



## ***The Red-Haired Woman: An Ecofeminist Analysis***

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### **Abstract**

This article analyzes Orhan Pamuk's *The Red-Haired Woman* (2017) (hereafter *RHW*) from Alicia Helda Puleo's ecofeminist perspective. It discusses Gülcihan's character in *RHW* as a cultural figure who, standing beyond the essentialist division of culture / nature, develops a constructive interaction with the masculine world of the novel, prefiguring the reestablishment of life. The novel reviews the process of modernization in Türkiye through detailing the confrontation of the old and new via references to the mythological stories of Oedipus Rex, and Rostam and Sohrab. The references highlight the notions of patricide and filicide, pointing to rising tension between Eastern and Western aspects of Turkish cultural identity. This investigation challenges the dominant reviews of the references as pessimistic illustrations of the disappearance of historical Türkiye along with her environment and argues that *RHW* offers an alternative vision of modernization via Gülcihan's narration as an optimistic stand toward industrial formation through enhancing self-awareness and intercultural understanding.

**Keywords:** Alicia Helda Puleo, Orhan Pamuk, industrialization, self-awareness, interculturalism

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## Introduction

Pamuk is referred to as “Istanbul writer.” That is to say, all of his works are about Istanbul. He has always maneuvered on the rich cultural-historical background of Istanbul as the multicultural backbone of Turkish identity. Almost, always he has represented this multicultural aspect as empowering and defining Istanbul as a condensed, symbolic illustration of Turkish sense of being. *The Red-Haired Woman* (2017) apparently opposes this. Yet, casting a deeper look into the novel, it emerges as an enlightening type that familiarizes people with the consequences of rapid industrialization enacted at the expense of sociocultural heritage, and through an essentialized sexist-gendered dichotomy. *RHW* offers a sustainable vision of this industrial development. This is done by challenging the notion of death via the illustration of a balanced interaction of culture / nature through characterizing a woman who, resisting the objectification imposed on her, brings these dichotomies into a kind of agreement.

The dichotomies of *RHW* are represented in the interactions of the three groups of man versus man, including son versus father and father versus son, and man versus woman. They are discussed in the three parts of the novel. The first part narrates young Cem Çelik’s struggle to financially support his nuclear family, consisting of him and his mother, in the absence of his father. The father, a leftist activist who used to run a pharmacy, was arrested after the military coup in 1980. After being released, he refused to return to his family and pharmacy and started living with another woman. Young Cem struggled against his absence by working as a well-digger outside *Öngören* (meaning foresight), an imaginary suburb of Istanbul, under Master Mahmut’s supervision and developed a father-son relationship with him. One day, by accident, he dropped a bucket into the well where Master Mahmut was working and, scared of having killed him, escaped to Istanbul. During that time, he had fallen in love and had sexual intercourse with Gülcihan, an actress who performed in a traveling leftist theater group in the city. The actress was almost twice his age and the night that they met, she let Cem know that Master Mahmut had come to their tent to watch their performance, which represented the tragedy of Rostam and Sohrab.

The second part narrates Cem’s growing up, his graduation from university, marriage, and establishment of a construction company which he named after Sohrab to satisfy his desire to have a son – he and his wife Ayşe were childless. All through these years, he had suffered from the hidden guilt of killing Master Mahmut. Finally, he understands that he has a son from Gülcihan, named Enver (meaning enlightened), and decides to meet him. The place of their meeting is the very well he was digging in *Öngören* in his youth. He discovers that Master Mahmut has survived the accident, and in the middle of the tension that rises between him and his son, he accidentally falls into the well and dies.

The third part is narrated by Gülcihan. In this part, she represents herself as a strong woman who succeeds in establishing herself as a free self and saves her son from the charge of patricide. The chapter reflects her mindset as a woman who resists the masculine world that is trying to objectify and restrict her within

stereotypical feminine roles. This is clear in Gülcihan's constructive cooperation with Cem's widow after she and Enver inherit two-thirds stock of Cem's company. This embodies a feminine understanding of "sisterhood" beyond restrictive, separatist masculine visions (Hampson, 1991, p. 34). She also asks her son to write the very story which unfolds as *RHW*.

### **Literature Review**

As the story unfolds, Gülcihan emerges as a figure who connects the masculine and feminine worlds of the novel. Yet, this function is missing in the reviews written on *RHW*. These reviews notably have cultural, political, and psychological perspectives through which the patriarchal culture of Turkish society is discussed via references to Western and Eastern narrations of Sophocles' Oedipus Rex and Firdowsi's Rostam and Sohrab. Considerably, the reviews believe that the novel bitterly narrates the failure of the process of modernization in Türkiye by highlighting the lack of harmony between past and present that is textually illustrated by fraught father-son relationship and related to the faulty cultural interaction of East and West in the context of the country. Almost all of these criticisms, except to Hughes (2017), who believes Gülcihan is the only figure who has the sense of self in the novel, discuss her as being trapped within the country's masculinist culture despite the all attempts for uplifting women's position in Türkiye.

