

**THE ARBOREAL NARRATIVE:  
AN ECOLOGICAL POSTHUMANIST  
READING OF ELIF SHAFAK'S *THE ISLAND  
OF MISSING TREES***

**BY**

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**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN  
LANGUAGES ISLAMABAD**

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By

SANA AZEEM

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**Thesis Title:** The Arboreal Narrative: An Ecological Posthumanist Reading of Elif

Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*

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Candidate of **Master of Philosophy** at the National University of Modern Languages do hereby declare that the thesis **The Arboreal Narrative: An Ecological Posthumanist Reading of Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of MPhil degree, is my original work, and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution.

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## ABSTRACT

**Title: The Arboreal Narrative: An Ecological Posthumanist Reading of Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees***

This research explores Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* (2021) from the perspective of ecological posthumanism. It investigates the strategies used for the configuration of ecological posthumanist elements in the selected text by focusing on the arboreal narrative of the novel. I invoke Serpil Oppermann's concept of "ecological posthumanism" and Rosi Braidotti's idea of "contemporary critical posthumanism" in order to analyse the selected text. Oppermann draws on Braidotti's theorising which incorporates 'ecology' and 'environmentalism' with a special emphasis placed on all "earth-others". I have been able to employ Oppermann and Braidotti's concepts to advantage by exploring the arboreal narrative in Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*. I do it by focusing on the interconnectedness of humans and nonhumans (plants and animals) and subverting anthropocentrism through the idea of 'becoming-with'. Thus, this study explores the mutual relationship between the two (humans and nonhumans) in an ecologically sustainable mode and the consequences of the problematic enmeshment of the two entities. For this research, I use Catherine Belsey's textual analysis as my research method. My analysis of the novel uncovers various strategies it employs to depict ecological posthumanist elements. These include the arboreal narrator, interconnectedness, becoming-animal, becoming-earth, and matter's effectivity. These strategies decentralise human agency and challenge anthropocentric hierarchies. They also highlight the interdependence of human and nonhuman entities in an ecological framework. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that human-nonhuman enmeshment results in both harmonious and disruptive consequences; while mutual coexistence fosters ecological balance and sustainability, neglecting interconnectedness leads to disruptions in ecological equilibrium. The novel also explores ecological sustainability through symbiosis and regeneration. Since Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* has not been studied from the perspective of ecological posthumanism in the available critical scholarship, this investigation fills this research gap and contributes to the production of knowledge in this domain. It also contributes to discussions on ecological sustainability and narrative agency.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <b>THESIS AND DEFENSE APPROVAL FORM.....</b>  | <b>iii</b>  |
| <b>AUTHOR’S DECLARATION.....</b>  | <b>iv</b>   |
| <b>ABSTRACT.....</b>  | <b>v</b>    |
| <b>TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>   | <b>vi</b>   |
| <b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>  | <b>viii</b> |
| <b>DEDICATION.....</b>  | <b>ix</b>   |
| <br>  |             |
| <b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>   | <b>1</b>    |
| 1.1 Locating Shafak’s <i>The Island of Missing Trees</i> within the Tradition of Arboreal Narratives..... | 8           |
| 1.2 Thesis Statement .....  | 10          |
| 1.3 Research Questions .....  | 11          |
| 1.4 Delimitation of the Study .....   | 11          |
| 1.5 Significance of the Study .....   | 12          |
| 1.6 Chapterisation .....  | 13          |
| <b>2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>  | <b>14</b>   |
| 2.1 Barry Commoner's Ecological Principles .....  | 14          |
| 2.1.1 Commoner's First Law of Ecology.....  | 15          |
| 2.1.2 Commoner's Second Law of Ecology.....   | 15          |
| 2.1.3 Commoner's Third Ecological Law .....   | 16          |
| 2.2 Cheryll Glotfelty's Contribution in Ecocritical Posthumanism.....                                     | 16          |
| 2.3 Material Narratives and Ecological Webs .....   | 18          |
| 2.4 Creative Materiality and Narrative Agency .....   | 20          |
| 2.5 Jay D. Bolter’s Critique of Human-centric Worldview .....   | 21          |
| 2.6 Bridging Posthumanism-Ecocriticism Divide .....   | 23          |
| 2.7 Reexamining Ecohumanism .....   | 24          |
| 2.8 Works Already Done on/around the Arboreal Narratives .....  | 25          |
| <b>3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....</b>   | <b>32</b>   |

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 3.1 Introduction.....   | 32        |
| 3.2 Theoretical Framework.....  | 32        |
| 3.3 Research Methodology.....   | 40        |
| 3.3.1 Research Method.....  | 41        |
| <b>4. THE ECOLOGICAL ENTANGLEMENT IN SHAFAK'S <i>THE ISLAND OF MISSING TREES</i> .....</b>                            | <b>44</b> |
| 4.1 A Tree Narrates.....  | 45        |
| 4.2 Interconnectedness between the Human and the Nonhuman .....   | 49        |
| 4.3 Becoming Earth .....  | 53        |
| 4.4 Becoming Animal .....   | 58        |
| 4.5 Matters Effectivity in Ecosystem.....   | 63        |
| <b>5. "IT WILL TAKE TIME, HEALING": ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY IN SHAFAK'S <i>THE ISLAND OF MISSING TREES</i>.....</b> | <b>70</b> |
| 5.1 Challenge to Anthropocentric Views.....   | 70        |
| 5.2 Problematic Enmeshment between the Human and the Nonhuman .....   | 75        |
| 5.3 Symbiosis and Regeneration.....   | 81        |
| <b>6. CONCLUSION.....</b>   | <b>87</b> |
| 6.1 Recommendations for Further Research.....   | 91        |
| <b>7. WORKS CITED.....</b>  | <b>93</b> |

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## **DEDICATION**

*To my mother, whose love I can never repay.*

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

This research examines Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* (2021) from the standpoint of ecological posthumanism. It explores the strategies used for the configuration of ecological posthumanist elements in Shafak's novel. While focusing on the arboreal narrative of the selected text, I do not use "arboreal narrative" because I intend to focus on the narrating technique of the selected text; I use it to emphasise that the narrator of the selected text is a tree (fig tree) and, therefore, my research is located within ecological posthumanism that argues to consider the human and the nonhuman (trees and animals) at par with each other. I invoke Serpil Oppermann's concept of "ecological posthumanism" and Rosi Braidotti's idea of "contemporary critical posthumanism" in order to analyse *The Island of Missing Trees*. Oppermann draws on Braidotti's theorising which incorporates 'ecology' and 'environmentalism' with a special emphasis placed on all "earth-others" (67). Braidotti uses the term "earth-others" to emphasise the nonhuman components such as animals, plants, minerals, and ecosystems that are often marginalised, exploited, or endangered by human activities.

In the centre of Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*, an unusual voice appears that speaks through the whispers of a fig tree instead of human language. The way this arboreal narrator unfolds the plot transgresses traditional bounds of what could be a narrative and takes its audience to a place where the relationship between people and their environment takes centre stage. Not only is the narrator narrating its own life but also the interwoven lives of the island residents, memories preserved through ages, pleasures and sorrows of the islanders, their traumas, recoveries, anguish, and serenity are spoken about by this arboreal narrator. With its roots deeply entrenched, the narrator bears witness to the ups and downs of the island and its inhabitants. In this novel, Shafak oversteps the anthropocentric borders of traditional storytelling by invoking for readers a universe in which the natural and the mundane coexist. This remarkable narrator intrigued me to further look into the ecological posthumanist approach that challenges anthropocentrism. The arboreal voice stands witness, not an echo, to the horrors, hardships, and struggles of the people who live beneath its boughs; it does so as a kind of person rather than a mere literary device. In

other words, this perspective might be called a symbiotic relationship between the human and the nonhuman, which is reflected across the pages of the novel. This narrator arising from among the rustling leaves and intertwined branches speaks not only about its life and destinies but also those of the connected islanders, as well as the surrounding natural tapestry.

Published in 2021, *The Island of Missing Trees* presents a narrative woven together with elements of the past and present. The Cyprus War serves as the backdrop for the book. It begins with the elegance of a fig tree, its roots reaching deep into the ground to uncover memories and the devastation left by war-torn areas. An ever-present yet silent narrator, the fig tree offers a metaphor for perseverance. In my opinion, the arboreal voice is a special literary device that offers a unique viewpoint on the complex relationship that exists between humans and nonhumans. The fig tree takes on the role of a symbolic bridge, uniting the island's occupants with the planet they live on. The narrative tackles issues of loss and displacement as well as the desire for peace while depicting the effects of violence. Through her book, Shafak paints a picture of islanders caught in the crosscurrents of history, revealing their hopes, weaknesses, and the impact that political and cultural unrest has had on their way of life. Shafak has tackled the collective trauma of the people of Cyprus through the lens of the island of lost trees.

*The Island of Missing Trees* presents complex cultural and political issues through the narrative voice of a fig tree. This posthuman narrator does not stand in a vacuum without political and cultural dimensions. During her interview with *The Conduit* (Podcast Show), Shafak talks about the posthuman narrator voice, that is, of a fig tree, in her novel. Considering the complex political history of Cyprus that has been shaped by a number of factors, strategic location, its diverse cultural heritage and its relation with neighbouring countries, she states, “it's a place of accumulated grief” (Shafak n.p). On a question about the unusual narrator, a fig tree, she states that she wanted to present the cultural and political dilemma of Cyprus “without falling into the trap of nationalism and tribalism” (Shafak n.p). At this point, I feel it is necessary to rationalise why the ecological posthumanist outlook is different from the cultural and political aspects of the novel.

Ecological posthumanism, as deployed in the analysis of *The Island of Missing Trees*, offers a distinct perspective that diverges significantly from the cultural and

political dimensions of the novel. On the other hand, rather than relying on cultural and political narrative that exclusively privilege human experiences, societal structures, and historical ideologies, ecological posthumanism reorients that gaze onto the intertwined destinies of human and nonhuman agents and foregrounds the agentic capacities and narratives of more-than-human entities in an anthropocentric world.

Ecological posthumanism is different from any other more traditional cultural and politically oriented approach that has space for ethical considerations to be re-evaluated and the discourse that includes the rights and well-being of other nonhuman actors. This challenges not only the rigidity of identity and boundaries of agency (of the human and nonhuman) but questions the divisions between nature and culture that have long existed. Underlined to the core by the ecological enmeshment and porosity of boundaries existing between human and nonhuman, ecological posthumanism comes across as a useful framework in taking a hold over the intricacies among species and the intrinsic value vested in all kinds of living forms in the narrative of *The Island of Missing Trees*.

To provide a background for the theoretical lens of Oppermann and Braidotti, it is important to situate ecological posthumanism within its broader context. The foundations of ecological posthumanism are rooted in philosophical and ecological traditions that challenge anthropocentrism and highlight the interconnectedness of all forms of life. One of the earliest contributions to this discourse comes from Arne Naess's concept of deep ecology, introduced in 1973. Naess distinguishes between "shallow" ecology that prioritises environmental conservation for human benefit, and "deep" ecology that recognises the intrinsic value of all living and nonliving entities. He conceptualises humans as "knots in the biospherical net" and thus rejects the anthropocentric notion of humans as separate from or superior to their environment (Naess 95). In this way by presenting the networked ecological entities, he provides foundational understanding of destabilisation of the binary of the human and nonhuman.

Donna Haraway's contributions further expand the ecological dimension of posthumanism. In her seminal work, *When Species Meet* (2008), Haraway challenges anthropocentric boundaries by introducing the concept of "companion species." This concept emphasises the reciprocal and co-evolutionary relationships between humans

and nonhumans (16). Haraway's perspective deepens our understanding of how species interdependence reconfigures traditional human-centered narratives.

Timothy Morton's *The Ecological Thought* (2010) extends the conversation on ecological interconnectedness through his notion of "the mesh." Rather than envisioning species as neatly organized or ranked, Morton depicts all living and nonliving entities as woven into an expansive web. He states that the mesh consists of infinite connections and infinitesimal differences (28). He underscores how every boundary is fluid and every organism is enmeshed with countless others. This perspective compels a reevaluation of ethical responsibilities humans are no longer viewed as occupying a pinnacle of hierarchy but are instead participants in a network of interdependent life forms.

Cary Wolfe's *What Is Posthumanism?* (2010) further expands this discourse by critiquing the humanist tradition that prioritises human rationality and autonomy. Wolfe's posthumanist framework emphasises the embeddedness of humans within ecological and technological systems and rejects the dichotomy between nature and culture. Wolfe argues that posthumanism "opposes the fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy, inherited from humanism itself that Hayles rightly criticizes" (xv). This progression, from Naess's deep ecology to the relational frameworks of Haraway, Morton, and Wolfe, provides the necessary background for understanding the ecological posthumanist lens employed in this study. These foundational ideas set the stage for Oppermann's concept of "ecological posthumanism" and Braidotti's "contemporary critical posthumanism" that will serve as the primary theoretical framework for analysing Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*.

Before diving into the hybrid discipline of ecological posthumanism, it is instructive to outline the key concepts that inform this research. I focus on the human and nonhuman networks that co-constitute each other regardless of species designation. The research also explores how these networks operate in mutuality and the consequences of problematic enmeshment of the human and nonhuman interpenetration. In the selected novel, the human and nonhuman (plants and animals) are the inseparable parts of the ecosphere and are equally important for its harmony. In order to make such connections between the two, a fig tree is used as the narrator of the novel.

My first theoretical lens for exploring the selected primary text, *The Island of Missing Trees*, is Oppermann's idea of "ecological posthumanism" proposed in her treatise *From Posthumanism to Posthuman Ecocriticism* (2016). It stresses the significance of interconnectedness of social and ecological networks within which humans and nature coexist, enmeshed with knowledge practices and material phenomenon. The relationship between humans and nature depends upon the ways they are interconnected with each other.

This concept of ecological posthumanism stresses the link between the human and the nonhuman (plants and animals) and their interdependence. It argues to consider the nonhuman to be brought at par with the human. The interconnection of the two entities is twofold; on the one hand, their mutual relation suggests an ecologically sustainable space where they live in a symbiotic relationship, on the other hand, the problematic enmeshment of the human and the nonhuman results in dire consequences for both the species. If all the human and nonhuman ecological entities are "networked with each other [sic] and with technologies, practices, and disciplines which may cluster and co-constitute them regardless of species designation" (Oppermann 2016, 26), humans can no longer be defined in a separate ontological zone. Rather, they are part of a bigger network where other nonhuman actors are also enmeshed with them. Therefore, ecological posthumanist theory rejects the primacy of humanity and "destabilizes the hierarchy of species, opening an ontological gap where all earth-others come galloping in" (Braidotti 67).

Oppermann draws on Braidotti's concept of "contemporary critical posthumanism" for her concept of ecological posthumanism. Braidotti maintains that contemporary re-configurations of critical posthumanism engage with ecology and environmentalism. They rest on an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the nonhuman or 'earth-others'. This practice of relating to others necessitates the rejection of self-centred individualism. It produces a new way of combining self-interests with the well-being of an enlarged community, based on environmental inter-connections (Braidotti 48). Under Braidotti's umbrella concept of "contemporary critical posthumanism", there are smaller closely related ideas like "becoming-earth" and "becoming-animal" that are useful for my analysis in chapter four and five. "Becoming-earth" recognises the issues of ecological sustainability and "becoming-animal" implies the rejection of anthropocentrism.

Posthumanism, as Eileen Joy and Christine M. Neufeld argues, may have “complicated how we conceptualise and enact our human identities”, and destabilised “the category ‘human’, in its biological, social, and political aspects”. This reflects a departure from anthropocentric practices and discourses in all aspects of cultural, biological, political, and ecological relations (171). The traditional humanistic conceptual premises within which the human was defined are now replaced by new materialist and posthumanist viewpoints that contest the centrality of man as well as recognise the interconnections among different forms of life. This rejection of anthropocentrism results in the restructuring of species’ hierarchy and man’s connection to other nonhuman beings. Hence, man becomes, what Nayar calls “humanimal” (5), because human existence is always characterised by networks with other beings and material forces.

For my research, I have focused on the ecological posthumanist elements in the selected novel. The text demonstrates the agency of trees in a way that it is deeply interconnected with humans and their inventions. As presented in the text through the narration of a fig tree, trees have been an equal part of the universe with human beings. From the times Adam and Eve descended from the Garden of Eden after eating the fruit of knowledge. Through thousands of years of evolution, in fact, plants were present on earth before human civilization. But when man came, he exploited nature for his benefit. This idea of man as the centre is the main claim of the “shallow ecology”, a concept expounded by Næss in his article “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement. A Summary” (1973). According to Naes, shallow ecology refers to the environmental perspective that primarily focuses on the preservation and conservation of nature for human benefit (95). It tends to prioritise human interest over the intrinsic values of nonhuman entities and ecosystems. While ecological posthumanism refutes this concept and takes on the dimension where human and nonhuman agencies are considered to be equal and having independent and mutual right to exist.

The ecological aspect talks for the mutual coexistence of nature and culture where both can either live in a symbiotic relation, or independently, without causing harm to each other. Considering the postmodern era where population is ever growing at an exponential pace, it is inevitable that humans need more space and that will leave less space for nature. In *The Island of Missing Trees*, the author has portrayed

the idea of ecological sustainability in a modern society where humans and nonhumans are living in harmony and that space is represented by a tavern called “The Happy Fig”. The novel, enriched with many nonhuman metaphors and similes, presents the life of an immigrant tree, portrayed as a female protagonist that finds it hard to survive in London as it is the tree of the hot climate of Cyprus. The tree’s melancholy and generational memory gives it agency and puts it at par with the humans.

By deploying the hybrid theoretical concept of ecological posthumanism, I explore the complex environmental interconnections and social-ecological networks within which humans and nonhumans and material phenomena are enmeshed. This idea is developed in the analysis chapters where I try to locate such instances where nature and culture overlap, inter-depend and co-evolve. If ecocritical and posthumanist approaches individually re-evaluate the species’ binaries, ecological posthumanism, an interdisciplinary field, may be engaged with for theoretical support to analyse the text where the interdependence of nature, culture and society is depicted. This makes my study interdisciplinary in nature because it inherently intersects multiple disciplines, including ecology, ecocriticism, posthumanism, environmental studies, literary studies, and philosophy. This idea of multidisciplinary of my study is reinforced by what Braidotti writes in *The Posthuman*. She notes that contemporary critical posthumanism integrates “ecology and environmentalism with a special emphasis placed...all ‘earth-others’” (48). Braidotti further identifies her framework within a broader posthumanist tradition that draws from anti-humanist philosophies of subjectivity. When I interbraid Oppermann’s concept of “ecological posthumanism” with that of Braidotti, the interdisciplinary nature of my research project is crystalised.

In qualitative research, objectives are not always fully achievable due to the interpretive and exploratory nature of the methodology. Keeping this in view, I intend to achieve objectives mentioned hereinafter through this study. I demonstrate how Shafak configures ecological posthumanist elements in the text. I analyse the consequences of human-nonhuman enmeshment and the impact such entanglement has on both species. Finally, I also investigate how *The Island of Missing Trees* underscores the idea of ecological sustainability in a world threatened by anthropocentrism. These objectives guide my approach to the novel and address the



shifting balance between culture and nature that is portrayed in the selected text through the voice of an arboreal narrator. In the forthcoming section, I try to locate and contextualise my primary text in the tradition of arboreal narratives.

### **1.1 Locating Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* within the Tradition of Arboreal Narratives**

Before plunging into the ecological posthumanist dimension of *The Island of Missing Trees* (2021), it would be instructive to contextualise my study in arboreal narratives. First of all, it is important to explain that, for me, an arboreal narrative is both a narration by a tree and a narration about trees. After the ecocritical consciousness that emerged in the late 20th century, Shafak is one of the few writers who have written novels from an arboreal perspective. Besides Shafak, Orhan Pamuk has also practised arboreal narration in his novel, *My Name is Red* (2002), originally published in 1998. However, the arboreally conscious part of the novel appears only on a few pages. In the novel, the arboreal narration is from the perspective of a tree picture that hangs on a wall. The tree describes how it was once part of a manuscript that was commissioned by the son-in-law of the Persian Shah Tahmasp. But it got separated from the rest of the book during a robbery. Another recent novel in this tradition is *The Overstory* (2018) by Richard Powers. *The Overstory* is a piece of fiction that discusses trees and nature in an ecological and scientific way. It illustrates widespread environmental problems like deforestation, climate change, and other types of natural calamities. Shafak's works, on the other hand, often address environmental and ecological issues in a broader social and political context. For example, her novel, *The Flea Palace* (2015), explores the impact of urbanisation on nature and the environment. Her novel, *The Forty Rules of Love* (2023), originally published in 2009, touches on themes of environmental degradation and the interconnectedness of all living things.

