

Review

Ecocritical approach to children's literature: Example of "I am a Hornbeam Branch"

Emine Ulu Aslan^{1*} and Bayram Bas²

¹Department of Turkish Education Faculty of Education, Mus Alparslan University, Turkey.

²Department of Turkish Education, Faculty of Education, Yıldız Technical University, Turkey.

Received 11 September, 2020; Accepted 11 November, 2020

Eco-criticism determines how the relationships of each element belonging to the field of being outside the human beings with each other and their environment are depicted in literary texts, the approach of literature to these relationships, as well as the forms of discourse in which a human being can direct through language. The aim of this study is to examine the children book entitled *I Am a Hornbeam Branch* by Hasan Ali Toptaş in the context of human-nature relationship and question with what perspectives eco-criticism scrutinizes such literary texts. In this study, the possibilities of thinking about nature are discussed through "I am a Hornbeam Branch" written in an eco-critical language. In the thought imposed by the "human" oriented hierarchical order, inquiries have been made that every living thing other than a human being is considered as the "other" and deprived of an identity owing to the lack of language and intellect. Furthermore, it has been determined that the representation of "nature" is presented in a cycle based on ecological consciousness by taking into consideration material transformations and that the problems of nature are cited not only environmentally but also as sociological, psychological and cultural problems that concern humanity.

Key words: Human, nature, environment, ecology, eco-criticism, children's literature.

INTRODUCTION

Disengagement of human beings from nature began by owning the land and propertied it. In addition, ideological transformations in beliefs, philosophy, science and politics have accelerated the process of seeing nature as a source of raw materials (Şen, 2018: 33), and have supported the idea that civilization and development will be achieved by man's domination of nature. The operational aspect of this ideological process has accelerated with technology, and "human" has become nature's greatest threat. The ecological problems that

need to be dealt with and the literary, sociological, political and cultural perspectives behind them have revealed the fact that the natural balance to be established with other creatures for a livable and sustainable world cannot be achieved solely with the technology and science. In this direction, all components that make up modern thought, culture and civilization have been discussed with an ecological perspective, and has revealed that ecology is not only a subject of natural sciences (Şen, 2018: 34). It has been noticed that the

*Corresponding author. E-mail: emineuluhcttpe@gmail.com.

relationship between man and nature is shaped by the discourses drawn by "language" in line with the interests of societies.

Ecocriticism offers the opportunity to examine the relations between literature and environment, ecology, and culture in depth by interpreting literary and cultural texts from an environmental perspective. On the basis of eco-criticism, which maintains that the perfect balance of the world can only be achieved in cooperation with "human-nature" and with the acceptance of the original identity of each living thing, there is "human" who is a part of the environment and has a common living space with other living things. Ecocriticism, which carries its analysis and opinions to multi-dimensional approaches in contrast to an anthropocentric point of view, thus offers an interdisciplinary field of study. It sees all elements of nature as a whole by attributing intrinsic value to nature (Oppermann, 2012: 15) and argues that the right to life of all living things should be respected.

Ecocriticism aims to bring ecological consciousness to the reader by overturning the hierarchical order based on human superiority and deeply shaking the absolute authority of man over the universe. In doing so, it "transforms nature from being a romantic, idealized object or served to the service of human beings and into a scientific platform." (Sarikaya, 2012: 96). In this understanding, nature is accepted as an entity that can define its "own" identity through "itself", rather than being a secondary element that is presented to the disposal and endless consumption of man, completing its existence through human. As a matter of fact, in the destruction of nature, the answer given by nature to human is also evident: If nature dies, human also dies!

Ecocriticism, combined with postmodern theory, which draws attention to the interests of monological discourses by rejecting a single and fixed identity, encourages new ideas that deal with discourse and the physical world together, and points to an existing cycle:

We do not see a difference between human and nature: the human essence of nature and the natural essence of human unite in nature in the form of the production of diligence, just as they unite in human life as a species ... human and nature are not confronted like two opposite terms ... More precisely, they exist as sole and whole fundamental reality, hence the manufacturer's product. (Deleuze and Guattari 1984, as cited in Oppermann, 2012).

Ecocriticism reads literary texts from world-centered approaches and especially encourages the teaching and research of a textual understanding in which the environment is not written only in the fictional-reflective meaning. Eco-critics are interested in how discursive conventions enable and constrain our contact with environment, how much the environment affects literary representations and how the means of representation shape our sense of place. (Speek, 2000: 160).

The most important point in the art of rhetoric, in which the truth is shaped according to culture, language and people, is determined by the boundaries of language; language can distort reality and knead it according to itself, and involves the vital roles played by the discourses created between genders, classes and ethnic groups. Since culture is a system of values that are shaped by the boundaries of the human brain, produced by it, and where rights and wrongs are determined according to human interests, the sphere of influence created by discourses is not the same for each group of society:

"Therefore, it should be kept in mind that even discourses that are candidates to oppose or disrupt practices that harm the environment can be owned or manipulated. For example; although wildlife seems to threaten an industrialized, prosperous social order and worldview, some of the actors of this order, such as off-road vehicle manufacturers, have embraced wildlife as the 'natural environment' of their products in their advertisements" (Garrard, 2016: 23).