Göknar (2017) discusses Gülcihan as the reflection of top-down sociopolitical and cultural democratic renovations in Türkiye, which remain defeated before the dominant father-centered culture. This culture is echoed through repeated references to the stories of Rostam and Sohrab as well as Oedipus Rex in the novel. In the first one, Shorab loses his life to a father who symbolizes tradition and determination for the preservation of the dominant culture and status quo. The second one similarly highlights patriarchy by depicting the negative effect of a father's absence on his son's life. The two stories are used to enframe Cem's sterile life in relation to his absent father and his own son to whom he has been absent as well. Absence here connotes the notion of an imbalanced life, where true human interactions are missing. As a country with feet on two continents, Türkiye has inherited from both Eastern and Western traditions whose interactions have shaped Turkish culture. Göknar believes *RHW* illustrates the imbalance imposed on this interaction. The way Enver, a rightist religious Muslim, unintentionally causes his father's death, signifies the strengthening of typical patriarchal figures in recent Türkiye. This new generation endangers the country's entire democratic achievements initiated by *Ata Türk* as the founding father of the Republic of Türkiye.

Mathew (2017) has a similar political perspective. He discusses the rise of young Muslim conservatives, represented by Enver, who confront Türkiye's Western modernization. This scientific modernization has not offered an "organic combination of East and West" (para. 1) as unique to Turkish culture. It has created a gap that has led to the rise of rightist religious groups who struggle to revive a kind of religious patriarchy through figures like Erdoğan.

Günay-Erkol (2019) and Vanwesenbeeck (2017) discuss the very idea through the notion of traumatized identity. Trauma, according to Günay-Erkol, is a continuous process that afflicts several generations of Turkish citizens, disturbing natural life practices. She believes the traumatized identity in modern Türkiye is the direct result of military coups which were justified - by the conductors and leaders of the coups, as protective father figures - as safeguarding *Ata Türk's* achievements. As such, the strengthening of the father-centered culture is the nub of the problem dramatized in *RHW*.

For Vanwesenbeeck (2017) the trauma is associated with the notion of forgetfulness. Traumatized, Cem is afflicted with fate and, forgetting his youthful aspirations for becoming a writer, follows his father's path. Despite being illustrated on the cover of the book, Gülcihan cannot escape this traumatization as well and "is no more than a subject of desire" (para. 3).

Offering a feminist reading of *RHW* through focusing on Gülcihan's characterization as a strong Lilith figure,<sup>1</sup> Karaca (2019) similarly concludes that Gülcihan's sense of being depends on her association with other men as husband or son. She discusses two categories of angelic and diabolic women that are alternatively applied to submissive, objectified, and strong, subjective women by the masculine world. She believes, while struggling to write her life through being a decision-maker and, therefore, not an angelic one, Gülcihan cannot escape the controlling ties determined by the masculine world.

Likewise, Brooks (2017) discusses the masculine world of *RHW* through repetitive references to Eastern and Western mythologies of filicide and patricide. She criticizes the rapid unfolding of the story and unconvincing characterization along with the diction associated with characters. She argues that even if Cem's narrative voice is acceptable as the true reflection of "authentic adolescent voice," the same "inelegant expression" attributed to the red-haired woman, as the central mature figure of the novel, renders her characterization unconvincing. According to her, the "second and third sections of the novel become nothing more than clunky melodrama laced with ever-greater implausibility and snarled in repetitive references to the two classic stories of patricide and filicide until the foreshadowing becomes positively penumbral" (para. 7). She believes, in this novel, Pamuk's sensitivity toward Istanbul's unsustainable development is clear, yet he does not delve into it:

Cem . . . is able to enrich himself on the back of Istanbul's expansion. . . . Pamuk flits like a barn swallow over fascinating issues of contemporary Turkish life, but never alights long enough to offer interesting insights or even substantially enrich the story. (para. 8)

Bettany Hughes (2017) similarly talks about Pamuk's consciousness about Istanbul's urban development wrapped in a psychological description of "a journey into adulthood" and self-recognition in the cases of Cem and Gülcihan, alternatively. This review lightly touches political aspect as standing on the side of the rich class, facilitating its cheese-knifing of landscape and "traditional communities" for "more roads," and stealing "others' water" (para. 7). As is clear, this review recognizes Pamuk's ecological sensitivity and points to the feminine influential power through

Gülcihan, yet being a short review, the writer does not explain how these aspects are totally developed and elaborated on in the novel.