In this section, I attempt to situate my primary text within the ecological posthumanist tradition of fiction writing. Therefore, a brief background of this tradition would be in order. The emergence of the modern environmentalist movement in the late 1960s and the early 1970s correlates with the development of ecocriticism as a field of literary theory. Because of rapid environmental changes that were taking place throughout the world, the second half of the 20th century saw an

increase in environmental consciousness in literary scholarship. The environmental movement developed in response to the issues as environmental disasters such as species extinction, ozone layer depletion, and degradation started to be viewed as genuine concerns for humanity. Through a variety of channels, the Environmentalist movement made itself known to arouse societal and, more especially, political concern for environmental issues. The emergence of ecocriticism in literary criticism followed the emergence of new environmental considerations in other fields. Ecocriticism has no exact known origin date, but in the 1980s, when environmental literary studies became more popular in colleges, it began to acquire acceptance.

One of the first texts of nature writing, *Walden* (2011) by Henry David Thoreau, originally published in 1864, depicts the interaction of humans and nonhumans in intricate networks that they both co-create and co-evolve. Thoreau's *Walden* (2011) advances the idea of ecocriticism so that it can have an interdisciplinary impact that transcends prejudice to build a universal discipline to debate, innovate, and produce a healthy literature-environment anthology for future generations to live in. This persuades critics to pursue a passion for ecology. Thoreau's appreciation of nature establishes new premises that address the most pressing ecological issues. John Burnside's *The Glisters* (2009) is a very unsettling book about the intricate relationships between ecosystems and human bodies that have the potential to be toxic and bring various resistant types of nonhuman action into closer foreground. In a compelling portrayal of how toxic agents generate a physical crisis and spiritual infection next to a chemical facility, *The Glisters* (2009) shows the physical and environmental repercussions of hazardous substances.

*Flight Behavior* (2012) by Barbara Kingslover tackles climate change, one of the most divisive issues of our day. The work reflects the essence of eco-fiction since it explores the complex scientific, financial, and psychological aspects of climate change. Kingslover writes a passionate book on how human activity is causing global warming and how it affects both humans and nonhuman animals, drawing on both her Appalachian heritage and her biology training (butterfly in this novel). Emmi Itäranta's *Memory of Water* (2014) also presents a dystopian future where global warming has resulted in scarcity of potable water and wars are waged over water. The novel engages with the problematic enmeshment of humans and nature resulting in dystopia.

James Bradley's *Clade* (2017) is also a cli-fi novel in which the effects of climate change are presented. In *Clade* (2017), extreme weather is grappled with very effectively and convincingly, and some aspects of larger impacts such as changes to daily temperatures and the disintegration of glaciers. The novel takes on the posthuman turn as it includes the genetically engineered species and interconnections of the human and the nonhuman.

Recent novel in this tradition is *The Overstory* by Powers. As mentioned above *The Overstory* is a piece of fiction that discusses trees and nature in an ecological and scientific way. It illustrates widespread environmental problems like deforestation, climate change, and other types of natural hazards that affect the growth and life of trees. In *The Overstory*, Powers also shows how trees interact with one another (socialise), battle, and live with a few other primary characters who are entwined with and connected to trees. It is here, within the sphere of eco fiction and nature writing that my primary text *The Island of Missing Trees* gets located.

As per the location of my selected text, this research is a quest for deeper meanings within the networks of symbiotic connections portrayed in the plot of the novel. Navigating through its narration, the arboreal narrator demands us to question our relationship with nature and our role in shaping our environments and to reflect upon our actions and their consequences. The study aspires to contribute to the emerging field of ecological Posthumanism that highlights the complex relationship between nature and humanity.

## **1.2 Thesis Statement**

Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* (2021) portrays the human and nonhuman (plants and animals) networks in which both agencies seem to co-evolve in an ecologically sustainable manner. However, the enmeshment of the two is likely to result in disruption of their sustainability, with effects on both human and nonhuman actors. Serpil Oppermann and Rosi Braidotti's theoretical positions like "ecological posthumanism" and "contemporary critical posthumanism" may be usefully employed to read the selected text and to demonstrate how the nonhuman has been brought on par with the human and how they impact each other.

### 1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the strategies used for the configurations of ecological posthumanist elements in Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*?
2. In what ways do the consequences of human-nonhuman enmeshment play out in the selected novel?
3. How does the selected text engage with the idea of ecological sustainability?

### 1.4 Delimitation of the Study

This study aims to explore how Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* challenges and expands upon conventional narrative techniques through the use of an arboreal narrator. The research seeks to provide a comprehensive and in-depth examination of the ways in which Shafak incorporates ecological posthumanist themes into her writing, using a fig tree as the primary narrative voice.

My research's sampling technique closely aligns with purposive sampling, a method that involves the selection of text for an in-depth examination. This approach allows for a focused investigation of specific texts that are relevant to the research questions. *The Island of Missing Trees* offers a distinctive portrayal of ecological concerns and features a unique arboreal narrator that makes it especially relevant to the aims of this research. Other works by Shafak, or texts with related themes, remain outside the scope of this study. These boundaries ensure a clear and focused inquiry into the complexities of human-nonhuman interactions, as portrayed through *The Island of Missing Trees*.

My research focuses solely on *The Island of Missing Trees* and utilises Oppermann's and Braidotti's frameworks as the primary analysis tools. This delimitation does not take into account Shafak's other works, which might also deal with related themes or employ comparable narrative techniques. In addition, the study does not include other theoretical stances that offer alternative viewpoints on the novel's ecological and posthumanist aspects. By establishing these boundaries, the study hopes to keep the investigation focused and clear on how *The Island of Missing Trees* specifically addresses the complexities of relationships between humans and nature through its distinct narrative voice, adding to the larger conversation on ecological posthumanism and environmental studies.

## 1.5 Significance of the Study

The importance of this study lies in the fact that it examines Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* by deploying the lenses of ecological posthumanism and contemporary critical posthumanism. Through the integration of literary studies, ecological consciousness, and posthumanist theory, it generates an important interdisciplinary discourse and provides significant insights into the urgent ethical and environmental issues of our day. The research encourages more comprehensive thinking about human-nonhuman interactions, conservation of the environment, and the possibility of ecological sustainability and regeneration.

Since the selected novel has got a fig tree as a narrator, its analysis discusses the creative use of nonhuman viewpoints. The approach also offers a more inclusive narrative that recognises the subjectivity and agency of the nonhuman. It also challenges the anthropocentric narratives that are common in literature and society. A shift in the normative narrative technique helps readers reevaluate their place in the natural world and develop a greater understanding of the nonhuman species that coexist with us. The study also highlights the devastating effects the human-nonhuman conflicts have on the environment. It highlights the destruction that political conflicts and wars inflict on the natural world, harming ecosystems and cutting off the complex web of life. It calls for a reevaluation of development and conflict resolution methods in the light of their ecological consequences.

This study emphasises how humans should treat the planet and nonhuman world ethically. It encourages collective reevaluation of the human behaviour and its effects on the environment. By putting emphasis on how all life forms are interdependent, the study encourages societies and individuals to embrace more sustainable lifestyles and laws that respect the worth and dignity of every living thing on Earth. Overall, this study is significant in that it successfully offers important new perspectives on the interactions that exist between the humans and other living things. It also reminds us of the ability of literature to reflect, critique, and motivate change. It also adds to the worldwide conversation about posthumanist ethics, environmental sustainability and the quest for a more equitable and peaceful coexistence on the Earth.

## 1.6 Chapterisation

1. Introduction
2. Literature Review
3. Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology
4. The Ecological Harmony: A Textual Analysis of Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*
5. "It will take time, healing": The Promise of Ecological Sustainability in Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*
6. Conclusion

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to validate the current research, I have conducted an in-depth literature review to identify the research gaps in the body of critical knowledge. This literature review helps contextualise my study within the expanding body of ecological posthumanist studies. I have attempted to review the available scholarly sources in thematic order. The first two of the eight parts of my literature review belong to the domain of ecocriticism, the next five fall in the field of ecological posthumanism, and the last part of the review engages with critical works already done on/around arboreal narratives including my primary text. I have done my review of literature under the following subheadings:

- Barry Commoner's Ecological Principles
- Cheryll Glotfelty's Contribution in Ecocritical Posthumanism
- Material Narratives and Ecological Webs
- Creative Materiality and Narrative Agency
- Jay D. Bolter's Critique of Human-centric Worldview
- Bridging Posthumanism-Ecocriticism Divide
- Reexamining Ecohumanism
- Works Already Done on/around Arboreal Narratives

#### **2.1 Barry Commoner's Ecological Principles**

Commoner's contribution to the environmental movement and the applicability of his ecological laws to current ecological research suggest that Commoner's work serves as a crucial basis for comprehending the intricate relationships that exist within the ecosphere. A key figure in the modern ecology movement, Commoner wrote extensively about environmental issues and emphasised the intricate relationships that exist between nature, technology, and society. His groundbreaking book *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology* (1974) examines the environmental crisis from a broad angle. He claims in his book that the crisis is because man has “broken out of the circle of life, converting its endless cycles into man-made, linear events” (Commoner 5).

In *The Closing Circle* (1974), Commoner states four fundamental principles of ecology: (1) everything is connected to everything else, (2) everything must go somewhere, (3) nature knows best, and (4) there is no such thing as a free lunch. These guidelines highlight the complex web of relationships and interdependence that make up the ecosphere and highlight how human activity affects the environment and vice versa. Commoner argues against the prevalent ideas that the main ways to address the environmental disaster are to restrict consumption or population increase. Instead, he supports changing production methods and technologies so that they are in line with ecological principles and human needs. He emphasises the moral and political aspects of environmental challenges with his appeal for a democratic, decentralised, and ecologically healthy society. In the next three subheadings, I have reviewed Commoner's first three laws of Ecology in order to situate my study and justify my point of departure.

### 2.1.1 Commoner's First Law of Ecology

The first three ecological laws proposed by Commoner are very relevant to our study. The law that says "everything is connected to everything else" (30) aligns with the goal of the study, which is to investigate the intricate webs of relationships that exist between different species and between living things and their environments. This viewpoint is consistent with the objective of cultivating a sustainable ecosphere in which nonhuman species and people live in harmony.

### 2.1.2 Commoner's Second Law of Ecology

The idea that all components of the ecosphere are interrelated is reinforced by the second law, "everything must go somewhere" (Commoner 35) that implies that the acts of one entity always have an effect on others. The significance of comprehending the effects of both human and nonhuman activity within ecological networks is emphasised by this principle. This principle underscores the inevitability of the impact of actions taken by any entity within an ecosystem on others. This would only point out that in nature, there is no "away" for the garbage or pollutants not influencing other parts within the ecosystem. Sustainability established within environmental practices assures recognition of the well-being of all components of the ecosystem and not only those of the human being.



This principle underlines the need for integrating a more holistic approach into environmental science, one which fully takes into consideration the cascading effects of actions across species diversity. It also points at the importance of research and education to enlighten such complex interactions and guide human activities, responsible for the ecosphere. Understanding and acting upon the interconnectedness described by Commoner's second law is essential for addressing global environmental challenges such as climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss.

### 2.1.3 Commoner's Third Ecological Law

The claim made by Commoner that "nature knows best" (37) opposes anthropocentric viewpoints and is in favour of acknowledging the agency of nature. This law emphasises the significance of viewing natural processes and entities as equal participants in maintaining ecological balance and pushes for a reevaluation of human supremacy.

The research suggests that Commoner's rules might not adequately reflect the complexities of environmental relations, particularly with regard to the interactions and material impacts between human and nonhuman actors, even though they provide a fundamental framework for ecological understanding. Thus, by concentrating on the complex nature of intra- and inter-species interactions and investigating how these dynamics contribute to the preservation and improvement of ecological sustainability, this study seeks to go beyond Commoner's paradigm and explores the narrative agency of nonhuman entities, such as arboreal narrators, as a means to challenge anthropocentric frameworks and offer fresh insights into ecological consciousness and interconnectedness. In the next section, I critically review Glotfelty's contribution in ecocritical posthumanism.

## 2.2 Cheryll Glotfelty's Pioneering Contribution in Ecocritical Posthumanism

According to Cheryll Glotfelty, in "Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis" (1996), the study of the connection between literature and the natural environment is known as ecocriticism. This essay is crucial in understanding my point of intervention. Ecocriticism is a field that is strongly committed to examining the interconnectedness between the human and nonhuman worlds. According to Glotfelty, ecocriticism studies the complex web of the ecosphere, where

every component is interconnected (XVII). This idea offers a thorough method for comprehending how literature both reflects and shapes our interaction with the natural world. In *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), Glotfelty helped establish ecocriticism as a vital topic in literary studies. Glotfelty lays the groundwork for understanding the interactions between literary narratives and the environment. But her viewpoint is primarily on the interaction rather than going into great detail about the posthumanist elements that later critiques and theories have highlighted. The goal of this study is to fill that gap by exploring the hybrid field of ecological posthumanism. This field expands the discussion of nonhuman agencies and the moral implications of their relationships within literary analysis, going beyond how humans interact with the environment.

According to Glotfelty, literature is essential for addressing the environmental crisis (Glotfelty 231-232). Her work encourages a closer examination of how narratives might develop a sense of responsibility towards the nonhuman world by acknowledging the influence of literature in forming environmental consciousness. Glotfelty demonstrates how literature may address urgent environmental issues and urge readers to reconsider their role in the natural world.

By deploying posthumanist theory, my study aims to broaden the scope of ecocritical analysis and provide a more detailed examination of the intricate relationships that exist between humans and the environment as they are portrayed in contemporary literature. In general, this study attempts to expand Glotfelty's ecocritical framework by incorporating the ideas of ecological posthumanism. Though her work offers an essential foundation for comprehending the relationship between literature and the environment, it lacks ecocritical interconnectedness. While her analysis is pioneering in establishing ecocriticism, it does not delve into the posthumanist elements that later critiques and theories explore. This includes issues such as nonhuman agency, materiality, and the moral dimensions of human-nonhuman relationships that are integral to ecological posthumanism. My research expands the conversation about how literature (Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*) might raise environmental consciousness and ethical questions for nonhuman animals. In the next section, I critically review Serenella Iovino and Oppermann's collaborative work, *Stories Come to Matter* (2014).

## 2.3 Material Narratives and Ecological Webs

Extending the integration of Iovino and Oppermann's collaborative work, *Stories Come to Matter* (2014), into the theoretical foundations of this study, it is clear that their understanding of the dynamic materiality of the world and the entwined stories of humans, nonhumans, and their creative agency greatly enhances the ecological posthumanist framework that this study has chosen. Like Commoner's third law of ecology, "nature knows best" that emphasises the innate wisdom and interconnectedness of natural systems, Iovino and Oppermann present a vision of the world as a dynamic network where all forms of matter possess the capacity for agency and expression (Iovino and Oppermann 5). In Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* (2021), the arboreal narrator embodies this agentic creativity and vitality and thus challenges the anthropocentric narratives and encouraging a deeper engagement with the ecological and posthumanist dimensions of storytelling. This perspective is essential to understanding the narrative strategy used in the work.

Iovino and Oppermann's concept of "material narratives" expands upon Commoner's principles by emphasising the agency of matter in ecological systems. While Commoner's framework highlights the interconnections within the ecosphere, material ecocriticism takes this further by attributing narrative potential to nonhuman entities, thus bridges scientific principles with literary storytelling.

This research explores the novel's interaction with the vibrant materiality of the earth and the inseparable mesh of nature and culture by deploying Oppermann's thoughts into the analysis. The novel's natural-cultural plexus is examined through the critical lens of this hybridization, or the congealing into what Donna Haraway refers to as "naturecultures" (qtd. in Iovino and Oppermann). It highlights the complex relationships that underpin ecological systems and how they are portrayed in literature (Iovino and Oppermann 5). A fundamental tenet of the ecological posthumanist approach is the idea that culture and nature constitute an interdependent compound. This emphasises the importance of investigating how disruptions within this complex network might result in ecological unsustainability.

*Stories Come to Matter* (2014) by Iovino and Oppermann makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the dynamic materiality of the world and the entwined narratives of humans and nonhumans. However, there is a lack of exploring

particular literary works that use nonhuman narrators to explore themes related to ecology and posthumanism. By adopting Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* as an example, I have explored how an arboreal narrator subverts anthropocentric narratives and encourage a deeper engagement with the ecological and posthumanist aspects of storytelling. This study seeks to close this gap. While some studies, reviewed later on in this chapter, have explored ecological posthumanism broadly, a very few have analysed how disruptions within the "naturecultures" framework manifest in literature. By addressing this overlooked aspect, this study examines *The Island of Missing Trees* as a distinctive contribution to ecological posthumanist discourse.

Exploring how these narratives contribute to discussions, on sustainability and the connection, between nature and society is an area that requires immediate research attention. Although the theoretical foundation for ecological posthumanism has been established by Iovino, Oppermann, and others, there is a lack of focused literary analysis that examines how novels, such as *The Island of Missing Trees*, use their narrative structures and thematic content to address these important environmental issues.

In order to close this gap, this study offers a thorough analysis of *The Island of Missing Trees* through the perspective of ecological posthumanism. It highlights the novel's distinctive contribution to the larger conversations about the interactions between humans and nature, environmental consciousness, and the role of literature in reflecting and influencing our comprehension of these intricate issues. Through this approach, it aims to contribute to the scholarly discourse on the significance of nonhuman perspectives in literature and their potential to reshape our engagement with the ever-evolving nature of our world and the pressing ecological concerns we face. A growing body of research is exploring nonhuman views in literature, especially from the standpoint of ecological posthumanism. This field of study interacts with a broader discussion of environmental consciousness and the material agency of nonhuman. Oppermann's work, whose contributions have greatly influenced the theoretical terrain of material ecocriticism and narrative agency within ecological contexts, is central to this discussion. In the next section, I critically examine *Material Ecocriticism* (2014) by Iovino and Oppermann.

## 2.4 Creative Materiality and Narrative Agency

The foundation for Oppermann's more developed concept of "ecological posthumanism" that she presents in her collaborative work with Iovino, *Material Ecocriticism* (2014), in Chapter 7 "From Ecological Postmodernism to Material Ecocriticism; Creative Materiality and Narrative Agency", is laid out in her article, "From Posthuman to Posthuman Ecocriticism" (2016). According to her, the world can be viewed as a matter that has been given agency. This idea signals a change in the way that matter is perceived as having agency, vitality, and internal experience (Oppermann 21). The recognition of matter as narrative agency marks a significant turning point in ecological literary criticism. This marks a shift away from anthropocentric narratives and towards a more inclusive assessment of the storytelling function of the nonhuman world.

Her earlier work underscores the narrative potential and agency of matter, but her 2016 development deepens this by addressing the complexities of entanglement, particularly when these networks are disrupted by anthropogenic forces. As Oppermann notes, such disruptions create a posthuman condition characterized by "an entanglement in many antagonistic forces with formidable efficacy"(27). To effectively situate the current research within the larger context of ecological posthumanist theory and postmodern literary criticism, it is essential to consider how her 2014 work laid the foundation for this progression. Oppermann's claim that the universe is a web of intricate networks, composed of entangled matter stories, bridges the conceptual gap between new materialist theories, ecological postmodernism, and material ecocriticism. Oppermann invites a reconsideration of how stories are constructed and what entities are acknowledged as having narrative agency by presenting matter as actively engaged in the process of creating narratives. This theoretical approach challenges traditional divisions between culture and nature (Oppermann 21), as well as humans and nonhumans, and thereby emphasises the interconnectivity of discourse and existence across the globe.

The use of afore-mentioned theoretical frameworks to the examination of particular literary works that use nonhuman narrators to interact with ecological and posthumanist themes is still lacking, despite the contributions of theorists such as Oppermann, who, even though she explores literary texts such as *The Glisters* and *Natural History* in her 2016 essay, does not specifically address arboreal narrators.

The narrative agency of the nonhuman can be examined in depth through the use of conceptual tools provided by ecological Posthumanism but there are few focused literary analyses that examine how novels, like *The Island of Missing Trees*, use their narrative structures to accomplish this.

While her work lays the groundwork for understanding the broader implications of posthumanism within ecological discourse, there is a noticeable scarcity of studies that delve into the specificities of how nonhuman, non-technological narrators, like the arboreal narrator in *The Island of Missing Trees*, contribute to this discourse. The literature review reveals a need for a more thorough analysis of the role of nonhuman perspectives in literature.

This research aims to address this gap by employing the principles of ecological posthumanism to the analysis of *The Island of Missing Trees*. It seeks to expand upon Oppermann's concepts by exploring how literature can employ nonhuman narrators to contest anthropocentric worldviews and foster a deeper understanding of the complex, interdependent interactions that define our ecological reality. By offering a thorough examination of *The Island of Missing Trees* through the lenses of contemporary critical Posthumanism and ecological posthumanism, this study seeks to close this gap. In doing so, the study intends to contribute to the ongoing discussion of how literary representations of nonhuman perspectives might shed light on ecological problems of our day.

## **2.5 Jay D. Bolter's Critique of Human-centric Worldview**

The study of posthumanist literary theory by Jay David Bolter in his paper *Posthumanism* (2016), is also relevant to my research. Bolter emphasises the critique of the conventional human-centric view of the world and identifies the break from Western humanism as a fundamental component of posthumanism (1). This view aligns with Braidotti's definition of the term, which sees humans not as independent agents in the cosmos but as interconnected nodes in a vast web of "earth-others" (Braidotti 68). Bolter, however, highlights a weakness in posthumanist discourse by drawing attention to its widespread neglect of the ecocritical dimension, which is the area in which this study finds a niche.