The result that can come out of such an opposition shows that natural life is based on an ideological basis in line with human interests and that the unlimited consumption of countries can even help them gain sympathy.

Within the poststructuralism critique, where ecocriticism shows growth, the relationship of signs with each other rather than pursuing the "real" is emphasized. Along with these fields, developments in other fields such as feminist literature have strengthened the thought underlying the language and reality distinction. Feminist critics "revealed the difference between sex as a biological category and gender as a social construct, and underlined how the male-centered worldview and social order tried to justify changing gender constructions by portraying them as" natural "sexual identities (Garrard, 2016: 24). In this respect, "femininity" includes the reactions of a cultural encoding, beyond being inherent in the natural characteristics of genetics. These readings belonging to different fields enabled us to make sense between the lines of all kinds of formations in society, especially in many fields such as politics, advertising, literature, art, and marketing, different from what is seen. At this point, the ecology movement that can be realized and every reading made in an eco-critical sense is not a shallow ecology movement that explains environmental problems only with the limitation of natural resources and emphasizes environmental protection policies. The shallow ecology movement is extremely inadequate to tackle today's environmental problems. Shallow ecology, with an ongoing human-centered perspective, "establishes a self-interested relationship between human and nature" (Dindar, 2012: 60). This relationship places human in the role of its ruler or master of nature. This role gives human an unlimited right and freedom to exploit nature. On the other hand, eco-criticism aims at bringing a new

consciousness by changing people's perspective on nature. Instead of human-centered thinking, it is necessary to create a new environmental ethic and try to explain that even the smallest damage they cause to the environment is actually the damage they cause themselves (Sarıkaya, 2012: 99).

The first step of eco-criticism philosophy is the realization of the self-realization potential of the human being and starting to live consciously. In this way, the philosophy of self-realization, which has the belief that the consciousness acquired individually is shared by all humanity, becomes a lifestyle. In this lifestyle in which ecological consciousness spreads, there is a cycle where everything is interconnected. In this cycle, living creatures act as chains in relation to each other, rather than being positioned up or down. Thus, human beings consider their existing relationships and connections with "other living and non-living beings, ecosystems, the earth, itself and its bad history" while forming its selfness. (Dindar, 2012: 79). The "self" created in an ecologically based system includes multi-faceted connections that are not purely linear.

In eco-criticism, where knowledge and existential philosophy work together, it is never forgotten that discourse is the product of language, therefore it is considered simultaneously with human beings. Meaning is provided only on condition that these two are together. Studies conducted within this scope brought together materiality and discursiveness, causing a paradigm shift in social sciences, natural sciences, and environmental human sciences (Yazgünoğlu, 2012: 329). Literature, which is one of the most important branches in which social sciences can use the possibilities of "language" in terms of creating an eco-critical consciousness, and especially children's literature due to fun, informative and at the same time creative, is the most critical field in which the ecological consciousness is created by this paradigm. As a matter of fact, the child, who can be associated with the primitiveness of the subconscious that cannot reach the limits of the "I", "has not yet divided and separated his specific experience with irreducible oppositions. In his narrow universe, spirit and matter are intertwined and they are defined as gods who produce humans in forests and fields." (Jung, 1994, 34). In her world, the "mother nature", which has similar characteristics with his mother from the moment of birth, occupies a large place. "Mother nature" archetype, with characteristics such as "wisdom and spiritual sublimity far beyond reason, good, nurturing, carrying, providing growth, abundance and food, place of transformation and rebirth" (Jung, 2005: 23), was entrusted to the individual when he was a child. Then, with the imposition of the "subject" by modern thought and the life experiences it adds to the primitiveness of human beings, the subconscious leaves itself to the consciousness. Everything that we are conscious of "naturally joins the "I" through consciousness" (Jung, 1994: 64). The

subconscious, on the other hand, works quite differently from the "consciousness" and the "I" to it because it does not accept a center and hierarchy. Jung, saying "if the subconscious personified, it would carry the lines of a holistic creature living on the border of birth and death, man and woman, old and young," (Jung, 1994: 30), underlines the common philosophy of childhood and nature. In this philosophy, there are holistic instead of dualities, cycles instead of hierarchical and linear structure, and many points where life can be sustained instead of the center. Therefore, children's literature is a highly effective tool in promoting environmental literacy. This is because children's books by breathing life into concepts that are perceived as inanimate, provides children with not only fiction, but also words and pictures that will enable them to think about environmental problems and situations. In this way, children's literature can become a powerful code in guiding children's minds, children of all ages can learn many aspects of their environment and better understand the relationship of their lives with their environment. Thanks to the strong codes created through children's literature, the child is able to carry his "nature" to the future without melting it in the limits of modern consciousness and the individual.