According to this sample literature, *RHW* has been the subject of consideration through mythical, psychoanalytic, feminist, and sociocultural, and political perspectives. The current research investigates the interaction of these forces through a feminist environmental viewpoint to elaborate on the sustainable vision of existence reflected in the novel through the recognition of the constructive interaction between past, traditional understanding and the modern one. This is done by focusing on the reflection of ecological destruction as well as Gülcihan's characterization. The current research takes this central female figure as the embodiment of Turkish society's sociocultural wisdom that, aware of the significance of sustainable development, addresses the gap resulting from imbalanced industrialization.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This analysis is based on Puleo's "critical ecofeminist" perspective. It is a nonessentialist one, conscious of the significance of Modernist heritage for feminist movement in the case of equality. Yet, she criticizes anthropocentric, androcentric perspective of Modernism which, she believes, endangers the possibility of sustainable life on this planet, producing "new forms of exploitation and inequality" (Puleo, 2017a, p. 75) based on competition. As such, she argues for an enlightened form of Modernism that goes beyond the fixed hierarchical understanding that categorizes particular features and individuals as the representation of "universal entities" (2012a, p. 349). In this way, she criticizes the master / slave relationship that has traditionally determined human being's treatment of the nonhuman world. On the other hand, it challenges the stereotypical gendered relationships in human societies that have debased women's rights, as secondary citizens, before men.

In the first case, she discusses the disadvantages of rapid, uncontrolled industrialization one of which aspects is urbanization. This includes the expansion of urban areas at the expense of the desertification of rural ones because of the depletion of their ecological heritage which, in itself, results in migration from villages (Puleo, 2012b). This reflects an anthropocentric understanding that does not assume any tenable function for the nonhuman world save to serve human one.

The second case points to a deep androcentric vision within anthropocentric understanding. Relying on a dominant background that viewed men as human societies' civilizing agents, who tamed nature and established human culture, this androcentric vision associated women with nature (Puleo, 2012b) as a primitive stage of human life. Naturally, by the beginning of Industrial Revolution, women and nature were considered secondary before the masculine civilization, which actualized techno-scientific progress by giving priority to reason in the binary of reason / emotion. Being associated with nature and emotion, women were, at best, assumed as protective caregivers whose only duty and ability were giving birth to children and nursing the family - its extended form that included whoever related to the family. An unavoidable consequence of this understanding was the sacralization of life that denied women's subjective, self-conscious role as free decision-makers

in choosing to be mothers. Indirectly, this denied women's capacity for critical-scientific reasoning (Puleo, 2017a). Puleo challenges this understanding by discussing the universal concept of care beyond family ties, and demanding the acknowledgment of self-care, with ecological consciousness of course, for women, as they are among the first ones whose bodies are affected by toxic ecological changes that damage their reproductive health. Accordingly, she emphasizes innovations in the light of human rights, which include the right to live in a healthy environment, and respect for biodiversity (Puleo, 2017a), which guarantees the continuation of the chain of life.

She reviews Donna Haraway's theory of cyborg to highlight the notion of gender as a sociocultural construction that debases the essentialist vision on womanhood by stressing the notion of equality despite difference. This equality is not limited to the human world of course; it connects the human and nonhuman worlds in a way that does not prescribe a prioritized position to human beings. This nonhuman element can be either part of the natural world or a techno-scientific construction.

At the human level, she discusses racial and classist aspects that, beside sexist perspective, shape a dominant materialist stand. This "capitalist development model, based on technology and economics, insatiably drives us towards competitiveness and the search for unrestrained riches" that, according to her, "stems from the old desire for patriarchal power" (Puleo, 2017b, p. 27). Before this model, she introduces a critical stand that highlights the notion of "Human Right" with ecological sensitivity. It emphasizes self-awareness shall be actualized in relation to the Other to guarantee the preservation of biodiversity and leave it as "inheritance . . . for future generation" (Puleo, 2012b, pp. 87-88). This is along with the knowledge obtained from different sources about the vulnerability of the woman's body before "toxic chemical substances used in the agro-business" (Puleo, 2012b, p. 85) that can expose human society to annihilation. As such, she emphasizes women should recognize the necessity of deep scientific-technological knowledge and be equipped with it to improve the quality of human life, including women's lives. This stand goes against the essentialist ecofeminist vision that, repeating patriarchal sexist-gendered division, associates women with nature before men who represent culture (Puleo and Young, 2013), and frowns at whatever associated with this masculine world, including the technological, industrial life.

Puleo's ecofeminist model entails significant aspects. Beside the management of "non-renewable resources" (Puleo, 2012b, p. 78), she argues for an "intercultural" perspective that recognizes, and benefits from, the precious environmental experiences of women from different cultures to enlighten others about the criticality of ecological conditions. It is because the majority of these women come from areas that are terribly affected by climate change and desertification. Because of this, they are actively involved in supplying family needs through nature and, due to this, have valuable experiences in sustainable management of nature, which can work to shape an ecological culture of equality. As such, women emerge as cultural agents who debase the essentialized dichotomy of nature / culture. Fulfilling this role, women's capacity to educate human beings to

develop environment-friendly attitudes will be acknowledged. This is easily achievable as a positive aspect of urbanization, which is the expansion of education. With the rise of the middle class that is well aware of its rights, it is now easier to establish an ecological culture of equality that recognizes the rights of all for a sustainable system of life. As Puleo affirms: “ecofeminist theory and praxis maintain the enlightenment tradition of condemning oppressive doctrines and practices” (2012b, p. 81).

