consciousness. The contrast between her and the hunter reveals the alienating effect of industrialization and urbanization from natural life. In the excerpt below, an example of what kind of character one will become when moving away from anthropocentric system of values and approaching ecocentricism is described. Grandmother, Mrs. Tilley, describes Sylvia's friendly relations with the nonhuman nature to the unexpected guest as follows:

There ain't a foot o' ground she don't know her way over, and the wild creaturs counts her one o' themselves. Squer'ls she'll tame to come an' feed right out o' her hands, and all sorts o' birds. Last winter she got the jay-birds to bangeing here, and I believe she'd a' scanted herself of her own meals to have plenty to throw out amongst 'em, if I hadn't kep' watch (3).

On the way home from grazing Mistress Moolly, the cow, Sylvia listens to the sounds of nature, especially the birds, and she sees herself as a part of the environment and integrates with all the ecosystems of nature. However, it is not clear whether the birds mentioned in the excerpt below are in a symbolic sense or are part of a realistic narrative describing the natural world surrounding her.

[She] listened to the thrushes with a heart that beat fast with pleasure. There was a stirring in the great boughs overhead. They were full of little birds and beasts that seemed to be wide awake, and going about their world, or else saying good-night to each other in sleepy twitters (5).

As a matter of fact, the author apparently tried to make some real "little birds" and real "beasts" here, but she did them good and true enough they would mean many things. In other words, the narration is so lively and poetic that description of the physical setting rises beyond any high school biology textbook and reaches the sublime nature defined by Emerson, the famous dean of the New England nature religion (transcendentalism). In 'Nature' he prophetically argued that "in the woods ... at what period soever of life", you are "always a child", because "in the woods, is perpetual youth" (Emerson, 1950: 6). As elaborately stated at the beginning of 'A White Heron', in the woods Sylvia finds "something more dear and connate than in streets or villages" (6-7), like Emerson who "become a transparent eye-ball" while "the currents of the Universal Being circulate through" him. (6). Although not clearly mentioned in the story, given her age and place of residence, it is understood that 9-year-old Sylvia has received little or no formal education. From



this point, it can be assumed that Sylvia's ecocentric wisdom and ethical understanding towards natural life stem from an intuitive knowledge of the surrounding wilderness, not only the physical existence of "the great pine-tree ... the sparrows and robins ... the hawks, and bats, and moths and even the sweet-voiced thrushes" (Jewett, 2001: 4-5). This situation, which is in harmony with the romantic views of Emerson and his followers, constitutes an example of child nature that has not been corrupted by civilization and human society. In the forests of Maine, Sylvia has reached a level of consciousness that is mature enough not to succumb to the materialistic promises of urban life. Perhaps the most obvious proof of this is Sylvia's refusal to give away the secret location of the white heron in return of a generous money reward. At first, her attention was drawn to the \$10 reward, which can be considered a substantial amount for a child of her age. "He can make them rich with money; he has promised it, and they are poor now" (6). Besides, it wasn't just the financial promise that confused Sylvia, she is intrigued by the masculinity of "the handsome stranger" (4), "his scientific knowledge, [and] his urban sophistication" (Donovan, 1991: 151). The day after they met, they wandered through the forest together. Although Sylvia got rid of her initial shyness and uneasiness towards the young man, his attitudes towards the birds continued to bother her. At this point, 'A White Heron', unlike the other two texts handled in this essay, emphasizes the destructive effect of patriarchal power on nature and indicates the ecofeminist content of the short story:

Sylvia would have liked him vastly better without his gun; she could not understand why he killed the very birds he seemed to like so much. But as the day waned, Sylvia still watched the young man with loving admiration. She had never seen anybody so charming and delightful; the woman's heart, asleep in the child, was vaguely thrilled by a dream of love (Jewett, 2001: 4).

The next day, before sunrise, she left the house and made a dangerous climb to the tallest tree around which is the "last of its generation" (4), and learned the secret of the white heron, the exact location of the tree it was perching on. Nevertheless, Sylvia did not share what she knew about the white heron with the hunter:

No, she must keep silence! What is it that suddenly forbids her and makes her dumb? Has she been nine years growing and now, when the great world for the first time puts out a hand to her, must she thrust it aside for a bird's sake? The murmur of the pine's green branches is in her ears, she remembers how the white heron came flying through the golden air and how they watched the sea and the morning together, and Sylvia cannot speak; she cannot tell the heron's secret and give its life away (6).



Clearly, this passage demonstrates the sharp distinction between the industrial city represented by scientific knowledge and masculine power. For the hunter who represents the urban vision, dead birds can be stuffed and turned into spectacle objects. On the other hand, in the countryside, Sylvia identifies herself with the white heron after gaining a new perspective from atop a tree while searching for the nest's exact location. The hunter's behavior obviously represents industrial transformation of nature in accordance with human purposes. On the other hand, by not sharing 'the heron's secret', Sylvia nails her colors to the mast. In light of Sylvia's ethical decision, the story extols the birds as exemplars of artistic beauty, underscoring the necessity to protect them, while concurrently emphasizing the importance of preserving nonhuman nature in the face of the destructive impacts arising from industrialization and other manifestations of human interference.