I AM A HORNBEAM BRANCH IN THE CONTEXT OF ECOCRITICISM

Hasan Ali Toptaş's only children's novel, *I Am a Hornbeam Branch*, is the story of the trees living behind the *Beşparmak Mountains* in the Aegean lands and a hornbeam who grows with them and feels the pain of maturing as they grow. Pines, firs, spruce, junipers, chestnuts and even an old oak, not just trees; Birds, other animals, herbs, in short, all living creatures living in the forest are described through the eyes of the child hornbeam. After humans set foot in this beautiful forest and brought pain here, the minds of the forest dwellers were filled with curiosity and anxiety. It would be exceedingly difficult to face this end for the hornbeam who never hope to be gallows while dreaming of having many things worth the pain of it after it is cut.

In the story, the reader, while witnessing the ontological searches of the hornbeam and his friends, also finds the opportunity to reflect on the journey of man to himself. Therefore, the study aims to reveal the pro-natural discourses of literary texts while focusing on the ecological consciousness of this search for identity and journey.

IDENTIFICATION VIA "MYSELF": "I EXIST TOO!"

Ecocriticism does not only examine how nature is reflected in literary works, "but also scrutinizes the symbolic meanings attributed to nature, the thought

patterns created by these meanings, how nature and animal species shape human cultures, how language is used, how to approach environmental problems." (Oppermann, 2012: 25). With such an understanding, Hasan Ali Toptaş's work, *I Am a Hornbeam Branch*, depicts the adventure of the existence of those who are not human, through the "self", from the mouth of a hornbeam. For hornbeam, saying "*I was a very young hornbeam in the Aegean soil*" (Toptaş, 2016: 7), this awareness is not limited to itself but also finds its place as the awareness of environmental identities:

Birds would fly over me from morning till night, varicolored clouds from shape to form would fly. Of course, I also had neighbors, each one more beautiful than the other, greener than the other, better than the other. For example, a few trees tall, there lived a hunchbacked fir that was thirteen years older than me. There was also a middle-aged hornbeam just a short distance from him. Farther, there were red pines with their crispy cones, then there were fuzzy junipers, spruces, and chestnuts... (Toptaş, 2016: 7)

These lines make the reader sense that there is life other than himself, and that the act of being takes place in perfect beauty. This way of expression means "I exist in the world you live in!" and has the same meaning as the saying. In traditional thought, a relationship is established between matter's lack of intelligence and its "non-existence". For this reason, due to the superiority of using the "language" feature, human beings define "other" entities outside of himself as unwise. With movement of material transformation, it is argued that non-human beings are in contact with their environment just like humans. Thus, the fact that material formations as well as discursive formations based on language play a role in the production of knowledge has reduced the purely human-centered perspective in many areas. Therefore, discursive formations should be considered not alone, but together with material formations (Yılmaz, 2012: 132). It is possible to see the traces of material transformation in *I am a Hornbeam Branch* in the following lines:

The herbs around us were even singing, insects wandering from right to left, long-eared rabbits, foxes with rabbits, wolves and stones were singing too. In short, everything in the forest was participating in this song with its own voice. Everything was participating with its own color. Everything was participating with its own stance. (Toptaş, 2016: 8)

The ball of relationships, in which the author realizes with the "self" of everything, appears to be an essential condition for the life cycle, as opposed to being an obstacle to the continuation of one's life. A song accompanied by all living things in the world can only be continued in this way. The bodies of all human and non-

human beings in this cycle constitute a place in the ecological sense, which requires the reshaping of the relationship between human-nature. Acceptance of existence only for human beings since he can perform the act of thinking, takes the right to "identity" from the hands of all living and non-human beings. Substance according to material transformation - for example stones, minerals, seas, bacteria, garbage, etc. everything- has ontological identity and feature of being subject (Oppermann, 2012: 37). This ontological identity and the state of being a subject; in story, are expressed by hornbeam with these lines: "*In other words, we were suffering, like people, we were sometimes upset, we were crying from time to time, like people, sometimes we were anxious, thinking and scared.*" (Toptaş, 2016: 10).

For hornbeam, the main character of the book, which believes that it occupies at least as much space in nature as human beings, and explains this space occupation with a physical volume as well as its affective and emotional dimension, there are parts of a whole that makes human and physical environment inseparable, contrary to binary oppositions. This conception style destroys the validity of the ideology that dominates nature, and forces knowledge and existence to think together. In the work, the lines that describe the beauty that increases as they share among all the beings in nature are the proof of a reading that can be solved with a deep ecology consciousness, contrary to an observable knowledge:

I was like a lush poem that adds beauty to the beauty of the forest, according to the other trees living on the plain. This must be why, even the birds that landed on my shoulders and took off were rapidly becoming beautiful in those years. (Toptaş, 2016: 55).