### **Self-Awareness, Intercultural Understanding, and Sustainable Life**

*RHW* illustrates the overlap of masculine and feminine worlds in a way that reflects Puleo’s nonessentialist ecofeminist stand. At first view, the novel suggests the clash of these worlds through Gülcihan’s confrontation with the patriarchal world surrounding her. Yet, considering her characterization, her cultural activities along with her social dedication introduce her as a strong caregiver whose nursing activities are not limited to stereotypical feminine duties that define a woman’s task as “taking care of the most vulnerable (children, the elderly, and the sick) and maintaining the domestic material infrastructure” (Puleo, 2017b, p. 27). This mirrors a process of self-awareness that, recognizing personal rights, does not actualize them through separating Self from the Other.

While acknowledging that Pamuk’s characters suffer from the “depression that runs somewhere down in Turkish social articulation and stays slippery toward the West,” Ali Murshed (2020) emphasizes they “are fighting suppression, sorrow, disloyalty and a hurting for something they don’t anticipate to discover” (p. 7). This aspect is observable in the masculine / feminine worlds that *RHW* creates. At first view, the masculine side brings to the fore the characters who are not fully developed men; the father-son relationship in the world of the novel is totally disturbed throughout generations (Vanwesenbeeck, 2017; Mathew, 2017; Hughes, 2017; Fischer, 2017; Azzam, 2017; Hoffman, 2017; & Genç, 2017). It embodies an abnormal situation where the running principles are competition for financial well-being and survival, which are ironically made fun of by highlighting the notions of insomnia and childlessness. Brooks (2017) even believes that, despite going through the process of growing up, the main male character of the novel has not developed a grown-up man’s mental abilities. These all are framed within a geographical description that represents the disappearance of historical Istanbul and the emergence of a new one. Openly pointing to the notion of uneven urbanization, it parallels references to the stories of Oedipus, and Rostam and Sohrab, where both father and son disappear due to the lack of true understanding of the interconnectivity of past, present, and future: the young generation who does not know past history and sacrifices it for new order and system, while the fault is with the very old generation who has ignored or denied the young one as a source of power usurpation threat.

On the other side, the central female figure of the story struggles for a more human world by tackling the passive definitions of true womanhood, and suppression consequently, and developing a more inclusive interaction with the masculine world. The close relationship she has with her son and the way she tries to

bring him up as a man conscious of all his capabilities, and nurture them, testify to this (Pamuk, 2017). It is interesting that, while personally she enjoys the social freedom given to her based on a Western model of individual rights, she does not bring her son up as a Westernized one. It seems that because of her intercultural understanding, resulting from her involvement with Eastern and Western dramatic texts as an actress, she has developed consciousness over the vitality of avoiding stubborn dedication to a particular ideology or stand. In the world of the novel, this renders her and Enver symbols of hope. In the third chapter of the novel, Enver, being acquitted of the charge of patricide, in cooperation with his mother, saves the collapsing business empire of his father by bringing all factors together, while writing *RHW*. Opposed to the masculinist hierarchical understanding that acts based on differentiation, separation, and control, this embodies a horizontal form of organization and management. As such, Enver represents the opposite of his father and grandfather who left family and work; he has a more developed character. Being an educated one, he shares his mother's artistic interests, while conscious of and devoted to his society's traditional, Islamic teachings despite his grandfather's Marxist and his father's Western inclinations. It means there is a balance among past, present, and future in his life. He does not erect borders among these and is more inclusive toward the Other. Naturally, the mentality reduces stress and tension in social interactions and lessens the isolation which, in itself, can lead to the feeling of loneliness, as Cem is emphatically represented as being afflicted with. Based on this, Enver and his mother embody the alternative pattern opposite to the depression and destruction illustrated in the first two chapters of the novel.

The two masculine and feminine worlds of the novel revolve around Cem and Gülcihan. The first two chapters of the novel cover Cem's life and how he is bereft of a natural one. Karaca (2019) writes: "[i]n the *Red Haired Woman* father's d[y]sfunction and mother's fatal personality lead the son to a tragic end" (p. 127). On the one hand, the father's absence has left Cem bewildered in his journey toward adulthood. He has not received the support and protection that a son normally receives from his father. Even the supportive, emotional relationship he seeks in his surrogate father Mahmut "comes to an abrupt and tragic end" (Vanwesenbeeck, 2017, para. 2). It brings to mind the image of a plant that, removed from the embedding soil and left rootless, is not rhizomatically attached to any other supporting host plant. He is a victim of child labor, and from a very young age is obsessed with the notion of competition for survival. This is exacerbated by having a very passive mother who, embodying Karaca's (2019) angelic woman, has left the responsibility of life maintenance on her 16-year-old son's shoulder. These two show that an important constituting block is missing in Cem's life, which is the balance between the two worlds. It reflects the priority given to a masculine world that does not function properly.