Bolter's work is relevant to this study because it provides a thorough overview of posthumanist theory by providing a theoretical framework for further exploration

of the ecocritical components of posthumanism as proposed and defined by Iovino and Oppermann in "Stories Come to Matter" (2014). Iovino and Oppermann present the idea of the world's "vibrant materiality," putting up the case for an understanding of the planet as a dynamic (agentic) web of interconnected narratives that are material, non-material, and human (Iovino and Oppermann 5). Their approach, combining ecocritical ideas with posthumanist theory, enhances the posthumanist discourse by emphasising the narrative potential and agentic force of all matter.

Literary writings that explore posthumanist themes can be analysed using a comprehensive framework that is provided by Bolter's definition of posthumanism, which includes post-humanism, post-anthropocentrism, and post-dualism. Bolter also advocates for a broader understanding of life and agency outside of humans by questioning the idea that humans are inherently superior. His concept of post-anthropocentrism is in line with the novel's thematic engagement with human and nonhuman agency.

There exists a clear gap in the critically deploying the posthumanist and ecological posthumanist theories to literary analysis, despite the fact that Bolter, Iovino, and Oppermann offer crucial insights into the framework of these theories. This is particularly true for works that use nonhuman narrators to explore themes of ecological interdependence and ecocritical consciousness. By deploying Braidotti and Oppermann's theoretical frameworks to analyse Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*, this study seeks to close this gap. It specifically attempts to investigate how the novel's arboreal narrator subverts conventional anthropocentric narratives and advances the conversation on the interconnectedness of humans and nonhuman animals as well as ecological sustainability. This advances posthumanist literary study and ecological posthumanism in literature. Using the novel for analysis, this research highlights creative narrative and thematic engagement with the complex web of relationships that characterise our ecological and posthumanist realities. Through this research, the study aims to bridge the current scholarly literature gap and demonstrate the significance of Shafak's contributions to the ongoing discussion on posthumanist and ecocritical themes in contemporary literature.

## 2.6 Bridging Posthumanism-Ecocriticism Divide

In literary criticism, Helena Feder appears as a pivotal player in bridging the posthumanist and ecocriticism divide, building on the groundbreaking work of Braidotti. Feder explores the fundamental connection between these two disciplines in her paper "Ecocriticism, Posthumanism, and the Biological Idea of Culture" (2014), emphasising their shared emphasis on biological change and its consequences. Feder argues that posthumanism pushes the boundaries of what it means to be human and calls for a reconsideration of our relationships with nonhuman beings (Feder 226). She makes the same argument as Bolter that posthumanism directly opposes the deeply ingrained anthropocentrism that Enlightenment essentialism bestows, which places man at the centre of everything (Feder 225).

Glotfelty's foundational work in ecocriticism complements Feder's insights into posthumanism, particularly in their shared emphasis on dismantling anthropocentric hierarchies. By integrating these perspectives, ecological posthumanism emerges as a hybrid framework that not only critiques human exceptionalism but also highlights the moral and material agency of the nonhuman. A crucial connection between posthumanism and ecocriticism is made by Feder's speech that emphasises how vital it is to reconsider human superiority in light of the environmental catastrophe and biological interdependence. Her research does not, however, go so far as to offer a single theoretical framework that combines these two methods into a coherent analytical lens. Using the ideas of "ecological posthumanism" and "contemporary critical posthumanism," my study aims to address this important research opportunity. In order to provide view of the interrelationships between human, nonhuman, and material things, my research attempts to further the conversation by delving into the intricate ecological networks that surround them. By doing this, it hopes to add a fresh perspective to the discussion Feder started and enhance the theoretical framework with a more comprehensive method that takes into account the intricate realities of our ecological interdependencies.

Although Feder extensively examines the biological concept of culture in the context of ecocriticism and posthumanism, there is still a lack of employment of these theoretical insights to the understanding of nonhuman narrators in modern literature. Feder's research provides a fundamental comprehension of the biological roots of culture and its portrayal in literary works. However, there has been comparatively less



focus on the manner in which novels such as *The Island of Missing Trees* (2021) that features a distinctive arboreal narrator, contest anthropocentric narratives.

This study aims to fill this void by thoroughly analysing how *The Island of Missing Trees* employs its nonhuman narrative perspective to explore and enhance the concept of material agency. This study seeks to enhance the wider conversation regarding the significance of nonhuman viewpoints in literature and their capacity to enhance our comprehension of ecological posthumanism and the interdependence of human and nonhuman realms. The existence of this gap highlights the necessity for more literary study that connects the theoretical advancements made by scholars such as Feder with concrete instances of modern fiction that exemplify ecological and posthumanist ideas.

## 2.7 Reexamining Ecohumanism

Hubert Zapf, in “Posthumanism or Ecohumanism? Environmental Studies in the Anthropocene” (2022), explores the tensions between posthumanism and ecohumanism in environmental humanities. He offers ecohumanism as a mediating framework that acknowledges relational ontologies while retaining human responsibility (Zapf 6). His study critiques posthumanist discourse for its tendency to decentralise human agency to the extent that ethical accountability becomes unclear. While he appreciates posthumanism’s challenge to anthropocentrism, he argues that it risks neglecting the practical and moral dimensions of ecological engagement. To counter this, Zapf proposes an ecohumanist perspective that sustains human ethical responsibility while still considering the entanglement of human and nonhuman actors.

However, Zapf does not extensively discuss problematic enmeshment or the ways in which nonhuman perspectives complicate human-nonhuman relationships. My research fills this gap by investigating how arboreal narration in *The Island of Missing Trees* exposes the complexities of ecological interdependence and sustainability. While Zapf defends ecohumanism as a model of ethical engagement, my study highlights how arboreal narrative enacts posthumanist principles by directly challenging anthropocentric hierarchies through narrative agency.

In reviewing Zapf’s critique of ecohumanism, it becomes clear that while he offers a valuable framework for maintaining human ethical responsibility within

ecological contexts, his work does not fully address the complexities of human-nonhuman relationships, especially through nonhuman perspectives. My research seeks to fill this gap by investigating how the arboreal narration in *The Island of Missing Trees* challenges anthropocentric frameworks and enhances the understanding of ecological interdependence. My study demonstrates how the narrative voice not only critiques human exceptionalism but also foregrounds the agency of nonhuman entities. This approach moves beyond Zapf's ecohumanism and offers an understanding of ecological sustainability that accounts for the intricate realities of human and nonhuman interconnections. Through this analysis, my research contributes to a growing body of work that recognises the significance of nonhuman viewpoints in literature, ultimately advancing the discussion on the interdependence of human and nonhuman realms within the framework of ecological posthumanism. In the next section, I have critically reviewed researches done or around arboreal narrarratives.

## **2.8 Works Already Done on/around the Arboreal Narratives**

In this section, I review four research papers on *The Island of Missing Trees*. Though their focus is not entirely on arboreal narrative, all four scholars use the same text, which is unavoidably narrative of a tree. After reviewing these papers, I have also examined three other notable arboreal narratives in which trees are represented as active narrators or agents in literature, though not in the same way as in Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*. Novels such as Powers' *The Overstory* have been extensively explored through the lenses of ecocriticism and posthumanism by exploring themes like interconnectedness, grievability of nature. However, existing studies on *The Island of Missing Trees* have largely focused on its treatment of intergenerational trauma, displacement, and cultural identity. While these aspects are significant, they do not address the arboreal narrative or its ecological posthumanist dimensions. Specifically, the fig tree's role as a narrator and its implications for critiquing anthropocentrism and exploring the interconnectedness of humans and nonhumans remain underexplored. My research aims to fill this gap by critically engaging with concepts such as matter's effectivity, becoming-with, earth others, problematic enmeshment, nonhuman agency, and ecological sustainability.

While several studies have explored aspects of the novel, significant gaps remain, particularly in applying interdisciplinary frameworks that integrate ecological

and posthumanist perspectives. This review synthesises critical perspectives to highlight contributions, limitations, and research opportunities in the novel's scholarly exploration.

Intergenerational trauma is a central theme in *The Island of Missing Trees*. Fariha Chaudhary and Aneeqa Munawar, in their article “Un-burying the Buried: Exploring Silence and Generational Trauma in Elif Shafak’s *The Island of Missing Trees*” (2023), analyse how Shafak portrays the long-term effects of unresolved historical trauma on familial relationships. The authors argue that Ada’s fractured identity stems from her parents’ inability to process their traumatic experiences, shaped by the Cyprus conflict. They identify the fig tree as a narrative counterpoint to human silence. This way they offer a perspective that links individual familial struggles to broader historical traumas. The article emphasises that the fig tree allows the narrative to move beyond the confines of human memory by recounting suppressed histories.

Inas Laheg (2024), in her study “Identity Crisis as Intergenerational Trauma Progeny in Shafak’s *The Island of Missing Trees*,” similarly examines the impact of inherited trauma on Ada’s identity. Laheg highlights how the fig tree serves as a mediator of memory, intertwining personal and collective histories. She notes that Shafak employs magical realism to articulate trauma that transcends individual experiences by situating it within a broader socio-political and historical context. Laheg emphasises the role of the fig tree as a conduit for collective memory that enables Shafak to address the silences surrounding historical violence and displacement.

In “Rooted in Loss: Exploring Generational Trauma through a Postcolonial Lens in *The Island of Missing Trees*,” Saima Bashir and Muzamil Ishaq explore the fig tree’s narrative within the framework of Gilles Deleuze (2024) notion of generational trauma. This perspective investigates how generational trauma is transmitted across time and explores how trauma influences identity formation, personal perspectives, and responses to suffering. The study highlights how Ada, Kostas, and Defne attempt to process their inherited trauma, shaped by the violence of the 1974 Cyprus conflict. The study further explores how intergenerational transmission of trauma reshapes relationships and views suffering as a potential source of new ideas and creativity. By using the Deleuzian lens, this analysis situates

trauma not only as a burden but also as a transformative force that fosters resilience and innovation.

While these studies effectively address the symbolic role of the fig tree in narrating intergenerational trauma, they largely overlook its ecological dimensions. The fig tree's narrative reflects not only the scars of human conflict but also environmental degradation. This interplay between human and ecological trauma, in sense of destruction, remains a significant gap in the current scholarship.

Diaspora and displacement form central motifs in *The Island of Missing Trees*. Sherien Sabbah and Paramita Ayuningtyas (2022), in their article "The Issues of Diaspora and Displacement in Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*," explore how Shafak portrays the parallels between the uprooted fig tree and the human characters experiencing cultural dislocation. The authors highlight how the tree's physical transplantation from Cyprus to London mirrors the struggles of migrants, who grapple with the emotional consequences of uprooting and the search for belonging in unfamiliar environments. They situate Shafak's narrative within a broader diasporic framework and examine how it engages with themes of exile and longing.

Although Sabbah and Ayuningtyas provide valuable insights into the human aspects of displacement, their analysis does not extend to the fig tree's agency as a nonhuman narrator. The arboreal perspective offers a unique lens to explore how displacement affects both humans and nonhumans, thereby challenging anthropocentric narratives. This oversight underscores the need for further exploration of how *The Island of Missing Trees* positions arboreal displacement within the larger context of diasporic storytelling.

Bellavita Hadiatul Laila Sutari (2022) in her thesis *Anthropocentrism and Its Impact on the Environment in Elif Shafak's The Island of Missing Trees* highlights the anthropocentric underpinnings prevalent in human-nature relationships within the novel. Sutari critically examines how anthropocentrism manifests as both an exploitative and a destructive force. She underscores the narrative's portrayal of strong anthropocentrism, wherein human actions lead to significant environmental degradation, including deforestation and the loss of biodiversity (29).

A notable point in Sutari's research is her identification of anthropocentrism as rooted in human selfishness and economic motives. For instance, the author highlights how the novel portrays forests being destroyed for cultivation and profit-driven activities like bird trafficking. Sutari critiques this dynamic as a representation of "strong anthropocentrism," where human preferences outweigh ecological concerns (31). Her analysis links these destructive behaviors to what she terms "cornucopian" ideologies (3) in which humans prioritise immediate benefits over long-term sustainability.

Moreover, Sutari delves into the role of invasive species in altering Cyprus's natural ecosystem. She emphasises that the introduction of non-native species, such as eucalyptus, to combat malaria exemplifies a lack of ecological foresight that leads to the disruption of local biodiversity and groundwater cycles (p. 33). This reflection ties closely to the broader themes of environmental ethics and the consequences of anthropocentric actions.

While Sutari effectively critiques the destructive consequences of anthropocentrism in *The Island of Missing Trees*, her study focuses on the environmental harm caused by human actions and does not engage with the transformative potential of ecological consciousness or the idea of ecological sustainability present in the novel. Her work overlooks how the fig tree's narrative challenges human exceptionalism and anthropocentric hierarchies. The fig tree's perspective, as a nonhuman narrator, provides a unique lens for understanding interconnectedness and calls attention to the agency of nonhuman entities within ecological systems.

Feride Çiçekoğlu, in "Difference, Visual Narration, and "Point of View" in *My Name is Red*", examines how Pamuk's novel deploys multiple points of view to explore the tension between Ottoman miniature painting and Western portraiture. She emphasises how Pamuk's narrative style reflects a dialectical interaction between different artistic traditions and incorporates various perspectives, including those of objects and colors, to challenge the dominance of singular viewpoints. Çiçekoğlu situates *My Name is Red* within broader discussions of visual culture, perspective, and the shifting role of the observer in fiction by drawing connections between narrative structure and artistic representation. Her study highlights how Pamuk's narrative

approach mirrors the tension between Eastern and Western modes of seeing, thus problematises the act of representation itself.

While Çiçekoğlu's study focuses on narrative technique and artistic traditions, it does not extend its analysis to the role of nonhuman agency or the entanglement of human and nonhuman actors in shaping broader ecological relations. Her work remains centered on the ways in which narration and visual traditions construct identity and meaning. And it overlooks how narrative structures can also articulate interspecies connections and ecological interdependence. My research fills this gap by shifting the focus from narrative style to the ecological dynamics portrayed in *The Island of Missing Trees*. Unlike *My Name is Red* that primarily explores artistic and cultural tensions, Shafak's novel presents a complex web of human and nonhuman interactions that co-evolve in an ecologically sustainable manner, yet remain vulnerable to disruption. This study contributes to the discourse by examining how arboreal narrative not only decentralises the human but also exposes the fragility of ecological networks.

The article "On Ecological Philosophy in *Walden*" by Jie Lu and Zhiqiang Zhang (2019) provides an insightful exploration of Thoreau's transcendentalist ideals and focuses on the harmony between humans and nature, and the importance of simplicity for human well-being. The authors note that Thoreau believed "nature can endow people with factors of inner beauty," suggesting a deep connection between human well-being and the natural world (890). While the paper effectively outlines the philosophical underpinnings of *Walden* and Thoreau's critique of materialism, it remains predominantly centred on the human experience and does not delve into the posthumanist and/or ecocritical dimensions that could provide more depth to Thoreau's work in the contemporary context. Although the article touches on the need for a harmonious coexistence with nature, it overlooks the interconnectedness between human and nonhuman entities that modern ecological posthumanist theories champion. For instance, the failure to engage with contemporary debates on anthropocentrism and ecological sustainability restricts the article's broader implications to current environmental issues.

The authors cite classical interpretations but fail to connect these with evolving theories on human-nonhuman relations that question the anthropocentric worldview. An engagement with concepts such as "becoming-animal" or "becoming-

earth,” which form part of the ecological posthumanist discourse, would have provided a more comprehensive analysis of Thoreau's work in relation to the ongoing environmental challenges of the twenty-first century. My study expands the analysis beyond Thoreau's personal ecological renewal to explore the interdependence between human and nonhuman entities in a global context and highlightd the novel's contribution to ecological sustainability and posthumanist discourse.

Powers' novel *The Overstory* (2019) has gained significant attention as a prominent example of environmental/eco fiction and has earned a place in discussions anthropocentrism within the environmental humanities. Linda M. Hess in her essay "The Aesthetics of Wonder: Networks of the Grievable in Powers' *The Overstory*" analyses how the novel integrates ecocritical perspectives “to re-envision human relations with the nonhuman in the age of climate change” (190). Hess highlights that Powers employs a narrative strategy that prompts readers to contemplate a new perspective on the world in which humans are not the central focus but part of a larger ecological network that includes trees as key actors. According to Hess, this narrative of Powers invites the audience to perceive trees and plants as entities with knowledge and agency. In this way, Hess challenges anthropocentric views by instilling a sense of “grievability” for nature by emphasising its value and the loss we face if it were to disappear. Hess has used the Judith Butler's concept of “grievability” (190). The concept of “grievability” refers to recognising the intrinsic value of lives beyond our own immediate. She “propose[s] to transpose the concept of grievability onto nature” because she believes that it “can serve as a productive concept for the analysis of environmental writing” (191). She avers:

In this novel Powers uses narrative strategies to create *grievable nature*; to bring about a recognition of nature, and an understanding of trees as creatures with which, as humans, we are more intricately connected than we commonly consider, creatures for which we should grieve, if they were lost. (190)

Powers' narrative suggests a deeper appreciation and responsibility towards the environment by making nature grievable. This approach not only highlights the potential losses due to environmental degradation but also the importance of narratives in shaping our understanding and ethical stance towards the nonhuman world

My research significantly differs from and fills the gaps identified in Hess's analysis of *The Overstory* by closely examining *The Island of Missing Trees* through the lens of ecological posthumanism and contemporary critical. While Hess focuses on narrative strategies and the thematic role of trees in reflecting ecological interconnectedness, my study extends this framework by deploying Braidotti and Oppermann's ecological posthumanist concepts, such as, interconnectedness, becoming-animal, becoming-earth, ecological sustainability, problematic enmeshment, arboreality and matter's effectivity.

Despite the richness of existing scholarship on *The Island of Missing Trees*, there remain significant gaps in the critical exploration of the novel. While many studies have effectively examined themes such as intergenerational trauma, displacement, and ecological interconnectedness, there is limited engagement with ecological posthumanism, particularly regarding the fig tree's role as a nonhuman narrator. Current analyses have yet to fully explore how the novel employs a fig tree as a narrator to challenge anthropocentric narratives and expand discussions of ecological consciousness. Additionally, while the novel's ecological themes are acknowledged, the material agency of the fig tree and its ability to influence both human and nonhuman interactions remain underexplored.

Moreover, interdisciplinary researches that integrate posthumanist ideas and ecological frameworks are almost non-existent. While scholars have analysed gendered and cultural dislocation in the novel, few have considered how these themes intersect with ecological and posthumanist discourses. Comparative studies also highlight a notable gap, for example, Richard Powers' *The Overstory* has received extensive ecocritical attention, yet Shafak's novel has not been similarly analysed for its contributions to ecological studies. By addressing these gaps, I expand the scholarly discourse on *The Island of Missing Trees*. Literature review has helped me find research gaps existing in the area of study. By bridging these gaps, my research aims to offer fresh insights into the ecological dimensions of the text and advance our understanding of posthumanist discourse within contemporary literary studies. In the forthcoming chapter, I have developed theoretical framework for my dissertation and discussed my research methodology.



## CHAPTER 3

# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

In order to analyse the selected text, I draw on the notions of "contemporary critical posthumanism" put forth by Braidotti in her book *The Posthuman* (2013) and "ecological posthumanism" outlined by Oppermann in her treatise "From Posthumanism to Posthuman Ecocriticism" (2016). I study the ecological posthuman condition in the novel by focusing on the arboreal narrative of the selected text. The theoretical framework devised builds a foundation for the reading of the arboreal narrative in my selected primary text, Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* (2021).

The purpose of adapting these concepts for my research is to explore the interdependence and interconnectedness of the human and the nonhuman (plants and animals) in the selected text and its engagement with the idea of ecological sustainability. It is instructive to state that my focus is on the arboreal narrative of the text, as I have already mentioned in the introductory chapter. The term "arboreal narrative", in my view, carries the implication of human decentralisation and posthuman negation of the primacy of man. The arboreal narrative in *The Island of Missing Trees* suggests a two-fold conflict. On the one hand, it suggests the symbiotic relation of humans and nonhumans (animals and plants), that is, the idea of ecological sustainability that enhances the chances of mutualism. On the other hand, it reveals the consequences of problematic human-nonhuman enmeshment. The former one develops the idea of ecological sustainability, while the latter reflects the destruction/disruption of ecological sustainability. In the forthcoming pages, I provide a rationale for my theoretical framework followed by research methodology.