The way of using language, which supports the idea that nature exhibits a dynamic vitality in the work, is established to defend that all living things and matter are organically active. According to this, "All living things, including humans, and all the building blocks of matter have a magical intrinsic value" (Oppermann, 2012: 36). The problem for eco-criticism, acting with this intrinsic value awareness, is not the emergence of differences, but the creation of a hierarchical order based on differences and the ignoring of the original cycle. Ecocriticism makes sub-readings to reveal this detail in the texts targeted. Hasan Ali Toptaş gives the key to this sub-reading, which he wants from the reader, in his work, which he writes with the awareness of the intrinsic value of the beings in nature. The writer emphasizes that everything has an identity far beyond what is seen with these sentences:

"According to him, the thing called wind was not only wind... should know how to read it." (Toptaş, 2016, 42) The things that those who have this secret of life will find in life are quite different from those who do not realize it:

Those who knew this could find almost everything about life in the wind ... Those who know how to read the wind could even taste the salt of a sea they have never seen if they so desire (Toptaş, 2016: 42).

"Individuals who start to question their self-potential also tend to identify themselves with the beings around them," in order to acquire this perspective and to realize themselves, which the author also mentioned (Dindar, 2012, 80). Eco-criticism, which does not forget that all discursive formations are privileged in line with the guidance of human beings, gives us the opportunity to question all our relations with nature. This is an important indicator to assimilate the "Live and Let Live!" principle of deep ecology (Dindar, 2012, 80). *I am a Hornbeam Branch* whispers to the reader that the act of "living" can perform only by only keep something alive, that the limits are far beyond what the human eye sees, with the following lines:

No matter how much we paid attention, we could not know which color gushed from and to whom it belonged. The pomegranate red blues, snow-white purples, pale yellows, and exile greens would stand around with a loud noise, and we just looked at them (Toptaş, 2016: 9).

These lines are indicators that both the attributes we give to nonhuman beings are at the simplest level and that the perfect balance of nature exists with a perfection that exceeds the power of all beings, including human beings and is another way of saying "I exist too!"

HUMAN VERSUS NATURE: "I" AND "OTHER"

People who adopt the wheel of consumption of the twenty-first century and continue to destroy nature with unbelievable speed, insensitivity, and unconsciousness, exhibit a ruthless attitude towards nature by seeing themselves at the center of moral values and authority. Humans have made their own subspecies into a hierarchical social structure by also classifying those who resemble themselves the most (Arıkan, 2011: 45). Thus, people think that they have the right to use everything that encompasses the "other" including human groups of undeveloped societies. This is because "*human is a strange puzzle that has not been solved for centuries, and it carries the unknown secret of a universe full of dirt and unique beauties.*" (Toptaş, 2016: 28).

As Toptaş says in his work, man has the will to extract the potential of "bad" and "good", but the desire to dominate and consume with an eternal passion pushes him farther than the understanding of being a part of nature. Epistemology based on dual understanding perceives the human body as "a mechanism detached from the ecosystem and superior to other living things" (Oppermann, 2006: 78). With such a perception, body

politics, which places the human being at the center of creation, thinks the "other" as a property that can be controlled and used for all kinds of interests. For this reason, the bodies of all non-human creatures living, both symbolically and physically, were othered. The claim that they were created with a colonial mindset for human interests has been accepted as a so-called universal discourse in all human sciences (Oppermann, 2006: 78). The reflections of this discourse also affect the expression of the "others" in *I am a Hornbeam Branch*:

Most people could not see many beauties. A large part could not touch many beauties. They, like sleepwalkers, would pass by their beauty. Or while going after another beauty they have worn on their heads, for his sake, they would also ruthlessly crush many beauties under their feet without realizing it. (Toptaş, 2016: 29).

The "others" in the work cannot make their voices heard due to the lack of superiority provided by "language". In the culture he has created, the human remains silent in the sense that the status of a "subject" who can speak is preserved only as a human privilege. "We are people who presumably must think of the world in terms of the learned categorical scheme of Modernism. It is as if we have compressed the entire buzzing, howling, gurgling biosphere into the narrow vocabulary of epistemology." (Manes, 1996, as cited in Speek, 200: 159). In Toptaş's work, man is the subject of the world that has become deaf because he cannot or does not want to hear the screams of nature:

Then, in a voice sometimes angry, sometimes grief, sometimes distress, the oak would begin to tell us exactly what was happening below. As he says, from time to time, some men with executioner faces came to the bottom of the slope below... Then, these men were walking around with a wandering spirit, chewing the beautiful mountain flowers for a while... Of course, they never heard the screams of what they chewed and crushed. (Toptaş, 2016: 11).