In the early part of the first chapter, Cem and Master Mahmut have closer ties with nature. They are living outside of Öngören, surrounded by the natural scenery, and are digging a well in a traditional, and not industrial, way for the establishment of a washing-and-dyeing factory. It shows that their reliance on nature as a source of supply at this stage is somehow controlled and away from depletion.



The description of the nonhuman world in this section reflects a kind of unity between the human and nonhuman ones. For example, digging the well, Cem hears the hooting of an owl, and sleeps outside of the tent when it is not raining, watching the stars (Pamuk, 2017). This is along with the description of the infatuation of both Cem and Master Mahmut with Gülcihan, which symbolically shows that they are emotionally connected to the soft part of their heart. The literal meaning of Gülcihan explains the connection of these two aspects. Gülcihan consists of two parts: *Gül* is a Persian word that is popular in Türkiye and means flower, and Cihan means the world. Therefore, the name symbolically connotes the world of nature. So, the infatuation of Cem and Mahmut with Gülcihan means that this surrogate father and son have a more environment-friendly way of life. However, as the chapter gets closer to its end, this mildness and connection with the natural world give way to rivalry and competition, noticeably illustrated in Cem's jealousy against Master Mahmut over Gülcihan: "My inside churned with ungovernable rage and suspicion" (p. 95). In itself, this represents the masculine temptation to possess whatever desired. Reaffirming Günay-Erkol's (2019) argument, in this stage "the 'progress' in masculinity is clearly visible and it is in line with the expectations of the society" (p. 177). What are society's expectations from a grown-up man? Success in establishing a sustainable married and financial life. Growing up, Cem represses whatever associated with the natural, soft aspect of his life. This is directly referred to at the beginning of the novel when Cem remembers the woman he left as well as his ignored aspirations to be a writer (Pamuk, 2017, p. 3). The reference depicts a process of growing up at the expense of the natural internal world which still surfaces during his adulthood through his mania for reading books and watching films, mostly about Oedipus, and Rostam and Sohrab. At the same time, he internalizes the understanding that whole life is the repetition of the very stories and, due to this, develops a kind of bitterness highlighted by his affliction with insomnia. This bitterness reflects the suffering associated with distancing oneself from the world of innocence and entering the realm of experience as connoting culture and civilization.

The second chapter represents the development of the state of culture. Considering the novel as the story of Human Life in general, it depicts the cycle of life by beginning with the stage of nature and, then, proceeding to culture.<sup>2</sup> It narrates Cem's establishment of himself as a successful man in a construction activity that is blooming at the back of Istanbul's expansion. Along with references to insomnia and childlessness, references to his successful business show that the developments in his personal life, paralleling Istanbul's development, are not based on a constructive, sustainable pattern. As the first two chapters of the novel unfold, Cem emerges as a secular, Westernized freethinker who distances from the traditional, religious values he was brought up with. This is highlighted as he teases Master Mahmut when he alludes to some Quranic stories like Jacob and Joseph (Pamuk, 2017). It points to the father-son relationship, ironically highlighting the contrast between the relationship in this story and the one reflected in the hostility of Modern, industrial Türkiye toward the old, Ottoman Empire. Unlike Joseph whose consciousness of the lessons learned in the past, despite the absence of his father, leads to sustainable civilizational management that saves Egypt from annihilation,

Cem's distancing from the established sociocultural heritage of his native country, while moving in the one-way road of material social progress, ends in his annihilation. According to Mathew (2017), "Pamuk has long given voice to anxieties about the modernization and Westernization of [Türkiye] in his fiction" (para. 2); Cem's life is the embodiment of the very anxiety. The introduction of Gülcihan and Enver, who embody the mother-son relationship, is the substitute that Pamuk offers as a trace of hope to recreate harmony between masculine and feminine worlds; this mother-son relationship remains away from competition for survival and superiority at the expense of the Other.

The question is in what ways does Patriarchy threaten harmonious life? According to ecofeminist argument, based on inequality, the androcentric ideology, incessantly working through economic, sociocultural, and psychological aspects of human life, with a focus on technological and scientific progress at any expense, is violently depleting the biological life associated with Earth, endangering the continuation of life on the planet.<sup>3</sup> The symbolic representations of fatherlessness and childlessness in *RHW* explain this. Psychologically unable to tackle the negative effect of his father's absence, Cem employs the dominant pattern of exercising power via social, financial, and industrial success. Cem's father leaves him and his mother, and Gem leaves Master Mahmut dying at the bottom of the well. Following this, he leaves the woman he loves; unaware of the child she has conceived from him. Actually, these depict an unsustainable family life, connoting the notion of unsustainable life on the whole. As the story unfolds, in his married life, Cem unsuccessfully struggles to have a child while finally, and accidentally, he is killed by the very child whom he did not know till the last minutes of his life, and where? At the bottom of the very well where he left Master Mahmut dying. Master Mahmut, on the other hand, survives the damage befallen him and, marrying very late around his forties, remains childless and accepts the custody of his wife's child (Pamuk, 2017, p. 235). The motif of well tells a lot here. Falling into this well may signal "heading towards an abyss without return" (Puleo and Young, 2013, p. 60); a symbol of the future of human life if the overexploitation of natural resources is not controlled. Both Mahmut and Cem depend on Earth for their life. Mahmut totally symbolizes the traditional way of interaction with nature that is disappearing before the modern industrial one, symbolized by Cem's adult life that ends in a well because of the absence of a harmonious interaction with nature.