### 3.2 Theoretical Framework

My first theoretical prop is Oppermann's concept of "ecological posthumanism" included in her treatise "From Posthumanism to Posthumanism Ecocriticism" (2016). She notes:

Ecological Posthumanism [. . .] stresses the significance of complex environmental relations, perviousness of species boundaries, and social-ecological-scientific networks within which humans and nonhumans, knowledge practices, and material phenomena are deeply enmeshed. (26)

The posthumanist perspective challenges the notion of human agency and seeks to establish a sustainable ecological system in which many life forms can coexist harmoniously without disrupting the equilibrium within the ecosphere. In this manner, the theory challenges the anthropocentric perspective of the world and urges us to acknowledge the interdependence between people and the nonhuman components of the ecosphere. When anthropogenic influences intervene, the effect of nonhuman and humans become more apparent. This matter's effectivity, according to Oppermann, cannot be confined within the species boundaries, rather these borders are pervious and the forces of matter are continuously in connection with each other. (Oppermann 2016, 27). Oppermann's notion of "ecological posthumanism" in her work "From Posthumanism to Posthuman Ecocriticism" implies a thorough exploration of the complexities surrounding the interdependence of human and nonhuman entities within an ever-changing ecological system. Her theory critiques the traditional anthropocentric perspectives that put humans at the centre of the universe. It advocates for an alternative perspective that acknowledges the significant influence of nonhuman forces in influencing both our environment and our existence.

Oppermann's ecological posthumanism marks a significant shift in perspective. It highlights the importance of recognizing the complex relationships within ecosystems of both humans and nonhuman elements. This perspective suggests that humans are not controllers of nature but rather integral components of a vast interconnected web of life where each entity plays a role and contributes to ecological balance.

The concept of interconnection, which goes beyond a basic conception of human-nature interaction, is central to Oppermann's concept. This implies that there is a strong connection between sociological and ecological webs which means that effect on anyone would also affect the other. This dynamic interconnectedness, where knowledge processes, cultural narratives, and material occurrences are intricately entwined, is not passive. This forces us to reevaluate our role in the world because we

understand that our activities have an impact on nonhuman species as well as other people by reverberating across and within the ecosphere.

The complete rejection of anthropocentric views is one of the important tenets of ecological posthumanism. It challenges the convention that holds humans as the primary agents of the world and the ultimate form of species' evolution. Ecological posthumanism promotes a more equitable perspective in which humans are only one of the many actors in a vast ecological network, in which each of them has a distinct role and importance.

Drawing from Gaston Bachelard's notion of "the mirror of our energies"(17) Oppermann brings to light the concept of matter's effectivity. This concept challenges the categorical distinctions often made between species and between the natural and human-made worlds. It suggests that material forces, whether human or nonhuman, continuously interpenetrate and affect one another and often in ways that are not visible immediately. Anthropogenic causes contribute to this interaction that serves as a reminder of the profound impact human activity has on the ecosphere and how it affects the existence and agency of nonhuman species.

Deploying Oppermann's ecological posthumanism for Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* opens up new interpretations of the novel's themes and narrative strategies. The story of the tree is a powerful illustration of moving beyond human-centered views and recognizing the interdependence of humans and nature. The fig tree, central to the story, embodies the interconnectedness of life. It serves as a repository of human and nonhuman memories, histories, and stories. Shafak's choice of narrative also highlights the ecological posthumanist perspective, which acknowledges the agency of nonhuman actors in our common ecosphere and also challenging the supremacy of human perspectives.

My second theoretical support is Braidotti's concept of "contemporary critical posthumanism" proposed in her ground-breaking book *The Posthuman*. She maintains that the source of inspiration for ecocritical strand of contemporary critical posthumanism is environmentalism and ecology. This contemporary strand of posthumanism that takes on an ecocritical dimension rejects the Western humanist viewpoint of man. The anthropocentric vision of man is replaced by a hybrid field of

ecological posthumanism which recognises the matter's effectivity and interconnectedness of different forms of life in a natural cultural plexus.

In *The Posthuman*, Braidotti challenges the anthropocentric and humanist views prevalent in western thought and proposes a shift towards a contemporary ecological posthumanism. This approach acknowledges the vitality of matter and the deep interconnectedness of all forms of life within a natural-cultural nexus (Braidotti 48). This viewpoint raises questions against the conventional views on human superiority and calls for a more comprehensive viewpoint of interactions between humans and nonhuman entities. This idea spotlights how human actions impact the harmony between humans and the nonhuman world. It is similar to Bachelard's concept that our energies are mirrored in the material world around us (XII). This viewpoint underlines the challenge of confining such active forces within set boundaries and indicates/implies a web of interactions that transcend usual separations.

Braidotti suggests that we need to see humans as just one part of a big, interconnected world that includes all kinds of life. This means we have to rethink how we see ourselves, how we make ethical decisions, and how we interact with everything around us. The long-standing Western humanist tradition that puts people at the centre of existential, ethical, and philosophical research is criticised by Braidotti. She makes the case for replacing this anthropocentric viewpoint with one that is more inclusive, ecological and recognises the interdependence of all life forms. This change calls for a reassessment of human subjectivity, ethics, and our interactions with the outside world.

Braidotti emphasises the need to shift our perspective towards an ecological one that truly appreciates and acknowledges the role and agency of nonhuman entities in our ecosystems. This connection suggests a more holistic perspective of existence where human and nonhuman lives are intricately intertwined and which challenges the traditional boundaries between species and between the natural and cultural spheres. Her approach to posthumanism goes beyond merely critiquing human centrality in philosophical thought. It calls for a rethinking of human subjectivity and our ethical frameworks, especially in the face of environmental crises. She advocates for an ethical stance that values the health and well-being of the entire planet and all its diverse inhabitants not just humans. This means fundamentally changing our

actions and their impact on the environment and practising more sustainable living practices, and cultivating a deeper respect for the nonhuman world.

Braidotti's concepts of "becoming-animal" and "becoming-earth" are crucial for my research as they provide a comprehensive framework to reevaluate the anthropocentric biases in environmental and ecological studies. These concepts challenge traditional views of human centrality by promoting a more inclusive understanding of subjectivity that incorporates nonhuman entities and the planet itself.

Braidotti suggests that "becoming animal" involves a radical repositioning of the subject in relation to animals and the environment. It is a move away from anthropocentrism and towards a more bioegalitarian view that recognises the interconnectedness of all life forms. This concept encourages us to think of ourselves as part of a larger living ecosystem rather than as separate or superior to it. In her own words, Braidotti writes:

The challenge today is how to deterritorialize, or nomadize, the human/animal interaction, so as to bypass the metaphysics of substance and its corollary, the dialectics of otherness, secularizing accordingly the concept of human nature and the life that animates it. This is the challenge of antioedipal animality in a fast-changing technoculture that engenders mutations at all levels. It spells the end of the familiar, asymmetrical relation to animals, which was saturated with fantasies, emotions, and desires and framed by power relations biased in favor of human access to the bodies of animal others. With Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, I would say that in turning into humanoid hybrids, we are becoming animal. (71)

Braidotti's concept of "becoming-earth" extends the idea of radical relationality to encompass not just animals but the entire planetary ecosystem. It prompts a shift from an anthropocentric to a geo-centric perspective. This approach underscores the significant impact humans have as geological agents with their existence and actions deeply intertwined with the Earth's ecological and geological systems. Braidotti articulates:

The planetary or becoming-earth dimension brings issues of environmental and social sustainability to the fore, with special emphasis on ecology and the climate change issue. (67)

The concept of "becoming-earth", as defined by Braidotti, involves recognising and redefining the human relationship with the planet and all its constituents which includes what are termed "earth others". "Earth others" refer to nonhuman entities, plants, geological features, ecosystems, and other natural elements that are traditionally seen as distinct or subordinate to human interests in mainstream environmental discourse (Braidotti 68).

In *The Island of Missing Trees*, "earth others" and "animal others" represent more than just background characters or silent participants in the story's setting. "Earth Others" encapsulates the wide array of nonhuman organisms and ecosystems that form the intricate web of life. "animal others" refers to the nonhuman creatures that coexist with people in their surroundings "cast out of normality, on the side of anomaly, deviance, monstrosity and bestiality" (Braidotti 68, 95-96). In Shafak's work, these entities are given a dynamic stage on which they can not only exist but also convey their experiences, their pain, and the contributions they have made to the shared spaces of existence. The goal of this study is to reveal the layers of meaning between nonhuman actors and human characters within the novel.

*The Island of Missing Trees* is a suitable text for deploying Braidotti's contemporary critical posthumanism. Through its depiction of human-nonhuman connections and arboreal narration, the novel challenges anthropocentric perspectives and reflects the idea of interconnection. This fig tree isn't just part of the backdrop rather it's a key player that brings out the tangled web of relationships among humans and other beings. It's clear through the novel that nonhuman entities aren't just passive but rather they have their own stories and a significant impact on us and the environment.

Analysing Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* by deploying the concepts of ecological posthumanism and contemporary critical posthumanism offers rich insights into the intricate connections between the human and nonhuman. This approach is particularly effective in showcasing the novel's engagement with ecological sustainability. The arboreal narrative within *The Island of Missing Trees* exemplifies not only the challenges of human-nonhuman entanglements but also the potential for mutually beneficial relationships.

The narrative in Shafak's novel that takes place in a world where humans are not the centre of everything showcases a different way of telling stories. This plot structure highlights two aspects of ecological interaction, the negative effects of disrupting human-nonhuman entanglements and the promotion of symbiotic partnerships that improve sustainability. The concepts proposed by Braidotti and Oppermann help us understand how everything in nature is connected and make us think differently about our place in the world and how stories like this shape our understanding of the environment.

My research integrates ecological posthumanism and contemporary critical posthumanism to highlight and explore the intricate bonds connecting humans with the broader nonhuman realm. It is important to explain the reason for employing both "ecological posthumanism" and "contemporary critical posthumanism" as my lenses. The former stresses the significance of complex environmental relations and perviousness of species boundaries, while the latter proposes a new way of combining self-interests with the well-being of a larger community. Braidotti's concept implies the idea of ecological sustainability and it has concepts like "becoming-earth" and "becoming-animal" (67) subsumed under it. "Becoming-earth" dimension brings the issues of environmental and social sustainability to the fore, while "becoming-animal entails the displacement of anthropocentrism" (66-67). Oppermann's idea recognizes the matter's effectivity in a network of human-nonhuman interactions. Therefore, both of these concepts of "ecological posthumanism" and "contemporary critical posthumanism" are important for my research.

With its emphasis on ecological sustainability, Braidotti's framework is an essential analytical tool for comprehending the interdependencies that are essential to life. Her ideas of "becoming-earth" and "becoming-animal" push us to rethink our position within the larger ecological web/matrix while also symbolically strengthening our bond with the Earth and its diverse range of life. These ideas support a departure from human-centred views and prompt a reconsideration of human identity in relation to the natural world.

For a comprehensive examination of the interdependencies defining our modern ecological and social settings, it is not only strategically important but also imperative to incorporate "ecological posthumanism" and "contemporary critical posthumanism" into the analytical framework. Theorists such as Oppermann have

defined ecological Posthumanism that emphasises the complex relationships between the entities of environment and questions the strict boundaries that are typically enforced or constructed between species. This approach is essential for comprehending the permeability of barriers that separate humans and nonhuman entities and highlighting an ecological network marked by shared vulnerabilities and mutual effect.

On the other hand, Braidotti's "contemporary critical posthumanism" expands this discourse by arguing that human purposes should be rearranged to better serve the interests of the society as a whole that includes nonhuman entities. In order to promote sustainable coexistence, it is imperative that humans rethink their place in the ecological system from one of domination to cooperation. In this sense, Braidotti's ideas of "becoming-earth" and "becoming-animal" are crucial since they not only call for the abolition of anthropocentrism but also a meaningful interaction with the world and all of its inhabitants. The "becoming-earth" component calls for a profound ecological consciousness that acknowledges the interdependence of all life forms and their common fate, directly addressing environmental and social sustainability. "Becoming-animal" suggests a radical empathy that recognises the agency and subjectivity of nonhuman life by challenging the primacy of human viewpoints and privileges (Braidotti 66–67). Combining these two perspectives enables a deep study that reflects the dynamic interaction between agents who are human and those who are not.

It is clear that Braidotti's "contemporary critical posthumanism" and Oppermann's "ecological posthumanism" work well together to make a strong and multidimensional view that can be used to read *The Island of Missing Trees*. This method broadens our comprehension of Shafak's novel's arboreal narrative and increases our awareness of how intertwined human and nonhuman entities are. This framework establishes the foundation for an examination of the themes of interdependence, the matter's effectivity and complexities of residing within an interwoven ecological web. It does so by contesting anthropocentric narratives and promoting an ecological sustainability that includes respect for one another and coexistence. These posthumanist viewpoints are crucial for promoting a more inclusive, compassionate and sustainable way of looking at our common world as we analyse Shafak's work.



### 3.3 Research Methodology

This project is located in the qualitative paradigm of research. In order to analyse the text, I have used an interpretative and exploratory approach, to conduct a qualitative analysis of Shafak's ecofiction novel, *The Island of Missing Trees* for my dissertation. This study's method is grounded in the concept of "textual analysis," as articulated by Catherine Belsey in her groundbreaking work "Textual Study as a Research Method" (In Griffin, 2005). She defines textual analysis as a "close encounter with the work itself, an examination of the details without bringing to them more presuppositions" (Belsey 160). Belsey emphasises an immersive engagement with the text that puts the text's inherent complexities and nuances ahead of preconceived notions or external theoretical frameworks.

As far steps in my textual analysis in the next chapters, I follow a structured approach to examine the ecological posthumanist elements in *The Island of Missing Trees*. First, I conduct a close reading of the novel to identify key instances where human and nonhuman interactions are emphasised. This detailed engagement with the text allows me to trace the strategies that foreground the agency of the fig tree as a narrator. Next, I identify ecological posthumanist elements in the novel by drawing on Oppermann's ecological posthumanism and Braidotti's contemporary critical posthumanism. This stage of analysis involves locating moments in the text that illustrate interconnectedness, becoming-animal, becoming-earth, and the dismantling of anthropocentric hierarchies. To situate these findings within a broader scholarly context, I contextualise the novel within ecological and posthumanist frameworks and link its arboreal narration to critical discourses on nonhuman agency, materiality, and ecological sustainability. Additionally, I categorise my analysis thematically by focusing on key aspects such as narrative role of the fig tree, human-nonhuman entanglements, and the text's engagement with ecological sustainability. This thematic division ensures a coherent and organised approach to the study. Finally, I synthesise the findings to demonstrate how Shafak's novel not only challenges anthropocentric perspectives but also contributes to the evolving discourse of ecological posthumanism. This step-by-step analysis provides a systematic yet flexible method for engaging with the text while allowing for deeper insights into its ecological and philosophical dimensions.

### 3.3.1 Research Method

Belsey's method is based on poststructuralist theory that rejects the idea of definitive or stable meanings and maintains that meaning is always "inscribed in the signifier, in the sound or image" (167). Belsey's idea of textual analysis is appropriate for the study because it permits a flexible interpretation that recognises the text's multiple meanings and the dynamic interaction of signifiers and signifieds. Her method offers a deep understanding of novel's themes and narrative complexities. It allows for a nuanced interpretation of the text particularly in relation to ecological posthumanism, the interconnectedness of all life forms, and the problematic enmeshment of human and nonhuman actors. The fig tree challenges anthropocentric narratives by emphasising the agency and subjectivity of the nonhuman. This method highlights the novel's relevance to current issues on ecological sustainability, environmental crises and the potential for a more peaceful coexistence between the human and nonhuman species.

By employing Belsey's textual analysis, this research engages with *The Island of Missing Trees* in a manner that explores its complexity and richness. It allows for an open-ended and subjective interpretation that embraces the text's inherent ambiguities and contradictions. This method is appropriate to explore the novel's narrative which weaves together human and nonhuman perspectives, personal and collective memories, and historical and political and ecological themes. Through textual analysis, the research aims to reveal the complexity of Shafak's engagement with ecological posthumanism and to contribute to a broader understanding of how literature can reflect and influence the way we interact with nature.

I use textual analysis method as my research method because it allows me to concentrate on more in-depth readings and analysis of any text. I have thoroughly scrutinized the language to reveal the deeper and hidden meanings of the chosen text, including symbols and other forms of communication. Since this study is situated in qualitative research paradigm, textual analysis suits it as a research method. I list here some of the key principles of Belsey's (2005) textual analysis method:

1. Language is not neutral and is actually more complicated than it first appears. It is impossible to describe language as neutral because external social, cultural, and historical influences frequently influence it (167).

2. Setting a text in its proper social and historical context is essential to determining its most accurate and closest meanings. When examining the text's deeper and hidden meaning, ambiguity may arise in the absence of context (172).
3. Reading is an active process in which readers typically contribute their own viewpoints and prejudices to the text. This suggests that the meaning of a text is not fixed (165).
4. A published work cannot be considered politically neutral since it reflects the ideology, values, and beliefs of the creator (165).
5. Every text has potential for different and multiple readings because each reader will understand a work differently based on his or her own knowledge base (176).
6. Both form and structure of a text are important. Belsey highlights the authors' creative approach and how they craft the form and structure of a literary text because both of them influence how a reader will understand the work (163).
7. The nature of literary writings is multifaceted that leads its readers to multiple interpretations (176).

While Belsey's textual analysis method provides a broad range of interpretative tools, this study delimits itself to the principles most relevant to its ecological posthumanist focus. Specifically, I draw on her emphasis on close reading without imposing predetermined assumptions. This allows for an in-depth exploration of how Shafak's novel constructs nonhuman agency, particularly through its arboreal narrator. Her idea that meaning is not fixed but emerges through the interaction of signifiers allows for an open-ended reading of the fig tree's narrative voice and its challenge to anthropocentric storytelling. Furthermore, the principle that a text can hold multiple meanings aligns with the novel's exploration of interconnectedness and the fluid boundaries between species. By applying these selected principles, the study maintains coherence between its methodological approach and its theoretical framework and ensures a nuanced reading of Shafak's engagement with ecological posthumanism.

Belsey's method of textual analysis offers a strong methodological base for this research. It provides all the tools required to examine the complex narrative techniques and thematic issues of *The Island of Missing Trees*. By concentrating on the text itself and allowing a variety of interpretations, this research attempts to

uncover the novel's significance within the larger context of ecological posthumanism. This is going to add to the ongoing conversation about how literature can help us deal with the most important environmental problems of our time.

In the next chapter, I try to analyse the primary text through the theoretical supports of ecological Posthumanism and contemporary critical posthumanism. By deploying the theoretical concepts of Oppermann and Braidotti and qualitative textual analysis approach of Belsey, I have explored the text's engagement with ecological posthumanism where I study elements like interconnectedness, becoming-animal, becoming-earth, ecological sustainability, problematic enmeshment, arboreality and matter's effectivity.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE ECOLOGICAL ENTANGLEMENT IN ELIF SHAFAK'S *THE ISLAND OF MISSING TREES*

This chapter traces the idea of ecological entanglement in Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* (2021) and examines how the novel challenges the humanist paradigms. It provides a more humane and comprehensive approach to relating to others, whether they be human or not. I concentrate on two primary ideas that guide the reading of my selected text: contemporary critical posthumanism and ecological posthumanism as expressed by Braidotti and Oppermann, respectively.

This analysis chapter employs the theoretical frameworks of ecological posthumanism and contemporary critical posthumanism to critically examine the complex interactions between the human and nonhuman entities in *TIMT*. With a particular emphasis on the arboreal narrative, this chapter aims to shed light on the ways in which Shafak's novel subverts anthropocentric paradigms. The chapter also promotes a more inclusive understanding of ecological sustainability through the prism of Braidotti's concepts of "becoming-earth" and "becoming-animal," as well as Oppermann's idea of matter's effectivity. Shafak's *TIMT* is the most recent work of fiction written by Shafak, who is widely recognised as one of the most prolific contemporary writers of Turkish descent. The plot of the novel is around a forbidden love affair that takes place between a Greek Cypriot guy and a Turkish Cypriot girl. The two individuals first meet at a tavern where a fig tree and a parrot are witnesses to their romantic encounter. The plot also centres on their daughter Ada, who discovers her parents' history and her Cypriot origins as she grows up in London with her father following the death of her mother. The plot alternates between several places and eras. In addition to being a gripping story of love, grief, and identity, the novel offers a deep reflection on the interwoven ecologies and histories of Cyprus as well as the power of storytelling to mend and repair historical scars. I analyse my selected novel under the following subheadings:

- A Tree Narrates
- Interconnectedness between the Human and the Nonhuman

- Becoming Earth
- Becoming Animal
- Matter's Effectivity in Ecosystem

#### 4.1 A Tree Narrates

In this section, I explore the arboreal narrative, its symbolic import and implications, and how it challenges anthropocentrism by centering the narrative on a fig tree and foregrounding its perspective. The fig tree appears as a major symbolic figure in Shafak's *TIMT* (See p. 35, footnote 1, Chapter 4) that goes beyond its conventional botanical function to serve as a storyteller, a repository for memories and a link between the human, the animal, and the botanical worlds. This protagonist narrator represents the collapse of boundaries between species and demonstrates a profound interconnectivity that challenges traditional anthropocentric distinctions. This shift in perspective allows for a reimagining of the relationship between humans and nonhumans and depicts the blurring of roles between them. Rather than viewing the tree merely as a passive element of the environment, it is portrayed as an active participant in the narrative that engages in the world with a depth of experience often attributed exclusively to human subjects.