The human mind must accept the fact that there cannot be an ecology devoid of nature, just as it cannot be without humans. For this reason, ecology wants to switch to monism instead of being a party to the oppositions imposed by dualism (Morton, 2007: 142). This transition is not the belief of the fake unity in which one wishes to be fully integrated, but a way of gaining more loyalty to "things" by accepting differences. Humankind should allow everything to be spontaneously explained, and not imprison them in various meanings and identities for the sake of their "instrumental values" (Garrard 2016: 55). The best way to do this is to use "language". Perhaps, for this reason, literature is one of the best methods of enabling the existence to be unfolded. Unless this

freedom is provided and this reality is discovered by man, "things" will not go beyond turning into things ready to be used when necessary. In this case, trees like hornbeam, who say *"I could not even want to be a crooked chair leg in a distant village cafe from a human being who holds the strings of my life"* (Toptaş, 2016: 32), can be revealed not as trees but as timber awaiting their fate.

Contrary to being deaf to the specific language of nature, "a comprehensive identity developed on taking responsibility rejects seeing nature as a different and "other" element." (Sarıkaya, 2012: 101) It pushes people to make a self-criticism and question the irresponsible behavior towards the environment by looking at the events with the "eye" of nature. This is where ecocriticism seeks to guide people: experiencing enlightenment by self-criticism and ultimately creating an ecological identity. Ecological literary criticism gives nature a chance to express itself, in a sense, makes nature speak and gives it a voice in what can be:

While I was thinking about all these options one by one, sometimes I also wanted to be a railway sleeper. Maybe if these trains were to carry happiness and beauty from one place to another, I could accept being a traverse without even shearing my leaves... But if long train trains would carry bullets day and night, if long train trains would carry prisoners or wounded and hungry soldiers, they should not use me neither in the construction of sleepers nor in the station buildings where those trains enter and exit with a loud noise ... (Toptaş, 2016: 32).

Through nature, which finds the right to express itself, instead of a divisive and marginalizing way of thinking, a "holistic ecosystem" approach that accepts differences is developed. Within the framework of an interdisciplinary relationship and information exchange, the task of a critic is to examine environmental issues that come to the fore in any text, whether literary or not, and the text's responses to ecological problems. The reactions of nature are conveyed in the story as follows: *"We were also hearing the screams of the felled trees rising towards the sky from where we were. Sometimes we even couldn't stand it and were crying quietly."* (Toptaş, 2016: 13).

Thanks to the understanding that the contrasts or differences between the world and the human body do not give any superiority to any species, diversity is considered as a wealth, so in eco-criticism, all the links of the chain find a place of their own in nature. Ecocriticism, which refuses to think of the environment as nothing but ideological blueprints or other human meanings, also prevents false consciousness from settling. While media, politics, or some literary works often have a landscape for formal, symbolic or ideological purposes, texts created with eco-criticism refuse to refer to a landscape, place, and natural world as an independent object of value for its own good (Speek, 2000: 167). It is possible to see an

example of this in Toptaş's work:

"Well, what do people do when they cut?" I asked him. He said, "How can I know?" in a hesitant voice. "Probably they will use it for a purpose they set in their heads. They make the crooked ones into wood, for example, they cut them into large and small pieces and burn them in stoves or ovens. In a way, they warm up their hands with our death, cook their food and bread with our death." (Toptaş, 2016: 23).

IF I AM NONEXISTENT, YOU ARE NONEXISTENT TOO: "FEARS COME TRUE AND FAIRY TALE ENDS!"

The history of life on earth has also been the history of the interaction between living things and their environment. To a large extent, the physical form of the earth's vegetation and its habits and animal life have been shaped by the environment. However, in the time represented by the current century, there is a human who has gained significant power to change the nature of his world (Carson, 1962: 5).

The city created by the person who negatively sustains the change in *I Am a Hornbeam* is described as follows; *At dawn they passed the streets of a sizeable city that looks like a concrete forest. This was the city drowned in fog and smoke; Streets, avenues, boulevards, even squares writhed in pain to breathe.* (Toptaş, 2016: 51). This physical and spiritual exploitation triggers the consumption frenzy as the result of the mechanical worldview. "While biodiversity is rapidly declining and species disappear, human societies are trying to maintain a system that is based on economic and industrial growth along with social-economic-environmental injustice and exceeds the carrying capacity of the ecosystem" (Şen, 2018: 34). On the contrary, people now must strive to balance their needs with the demands of the ecosystem. Nature is aware of the value that her existence adds to her, but can develop her own transformation in line with a two-sided truth-based need:

Now I started the resistance with all my power, to not to be wood when I fall into the hands of people. Moreover, resisting anything has already beautified me. It gave my existence many meanings that I did not know. (Toptaş, 2016: 27).