Life is frozen in the changing Türkiye of the novel. The situation brings to the fore Puleo's warning about the pernicious effect of unsustainable industrialization on fertility through "Multiple Chemical Sensitivity . . . chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia and increase in breast cancer" (Puleo, 2017b, p. 31) done by "hunting . . . alterations due to climate change . . . toxic chemical substances" (Puleo 2012b, pp. 84-85). There are scenes in the novel that point to disappearing natural scenery. Almost all of these are represented in relation to the notion of fertility: "We were getting older, we still had no children, and meanwhile the farmlands between Öngören and Istanbul were filling up with industrial plants, warehouses, and factories, all of them dull and black as coal from the air" (Pamuk, 2017, p. 130). Here, aging, which denotes the gradual arrival of death, is associated with

childlessness, and both are accompanied by a dark environmental description that reflects the death of nature through “industrial plants” and black and polluted air. Clearly, the imagery depicts “the unsustainability of the techno-economic development model . . . that compromises the future of humankind” (Puleo 2017b, p. 28) by mirroring a violation of the right to live in a healthy environment.

Childlessness tortures Cem. He knows that his life ends nowhere and, to suppress his bitter feelings, expands his construction activities: “I felt like a sultan trying to forget his lack of an heir by annexing new provinces to his empire” (Pamuk, 2017, p. 161). This confession reflects a connection between sociocultural and environmental aspects. For example, in the funeral of Cem’s father, Sirri Siyahoglu, one of Cem’s employees in Öngören, informs him about the way his construction company exploits the natural scenery and resources of the town (Pamuk, 2017). This is along with references to Cem’s growing consciousness over the cultural dryness that obsession with industrial life has created in his life. For instance, his searching for classic manuscripts and paintings in museums all over the world to have a better understanding of the very stories of Oedipus, and Rostam and Sohrab (pp.154-158) embodies his desire for meaning and deep-laid connections, like extended family and children, beyond material life. Same, it shows, in his heart, he is yearning for something beyond the hierarchical order and civilization. That is why he names his company after Sohrab. In a way, historical Sohrab is the victim of hierarchical understanding where the father exercises his power over his son to dictate his power on all; the son is the commander of the enemy army, that is to say, the Other. Beside the depiction of Master Mahmut’s rescue from the bottom of the well, the naming of the company after Sohrab buttresses the very trace of hope in the novel, paralleling Gülcihan’s artistic performances based on the stories.

Representing Tahmineh at the moment she receives the news of her son’s death, Gülcihan does not characterize a submissive woman who patiently accepts what the masculine side does or decides for her: “the Red-Haired woman spoke angrily of men, and what they’d put her through” (Pamuk, 2017, p.83). The very scene, Cem already acknowledges, is imprinted on his mind forever (Pamuk, 2017). Cem in his adulthood is still under Gülcihan’s influence by remembering this scene and going beyond hierarchical codes. However, he does not change the way of his life to a psychologically more prosperous, satisfying one because he does not dare to distance himself from his materially successful life. When his son reveals his identity to him, instead of accepting him, Cem treats him as a source of extortion and, confronting him, falls to the well and dies (Pamuk, 2017). This contrasts with Master Mahmut’s falling into the well. Master Mahmut is saved by Gülcihan. Interestingly, she is the one who, seeing Cem’s escape from the town, gets dubious because she is sure Cem will revisit her. Alerted, she informs her group about the probability of an accident and saves Master Mahmut (p. 236). This is later followed by Master Mahmut’s success in hitting water. Highlighting the priority of life over death, the two scenes prefigure the turning of the storyline from a death-stricken one – with a blind dedication to industrialization – toward a more balanced form in the third chapter.

The turn offered in the third chapter of *RHW* replaces the motif of barren life with a productive, fertile one. It renarrates the cycle of nature-culture from Gülcihan's perspective where these two are juxtaposed in a nonhierarchical order. In this chapter, she emerges as Karaca's (2019) diabolic woman. Symbolically, she is not barren and gives birth to Enver. In the first place, her personal life and very decision to be a mother out of marriage exemplify Puleo's discussion of subjectivity in choosing motherhood. This, along with her upbringing of Enver as a person loyal to past traditions and enthusiastic for art and a better, developed future single her out as a woman who goes beyond the essentialist ecofeminist division of culture / nature and reason / emotion. She is an educated, cultural activist whose symbolic occupation as an actress fills the gap between nature and culture. Not only does she subjectively fulfill her instinctual, natural desire to be a mother, but she also nurtures the very result of this decision, Enver, as a cultural figure who does not refuse the natural side. She is the one who encourages her son to be a writer, the very desire that Cem had but never practiced. It is under her influence that Enver, a religious person, is fond of poetry, art, and acting. For instance, elaborating on his religious view, Enver refuses his father's chronological and secular understanding of God-Human relationship by arguing: "God is everywhere . . . Above and below, north and south. . . . Allah the Almighty, Creator of the universe. . . . Westernized Turks . . . set on secularism so that they can dress up their wickedness as modernity" (Pamuk, 2017, p. 217). This is continued by emphasizing:

I don't have anything against anyone! . . . I won't have my enemies define me, and I won't be caught in false dichotomies like left and right, or godly and modern . . . I avoid people and concentrate on my poetry. (p.218)

The saying shows that he is not type of a rightist Islamist to impose his ideas on others. Later, explaining how she spent time with her son, Gülcihan emphasizes: "I picked speeches from Rumi's *Masnavi* and old Sufi stories and fables, as well as . . . tales like 'Farhad and Shirin' or *Asli and Karam*" (p. 231); or elsewhere: "I would take him by the hand and show him . . . streets, houses, paintings, parks" (p. 238). These openly contrast with the dominant religious understandings in modern Türkiye where religious people frowned at art and poetry and the secular state, proud of cultural Westernization, looked at religion as a primitive state of human life, that is to say, nature.<sup>4</sup>

Ecosymbolically speaking, the first two chapters of *RHW* narrate the imbalanced interaction of nature / culture through the disconnection of old and new. The missing father represents the vanishing root or historical, traditional sense of Turkish life. The modernization of the state has been a blind type which has dried the traditional ways and cultural heritage of Ottoman era. While, no doubt, this modernization has had its positive aspects, it was a unilateral developmental model that disregarded the past. Employing Western technological development and social reconstruction model, this modernization was initiated and continued, very rapidly, after World War I. The afterworld debris and lack of resources rendered the looting of nature to cover the material necessities unavoidable. On the other hand, the religious context of Turkish society was resistive before Westernized cultural reconstruction. This left no option for the founding fathers other than forceful

administration of this reconstruction. All through these decades, the tension has resisted subsiding. Recently, a young generation of Islamist politicians has come to power that confronts the achievements of the secular system. It emerges as a patriarchal perspective that, according to Gūnay-Erkol (2019), like a dictatorial father does not tolerate his children's opposing voices. Enver, at first, seems to represent this Islamist vision, but he emerges as a young religious man who distances himself from prejudiced religious understanding. He embodies the multicultural Islamic stand of Ottoman dynasty as the backbone of Turkish religious identity (Mohammadi Achachelooei, 2023).

It seems Enver embodies a more perfect human vision. For example, in agreement with his mother, he continues cooperation with Ayşe. That is to say, he keeps Ayşe within the family. This reflects the preservation of a full connection with the emotional side. In fact, he does not repeat the same vicious cycle of his grandfather and father who left their wife and son. Being united with Cem, Ayşe had become part of this cycle. But, then, in a horizontal, rhizomatic model of attachment,<sup>5</sup> she is relocated to a more inclusive setting and perspective. The fact that the mother and son decided to share stakes and interest with Ayşe signifies that they are not after rapid, short-term benefits, and long-term prosperity and development of the firm, away from fighting for and against lawsuits, highly matters for them: "neither of us had any intention of dismantling the construction empire . . . much less of leaving its hundreds of employees out ... we wanted Sohrab to reach even greater heights" (Pamuk, 2017, p. 247). It means that their view of the expansion of the firm is not kind of competitive one, prioritizing financial supremacy at the expense of the Other. As such, Ayşe becomes part of Gülcihan, and, working together, they reflect a fuller version of femininity that encompasses two diabolic and angelic aspects. It explains why Göknaar believes *RHW* is "a woman's story" (2017, para. 1), and agrees with Pamuk's elaboration on *RHW* as a realistic feministic novel (Derakhshani, 2017, para. 13).

The title of the novel points to Golchin's decisive role in centralizing the notion of sustainable life as well. The red color of her hair signifies Puleo's discussion of woman's struggle against the "socialisation of determined tasks and attitudes" (2017b, p. 27) to ascertain an independent subjective role. It stands for life enthusiasm, energy, and liveliness. During her professional life, she decides to dye her hair red, which hue is strange and, somehow, irritating to the traditional people of that time; the people whose understanding of life, its disciplines, and its ends are shaped by a confusing amalgam of superficial modernization on the one hand, and conservative traditionalism on the other hand. This traditionalism is losing its touchstone sociocultural heritage, substituting it with a superficial Modernism that judges everything at surface value. In this way, Gülcihan's preferred hair color, as opposed to the blonde one offered by her hairdresser (Pamuk, 2017, p. 230), reflects her mental perspective. According to Karaca (2019), "[b]londe hair symbolizes a submissive woman who establishes her existence through body" (p. 128). Resisting the suggestion for blonde hair, Gülcihan refuses to idealize herself as an object of desire before social, sexist standards. Experiencing the frustration of married life by, firstly, marrying a politically left-wing activist, who has dedicated himself to the