The use of trees in literary works as storytellers (narrators), symbols, metaphors, or characters is a mode of narration known as "arboreal narrative." The relationships between people and trees, the ecological value of trees, and the manner in which trees express themselves are all covered in arboreal narrative. For me, arboreal narrative is the one where the narration is both by and for the trees. It is as if the trees themselves whisper their tales through rustling leaves and creaking branches and share their wisdom. This perspective allows me to immerse myself into the heart of nature where trees become the central characters of their own stories and not just silent observers in the human world. This vivid narrator and symbol in Shafak's *TIMT*, the fig tree entwines together the fates of humans and the nonhuman world in the novel that resonates with the posthumanist theories of Braidotti and Oppermann. Braidotti's theory of the posthumanism that challenges anthropocentrism by giving nonhuman entities a voice and highlighting a connection beyond species borders is embodied by this arboreal narrator. Oppermann's concept of ecological posthumanism that "stresses the significance of complex environmental relations, perviousness of

species boundaries, and social-ecological-scientific networks” (2016, 26) is also represented by this narrative technique that blurs the line between the natural world and human society. As a result, the arboreal narrative becomes a powerful tool for analyzing the complex concepts of becoming-with, interconnectedness, matter’s effectivity and ecological sustainability. It also encourages readers to reevaluate their position in the ecological system and promotes peaceful coexistence based on ecological interdependence.

The fig tree's role as a silent observer and storyteller of Kostas and Defne's love tale is an effective example of how it might act as an embodiment for posthumanist beliefs. A unique nonhuman viewpoint on human emotions, disputes, and reconciliations is provided by the tree's presence at their covert meetings in the tavern. By highlighting the tree's role in human existence beyond that of background scenery, this viewpoint challenges the anthropocentric belief that nonhuman characters in human narratives are inert or unimportant. The following excerpt vividly illustrates this concept.

They came to the taverna at night, when the streets were empty and the curfew was in effect. They climbed up the ladder, one after the other, and entered the room under my canopy. There, they would talk, laugh, cry, make love. I watched them with curiosity and wonder. I felt their joy and sorrow. I sensed their secrets and fears. (*TIMT* 97)

In this excerpt, the tree comments on Kostas and Defne’s meetings as I have demonstrated above. The fig tree's story goes beyond simple observation as well since it combines the political and personal and embodies the trauma and memories of the Cyprus conflict. The novel illustrates how the destinies of people and nonhumans are entwined in history and war through the fig tree's narrative. This implies that comprehension and reconciliation are impossible without recognising this connection. The tree's function is further enhanced as it travels from Cyprus to London, acting as a figurative bearer of life. The tree's capacity for adaptation and growth in the face of displacement and change is exemplified by the fact that it retains the wounds and memories of its original habitat.

In order for me to survive the long journey from Nicosia to London, Kostas carefully wrapped me in layers of damp sacking before tucking me at the

bottom of his suitcase. It was a risk, he knew. The English climate was not warm enough for me to thrive, let alone bear edible fruit. He took the risk. I did not fail him. (*TIMT* 56)

Now that you have come this far into our story, there is something else I need to share with you: I am a melancholic tree. (*TIMT* 172)

The fig tree's interactions with other nonhuman components in *TIMT*, such as the symbiotic fungi in its roots and animals looking for cover in its canopy, highlight the complex ecological networks essential to life's sustenance. The narrative reflects the fundamental posthumanist viewpoint that holds that people are only a component in a vast, interwoven ecological system and that they have an impact on and is dependent upon the nonhuman organisms they dwell with, as Oppermann notes that "material forces can never be contained in boundary-specific practices" (2016, 27). It implies that all the matter (living and non-living) interacts with one another. As seen in the first extract, the tree accounts the interaction between Kostas, a human, and itself, a tree.

In this passage, the tree's journey from Nicosia to London and its survival against the odds highlight the tree's agency and resilience. The tree is not just a passive object but an active participant in the narrative, capable of enduring and adapting to new environments. The tree's ability to thrive in the English climate, despite the challenges, demonstrates its inherent vitality and the dynamic interplay between its materiality and the surrounding environment. Oppermann in her essay "From Posthumanism to Posthuman Ecocriticism" quotes Joy that "the aliveness and agency of animals, objects, environments, and other nonhuman forces and propensities, [are] all enmeshed with humans" (qtd. in Oppermann 2016, 28). The tree's ability to thrive in the English climate, despite the risks, highlights the mutual influence and interdependence between human actions and nonhuman entities. Kostas's care and the tree's resilience reflect a symbiotic relationship where both influence each other's outcomes.

This mutuality also reinforces the idea that ecosystems are comprised of complex interactions where the well-being of one entity is often linked to the actions and conditions of others. According to Braidotti's concept of the posthuman condition, this portrayal highlights the breakdown of the anthropocentric paradigm in favour of



acknowledging the “ties that bind us to the multiple ‘others’ in a vital web of complex interrelations (100). It “introduces a qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species, our polity and our relationship to the other inhabitants of this planet” (1-2). The plot also effectively conveys Oppermann's focus on ecological posthumanism that highlights the intricate relationships and mutual reliance that exist between humans and nonhuman species in order to preserve ecological equilibrium (Oppermann 2016, 27, my paraphrase) Shafak's vivid descriptions not only give the fig tree and its companions' existence, but they also challenge us to reconsider our place in a vast ecological system and our individual and social roles within it.

The arboreal narrator challenges the conventional human-centered narrative framework by reorienting the plot around the fig tree. This narrative framework entails a posthumanist viewpoint that acknowledges the agency and subjectivity of nonhumans. *TIMT* uses the arboreal narrative to argue for a more inclusive and interconnected worldview in which the fates of human and nonhuman actors are inextricably linked and where understanding the nonhuman perspective is crucial to understanding our shared existence.

He cared about me, always had. In the past, whenever the weather turned frigid, he took precautions to keep me alive. I remember one chilly afternoon in January he set up windbreaks all around me and wrapped me with layer upon layer of burlap to reduce moisture loss. Another time he covered me with mulch. He placed heat lamps in the garden to provide warmth throughout the night and, most crucially, before the crack of dawn, the darkest hour of the day and often the coldest. That is when most of us fall into a sleep we never wake up from – the homeless on the streets, and us ..... [sic] fig trees. (*TIMT* 27)

This excerpt from the text highlights the interdependence of the human and nonhuman. It also displays the agency of the nonhuman. From the standpoint of ecological posthumanism, the fig tree, its reliance on human intervention for survival through harsh winters and its acknowledgment of the shared vulnerabilities between itself and the homeless, underscores the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman life. This excerpt not only emphasises the agency and experiences of nonhuman entities but also critiques the human-centric view of the world by positioning the experiences and survival of a fig tree as equally significant to those of humans. It calls

for an expansion of ethical consideration beyond human interests and suggests a mutual dependency and a shared fate between humans and the natural world.

A tree is a memory keeper. Tangled beneath our roots, hidden inside our trunks, are the sinews of history, the ruins of wars nobody came to win, the bones of the missing. (*TIMT* 192)

There is one thing I have learned: wherever there is war and a painful partition, there will be no winners, human or otherwise. (*TIMT* 173)

These excerpts not only underscore the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman beings in the midst of conflict and strife, but also emphasises the novel's discerning analysis of the ways in which political violence affects ecological systems and individual existence. This examination engages with the posthumanist critique of narratives and histories that centre human experience. Moreover, the mention of "painful partition" and the assertion that "there will be no winners, human or otherwise" (173) extend the critique to the often arbitrary divisions created by humans, whether political borders or species distinctions. These divisions inflict harm not only on human communities but also on the ecosystems and nonhuman beings caught in the crossfire. This insight challenges the anthropocentric view that sees nature as a backdrop to human affairs rather than as an active participant in or victim of these actions.

In this section, I explore the arboreal narrative, its symbolic import and implications, and how it challenges anthropocentrism by centering the narrative on a fig tree and foregrounding its perspective. The narrative urges readers to recognize the complex connections within the ecosystem. Trees and other plants also possess agency. The fig tree's voice reminds us of the interconnectedness of humans, animals, and plants. It encourages us to reconsider our relationship with nature. It fosters a deeper appreciation for the role of arboreal entities in the web of life. In the next section, I explore the complex relationship between the human and nonhuman entities of the ecosystem.

## **4.2 Interconnectedness between the Human and the Nonhuman**

In this section, I analyse the element of interconnectedness between the human and nonhuman in my primary text. *TIMT* goes beyond the ordinary human experience and explores the deep connection that unites the human with nonhuman. So, Shafak

tries to explain the tangled cobweb of ties characterising our life on this planet through the eyes of a fig tree. Its representation of the interconnections among the destinies of man, plants and the whole interdependent ecosystems, clearly highlights the ecologically posthumanist point of view. *TIMT* can be seen as a strong affirmation of mutual dependencies that are necessary for the survival and flourishing of any form of life and at the same time it breaks down the boundaries separation the species. This interconnectedness is well represented in the following extract from the text:

With their roots tangled and caught up underground, linked to fungi and bacteria, trees harbour no such illusions. For us, everything is interconnected.

(*TIMT* 33)

The narrative voice of a fig tree in Shafak's *TIMT* brings the complex web of interconnectedness within an ecosystem to life in this passage. The reflections from the tree highlight the dynamic relationships and interdependencies between varieties of nonhuman organisms, each of which is essential to their common environment. These organisms include worms, birds, insects, rodents, and mushrooms. The agency, intellect, and interconnectedness of nonhuman matter are indispensable to these networks. This perspective critiques anthropocentric views and pushes the boundaries of ecological narratives by demonstrating the indispensable roles that nonhuman agents play in maintaining the intricate web of life.

Furthermore, the paragraph illustrates the basic ecological relationships that promote collaboration, competition, and cohabitation within an ecosystem. Commoner avers that "everything is connected to everything else" (See citation on pp. 13 & 30). This interconnectedness, that is usually invisible to the naked eye, challenges the anthropocentric narratives that have traditionally marginalised nonhuman voices. These lines also highlight the concept of "vibrant materiality" explored by Iovino and Oppermann, where nonhuman entities possess agency and narrative capacity.

The lives of humans and nonhumans are woven together in *TIMT* to highlight the interconnectedness that underlies all life. The fig tree, which acts as both a narrator and a symbol of Cyprus's turbulent past and rich ecological resources, is central to this discussion. The viewpoint of this tree questions accepted ideas about agency by suggesting that plants are also capable of intelligence and memory. his

insight directly challenges the anthropocentric tendency to view nature merely as a passive backdrop to human affairs and proposes instead that nature actively participates in these human actions.

Ecological interdependence is also exemplified by the symbiotic interactions that are featured in the novel, such as those that exist between the fig tree and fruit bats or butterflies. In posthuman thought, where human and nonhuman forces are entangled in a dynamic web of relations, these relationships resonate with the idea of matter's effectivity and highlight the nonhuman contributions to ecological balance as well as human impact (Braidotti 13, my paraphrase).

The parrot Chico serves as another illustration of the novel's examination of interconnection. Chico, who is Kostas and Defne's companion, represents the connection between the animal and human realms. His unique personality, autonomy, and capacity to mimic human speech and emotions all work together to create a narrative device that highlights the intricate relationships that humans have with other living things. In addition to bringing a new dimension to the novel's depiction of biodiversity, Chico serves as an important reminder of the devastating effects of human strife on animal lives. This is well captured in these lines from Shafak's *TIMT*:

The Happy Fig closed down, Chico fell into a deep depression. He started plucking out his feathers and chewing his skin – a red, raw map of pain spreading across exposed flesh. It happens to parrots, just like humans, they succumb to melancholy, losing all joy and hope, finding each day more excruciating. (250)

This quote about Chico, a parrot falling into deep depression and self-destructive behavior, highlights an emotional response that parallels human experiences. This anthropomorphization invites a broader reflection on the interconnectedness of all life forms, a theme deeply rooted in ecocriticism. As Commoner has stated in his book *The Closing Circle* about the interconnectedness of all life forms:

Every living thing is dependent on many others, either indirectly through the physical and chemical features of the environment or directly for food or a sheltering place. Within every living thing on the earth, indeed within each of

its individual cells, is contained another network-on its own scale, as complex as the environmental system-made. (10)

Shafak's novel represents a world of a compound web wherein the natural world and human life come together, with joint histories and interdependencies. The fig tree is part of the plot and it explains the relationships among characters. It participates in the plot not only with its own participation but also observes events. The novel highlights the notion that nonhuman entities also partake in agency through mirroring thoughts from the fig tree. Thereby, it opens up the narrative space where the voice and emotions of a tree are given the same importance as a human character.

Shafak goes further to bring out the interrelation of nonhumans and humans by focusing on how her characters were relating with the nature elements that they came across. There is a nurturing relationship between the fig tree and the tavern keeper; both literally tend to each other with love and respect. The relationship between the fruit bats and butterflies with the fig tree displays how important nonhuman creatures are for ecological processes, such as pollination, among others, so as to maintain a healthy balance of the ecosystem. These relationships unveil how all lives are interconnected. This interconnectedness is aptly portrayed in these lines from the text.

Under and above the ground, we trees communicate all the time. We share not only water and nutrients, but also essential information. Although we have to compete for resources sometimes, we are good at protecting and supporting each other. (*TIMT* 93)

The novel's backdrop of the Cyprus conflict serves as a trigger for major ecological disturbances. The novel shows how habitat devastation from bombing, species displacement and deforestation for military purposes lead to ecosystem deterioration. Fragmented Cyprus indicates fragile connection between humanity and the environment and implies that the reconciliation of one is inherently intertwined with the reestablishment of the other. This particular element of the theme provokes the reader to think about the idea of the post-human condition, in which all existences interdepend in the ecological network, while, also retaining their autonomy and individuality.

### 4.3 Becoming Earth

Braidotti's concept of "becoming-earth" is pivotal for understanding the portrayal of nonhuman entities in *TIMT*. In her 2013 book, *The Posthuman*, Braidotti uses the concept of "becoming-earth" to emphasise the interconnectedness and interdependence of humans with animals, plants, minerals, and ecosystems. Through the lens of "becoming-earth," I have explored the complex interactions between human and nonhuman worlds in the novel and have revealed the profound interconnectedness that characterise their relationships. The concept of "becoming-earth" is closely linked to the notion of "earth others," which refers to nonhuman elements like animals, plants, geological formations, and ecosystems. Braidotti introduces "earth-others" "as pejoration, pathologized and cast out of normality, on the side of anomaly, deviance, monstrosity and bestiality" (68).

My research examines the portrayal of a fig tree in *TIMT* as an exemplary "becoming-earth." This tree, taking on the role of narrator, upsets the usual human-centric stories. Its character is pivotal in the story and bears witness to a range of human impacts like the harsh aftermath of intercommunal conflict in Cyprus, environmental degradation and the commodification of nature. At the same time, it can experience profound human emotions, such as Kostas and Defne's secret love and their family's hidden stories. The narrative role of the fig tree presents the agency, voice, and memory that nonhuman actors possess. It illustrates how they can both influence and be influenced by human actions and emotions.

From the perspective of the fig tree, my study encourages viewing the world beyond human-centric lenses and acknowledges the inherent value and agency of nonhuman beings. The fig tree's journey, from witnessing the scars left by violence on the island to participating in stories of love and rejuvenation, highlights the dual impact of human activities on "earth-others." They are at once the victims of our recklessness and the recipients of our care and affection. By deploying the concept of becoming-earth and "earth others" into its narrative, the novel challenges readers to rethink their interactions with the nonhuman world. Through the fig tree, Shafak creates a narrative space where the voices of the nonhuman are not just heard but also esteemed.

This concept of “earth others” puts a light on nonhuman beings affected by human actions. The whole plot is revealed through a fig tree by giving a voice to these earth-others. It witnesses the effects of human conflict in Cyprus and environmental harm. Yet, the fig tree also proposes the capacity for renewal and healing. It becomes a symbol of resilience that holds the secret histories and forbidden loves within its branches and has the inherent voice, memory, and agency just like humans. This is captured in the following excerpt from the primary text.

In nature everything talks all the time. Fruit bats, honeybees, wild goats, grass snakes [. . .] Some screech, others squeak, yet others caw, chatter, croak or chirp. Boulders rumble, grapevines rustle. The salt lakes narrate tales of warfare and homecoming; the field roses chant in unison when the meltemi blows; the citrus orchards recite odes to eternal youth. (*TIMT* 306)

The excerpt illustrates the communicative aspect of the nonhuman world. Braidotti emphasises the significance, agency, and inherent value of nonhuman entities. These above mentioned lines highlights the intricate and continuous dialogue within nature, where each element, whether animal, plant or other nature elements like mineral, participates in a complex web of interactions, each with its unique mode of expression.

The mention of fruit bats, honey bees, wild goats, and grass snakes, alongside their sounds, underscores the multiplicity of voices within the natural world. This diversity is not limited to sounds; it extends to movements and the silent narratives of static beings like boulders and grapevines. The text aligns with Braidotti's call to acknowledge the agency and voice of "earth-others" by personifying these elements and attributing them the ability to talk, narrate, chant and recite. This narrative choice challenges the conventional human-centric worldview. It also implies a viewpoints that is inclusive and that recognizes the active participation of nonhuman entities in the ecosystem.

In this light, the text serves as a vivid illustration of Braidotti's "earth-others" and their agency by showcasing the vibrant, communicative, and interconnected world beyond the human. It encourages a reevaluation of the anthropocentric perspective and urges readers to perceive the nonhuman world not as a backdrop to human activity but as an active and expressive participant in the network of life.

Now that you have come this far into our story, there is something else I need to share with you: I am a melancholic tree.

I can't help but compare myself with the other trees in our garden – the hawthorn, the English oak, the whitebeam, the blackthorn – all properly native to Britain. (*TIMT* 172)

In this excerpt, the revelation of the tree as a "melancholic tree" that compares itself with other native British trees such as the hawthorn, English oak, whitebeam, and blackthorn, represents agency of the nonhuman akin to the human. These earth other[ed] are showing emotions and implies that it suffers just as the humans do. Through Braidotti's concept of "earth-others" this excerpt recognizes the agency, and intrinsic value of all forms of life including those often marginalised or overlooked by human-centric narratives.

The tree's melancholia and its comparisons with native trees can be interpreted as a metaphor for the experiences of immigrants and the challenges of assimilation and identity in a new land. Just as the tree feels out of place among natives, immigrants might experience feelings of alienation and nostalgia for a homeland, grappling with the complexities of establishing a new identity while retaining connections to their origins. This narrative device enriches the text by paralleling the tree's experience with human social issues, thus, breaking down the binary between nature and culture, human and nonhuman just as the concept of "becoming-with" proposes.

Moreover, the tree's self-reflection and comparison with other trees underscore the themes of diversity, displacement, and the search for identity within the broader ecological and social contexts. It reflects Braidotti's emphasis on the ethical significance of recognizing and respecting the voices and rights of "earth-others" that are "cast out of normality, on the side of anomaly, deviance, monstrosity and bestiality" (68). By personifying the tree and attributing to it human-like emotions and reflections, the narrative invites readers to empathise with nonhuman entities. This excerpt also recognises their roles not just as passive elements of the environment but as active participants in their ecosystems with their own stories and experiences.

On such nights I felt so much love and affection for him that it hurt. It was in those moments that the difference between the two of us pained me the most.



How I lamented that I could not turn my branches into arms to embrace him, my twigs into fingers to caress him, my leaves into a thousand tongues to whisper back his words, and my trunk into a heart to take him in. (*TIMT* 37)

The intensity of the fig tree's emotional bond with its human companion is well captured in this quote. It presents the significant but unbridgeable distance between the two species. Oppermann's idea of the ecological posthumanism that blurs the lines between human and nonhuman entities and reveals a shared capacity for emotional depth and complexity (2016, 27) is presented here by the tree's longing to move beyond its botanical nature, to embrace, touch, whisper and admire in a human way. The idea of "becoming-earth," as described by Braidotti is also embodied in this text. She avers in her *The Posthuman* that "the displacement of anthropocentrism [through the idea of becoming-earth] results in a drastic restructuring of humans' relation to animals" (81). In addition to highlighting the constraints placed by physical form, the tree's grief over its inability to physically express love as humans show the strong emotional and interspecies ties that can exist other than human ways of expression.

Moreover, Braidotti's concept of the posthuman condition where the lines between human and nonhuman are blurred is further supported by the fig tree's wish to change its physical characteristics into human-like forms in order to express affection (Braidotti 48). The portrayed shift in the tree challenges conventional anthropocentric views of nonhuman life forms and alludes to a desire for a closer connection with the human world. It also suggests an innate capacity of nonhumans to experience and communicate a wide range of emotions.

This also aligns with the ecocritical viewpoints supported by Glotfelty who states that literature can reveal the complex interactions between people and the environment and foster empathy for the nonhuman world. She notes that one of the main questions considered by ecocritics during the literary analysis is: "In what ways has literacy itself affected humankind's relationship to the natural world?" (XIX). In this way, *TIMT* encourages readers to acknowledge and respect the emotional lives and agency of nonhuman creatures by giving voice to the fig tree's deepest emotions.