In the work, the dreams of new formations for hornbeam, who can only forget about being detached from the soil for a useful reason and with another transformation that can make mankind happy, are listed as follows:

I was dreaming being of beautiful thing If I will going to be cut in any case in the future. For example, when I was slaughtered, let a peasant made a cradle from me. Let be my carvings, fine, embroideries, colors, and beads ... Or

if they are going to do something in any case, let me be a toy in a playground. In any district of any city, I wish I was a seesaw among flowers, benches, and swings, for instance. (Toptaş, 2016: 31).

For Hornbeam, the dream of new formations are attributed to an inherent value and the satisfaction of the soul is also taken into account with body, in the phenomenon called ecological crisis, an insatiable wheel is created at the production and consumption by creating false needs. This system, in which excessive wealth on the one hand and poverty and insufficient consumption prevail on the other, unless it starts to see people as responsible for the negative consequences and takes action as soon as possible, The power that man thinks he has will not be enough to repair the world. The main issue is this: the war that man thinks he wages against nature is in fact towards his own existence and he must discover the power to produce an alternative end. The key to this issue was found in the story:

What is called war, as the white-bearded oak once told me, would not begin and end anywhere on the earth.

Like everything else, it would begin with the human and end with the human.

So, the fronts were not on that mountain or on this plain.

The fronts were in human beings with all their cruelty. (Toptaş, 2016: 97)

"Well, wouldn't it be a garden of peace, the same person?" (Toptaş, 2016: 98), according to the hornbeam, who questioned a beneficial formation for all parties with this question, the state of the world is a harbinger of fatal consequences not only for nature but also for human beings. Rob Nixon (2011) discusses the concept of social and environmental justice in the context of the ecological struggles of the Third World in his "Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor". This scope is important to grasp the seriousness of the situation. The severity of delayed destruction, which takes place gradually and out of sight, spread over time and space, which Nixon defined as "slow violence", is a product of erosive violence with more serious consequences. "Slow violence", which has a different understanding from the traditional understanding of violence, which is perceived as a sudden and immediately noticed event, emphasizes what we should be dealing with. The temporal emphasis on slow violence, in which ecological struggles take place, allows us to center on not only the perceived violence, but also the representational difficulties and creative dilemmas that this incomprehensible change presents (Nixon, 2011: 13). The person who is the subject of violence is also affected as the injured person, the fact that the only entity is human that can prevent the destructiveness that takes place in time from turning into action, finds place in Toptaş's lines:

Only human could resist the cruelty of human, not trees

and birds, insects and herbs, animals, and stones.

Everything was starting with a human and ending in a human.

The rest was empty...

So, everything that human did not get involved in was a fairy tale. (Toptaş, 2016: 65).

As the difficulties in the perception of environmental disasters that can occur with human will increase, the struggle against slow violence becomes more difficult. One of the most striking examples of "slow violence" is presented in the work. While the nature that cries to the pain of man despite his cruelty against nature is represented, the act of being "happy" that can only occur mutually and the state of being reborn are associated:

We were just looking at people's pain, doing nothing. There was nothing we could do other than feel sorry and cry with them. So much so that if a drop of happiness fell on their faces, we could have green leaves at the foot of the courtyard wall. (Toptaş, 2016: 86).

As underlined in the work, even though the revival of nature seems to depend only on physical and biological changes when viewed directly, an emotional meaning is sought under this revival. The reconstruction of the environment is always inevitably selective and changeable, and the world is passed through a series of filters - perceptual, ideological, and literary (Speek, 2000: 162). Regardless of these filters, the tendency to represent the environment as it appears is useless when used to show the green world as nothing but reflective. Texts written without mentioning the two-sided human-nature relationship become unable to give a green world message. Texts aiming to give an ecological message should be developed depending on the picture that can be analyzed from a holistic perspective, and the living things that the text deals with should adapt to their natural environment, otherwise they do not teach real ecological concepts and have the opposite effect. As a requirement of ecocriticism, "representations of nature that are not depicted in the same picture with humans, even if they are in their realistic and natural environment, is not sufficient reason to make it pro-environmental" (Baudreaux, 2006: 118). Of course, "nature exists independently of what we say about it, but it exists for us only as long as we say something about it" (Kovel, 2005, as cited in Şen, 2018: 43). In *I am a Hornbeam Branch*, while conveying the act of living an independent life from the human through the dream of Hornbeam, on the one hand, he attributes the process of making sense of his own existence to the fairy tales that people will tell: *Perhaps I was going to go to another tale, but that fairy tale had not been created yet ... Undoubtedly, I would fly away as soon as the tale that would tell about me was told.* (Toptaş, 2016: 19).