ideology at the expense of self-destruction, and marrying his brother after his death, who has the same political perspectives and practices (Pamuk, 2017, p. 177), Gülcihan comes to the understanding that she shall live herself away from dedication to masculine goals. *RHW* “is above all a book of ideas,” writes Hughes (2017, para. 8); it narrates the evolution of a woman who decides to live her own priorities and wishes, conscious of her responsibilities. In feministic terms, this highlights a form of self-awareness. Seeing Cem, Gülcihan comes to the conclusion that she has the right to develop a physical relationship with the man she likes. As referred to earlier, this matches Puleo’s argument about women’s right to personally decide on their bodies; this is a practice of “equality and self-empowerment” that “involves promoting sexual and reproductive rights” (2017b, p. 30).

The third chapter of *RHW* is short. Pamuk could have developed his perspective of change by direct or indirect references to the environment-friendly procedure of construction activities after Cem’s death. He prefigures it by pointing to promising signals of change through Gülcihan and Ever, but leaves it for the reader to imagine the alternative world. As such, maybe he highlights all human beings’ responsibility for making a better future.

### **Conclusion**

Pamuk has incessantly written about Istanbul - and the whole Türkiye extendedly - all through his life. Interestingly, modern urbanization is the theme that is repeated in all these works. The research done on Pamuk’s oeuvre has pointed to his sensitivity toward the superficiality of this modernization. Majorly, it has been reflected as “a battle between the . . . European Westernized Istanbul and its historical Islamist past” (Hashemipour, 2017, P. 71). However, the research has not paid attention to the ecological aspect of this modernization. The current study investigated the reflection of ecological anxiety associated with the uneven modernization of Istanbul in *RHW* from Puleo’s feministic perspective. It examined the illustration of Türkiye’s rapid industrialization in the novel through the trope of faulty father-son relationship, symbolizing the rising tension between East and West in the country’s context. The argument was that, while the whole novel revolves around a masculine world of destructive, industrial progress, Gülcihan’s characterization prefigures hope for bringing these conflicting aspects together, away from the masculine pattern of competition. It prefigures a promising perspective of change where self-awareness along with intercultural awareness offers a bed for exercising a sustainable model of life through the recognition of difference. And how does the storyline highlight this? In fact, describing beautiful natural scenery that is disappearing under the pressure of rapid industrialization that is careless of biological diversity, this story narrates Puleo’s warning that “[h]uman beings are hosts that must obtain the self-awareness of belonging to a fabric of multiple life and life forms of the planet we live in, and that its destruction is in the short or long term, our own” (Puleo, 2012b, p. 87). The illustration of the effect of this carelessness through the concept of barrenness in the novel brings to the fore a person who stands opposed to the trend by giving birth to a son who reconciles confronting ideologies and perspectives in himself. It is, in a way, distancing from the notion of superiority over the Other, which is also signified through the depiction

of the centralized male character's death. Being trapped in the self-fabricated cycle of filicide and patricide, he symbolizes hierarchical understanding and its collapse.

Offering an ecofeminist analysis of *RHW*, this research came to the conclusion that the investigation of the environmental aspects of industrialization in Pamuk's other works will contribute to Pamukean studies. Interestingly, it can be done by applying a religious (Islamic) ecological perspective. While Pamuk is a secular writer who does not limit himself to an Islamic perspective, he has revealed his awareness of the role of Islam in shaping Turkish identity in most of his works.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, his oeuvre can be studied based on Islamic ecological views which, no doubt, will result in interesting findings.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> In Judeo-Christian mythology is Adam's first wife who refuses to be submissive before Adam and leaves him. United with Satan, she turns to a diabolic figure with red hair which is reminiscent of fire.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to:

Chapouthier, G. (2018). *From Nature to "Culture" In The Mosaic Theory of Natural Complexity: A scientific and philosophical approach*. La Plaine-Saint-Denis: Éditions des maisons des sciences de l'homme associées.

Hobbes, T. (1651). *Leviathan*. Edwin Curley (Ed.) 1994. Hackett Publishing.

<sup>3</sup> Refer to:

Vandana, S. (1989). *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*. Zed Books.

Gebara, I. (1999). *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*. Fortress Press.

<sup>4</sup> Refer to:

Titrek, O. & William W. C. (2010). Valuing Science: A Turkish–American comparison. *International Journal of Science Education*, 33 (3), 401-421. doi: 10.1080/09500691003628379.

<sup>5</sup> For more information on the notion of Rhizomatic interaction refer to:

Kornberger, M., Rhodes, C. & Bos, R. (2006). The Others of Hierarchy: Rhizomatics of Organizing. In M. Fuglsang & B. M. Sorensen (Eds.), *Deleuze and the Social* (pp.58–74). Edinburgh University Press.

<sup>6</sup> References to Ottoman Empire and detailing Ottoman civilization in some of his novels like *My Name Is Red* (2001), *New Life* (1997), and *The white Castle* (1990) testify for this.

### Author's Biography

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