Conclusion

Rapid urbanization – expansion of urban areas in parallel with rapid population growth, has destroyed natural habitats in many parts of the world and it is one of the common presuppositions of modern environmentalist movements today. Historically, apart from wars and forced migrations, examination of the population growth trends of large and crowded cities reveals an unquestionable relationship between industrialization and growth. In other words, rapid population movements towards cities are mostly associated with industrialization, the prime suspect of today's environmental crisis. Compared to rural areas, cities have many advantages which make them attractive to masses, like job opportunities, comfortable housing and easy access to many products and services. On the other hand, city dwellers who have been disengaged with nonhuman nature enters a process of alienation that, in its most advanced stage, comes with a sequence of indifference towards the existence of our own kind on earth. This alienation and indifference can be observed most clearly in literary works that deal with the conflict between rural and urban settings.

This ecocritical reading of Sait Faik's 'The Last Birds', Yaşar Kemal's *The Birds Have Also Gone* and Sarah Orne Jewett's 'A White Heron' reaffirms the ecocritical principle that arts, especially the literary arts, will make a significant contribution to raising environmental awareness among urban people while it does not deny the scientific methods. For an effective respond to environmental problems sciences and arts should work together. This article shows how industrialization and urban culture, represented by technology and science, become alienated from



the essences of human life as they move away from natural life. In all the works discussed in this essay, destructive effects of urbanization and other human activities on nature is an essential key element of theme. They treat the contrast between urban and rural lifestyles with an environmentalist perspective. They explicitly or implicitly refer to the negative effects of urbanization and industrialization on biodiversity and nonhuman nature. While doing this, they include various façades of avian life, with its both symbolic and real meanings. All three stories are situated within verisimilar socio-physical environments, thereby ensuring consistency between the authors' depictions and the corresponding historical periods and geographical contexts. Moreover, meticulous portrayals of the flora and the fauna further support the literary analyses incorporating specific story details as discernible markers of the destructive consequences arising from human interventions on the natural world. The stories feature many kinds of birds; therefore, their area of sovereignty, 'the sky' is necessarily included in the settings: all stories take place in open spaces. For example, a certain part of 'The Last Birds' takes place on the skies of Burgaz island, where its author spent most of his life. In this story, the natural environment of the island is problematized with an environmentalist perspective. The narrator implies the necessity of treating nature like a work of art by frequently emphasizing its inherent value. Although the effect of urbanization and industrialization on nature is not directly addressed in this story, the narrator warns the readers by emphasizing that a process of change and transformation is going on.

The Birds Have Also Gone displays scenes from the republican period of Istanbul, on the eve of its transformation into an industrialized metropolis. The novel has detailed descriptions of the natural and built environment in various parts of Istanbul, such as Florya plain, Taksim, Eminönü and Dolapdere. In the meantime, considering that the two literary texts reflect historically successive periods, it is understood that the warnings made by the narrator of 'The Last Birds' were rightful determinations, and unfortunately, they were ignored. The problematic relationship of the child characters with their natural environment demonstrates the adverse consequences of alienation from nature. These children are from poor-income families who have recently migrated to Istanbul from the countryside. Given the innocence and benevolence of these children, their hostility and final cruelty towards birds is a difficult point to explain. It required an ecocritical analysis, and in particular, a comparison with the last literary text handled in this essay.



In Sarah Orne Jewett's 'A White Heron', the main character, 9-year-old Sylvia, comes up with a solution to the proximity and distance issue that discussed in the introduction part of this essay. She approaches the white heron until she determines the exact location of the nest, but then she keeps her distance in order to protect the bird's right to live. It is seen that a certain level of proximity may be necessary to protect bird species and populations. As stated above, Sylvia's behavior coincides with the modern scientific approach. The writer of this story, Sarah Orne Jewett is regarded as one of the corner stones of American literary regionalism. She is the creator of many archetypal environmentalist characters who live in harmony with the ebb and flow of nature. As frequently emphasized in 'A White Heron', for Jewett, the key to healthy functioning of nature, i.e. the natural balance is the continuity of each animal and plant species. This ecocentric and holistic approach became mainstream with the rise of modern environmental movements.

In conclusion, the profound connection Sylvia establishes with the natural world underscores a shared level of consciousness with the narrator of 'The Last Birds' that caused him to describe the roadside turf as 'green hair of our mother earth', and to worry about their plucking out. He also describes the migratory birds as 'the dark dots in the sky' and worries about their gradual decreasing with each successive autumn. Such eco-consciousness aligns with the expectations of both environmentalist literature and contemporary environmental movements. However, it becomes evident that achieving this heightened awareness is seemingly unattainable for the boys in Yaşar Kemal's novel, situated in the outskirts of Istanbul, an urban landscape shadowed by unsightly concrete buildings and ravaged by the adverse impacts of industrialization and rapid urbanization. The circumstances in which they find themselves offer valuable insights into the underlying socio-economic foundations of environmental issues.

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