It would be misleading to exclude language from a social and historical discourse and to consider the

intended ecological consciousness apart from language. Therefore, literature plays an important role. Because "the trace left by man on nature has two layers; by affecting nature both concretely, reshaping and arranging it, the human species leaves its mark on every part of the earth and all propositions about the natural world are social statements" (Şen, 2018: 43). The ways of talking about nature are expressed in language that has passed through the filter of culture and these come to life as social experiences. When it comes to nature, a language that requires not only social, cultural, and political discourses but also material discourses should be used. The acting force in the interaction of human bodies with the physical environment has the capacity to change social dynamics by causing the existing bodies to be restructured. The world has a much more intrinsic value than it seems, and continuity can only be achieved thanks to the cycle we accept that matter is also active. This state of continuity is expressed as the formation of a new production at the point where beauty is overflowing through, *I am a Hornbeam Branch*:

Well, was the fir, which first turned into the guitar, then the song, then into the waters and seeped into the presence of fish, was running out on the tables? Does it ever happen? Where can the creators of beauty be consumed, and by whom? (Toptaş, 2016: 47).

These lines are important to convey the intrinsic value of matter and to revive the acting nature of nature, which we consider ineffective. The role of material factors in change and transformation should also be considered, as social, cultural, and political discourses are not sufficient alone (Yazgünoğlu, 2012: 358). What humankind does is to glorify "human" with the discourses formed by beliefs and interests, and attribute all the negative results based on the destruction of nature to the body that is material despite human beings. In *I Am a Hornbeam Branch*, nature is a phenomenon presented as a reward despite the destruction of human beings, while the window made of wood on the grounds that it bridges the gap becomes a meaningful substance with this task. In other words, both man and matter only gain meaning if they are in contact with nature:

"It is best to be a window," said Pine. "In this case, believe me, it is best to be a window... Because if every window looks inside with one side, it looks outside on the other. Even if he cannot see anything, at least he sees the sky. He sees birds, clouds, horizons, stars, rains, or snowflakes..." (Toptaş, 2016: 74).

The linguistic transformation, which takes place with the emphasis on the active characteristic of matter, embraces the material transformation, leaves "language" to the center of all discourses and concludes that the world is formed by language. For example, in Toptaş's

work, being "poor" is associated with the state of being deprived of both nature and human components. Language is thus set up on an eco-critical platform plane where material transformations are also supported: *The street was poor in all respects. Their footsteps were little if any, for example, their cats were few, their colors, lights, and plants were few. At the base of the whitewashed mud brick walls, there was neither a branch of flowers nor a winged insect...* (Toptaş, 2016: 71).

When we see the nonexistence and poverty of nature as a threat to our own self, we will have a more durable way to justify this relationship. In eco-criticism, it is aimed to create a consciousness where we perceive the fact that what is different from us must also live:

The principle of "live and let live" aims at a democracy and classless society where we can speak of justice not only for humans but also for animals, plants, and the environment. This idea also emphasizes that everything is interconnected and that our egos are an integral part of this attachment. With this totality, we, our egos, have an extremely limited power and role... By identifying ourselves with a larger part, we undertake an important task in the creation and preservation of this wholeness. We have a share in this magnificence. (from Naess 1989, Dindar, 2012: 80).

Actions against this consciousness will bring our own end along with the end of nature. In Toptaş's work, the hornbeam dreams of many things happening while driving behind a trailer, unaware of what will happen to him. Nonetheless, these dreams have no counterpart in his own fairy tale. While they were making young hornbeam gallows, his end was nothing more than a movement planned to bring about the end of a human:

However, things did not develop as I thought. I became neither a door nor a window in the prison workshop where I was taken away... I was cut and sawn, chipped, I became gallows. (Toptaş, 2016: 102).

For hornbeam, just like his friend fir, being wood is better than this painful ending. This is an end that can be used for a better purpose, as opposed to amplifying man's suffering at death. Thus, he does not want to end the tale as gallows and calls out to the *Beşparmak Mountains* where he once lived:

"Hey trees!" I shouted. "Hey hornbeams, pines, firs and oaks! Hey long-tailed foxes, o timid stepped rabbits! Hear me, o! mountains, stones! Hear me, mountain hyacinth! Hear me, oh lone bug wandering in the forest's nook! Hear me, birds that deepen the sky! Hear me and don't know me as gallows from now on, "If I have a dry branch left in the plain behind the Beşparmak Mountains, now I'm a hornbeam branch!" (Toptaş, 2016: 111).

CONCLUSION

The rich depiction of nature in Hasan Ali Toptaş's book contributes to the presentation of environmental destruction as a social problem and produce representations of the sense of "protection" based on ecological consciousness. From the beginning to the end of the story, the interaction between man and the environment is constructed as a problem for both humans and nature. These problems are referred to not only as problems of nature, but also as social, psychological, and cultural problems that negatively affect all components of the earth. Environmental problems are presented both textually and pictorially using ecological language. In addition to presenting ecological concepts, the book sets the story in a natural environment and places the interaction between the environment and people on a natural basis. The trees depicted in the book offer the reader an opportunity to empathize, since we listen to the story from the hornbeam, instead of making an unreal effect on the reader. In this way, the awareness of children is transferred through hornbeam. Throughout the story, it is seen that the intrinsic value of nature is preserved. The general purpose produced in the book is the call to return to nature and the effort to realize the nature with a deep understanding of ecology emphasizing the wonders of nature and the inner values of nature. As a negative criticism of this book, the fact that hornbeam and other trees in the book, despite all the misbehavior of the human being, imagine the transformation as substances that are constantly offered to human service, is sustained in the idea that nature is an infinite resource for human use.