Now and again in my sleep I find myself in Nicosia, standing under a familiar sun, my shadow falling against the rocks, reaching towards the prickly broom

bushes that burst with blossoms, each as perfect and bright as the golden coins in a children's fable [. . .]. So I guess it is in my genes, this melancholy I can never quite shake off. Carved with an invisible knife into my arborescent skin (*TIMT* 36)

This passage demonstrates the continuing influence of one's place of birth on one's identity and feeling of self by reflecting the close relationship that exists between the fig tree and its native Cyprus. Memories of Nicosia experiences by the fig tree highlight the concept of "becoming-earth" in which nonhuman have a consciousness or agency and memory that connects them to particular environments and histories. In her own words, Braidotti describes such reconfigurations as "a post-anthropocentric configuration of knowledge that grants the earth the same role and agency as the human subjects that inhabit it" (160). A yearning for one's native land is symbolised by the vivid picture of standing under a "familiar sun" and the "golden coins" of blooms.

In addition, the recognition of a sadness that is "carved with an invisible knife" into the tree's "arborescent skin" speaks of the connectivity and common fate of humans and nonhumans that are central to the posthumanist viewpoints. This gloominess highlights the shared vulnerabilities that exist beyond species boundaries and challenges anthropocentric viewpoints by highlighting the multifaceted layers of nonhuman experiences and emotions. Commoner asserts that "everything is connected to everything else" (See the same quote on pp. 13 & 30 & 41). The fig tree in *TIMT* functions as both a literal and symbolic agent within the intricate web of relations among all life forms. Nonhuman entities' emotional landscapes are inextricably linked to their physical and historical contexts. In this context, the fig tree's portrayal in *TIMT* opens a space for a more inclusive understanding of our shared environment that foregrounds the emotional depth and agency of nonhuman entities. This narrative engagement challenges traditional boundaries by asserting that nonhumans, like humans, possess complex, entangled relationships with their surroundings. In the next section, I analyse the idea of "becoming-animal" and its potential to transform our understanding of human identity and our connections with other animal species

## 4.4 Becoming Animals

In this section, I explore the text through Braidotti's concept of "becoming-animal" that proposes a radical repositioning of human subjectivity in relation to the nonhuman world. Braidotti challenges the traditionally established anthropocentric paradigm and urges a shift towards a bioegalitarian view that recognises the interconnectedness of all life forms. "Becoming-animal" prompts us to reconsider our role within a broader, vibrant ecosystem, rather than seeing ourselves as distinct from or superior to it. Braidotti cites Margulis and Sagan to define "the becoming-animal axis of transformation". She avers:

[The concept] entails the displacement of anthropocentrism and the recognition of trans species solidarity on the basis of our being environmentally based, that is to say embodied, embedded and in symbiosis with other species. (qtd. in Braidotti 67)

This transformation involves rethinking the traditional notion of "animal others", entities often viewed merely as resources or objects of human domination. By deploying the perspective of "becoming-animal," we begin to see these "animal others" not as separate, inferior beings but as integral elements of our own existence that are fundamentally linked to our survival and well-being. Braidotti describes this shift as a process of "deterritorializing" or "nomadizing" that is, human-animal interactions moving away from traditional binaries and hierarchical structures that have historically placed humans at the centre of existence (71, my paraphrase). This not only reorients our understanding of human nature but also challenges the asymmetrical power dynamics that have characterised human relations with animals. By exploring the concept of "becoming-animal" in relation to "animal others," I uncover the interconnectedness between human and nonhuman entities and relational dynamics that shape our interactions within the broader ecosystem.

In the course of my analysis, I have noticed that "animal others" are more than just characters or symbols. They are vital to the story's world with their lives and outcomes deeply connected to humans. They often serve as mirrors reflecting the consequences of human actions on the natural world, as well as agents of change, healing, and connection. This highlights the interdependencies between human and nonhuman lives. Moreover, by attributing agency and voice to "animal others," a

narrative can subvert traditional human-centric perspectives. The text also offers insights into alternative ways of being that transcend exploitation and objectification.

Ultimately, the inclusion and consideration of "animal others" in literature reflects a growing awareness and reevaluation of human-nonhuman relationships and signals a move towards a more ethically and ecologically aware understanding of our place in the natural world. This shift has profound implications not only for how we live and act but for how we imagine our stories and ourselves in relation to the other lives that populate the earth.

In *TIMT*, Shafak shows nonhuman characters in a way that questions a human-centered story. She gives us a new way to see how everything in life is connected and how much people affect the natural world. A key example of "animal others" in her novel is the parrot character. This parrot is not just there for the human characters. It not only acts as a companion to the human characters but also as a witness to their history and emotional landscapes. The parrot's ability to mimic human speech becomes a powerful narrative device that blurs the lines between human and nonhuman expression. It also emphasise the shared experiences of joy, sorrow, and longing across species boundaries. This representation highlights the deep emotional connections that can exist between humans and animal others and challenges the notion of human supremacy.

Chico fell into a deep depression. He started plucking out his feathers and chewing his skin – a red, raw map of pain spreading across exposed flesh. It happens to parrots, just like humans, they succumb to melancholy, losing all joy and hope, finding each day more excruciating. (*TIMT* 251)

The touching story of the parrot Chico, who suffers from serious depression problems, proves the concept of "animal others" mentioned above and is closely linked to Braidotti's "becoming-animal." This quote shows aspects of emotional and psychological complexities forming the vulnerability of nonhuman animals to feelings similar to those of human beings. In describing Chico's behaviours of feather-plucking and skin chewing that are the two most common and observable behaviours that are direct parallels to human responses towards extreme emotional suffering, the text is challenging the anthropocentric views held against the sentience and intrinsic value of "animal others".

The description of Chico's suffering as a "red, raw map of pain" makes a comparison of what the parrot feels to that of a human. This is in accordance with the concept of "becoming-animal". Braidotti's concept of "becoming-animal" involves a process where human identity is redefined in relation to animals and acknowledges the shared experiences and emotional capacities between humans and nonhumans (66-67, my paraphrase). This perspective is crucial in understanding Chico's behavior, as it aligns with the recognition that animals, like humans, can experience complex emotional states such as depression and melancholy. Braidotti's framework encourages us to see Chico's behavior not just as an isolated incident but as part of a broader narrative that underscores the shared vulnerabilities between species. This choice of narration also points to the ethical necessity of reviewing our treatment and relation with the "animal others". According to Braidotti, this posthumanist displacement recognizes the "deep *zoe*-egalitarianism between humans and animals and "the vitality of their bond is based on sharing this planet, territory or environment on terms that are no longer so clearly hierarchical, nor self-evident" (71).

Furthermore, Chico's depression indicates the connectedness between human and nonhuman lives. It symbolises the fact that "animal others" do not lead lives that are unrelated to emotional and even environmental consequences of human activities. The focus on the emotional life of Chico continues a wider conversation about what it means to be human and what our relations are with nonhuman others in the world.

Furthermore, the symbiotic relationships between the fig tree, the fruit bats, and the butterflies exemplify the delicate ecological balances that sustain life. In my research, I point out how "animal others" aren't just background characters in the ecosystem. Instead, they're active players in spreading life. They're crucial for pollinating plants and helping them reproduce. But, because of what people do, like cutting down forests and polluting, these animals are in danger. This situation really shows the negative impact of humans not caring enough about the world around them. Through the stories in the book, Shafak highlights how everything in nature is connected. She shows that "animal others" play a big role in keeping our planet healthy and full of different life forms. This above-mentioned argument is presented in the following two extracts from the text:

We fig trees hold bats in high regard. We know how essential they are for the entire ecosystem, and we appreciate them, with their large eyes the colour of

burnt cinnamon. They help us pollinate, faithfully carrying our seeds far and wide. (*TIMT* 139)

I am going to include in it the creatures in my ecosystem – the birds, the bats, the butterflies, the honeybees, the ants, the mosquitoes and the mice – because there is one thing I have learned: wherever there is war and a painful partition, there will be no winners, human or otherwise. (*TIMT* 173)

This excerpt shows how fruit bats and butterflies are crucial but at risk in our ecological web. They are important for pollination and helping plants reproduce. This shows how important they are for keeping ecosystems balanced. But they face dangers like losing their homes to deforestation, being hunted, and pollution. This situation really shows how delicate their lives are. These animals aren't just part of nature's beauty and diversity. They also represent themes of moving from place to place and adjusting to changes, especially those changes caused by humans moving into their spaces. Their give-and-take relationship with the fig tree is all about helping each other out and living together peacefully that highlights idea that different forms of life can coexist. Shafak brings to life Braidotti's ideas about earth-others by making a strong case for treating nonhuman life with respect, care and a sense of togetherness. The way the fig tree, fruit bats, and butterflies are shown in *TIMT* reminds us how connected all life is. It encourages us to see and value the crucial part earth-others have in keeping our world healthy and ongoing.

This presentation of the "animal others" by Shafak in *TIMT* highlights another theme, that is, the ecological consequences of the relationships of humans with this nonhuman world. Giving voice and agency to nonhuman characters, she encourages a narrative space in which the division of not only human and nonhuman is called into question but actually healed by a more inclusive understanding of our place amidst the natural world. This novel is a story of human love and conflict but it also turns into a reminder of the entwined fates of any living being and an alarmingly urgent demand toward harmonious coexistence with the "animal others" living on the Earth. Mentioned below is an excerpt from *TIMT* that highlights the agentic power of nonhumans. I quote this extract in full length because it is important for my argument:

Where there is trauma, look for the signs, for there are always signs. Cracks that appear in our trunks, splits that won't heal, leaves that display autumn

colours in spring, bark that peels like unmoulded skin. But no matter what kind of trouble it may be going through, a tree always knows that it is linked to endless life forms – from honey fungus, the largest living thing, down to the smallest bacteria and archaea – and that its existence is not an isolated happenstance but intrinsic to a wider community. Even trees of different species show solidarity with one another regardless of their differences, which is more than you can say for so many humans. It was the hawthorn tree that informed me young Ada was not doing well. I was filled with immense sadness then. For I felt connected to her, even if she might not think much of me. We had grown together in this house, a baby and a sapling. (*TIMT* 94)

This passage represents the idea of "animal others" and interconnectedness. The imagery of "cracks," "splits," "autumn colors in spring," and "peeling bark" paints a picture of physical manifestations of distress in trees. These signs serve as a metaphor for recognizing and acknowledging trauma in both nature and human experience. They can also be considered as metaphors for the silent cries of help that all too often go unheeded in our environment. Additionally, the mention of trees being "linked to endless life forms" emphasises the interconnectedness of all living beings and suggests that even in times of hardship, there is a sense of belonging to a broader community.

The silent, disturbing narrative of the hawthorn, further animating the human world of nature, communicates Ada's distress to the tree. This mutuality of growth is expressed as a shared space between Ada and nature that later becomes a bond of shared experience and empathy. This seems to be indicative of the possibility for nonhuman entities to participate in and affect human narratives. This is not just a rethinking of our space on this planet, but it invokes the vision of the possibility of cohabitation that honours the intrinsic value of each being and its interdependence with all other beings.

This excerpt captures what may be considered the main point of Oppermann's "ecological posthumanism" that "puts great emphasis on ecological interconnectedness and shared vulnerabilities of different types of life ecological posthumanism that stresses the significance of complex environmental relations [. . .] [in] which humans and nonhumans [. . .] are deeply enmeshed" (2016, 26). The passage also resonates with Braidotti's critique of anthropocentric division, in which

human and nonhuman agencies are divided. The description of trauma in trees and their resilience shows a much more intricate web of life, in which nonhuman entities present signs of distress and recovery. In fact, the concept of "becoming-with," as a means for solidarities across trees of different species, stands against the ideals of human individualism as proposed by Braidotti (67, my paraphrase).

Bennett's exploration of the vibrant materiality and the active role of nonhumans in ecological systems are highlighted by the interaction between the fig and hawthorn trees regarding Ada's well-being. "The material agency or effectivity of nonhuman or not-quite human things" (Bennett IX) is presented in the excerpt. This underscores the nonhuman perception that transcends species boundaries. In this way, Shafak's narrative encourages a more inclusive and compassionate interaction with all members of the ecosystem, human and nonhuman alike and challenges and invokes readers to reevaluate their roles in the vast ecosystems. In the next section, I explore the concept of matter's effectivity that focuses on the impact of all living and non-living matter on one another within an ecosphere.

#### **4.5 Matter's Effectivity in Ecosystem**

Matter's effectivity as proposed through Bachelard's notion of "the mirror of our energies" and further explored by Oppermann, proposes a perspective on the dynamic interplay between various material forces in the world (qtd. in Oppermann 2016, 27). This concept dissolves the rigid boundaries traditionally upheld between different species and between the realms of the natural and the human-made and proposes instead a universe where all matter, regardless of its origin, engages in a constant interaction. Through this lens, the world is viewed not as a collection of discrete entities operating in isolation but as an intricate web of material forces that continuously affect and reshape one another.

At the heart of matter's effectivity is the recognition of the profound entanglement between human actions and the broader ecosphere. It highlights how anthropogenic activities ranging from industrial pollution to deforestation plays significant role in these interactions. This interconnectedness serves as a critical reminder of the impact of human behaviour has on the environment that influences the existence, agency, and well-being of nonhuman species. According to Bennett, we are in "a time when the interactions between human, viral, animal, and technological



bodies are becoming more and more intense” (108). Human activities do not merely alter the physical landscape but they also participate in shaping the conditions and environment for various forms of life to emerge, thrive, or decline. This concept invites a deeper understanding of the intrinsic value of the nonhuman world and the urgent need to develop a more harmonious relationship with it by acknowledging the active role that all matter plays in the ongoing creation of our world. It emphasises the importance of recognising and respecting the agency of nonhuman entities and the intricate ways in which our lives are intertwined with the larger ecological system. This is evident from these words of Oppermann “our environmental relations are always characterized by networks of complex crossings and interchanges with other beings and material forces” (2016, 27).

Within this framework, human-centrism is questioned. It also gives insights on how humans, nonhumans, and environments they live in all interrelate. In Bennett’s words “human culture is inextricably enmeshed with vibrant, nonhuman agencies” (108). The novel demonstrates how the fig tree, fruit bats, and butterflies are not accessories to the human story but have themselves a story and/or agency and worth with intentions and life of their own. In the text, Shafak's novel captures the very essence of the modern critical posthumanism and ecological posthumanism. It challenges the readers to question the dichotomies and separations that have so long existed and put humankind aside from the rest of the natural world. The delineation of the role of nonhuman agency in the novel and its influence on our understanding of the interrelatedness in life has been further analysed in the following chapter.

I know what you are thinking. How could I, an ordinary *Ficus carica*, possibly be in love with a *Homo sapiens*? I get it, I’m no beauty. Never been more than plain-looking. (*TIMT* 33-34)

In this passage, the notion of a *Ficus carica* (a fig tree) showing love for a *Homo sapiens* (a human being) embodies the radical idea that matter, irrespective of its form possesses the capacity to affect and be affected by other forms of matter. This perspective destabilises categorical distinctions between species, as well as the division between the natural and human-made worlds. It also suggests a universe in which all material forces are in continuous interaction and interpenetration. This is in accord with Oppermann’s concept of “networked relations”. She notes, “our

environmental relations are always characterised by networks of complex crossings and interchanges with other beings and material forces” (27).

In the context of "matter's effectivity," the fig tree's self-described love it professes for a human highlights the complex dynamic exchanges of the world. Love, from this perspective, is not merely an emotion experienced by humans but a force that can transcend the human/nonhuman division. It is indicative of the profound interconnectedness and mutual influence that characterises the relationship between different forms of matter. The tree's affection underscores the concept that human and nonhuman entities are part of an intricate web of relations, where interactions are not limited to physical influences but extend to emotional dimensions.

The fig tree's expression of love and self-awareness fundamentally challenges the entrenched anthropocentric assumption that consciousness, emotion, and agency are exclusive to humans. By presenting the tree as a conscious entity capable of affection, the text calls into question the traditional distinctions between human and nonhuman subjectivity. This shift disrupts the human-centric worldview and aligns with the posthumanist critique that seeks to destabilise these rigid boundaries. The narrative compels readers to acknowledge the agency of nonhuman matter, an agency often overlooked or dismissed in conventional thought. As Bennett suggests, "everything is, in a sense, alive" (117), and the fig tree's narrative illustrates how nonhuman entities can possess forms of agency and engage in relational dynamics that were once considered exclusive to human beings. The tree's embodiment of these qualities reinforces the idea that the capacity for agency, emotion, and relationality is not confined to the human realm but is part of a larger, interconnected ecological system. Thus, the text invites a radical reconsideration of subjectivity and agency that positions nonhuman entities as active participants in the intricate web of life.

In *TIMT*, water also plays a significant role beyond just being a setting. It is portrayed as a force that brings life, carries historical significance and facilitates transformation in the story. The novel explores the significance of water in different ways throughout the story. It represents the mythical birthplace of Aphrodite, symbolises intimacy and freedom for Kostas and Defne, and silently observes the island's turbulent history and the tragic fate of missing persons. Water showcases its ability to both create and destroy life. The novel explores the unseen and untold stories that shape collective memory by highlighting water's unique ability to witness

and conceal historical events. The emergence of Aphrodite from the depths of the conflict symbolises the birth of beauty that stands in stark contrast to its role in concealing the violence and loss of the conflict. Shafak uses narrative elements to show how things like water, which are not human, are closely connected to human life. Water can reflect the complexities of existence and the passing of time. Here is a passage from the text that portrays the materiality of all life forms:

Nature was always talking, telling things, though the human ear was too limited to hear them. (*TIMT* 188)

This excerpt from the text conveys a powerful message about the limitations of human vision and the ability of nature to communicate. Shafak sheds light on the ongoing conversation that occurs in the natural world through the fig tree narrator a conversation that goes beyond human perception and the traditional notion of communication. The fig tree's reflections attack anthropocentric viewpoints by highlighting the rich, complex universe of relationships and expressions that occur among plants, animals, and other nonhuman entities. This narrative choice engages with concepts of ecological posthumanism and contemporary critical posthumanism. The latter calls for decentering of the human and instead recognises and honour the agency, and interconnectedness of all living things. Braidotti notes:

The posthuman in the sense of post-anthropocentrism displaces the dialectical scheme of opposition, replacing well established dualisms with the recognition of deep *zoe*-egalitarianism between humans and animals. (71)

By stating that "the human ear was too limited to hear them," Shafak underscores the limitations of human perception and highlights the atrocity of human superiority over other forms of life. This aligns with Braidotti's critique of anthropocentrism, which traditionally places humans at the center of all understanding and value systems. Instead, post-anthropocentrism encourages us to recognize and respect the voices and agencies of nonhuman life forms, promoting a more inclusive and egalitarian view of the world.

Braidotti's concept of deep *zoe*-egalitarianism emphasizes that all life forms, including animals and plants, possess intrinsic value and deserve recognition and respect. This view encourages a more ethical and interconnected relationship with the natural world. Shafak's depiction of nature as constantly communicating, though

often unheard by humans, reinforces the need to broaden our understanding and appreciation of the diverse ways in which life expresses itself. Here is another passage from the novel that reveals the communicative abilities of nature:

Well, I think there's still so much we don't know, we're only just beginning to discover the language of trees. But we can tell with certainty that they can hear, smell, communicate – and they can definitely remember. They can sense water, light, danger. They can send signals to other plants and help each other. They're much more alive than most people realize. (*TIMT* 43)

This passage reflects on the communicative and sensory capabilities of trees. It resonates with the concept of "matter's effectivity" by highlighting the complex, interactive, and vibrant nature of matter beyond the human sphere. The assertion that trees possess abilities to hear, smell, communicate, remember, and sense various environmental factors underscores the agency and sentience attributed to forms of matter often deemed passive within traditional perspectives. This insight into the arboreal capabilities challenges anthropocentric views. According to Oppermann, we are living in “networks of complex crossings and interchanges with other beings and material force” and when “interfered with anthropogenic factors” then “matter’s effectivity [. . .] becomes much more pronounced” (2016, 27).

The revelation that trees can send signals to one another and help one another points to a network of interrelations and emphasises the interconnectedness of life forms at a level that transcends human understanding. This interconnectedness is a cornerstone of the concept of "matter's effectivity" that posits that all material forces, whether human or nonhuman, continuously affect one another in intricate and often invisible ways. By acknowledging that trees are "much more alive than most people realise", the passage offers a reevaluation of the conventional hierarchy of being that places humans at the top and regards other forms of matter as mere resources or backdrop to human activity. Let us take a look at another excerpt from the novel:

I still carry the island with me, though. The places where we were born are the shape of our lives, even when we are away from them. Especially then. Now and again in my sleep I find myself in Nicosia, standing under a familiar sun, my shadow falling against the rocks, reaching towards the prickly broom

bushes that burst with blossoms, each as perfect and bright as the golden coins in a children's fable. (*TIMT* 36)

This paragraph explores the intricate relationship that exists between location, identity, and memory and shows how a person's birthplace's essence shapes them even when they are physically separated from it. The fig tree's memory of Nicosia, that is characterised by clear visions of the sun, shadows, rocks and fragrant prickly broom shrubs, represents the lasting influence of natural environments on our existence. The recollections of fig tree of Nicosia challenge anthropocentric notions by illuminating how nonhuman entities experience and internalise their surroundings just as the humans do. It also shows how inseparable humans and nonhumans are from their ecological and cultural environments.