With this study, the ways of thinking on the solely non-monologue representations of the natural world is discussed. It is seen that the writer is aware of the ecological language he uses to remove the reader from his shell. This study also focuses on the way that the foundations that people derive from the natural world are shaped by the influence of learning, culture, and experience, despite their presumed biological origins. Considering the vital role of the ecological consciousness in childhood, "hornbeam" combined with a child's mind and discourses that can be developed through the nature it represents are emphasized. Eco-writing has the power to increase environmental literacy in the form of children's literature. For this reason, creating a literature that can be enriched and that can make children feel the inherent values of the world we live in and making reading suggestions from this literature can motivate children to establish a relationship with the environment and to develop their knowledge about environmental concepts. Considering that the recent ecological crisis and the next years may have more difficult consequences at this point, it is necessary to raise the awareness of children about the current situation and the protection of the environment. An environmentally conscious writer and a reader growing up from childhood refuses to allow

phenomena such as reason, language, and culture to determine what nature might be. Eco-critical readings reflect our noisy meanings as well as the unique voice of the nature in literature by offering alternative discourses that suggest what beings in nature can see.

Cultural ideologies presented to children about the environment clearly shape their cognitions, perceptions, attitudes, and behavior towards the world. For this reason, it is necessary to establish images, texts, and ideologies in relation to nature and in a non-anthropocentric way through children's literature. Unless we can provide a good reading opportunity to inculcate the values of environmental movement through children's literature, we will not be able to raise individuals with ecological identity and ideas. The important thing is not to reflect what is popular through magazines, stories, and the media, but to convey pro-naturalistic thoughts to children as values. "The environmental literature that children acquire has the capacity to make profound, lasting effects that appeal to both emotions and intelligence" (Gaard, 2009: 328). In this direction, as in *I am a Hornbeam Branch*, it must be priority to establish children's literature with works that aim to imagine non-human life worlds from the point of view of creatures, generally not as a field of absolute differences, but as a parallel universe that reflects back to human and interacts with human actors.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

REFERENCES

- Arkan A (2011). Literary Text Analysis and Ecocriticism. *Mediterranean Journal of Humanities* 1:43-51.
- Baudreaux BL (2006). The Representation of the Environment in Children's Literature. Master of Arts in Department of Sociology. New Orleans: University of New Orleans.
- Carson R (1962). *Silent Spring*. London: Crest Book Fawcett Publications.
- Dindar G (2012). Deep Ecology Movement: A Weird Poet Orhan Veli. *Ecocriticism: Environment and Literature*. Ankara: Phoenix. pp. 59-93.
- Gaard G (2009). Children's Environmental Literature: From Ecocriticism to Eco pedagogy. *Neohelicon* 36:21-334.
- Garrard G (2016). *Ecocriticism: Cultural Debates on Ecology and Environment*. Istanbul: Kolektif.
- Jung CG (1994). *Consciousness and the Function of the Subconscious*. Istanbul: Say Press.
- Jung CG (2005). *The Four Archetypes*. Istanbul: Metis Press.
- Morton T (2007). *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*. England: Harvard University Press.
- Nixon R (2011). *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. England: Harvard University Press.
- Oppermann S (2006). Body Politics in Nature Literature. *Littera: Literary Writings* 18:75-85.
- Oppermann S (2012). *Ecocriticism: Past and Present of Environmental and Literary Studies*. *Ecocriticism: Environment and Literature*. Ankara: Phoenix. pp. 9-59.
- Sarıkaya DB (2012). "An Eco-critical Look at the Epic of Gilgamesh". *Ecocriticism: Environment and Literature*. Ankara: Phoenix, pp. 93-129.

- Şen A (2018). Ecological Justice and Ecocriticism in Science Fiction Cinema. *İlef Journal* 5/1:31-59.
- Speek T (2000). Environment in Literature: Lawrence Buell's Ecocritical Perspective. *Koht ja paik/Place and Location. Estonian Academy of Arts* 8:160-171.
- Toptaş HA (2016). *I am a Hornbeam Branch*. İstanbul: Everest Press.
- Yazgünoğlu KC (2012). Posthumanism: New Materialism, Material Feminism and Trans-Corporeality". *Ecocriticism: Environment and Literature*. Ankara: Phoenix, pp. 323-365.

- Yılmaz ZG (2012). "Yaşar Kemal and Forest Fires". *Ecocriticism: Environment and Literature*. Ankara: Phoenix, pp. 129-171.