The novel depicts how human and nonhuman matter affects, support, and modify each other in a complex web of relationships. Shafak's novel encourages readers to recognise and value the diverse agencies and stories that come together in our shared planet. This exploration of the sensory and communicative capacities of trees underscores the vibrant participation of all forms of matter.

In this chapter, I have addressed the key points outlined in the five sections, beginning with the exploration of the arboreal narrative. I have analyzed its symbolic importance and implications, particularly how it challenges anthropocentrism by centering the narrative on a fig tree in Shafak's *TIMT*. Next, I have examined the element of interconnectedness between the human and nonhuman in *TIMT*. Shafak depicts the intricate web of ties that characterize our life on this planet through the perspective of a fig tree. Then, I explored Braidotti's concept of "becoming-earth" and analyzed the portrayal of nonhuman entities and their interdependence with humans, plants, minerals, and ecosystems. This analysis highlights the complex interactions and interconnectedness that define their relationships. Furthermore, I discussed Braidotti's concept of "becoming-animal" that proposes a radical repositioning of human subjectivity in relation to the nonhuman world and urges a shift towards a bioegalitarian view that recognises the interconnectedness of all life forms. Lastly, I examined the strategy of matter's effectivity as presented in the primary text Oppermann's perspectives. In the next chapter, I analyse the ways in which novel has challenged anthropocentrism. I explore the problematic enmeshment and the effect of

human intervention on nature and lastly, I examine the elements of symbiosis and regeneration in the novel that gives us hope for ecological sustainability.

## CHAPTER 5

# "IT WILL TAKE TIME, HEALING": ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY IN SHAFAK'S THE ISLAND OF MISSING TREES

In this chapter, I examine symbiotic relationships between human and nonhuman entities. This chapter explores how the text challenges the anthropocentric paradigms. It also articulates a vision of ecological sustainability through the lens of ecological posthumanism and contemporary critical posthumanism as expounded by Oppermann and Braidotti. It emphasises the interconnectedness of life and the critical importance of recognising and fostering these connections for the well-being of our planet. The chapter also explores the problematic enmeshment and the effects of such enmeshment on the ecological entities.

The portrayal of the fig tree's interactions with various forms of life including humans, animals and other plants highlights the concept of mutualism as a fundamental principle. This interdependence is not just a matter of survival but a demonstration of the natural world's inherent ability to sustain and regenerate itself when allowed to maintain its delicate balances.

By highlighting the promise of ecological sustainability, I seek to unpack the ways in which *TIMT* serves as a narrative call to action. It encourages a reassessment of human actions and their impact on the environment and urges a deep understanding and appreciation of the nonhuman world's contributions to our shared ecological systems. Through a detailed examination of the text, I explore the paths toward a more harmonious coexistence and the importance of healing and mutual coexistence. I investigate my primary text under the following subheadings:

- Challenge to Anthropocentric Views
- Problematic Enmeshment between the Human and the Nonhuman
- Symbiosis and Regeneration

### 5.1 Challenge to Anthropocentric Views

In this section, I examine how the novel challenges the anthropocentric views that have long been established. In *TIMT*, the interplay between human and nonhuman

entities forms the core of a narrative that challenges anthropocentric perceptions of the world. Through portrayal of interconnected lives, the novel dismantles the notion of human centrism or superiority over nature and instead presents a vision of existence as a complex and interdependent web of life. Shafak's narrative invokes the readers to reconceptualise their place within the natural world through its narrative where humans and nonhumans greatly influence each other in both suffering and flourishing. Braidotti states, "The vitality of their [humans and nonhumans] bond is based on sharing this planet, territory or environment on terms that are no longer so clearly hierarchical, nor self-evident" (71). This view of interconnectedness, free from rigid hierarchies, reflects the novel's portrayal of the reciprocal relationships between humans and nonhumans. In *TIMT*, the fig tree's relationship with humans is depicted not as subordinate or passive, but as an active, engaged participant in the world's ongoing dynamics.

The novel challenges anthropocentric views through its innovative narrative technique. According to Braidotti, posthumanist viewpoint "displaces the notion of species hierarchy and of a single, common standard for 'Man' as the measure of all things. In the ontological gap thus opened, other species come galloping in" (67). By giving narrative agency to a fig tree, Shafak disrupts conventional storytelling norms and presents the tree not merely as a backdrop to human activities but also as a sentient entity with its own intelligence, memory and ability to communicate. This choice elevates the fig tree from the status of passive natural element to that of a narrator and a protagonist. The fig tree thus becomes a symbol rich with the island's history, culture, and ecology that bridges the gap between past and present and establishes the potential of nonhuman matter to enlighten and inspire human beings. Here is one extract from the text that demonstrates the point that there is no difference between human and nonhuman pain and hence there should be no division of species bounds:

He had always believed there was no hierarchy – or there should be none – between human pain and animal pain, and no precedence of human rights over animal rights, or indeed of human rights over those of plants, for that matter.  
(*TIMT* 291)

This passage captures the essence of ecological posthumanism viewpoint that challenges the anthropocentric hierarchy that places human concerns above those of



nonhuman beings. It also resonates with Braidotti's contemporary critical posthumanism that advocates for a radical departure from human-centrism towards a more inclusive and ethical consideration of all forms of life. This perspective not only questions the established hierarchies between humans, animals, and plants but also calls for a reevaluation of species boundaries. Oppermann's ecological posthumanism further strengthens this idea by emphasising the entangled relationships within the biosphere, where human, animal, and plant rights are seen as integral to maintaining ecological balance and sustainability.

Furthermore, the novel explores devastating effects of the intercommunal conflict in Cyprus on not only the humans but also the environment. The destruction and displacement of natural habitats alongside human suffering highlight the interconnected fates of human and nonhuman entities under the impact of historical and political conflicts. Text illustrates the shared vulnerabilities and destinies of humans and nonhumans by depicting the creation of a buffer zone that fragments the island and separates human communities as well as disrupts the natural environment.

*TIMT* goes further to challenge anthropocentric views by highlighting the consequences of environmental degradation and pollution caused by human actions. The novel highlights the threats to biodiversity and ecosystem balance through the depiction of the consequences of deforestation, hunting, mining, and urbanization. The endangerment of species, exemplified by the fruit bats and butterflies, serves as a reminder of the fragile interdependence between humans and nonhumans. Oppermann states that “when these networks [of the human and nonhuman] are ostensibly disrupted by anthropogenic factors, the posthuman condition becomes an entanglement in many antagonistic forces with formidable efficacy and humans are not immune to their material effects” (2016, 27). This highlights the impact of human activities (anthropogenic factors) on the interconnected networks of human and nonhuman entities. It suggests that when these networks are disrupted by human actions, the resulting posthuman condition becomes a complex interplay of various opposing forces, each with significant power. In this context, humans are not exempt from the tangible consequences of these disruptions. The idea underscores the interdependence of human and nonhuman entities and highlights the substantial effects of human interference on these networks.

I wish I could have told him that loneliness is a human invention. Trees are never lonely. Humans think they know with certainty where their being ends and someone else's starts. With their roots tangled and caught up underground, linked to fungi and bacteria, trees harbour no such illusions. For us, everything is interconnected. (*TIMT* 33)

This excerpt from *TIMT* highlights the fig tree's insight into the fundamental interconnectedness of all life and also challenges the human-centric notion of loneliness and individuality. This extract portrays the concept of "materiality" that is "is the condition through which bodies act with and relate with each other, shaping other bodies" (Iovino 1). The fig tree's perspective highlights a critical aspect of ecological posthumanism, as advocated by Braidotti and Oppermann, where the demarcation between individual entities is less clear and the emphasis is placed on the collective existence "because there are no boundaries and everything is interrelated, to hurt nature is ultimately to hurt ourselves" (Braidotti 86). The imagery of roots intertwined with fungi and bacteria serves as a metaphor for the complex and interdependent relationships that define ecosystems. It aligns with Commoner's first law of ecology, "everything is connected to everything else" that posits the inseparability of all components within the ecosphere (See citation on pp. 13 & 30, & 41). By personifying the fig tree and giving it the wisdom to recognise the illusory nature of human constructs like loneliness, Shafak invites readers to reconsider their own place within the broader network of life. This narrative choice not only blurs the boundaries between human and nonhuman actors but also aligns with the posthumanist critique of anthropocentrism that suggests a more egalitarian and integrated view of the world where humans are not isolated or superior entities but part of a larger living network. This is what Braidotti has proposed in her book, *The Posthuman*, when she states that "the earth environment as a whole deserves the same ethical and political consideration as humans" (86).

The passage also conveys the idea that the human experience of loneliness is a product of societal and cultural constructs that contrasts sharply with the intrinsic interconnectedness. It serves as a reminder of the deep ecological wisdom embedded in the natural world and urges a shift away from anthropocentric viewpoints towards recognition of our embeddedness in the intricate web of life.

‘Well, I think there’s still so much we don’t know, we’re only just beginning to discover the language of trees. But we can tell with certainty that they can hear, smell, communicate – and they can definitely remember. They can sense water, light, danger. They can send signals to other plants and help each other. They’re much more alive than most people realize.’ Especially our *Ficus carica*. If you only knew how special she is, Kostas wanted to add, but stopped himself. (*TIMT* 43)

In this passage, the fig tree or *Ficus carica*, is recognised not merely as flora but as an entity with complex sensory and communicative capabilities. This enumeration of abilities positions trees as active participants in their environment. The verbs "hear," "smell," "communicate," "remember," "sense," and "send signals" ascribe human-like qualities to trees. These abilities suggest a level of intelligence and responsiveness traditionally reserved for animals and humans. This idea resonates with Braidotti's idea "that matter, including the specific slice of matter that is human embodiment, is intelligent and selforganizing" (35). The acknowledgment of the tree's ability to hear, smell, communicate, and remember portrays it as a vibrant participant in the ecosystem. The *Ficus carica* is not only acknowledged for its general capabilities but is also given a special status. The personification of the tree, referring to it as "she," adds a layer of individuality and significance, suggesting a unique relationship between the tree and the observer, Kostas. It aligns with Braidotti's posthuman condition where the hierarchical boundaries that separate humans from the nonhuman are dismantled in favour of recognizing the interconnectedness of all forms of life. In her own words, "the centrality of *anthropos* is challenged, a number of boundaries between 'Man' and his others go tumbling down" (65).

Furthermore, the character's hesitation to voice the full extent of the tree's uniqueness highlights a human reluctance to fully acknowledge or understand the depth of nonhuman experiences and capabilities. It suggests a gap between human perception and the reality of the natural world's vibrant materiality, a gap that literature like Shafak's seeks to bridge by offering a narrative space where the life of trees is rendered with the depth and complexity typically reserved for human characters.

In this way, *TIMT* not only contributes to a broader understanding of our place in the natural world but also serves as a call to action that urges a shift in perspective

towards a more inclusive engagement with the nonhuman. Through its exploration of the language of trees, the novel positions itself within the ecological posthumanist discourse that supports the view that recognizes the intrinsic value and agency of all forms of life. In the next section, I study the consequences of perviousness of species boundaries, that is, the enmeshment between the living and nonliving ecological entities.

## **5.2 Problematic Enmeshment between the Human and the Nonhuman**

This section examines the element of problematic enmeshment of humans with the nonhumans and its consequences in the selected text. The text shows how intricately human behaviour, emotions and social tensions are linked to the natural environment. Ecological posthumanism, as conceived Oppermann, highlights the impacts of human dominion over nature and the ecological problems that result from it. In her words, “when these networks are ostensibly disrupted by anthropogenic factors, the posthuman condition becomes an entanglement in many antagonistic forces (2016, 27). Shafak's novel shows the catastrophic implications of anthropocentrism and environmental degradation and in this way, it forces us to reassess the complex relationships that define our existence and survival on Earth.

*TIMT* shows how war and urbanisation affect the natural environment and its nonhuman inhabitants. The text exposes the disparity between human growth and ecological well-being by portraying the loss of biodiversity and ecological imbalance brought about by the human activities. By looking at how the lives of people, trees, animals, and the island itself are all connected, we need to understand how we are connected to the rest of nature and make a change right away to protect and balance the environment. From the devastations of war to the effects of urban expansion and environmental degradation, the novel portrays the implications of human actions on the nonhuman world. Shafak describes the physical and psychological splits caused by human war and the perseverance and mute testimonies of the nonhuman in *TIMT*. When Oppermann was talking about Chris Jordon's film *Midway*, she writes that the film presents “problematic human-nonhuman enmeshment and poignantly demonstrates the dire consequences of the social and the natural interpenetrating each other” (2016, 28). The same may be said about the problematic enmeshment that is

portrayed in the novel. Shafak's novel covers ecological problems like pollution, urbanisation and deforestation that destroy the fragile equilibrium of ecosystems.

The novel shows Cyprus's biodiversity loss and how human advances have destroyed once-thriving environments. This deterioration in the environment is evidence of the troublesome interplay between human actions and the health of the planet. It shows how deforestation and hunting disturb the habitat of many species and compromise the stability of ecosystems that support life. Such activities result in a dramatic decline in biodiversity represented by the endangered status of species that are essential to the island's distinct ecological identity, like fruit bats and butterflies. Here is a passage from the text that is voice of the arboreal victim. I cite this passage in full because it is very crucial to my argument:

Most arboreal suffering is caused by humankind. Trees in urban areas grow faster than trees in rural areas. We also tend to die sooner. Would people really like to know these things? I don't think so. Frankly, I am not even sure they see us. Humans walk by us every day, they sit and sleep, smoke and picnic in our shade, they pluck our leaves and gorge themselves on our fruit, they break our branches, riding them like horses as children or using them to birch others into submission when they become older and crueller, they carve their lover's name on our trunks and vow eternal love, they weave necklaces out of our needles and paint our flowers into art, they split us into logs to heat their homes and sometimes they chop us down just because we obstruct their view, they make cradles, wine corks, chewing gum and rustic furniture, and produce the most spellbinding music out of us, and they turn us into books in which they lose themselves on cold winter nights, they use our wood to manufacture coffins in which they end their lives, buried six feet under with us, and they even compose romantic poems to us, calling us the link between earth and sky, and yet still they do not see us. (*TIMT* 46)

The effects of human actions on trees are addressed in this text. It highlights the often-overlooked effects of urbanisation and human consumption on arboreal lives. The passage begins by asserting that "most arboreal suffering is caused by humankind," setting a critical tone towards human interaction with trees. It points out that trees in urban areas, despite growing faster, tend to die sooner than their rural counterparts. This implies that the conditions in urban areas, though possibly

promoting rapid growth due to factors like increased CO<sub>2</sub> levels, ultimately lead to a shorter lifespan for trees due to pollution, restricted root space, and other stressors. The critique in Braidotti's contemporary critical posthumanism and Oppermann's ecological posthumanism is to reconsider the anthropocentric perspective that prioritises human needs over nonhuman well-being. The passage suggests that humans are largely indifferent to the suffering of trees. It states, "Frankly, I am not even sure they see us", this highlights a lack of awareness or acknowledgment of humans towards the trees they interact with daily. Despite the extensive use of trees for practical, artistic and emotional purposes, the passage suggests a profound irony, that is, humans do not truly "see" trees or acknowledge their intrinsic value. They are appreciated for their utility and aesthetic contributions, but not recognized as living beings with their own experiences of suffering and existence. In *The Posthuman*, Braidotti acknowledges the agency of nonhuman life forms and calls for a change in perspective from viewing trees as merely resources to considering them as sentient entities with rights and duties of their own within the ecosystem. She notes, "a post-anthropocentric configuration of knowledge that grants the earth the same role and agency as the human subjects that inhabit it" (160). This idea acknowledges the agency of each entity, human or nonhuman, in shaping and influencing the interconnected ecosystem. Through its arboreal narrator, *TIMT* questions trees' visibility in human consciousness and inspires action. It pushes readers to recognise trees for more than just their practical uses and to see them as essential parts of our common environment that both witness human life and suffer the results of human actions. The human manipulation of nature is reflected in the following passage:

Having figured this out about us, humans use the knowledge to trick and manipulate us for their own ends. Flower farmers turn on the lamps in the middle of the night, deceiving chrysanthemums into blossoming when they shouldn't. With a bit of light you can make us do so much. With a promise of love ... (*TIMT* 47)

This extract from text describes the innate need that plants, here symbolised by the fig tree, have for light, both as a source of emotional health and as a biological requirement for photosynthesis. It supports Braidotti's posthumanist reflection on nonhuman agency and vitality. This passage talks about how humans use their knowledge to trick and control nature for their own benefit. For example, flower

farmers use artificial light at night to make chrysanthemums bloom when they normally wouldn't. This manipulation helps them produce flowers out of season, which is useful for making more money or meeting market demands. It makes us think about how humans can change natural things and the reasons why they do it.

Braidotti challenges the conventional divisions between subjectivity and objectivity by promoting “post-anthropocentric configuration of knowledge that grants the earth the same role and agency as the human subjects that inhabit it” (160). Here, the fig tree's appreciation of light suggests a form of consciousness or sensibility that confuses human-centric conceptions of life and intelligence.

The passage portrays the fig tree's observation of human manipulation of plants' phototropic tendencies. Shafak criticises human actions that take advantage of plant behaviours for financial benefit through the perspective of the arboreal narrator. Braidotti talks about this manipulative nature of humans in her book, *The Posthuman*. She states that “they [animals] have been exploited for hard labour, as natural slaves and logistical supports for humans” (70). While she was specifically talking about animals but we can import that point here. As portrayed in the passage, humans' exploitative nature has been displayed. This invites readers to consider the deeper bonds humans have with the plant kingdom and look into the possibility of exploitation that these relationships carry. Mentioned below is an excerpt from *TIMT* that portrays the devastating impact of human conflicts:

Forests had been decimated, cleared for vineyards, cultivation and fuelwood, and at times deliberately destroyed in endless vendettas. Constant logging, multiple fires and sheer ignorance were all responsible for our disappearance, not to mention the blatant neglect of the previous administration. But so were wars, of which we had already had too many throughout the centuries. Conquerors from the East, conquerors from the West: Hittites, Egyptians, Phoenicians, Assyrians, Greeks, Persians, Macedonians, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Franks, Genoese, Venetians, Ottomans, Turks, British ... (*TIMT* 82)

This excerpt from text examines the longstanding impact of human conflicts and actions on the environment especially forests. It shows how human conquests and civilizational development have caused ecological damage. This narrative part examines the suffering of nonhuman beings that frequently goes unrecognised during

crises that are focused on humans. The passage discusses the decline of forests due to human activities and historical conflicts. It notes that forests have been cleared for agriculture, vineyards, and fuel wood, and sometimes intentionally destroyed in disputes. Factors like logging, fires, and neglect have also contributed to their disappearance. The mention of wars throughout history highlights their role in shaping the landscape, with various conquerors from different regions being implicated. Overall, it reflects on the human impact on forests and the environment. Braidotti avers that “animals of all categories and species have been turned into tradable disposable bodies, inscribed in a global market of post-anthropocentric exploitation” (70). The recognition of the environmental toll exacted by human conflicts underscores the need for a paradigm shift in how we view and interact with the natural world. It calls for a reconsideration of human progress that takes into account the long-lasting consequences of exploitation and urges a more responsible and sustainable relationship with the environment, one that acknowledges the agency of nonhuman beings and the interconnectedness of all life.

Commoner's theory of ecosystem interconnectedness and human impact on the environment supports this reflection on the environmental cost of human conflict and expansion. The interconnectedness highlighted in *TIMT* is further highlighted by Commoner's first law of ecology that shows how ecological and human actions are intricately intertwined, frequently to the cost of the former. In words of Commoner, “an ecosystem consists of multiple interconnected parts, which act on one another, has some surprising consequences” (16). Shafak laments the loss of ecological diversity and stability in *TIMT*. The text also raises important posthumanist and ecocritical questions about human priorities and the marginalisation of suffering experienced by nonhuman animals and plants by incorporating the destruction of forests into the story.

In a land besieged with conflict, uncertainty and bloodshed, people took it for indifference, an insult to their pain, if you paid too much attention to anything other than human suffering. (*TIMT* 137)

This excerpt highlights the tension between human-centric narratives of suffering and the often marginalised ecological and nonhuman perspectives in times of conflict. It calls for a more expansive view that recognises the interdependence and shared fragility of all living beings. The passage critiques a society that fails to



acknowledge and appreciate the complex web of life and draws attention to the apparent disregard for nonhuman suffering. It emphasises the need for a worldview that values nonhuman experiences and recognises the importance of their agency in understanding ecological crises. In doing so, it challenges the prioritisation of human suffering over the broader, interconnected ecological context.

The novel challenges readers to contemplate the intricate interdependencies between human and nonhuman existence by referencing the wider ecological framework within which human conflicts are situated. This adds to the current conversation on environmental ethics and the need for a more comprehensive knowledge of pain and survival in the face of ecological deterioration and conflict in addition to expanding the parameters of empathy and ethical concern. Mentioned below is a passage from the text that portrays the human exploitation of the nature is mentioned below.

In the years of his absence, a black market had sprung up – trafficking dead birds had become a profitable business for international gangs and their collaborators. The birds caught in Cyprus were smuggled into other countries where they would be sold for hefty prices. (*TIMT* 227)

This extract from the text sheds light on the unseen side of human activity's detrimental effects on the environment with a focus on the illegal wildlife trade and how it affects bird populations in particular. The problematic enmeshment of humans and nonhumans is highlighted by depicting how the exploitation of nature specifically the trafficking of dead birds, intertwines the fates of both entities. It highlights how human actions directly impact the lives of nonhuman entities, in this case, birds. The birds, originally part of the natural ecosystem, are now caught in a web of human greed and criminal activity and serve as commodities in an illegal market. This is exactly what Braidotti refers to when she states “the second major manifestation of the problematic [enmeshment . . .] is linked to the market economy and labour force. . . [A]nimals [. . .] have been exploited for hard labour, as natural slaves and logistical supports” (70). This perspective reflects on how human economic systems exploit natural resources and living beings. Braidotti's work suggests a need for a shift in how we understand and engage with the nonhuman world. She emphasises ethical and sustainable practices that consider the well-being of all living beings and the environment. In the next section, I explore the possibility of ecological sustainability

by focusing on how the concepts of symbiosis and regeneration are portrayed inside the text.

### 5.3 Symbiosis and Regeneration

In this section, I investigate ecological sustainability by examining how the text presents the ideas of symbiosis and regeneration. The notion of symbiosis and regeneration assumes a central role in Shafak's econarrative *TIMT*. This section of analysis chapter shows how the novel is an apt reflection of the possibility of healing and rebirth within those relations. Shafak employs the fig tree as a character and a symbol of life's interconnectivity to connect human and nonhuman experiences.

The act of cutting and then replanting the fig tree in an unfamiliar environment exemplifies the remarkable ability of life to endure and thrive in difficult circumstances. This action symbolises not only the rejuvenation of a tree, but also a symbolic restoration of relationships that have been destroyed due to violence and displacement. The fig tree, deeply rooted in the cultural and natural landscapes of the story, stands as a testament to the potential for restoration and rejuvenation after a period of devastation. This phenomenon serves as a demonstration of the enduring nature of life and its ability to adapt. Commoner's words "everything is connected to everything else: the system is stabilized by its dynamic self-compensating properties" (19). The act of relocation and regeneration not only speaks to the resilience of the tree but also symbolises the broader capacity for recovery and adaptation in the face of human-induced destruction. It underscores the importance of understanding the interconnectedness of all life forms and challenges the conventional assumptions about environmental fragility, and offers a powerful reminder of nature's dynamic capacity for self-healing

It is through these relationships of the fig with man, bat, and butterfly that deep considerations are shown for the value of such mutualistic associations in maintaining natural equilibrium/sustainability of the various ecosystems. This opens a silent attack on the anthropocentric notions and brings out the coexistence paradigm where each entity is worth in the ecosystem. This study goes further to show how important these relationships are to the process of healing and regeneration within the environment and among the people who are part of it.

This section also explores how *TIMT* is a metaphor of environmental challenges and describes human actions in disrupting the natural world leading to ecological disasters. However, Shafak gives us hope and resilience. She does not leave us in hopelessness. In the novel, the revival of the fig tree back to life implies the chance for revival and sustainability in spite of human-based disturbances.

My focus in this section is to emphasise the importance of such relationships not only as a means of attaining ecological sustainability but much more as it is the most fundamental step in the direction of peaceful coexistence with the planet and all its inhabitants. Thus, *TIMT* is not just another love-and-loss story but rather a strongly argued case for recognising and supporting the interdependent fates of all living things for the future sustainability of the planet.

He cared about me, always had. In the past, whenever the weather turned frigid, he took precautions to keep me alive. I remember one chilly afternoon in January he set up windbreaks all around me and wrapped me with layer upon layer of burlap to reduce moisture loss. Another time he covered me with mulch. He placed heat lamps in the garden to provide warmth throughout the night and, most crucially, before the crack of dawn, the darkest hour of the day and often the coldest. That is when most of us fall into a sleep we never wake up from – the homeless on the streets, and us ..... [sic] fig trees. (*TIMT* 27)

This paragraph presents the symbiotic link between humans and nonhuman beings by examining the profound care and attention that a human gives to a fig tree. The detailed account of protecting the tree from the harsh winter conditions shows a deep awareness of ecological sustainability's interconnection and mutual dependency. This supports the idea of Oppermann when she states “profound interconnections between different forms of life in the composite world where previously we had seen separations” (2016, 25). It highlights the necessity of recognising and nurturing these connections to foster a more harmonious coexistence with nature. This thought also follows Commoner's views that "an ecosystem consists of multiple interconnected parts, which act on one another" in order to show just how complex the web of interrelations supporting life is (16).

Further, the narrative goes deeper into the realm of ecological post-humanism when the fig tree becomes sensitive to those cold nights, a behavior that is analogous

to the problems of the homeless. This comparison serves to foster empathy towards the realm beyond humankind while simultaneously contesting anthropocentric viewpoints and promoting the inclusion of all beings.

This paragraph also verifies Iovino and Oppermann's assertion of the dynamic materiality in this world where nonhuman beings are very active subjects involved in ecological networks rather than being passive constituents (Iovino and Oppermann, 2014 5). In Shafak's story, a bridge is built between human and nonhuman beings through the story about the humans who take it upon themselves to make sure the tree is well-taken care of. Following excerpt from *TIMT* shows the symbiotic relationship between the human and nonhuman:

‘Yes, they support the ecosystem more than almost any other plant, I’d say. Figs feed not only humans, but also animals and insects for miles around [. . .]’. (*TIMT* 198)

This quote from text emphasises how crucial fig trees are to the ecology of their environments, specie that sustains a wide variety of organisms. The fig tree, a major component of ecological networks, feeds many animals and insects. This demonstrates life's interdependence and biodiversity. This aligns with the ideas of ecological posthumanism, as expounded by Oppermann. In her own words, “[there exist] profound interconnections between different forms of life in the composite world where previously we had seen separations” (2016, 25). These beliefs support acknowledging the inherent worth and autonomy of nonhuman creatures in ecological systems. The novel encourages readers to reflect on the intricate interdependencies that characterise our shared environment by showcasing the ecological contributions of the fig tree. This supports a more sustainable and inclusive way of coexisting with Earth's ecosystems.

It is clear from discussion in the foregoing paragraph that *TIMT* is a strong reminder of our interwoven fates with the nonhuman world. When it comes to symbiosis and regeneration, the arboreal narrator is a potent and powerful symbol because of its profound links to both the earth and the people who live on it. We are urged to see, through its narratives, the possibility of restoration and rebirth following environmental and social upheaval and separation.

This chapter has examined how the novel's emphasis on interdependencies goes beyond literature to provide insightful analysis of contemporary ecological problems and their remedies. That sustainability is not just about protecting the environment in isolation but rather about nourishing the relationships that sustain all forms of life on our planet. Braidotti quotes, in her book *The Posthuman*, Midgley and writes that “we are not self-contained and self-sufficient, either as a species or as individuals, but live naturally in deep mutual dependence” (qtd. in Braidotti 77). The novel's depictions of symbiotic relationships and regenerative capacities highlight the need for a strategy for ecological sustainability, one that recognises the interconnection of all living things.

In addition, *TIMT* contributes to the conversation on ecological sustainability by showing how compassion and understanding for nonhuman animals can result in a more peaceful cohabitation. It pushes for a change from exploitation to guardianship and compels us to reevaluate our roles in the natural world. By doing this, the novel supports the theoretical tenets of Oppermann's ecological posthumanism and Braidotti's contemporary critical posthumanism providing a powerful story that embodies these ideas. The urgency of reevaluating our relationships in order to move towards a peaceful coexistence is highlighted in the following words of Oppermann:

This [reevaluation of human and nonhuman interaction] is necessary to understand the significance and depth of our interactions with the earth's variously uncanny nonhuman players, and the complexity of the world's posthuman co-shapers. Then, perhaps workable solutions would follow. (29)

As we come to the end of this chapter, it is clear that the promise of ecological sustainability resides not only in the recognition of the mutual advantages that come from human and nonhuman relationships, but also in the acknowledgment and acceptance of our responsibilities in the care and maintenance of this connection. When we take the time to reflect on the teachings that are hidden within Shafak's arboreal narrative, we are reminded of the everlasting possibility for healing and regeneration. This chapter has explored how a deeper understanding and respect for these intricate relationships can guide us towards a more sustainable and compassionate future.

*TIMT* invites its readers to reflect on how its narrative strategies actively challenge anthropocentric worldviews. The fig tree, as a nonhuman narrator, not only participates in the telling of the story but also shapes it. Thus offers a perspective that demands recognition of the material and ethical agency of nonhuman entities. This shift from traditional human-centred narratives opens up new possibilities for understanding the moral and ecological responsibilities that humans share with the nonhuman world. The arboreal voice not only enhances the novel's thematic concerns of interdependence and ecological sustainability but also serves as a call to reimagine our roles in the natural world. The novel challenges conventional literary forms by foregrounding the fig tree as a narrative agent.

In addressing the implications of this narrative choice, *TIMT* contributes to a wider ecological discourse by demonstrating that literature has the capacity to not only critique human dominance but also propose alternative modes of existence within the web of life. Shafak's fig tree offers a moral and philosophical challenge to human exceptionalism and emphasises that the survival and well-being of the nonhuman are not peripheral concerns, but central to the larger ecological whole. Through its complex relationships with both humans and the environment, the tree's narrative insists that the well-being of one is inseparable from the well-being of the other. This intersection of human and nonhuman lives provides an understanding of ecological sustainability, one that rejects the anthropocentric dichotomy and proposes a future where symbiosis and regeneration are not just ideals but practical pathways toward a more just and ecologically balanced world.

In this chapter, I have explored the three elements of ecological posthumanism and contemporary critical posthumanism in the novel *TIMT*; challenging anthropocentric views, examining the problematic enmeshment of humans with nonhumans, and investigating ecological sustainability through the ideas of symbiosis and regeneration. Through its narrative, *TIMT* fundamentally challenges anthropocentric perceptions by portraying a world where human and nonhuman lives are intertwined in a complex web of mutual influence. This exploration prompts readers to reconsider their place within the natural world. Additionally, the novel critiques the consequences of human dominion over nature through portraying the ecological crises that arise from such actions. Eventually, *TIMT* presents a vision of healing and regeneration, symbolised by the fig tree. It proposes that embracing

symbiotic relationships and a deeper understanding of our interconnectedness could pave the way for a sustainable future where all beings thrive together on our shared planet. In the next chapter, I will synthesise the findings from the analysis chapters to draw a conclusive summary of this study.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

In order to conclude this research, it is crucial to reflect on how the study has addressed the research questions and thesis statement. The study has examined Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* (2021) that portrays the interconnectedness between the human and nonhuman (plants and animals) entities that co-evolve within an ecosystem. However, it also highlights the potential disruptions in sustainability that can arise from this enmeshment which impact both human and nonhuman actors. By employing the theoretical positions of Oppermann and Braidotti, such as "ecological posthumanism" and "contemporary critical posthumanism," this study has effectively demonstrated how the novel elevates the nonhuman to be at par with the human and illustrates their mutual influence.

My thesis aimed to explore how Shafak's novel reflects and promotes the principles of ecological posthumanism and contemporary critical posthumanism through challenging anthropocentric views and fostering a deeper ecological awareness. Through a detailed qualitative textual analysis, this research has confirmed that the novel successfully portrays the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman life and emphasises the importance of ecological sustainability by portraying the dire consequences of the disruption in ecological balance.

The research questions posed at the outset have been addressed and can now be read as affirmative statements, validated through analysis of the selected text in chapter 4 and 5. The qualitative method of analysis, as outlined in chapter 3 (p. 32), facilitated a thorough examination of the primary text that allowed for a nuanced understanding of Shafak's *TIMT*. While the qualitative analysis inherently resists definitive closure, it affirms the thesis statement that *The Island of Missing Trees* effectively portrays the intricate networks and balance between all forms of life. This study highlights the novel's ability to depict the complex interdependence of human and nonhuman entities through the portrayal of the potential disruptions to ecological sustainability and the consequent impacts on both human and nonhuman actors.

The research was driven by the following three primary questions: (1) What are the strategies used for the configurations of ecological posthumanist elements in



Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*? (2) In what ways do the consequences of human-nonhuman enmeshment play out in the selected novel? (3) How does the selected text engage with the idea of ecological sustainability?

To address these questions, the analysis deployed the theoretical frameworks of Oppermann's "ecological posthumanism" and Braidotti's "contemporary critical posthumanism." These frameworks provided a comprehensive lens through which to examine the intertwined fates of human and nonhuman actors within the narrative.

In order to find answer to my first research question, several strategies, such as arboreal narrator, matter's effectivity, interconnectedness, becoming-animals, becoming-earth etc., (see chapter 4 and 5 section 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 5.1, 5.2, & 5.3) have been deployed in the primary text. One significant strategy is the choice of an arboreal narrator, the fig tree. This unconventional narrative voice decentralises human experience and emphasises the agency and perspective of the nonhuman world. Shafak blurs the lines between human and nonhuman by giving the fig tree a voice and, through this, she challenges anthropocentric narratives. The fig tree's observations and reflections provide a unique insight into the symbiotic relationships within the ecosystem. This demonstrates the permeable boundaries between species. This narrative choice aligns with Oppermann's ecological posthumanism that advocates for recognising the complex interrelations between human and nonhuman actors. (See 4.1 p. 36)

Another strategy is interconnectedness between the human and nonhuman entities of an ecosystem. The study has effectively demonstrated the interdependence of the human and nonhuman through the portrayal of complex networks that lie in ecosystems (See 4.2 p. 40). Through the depiction of interconnectedness of all matter (living and non-living), the hierarchy between the species has been challenged. The concepts of becoming-with has also been analysed thoroughly. It has been revealed through the detailed exploration that there exist complex interactions between humans and "earth others" that have always been marginalised and exploited by humans (See citation on p. 44). Another strategy employed in the primary text is matter's effectivity. It has been revealed that all matter (living and nonliving) has a profound impact on one another. The analysis has shown the vibrant interactions between all the entities of the ecosystems and agentic powers of entities other than humans (See 4.5 p. 54).

The exploration of the strategy of problematic enmeshment between the human and nonhuman has exposed disparity between human progress and ecological well-being by portraying the loss of biodiversity and ecological imbalance brought about by human activities (See 5.2 p. 65). The last strategy of symbiosis and regeneration gives us hope of peace and ecological sustainability. Through the analysis, it is evident that the promise of ecological sustainability resides not only in the recognition of the symbiotic relationship between the human and nonhuman, but also on accepting our responsibilities in maintaining ecological balance (See 5.3 p. 71). My findings show that several strategies were employed in the primary text, for instance, the use of an arboreal narrator, interconnectedness, becoming-animals, becoming-earth, and matter's effectivity. These strategies collectively decentralize human experience, highlight the agency of the nonhuman world, challenge anthropocentric narratives, reveal complex human-nonhuman interactions, and underscore the necessity of recognising and maintaining ecological balance for sustainability.

My second research question was about the effects of enmeshment of the human and nonhuman. The consequences of human-nonhuman enmeshment are portrayed through both positive and negative outcomes. On one hand, Shafak depicts the beneficial aspects of harmonious human-nonhuman relationships. The fig tree's interactions with human characters demonstrate how mutual respect and understanding can lead to ecological sustainability and the flourishing of both humans and nature. This positive enmeshment aligns with the concept of sustainable co-evolution, where humans and nonhumans coexist in a balanced and mutually beneficial manner (See 5.3 pg. 72).

On the other hand, the novel also highlights the detrimental consequences of disregarding the interconnectedness of all living beings. Human actions that neglect ecological balance result in environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, and social crises. The narrative shows how the exploitation of nature and the disruption of natural habitats can lead to ecological collapse that would affect both human and nonhuman communities. These negative outcomes emphasise the urgent need for ethical considerations and sustainable practices in human interactions with the environment (See 5.2 pg. 66). My findings for the second research question show both positive and negative outcomes of human-nonhuman enmeshment: Shafak illustrates

the benefits of harmonious relationships, where mutual respect fosters ecological sustainability and co-evolution, and also the detrimental consequences of neglecting interconnectedness.

Addressing the third research question, it is evident from the analysis that the novel engages with the theme of ecological sustainability by portraying the intricate relationships between humans and the natural environment. Shafak illustrates the impact of human actions on the ecosystem through the fig tree's experiences and the human characters' interactions with nature. The fig tree serves as a symbol of ecological balance and the need for sustainable practices. Through its narrative, Shafak emphasises the importance of preserving natural habitats and the consequences of ecological degradation. The novel's depiction of the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, as well as the devastating effects of environmental disruption, underscores the necessity of sustainable living practices. This thematic exploration resonates with the principles of ecological posthumanism that advocates for a holistic understanding of ecological systems and the need for sustainable practices to ensure the well-being of all species. The findings for the third research question highlight the novel's exploration of ecological sustainability through the portrayal of human-nature relationships. This stresses the importance of preserving natural habitats and sustainable practices to mitigate environmental degradation and ensure the well-being of all species.

The investigation of these motifs in the novel makes a substantial contribution to posthumanist approach. It encourages us to reconsider our position within the greater network of existence. It promotes a change from hierarchical and human-centric ideas to a more inclusive and ecologically conscious worldview. The novel prompts us to reflect on the consequences of our actions on the environment, the moral implications of our relationships with nonhuman entities, and the possibility of restoration and rejuvenation in damaged and neglected ecosystems. Shafak's novel, characterised by its abundance of ecological insights and adherence to posthumanist principles, serves as a reminder of the complex interdependencies that support life on Earth. It urges us to consider novel ways of existing in the world that respect the interdependence and interactions of all living beings.

This thesis concludes by showing how our study of Shafak's *TIMT* has made us think more deeply about how humans interact with nature. It helped us understand

ecological posthumanism and contemporary critical posthumanism better and opened up new ways to appreciate and interpret, and deploy these ideas. The text is a reminder of the interdependence and shared fates of humans and nonhumans because of its arboreal narrative style and the fig tree's symbolic meaning. It opposes deeply ingrained anthropocentric viewpoints in favour of a more comprehensive understanding of the universe that acknowledges the intrinsic worth, agency, and dignity of all living things. By highlighting the environmental issues represented throughout Shafak's novel, this thesis adds to a larger conversation about how we might rethink about our actions and their effects on the ecosystems and consider ecologically sustainable practices.

## 6.1 Recommendations for Further Research

While this thesis provides a comprehensive analysis of *The Island of Missing Trees* (2021) through the lens of ecological posthumanism and contemporary critical posthumanism, several areas for further research still stay open for investigation. These recommendations aim to extend the insights gained from this study and explore additional dimensions of ecological posthumanism and contemporary critical posthumanism.

Future researchers may employ the combined frameworks of ecological posthumanism and contemporary critical posthumanism to a wider range of literary texts. Analysing how various authors and genres engage with the intricate relationships between human and nonhuman entities will expand the understanding of these theories beyond Shafak's novel. Works such as Powers' *The Overstory* and Jeff Vander Meer's *Southern Reach* trilogy could provide fertile ground for such studies.

Exploring the intersection of technological posthumanism or transhumanism with literature could offer new perspectives on the evolving human condition in an era of rapid technological advancement. This approach might include examining works that address themes of artificial intelligence, cybernetics, and human-machine integration, such as Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* or William Gibson's *Neuromancer*. Conducting comparative analyses between *TIMT* and other contemporary novels that feature nonhuman narrators can illuminate different narrative strategies and thematic explorations. For example, comparing Shafak's work with Talia Lakshmi Kolluri's *What We Fed to the Manticore* (2022) that also uses

nonhuman perspectives to discuss ecological themes could yield valuable insights into how various authors approach similar subjects.

Additionally, integrating other related theoretical supports can further enrich the analysis. The use of Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* may explore the blurred boundaries between human and technology that offers a perspective on human-machine integration. Bruno Latour's "Actor-Network Theory (ANT)" may be deployed to investigate the networked relationships between human and nonhuman actors in literary texts that emphasise the agency of nonhuman entities. Timothy Morton's theory of "Dark Ecology" could provide a deeper understanding of ecological interconnectedness and the ethical implications of our relationship with the environment.

By investigating these texts and integrating the aforementioned theoretical frameworks, future researchers may further explore the area of posthumanist theories in literature. This will offer new insights into the evolving human-nonhuman dynamics and the broader implications for ecological and technological ethics. Such investigations might shed light on the futuristic position of technology in relation to humanity and advance the discourse on ecological sustainability and ethical responsibility within literary studies. Thus, this research project may prove to be a useful study for further research because its essence lies not solely in scholarly pursuit, but also in its capacity to stir thought and evoke response. We may benefit from the findings of this study to create a peaceful, sustainable, and just world for future generations.

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