

Buket Uzuner's *Fire* and Sacred Trees An Interview and Impressions

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Abstract Buket Uzuner's construction of iconography of nature, especially her integration of arboreal bodies in her novels, reveals anxiety mixed with the sense of accountability and responsibility she feels as we all face climate change. This work contains the interview that we conducted with Uzuner and an exploration of her conceptualisation of arboreal complexities in the age of climate change, especially discussing her upcoming work *Fire*. Our interpretation is informed by Paul Ricoeur, who approached different levels of hermeneutic adaptation by giving weight to both the transparency and opaqueness of the meaning of icons and metaphors.

Keywords Buket Uzuner. Fire. Arboreal ecocriticism. Eco-shamanism. Climate crisis.



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The contemporary Turkish writer Buket Uzuner has become known for her creative works ranging from novels to travel notes, but especially for her four-volume book series, which brings together Turkish society, history, and the cultures of Anatolia to explore layers of myth, complexities of everyday life, and the problems of the Anthropocene and climate change. Uzuner's series, named after four elements of the Universe, *Water (Su)*, *Earth (Toprak)*, *Air (Hava)*, and *Fire (Ateş)*, encourages growing awareness of the Earth, reflecting myth and nature to bind the essence of the cosmos to human thought and action. As a novelist, Uzuner presents herself as an 'eco-shaman', accentuating three aspects shaping the shaman's role in society in her writings: acting as an intermediary, enabling connections; providing alternative knowledge and understanding of eco-wisdom; and advocating balance and harmony to restore peaceful coexistence with nature to guide future decisions (Batur, Özdağ 2019). Uzuner's construction of iconography of nature, especially her integration of arboreal bodies in her novels also reveals anxiety mixed with the sense of accountability and responsibility she feels as we all face climate change. We interviewed Uzuner for her conceptualisation of arboreal complexities in the age of climate change.

We remember how excited we were talking about her first work *Water (Su)*, when it was published in 2012 in Turkey. In the US the publication coincided with Hurricane Sandy, the largest hurricane ever recorded in the Atlantic to that date. After the crushing landfall on New York City, Sandy's 160 km/h winds left behind more than 70,000 people stranded, and an astonishing 19 billion-dollars' worth of damages. A staggering 250,000 vehicles were destroyed as the waters rushed through the streets of Manhattan and the neighbouring boroughs. *Business Weekly's* cover declared: "It's Global Warming, Stupid!" (Hern 2012). Ufuk, who studies Aldo Leopold's work, remembers 2012 as the year of a bloodbath suffered by gray wolves after they were removed by the US Congress from the Endangered Species List in 2011. Seven hundred wolves were shot in the Rocky Mountains within months of this action (Morrell 2021). And here we were reading a book by Buket Uzuner in Istanbul, Turkey, bringing together the Anthropocene's global impact of climate change and extinction.

The publication in 2015 of the second book of Uzuner's series, *Earth (Toprak)* coincided with the Paris Climate Conference. COP 21, the UN climate negotiations, provided the background for 187 parties to set targets and new procedures to review emission reductions globally. Uzuner's *Earth* shows the reader the long shadow of history and myth in the lands of Anatolia. It is about "the cradles of civ-

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ilization", and carrying the burden of the consequences of the past and present for the future of society and nature. The message resonates loud and clear to those who listen: act together to change everything for the better (United Nations 2022). Even though there is structural and societal apathy in comprehending or assessing risks and damages associated with climate change, the warning signs are all here: in 2015, wildfires burned a record 880,000 acres in California (Cal Fire 2015). The record lasted only three years, as California wildfires burned 1,975,000 acres in 2018 (Cal Fire 2018). The Atlantic saw record setting hurricane seasons one after another. In 2016 there were 15 named storms, and 11 hurricanes, a number surpassed the following year, with 17 named storms and 17 hurricanes in 2017. Then 2018 became one of the 'deadliest hurricane seasons' in recorded history due to the loss of life and the \$50 billion dollars in property damage caused by two major hurricanes.

Uzuner's third book *Air* (*Hava*), published in Turkish in 2018, came out as the media was teeming with articles about a dire warning by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC 2018). Recent scientific reports were linking climate change to the density, duration and destruction of extreme weather events, and the IPCC report indicated that the intensity of weather events everywhere will increase in the future. Clean power remained a dream in the face of ever-increasing gas and oil exploration, to feed the hunger for fossil fuel energy consumption and profits. Uzuner's book reflects this tension between what needs to be, and what is. By discussing the nuclear energy aspirations of Turkey in *Air*, Uzuner alerted us about hard and dangerous bargains rising in our future.

As much as her first three books inform, advise, and warn about the global ecological collapse, her last book of the series, *Fire* (*Ateş*), which Uzuner describes as the culmination of all of the others, promises to be about witnessing, and specifically, witnessing the climate crisis. Uzuner wrote *Fire* during the COVID pandemic, and when the world watched fires engulfing the Amazon, Australia, the US, and the shores of the Mediterranean and Aegean region. As old and new forests went up in wildfires in Anatolia, the other parts of the globe fought with drought, smoke, wildfires and floods. The summer of 2020 was a summer of fears and tears for Turkey, for neighbours and strangers alike watched uncontrollable fires burn the ancient forests covering the Taurus Mountains. The forests, which endured the history of the classic civilisations and the rise and fall of empires, burned for weeks stretching into months throughout the summer. These were the forests where we, as children, played and collected leaf samples for our classes, as our families picnicked and went into the shady interior to worship the cool forest air in the hot summer sun. In the summer of 2021, we understood yet again that fossil fuels were not staying in the engines in our cars, or just providing energy to industry,

but burning our trees, forests, our lungs, the future of our land, our inheritance from our ancestors and our promise to our children. We were in wild blazes and choking smoke in the Mediterranean coast to coast, from Turkey to Spain. In our interview, we were concerned with how Uzuner was viewing this intimate and revered relationship with the forest and the trees as we all dreaded what might happen again in the summer of 2022.

Terry Erwin and Janice Scott defined the term “arboreal ecosystem” to talk about vast and complex biodiversity and the balance of great complexity of the terrestrial environment created by trees (Erwin, Scott 1982; Cossio, Simonson 2020). We interviewed Uzuner to explore her approach and her interpretation of arboreal agency in this vast complexity. We had the devastating Anatolian fires of 2021 and her latest and upcoming book *Fire (Ates)* in our minds. For Uzuner, arboreal environments house fables and myths, whispering lessons of the past to the future. As a novelist and eco-shaman, Uzuner creates this connection to reach a common ground for a collective eco-wisdom. She renders that ideally the network of trees creates a seamless and balanced eco-continuity between humans and all arboreal entities, but also, she portrays the trees as standing alone to represent components of tension and conflict as well as harmony and balance. There is a strong prevalence of trees which are icons and metaphors as formulated by Turkish folklore and Anatolian myths, and perhaps their appearance in her works is not surprising. However, Uzuner challenges the reader by introducing further complications into this presentation. She creates complicated interactions to represent trees as bridges and catalysts between the mythical and the everyday realms. The connection enables her to retain her ultimate aim of being a future seeker as an eco-shaman.

Icons are representations integrated into the visual lexicon of everyday life and popular culture, such as trees representing blessings and fertility. While images tend to remain stable, metaphors, which give meaning to icons, can change over time and they can become points of contestation, like seeing trees and forests as obstacles to economic development versus valuing them as essential for a sustainable future. Paul Ricoeur approached different levels of hermeneutic adaptation by giving weight to both the transparency and opacity of the meaning of icons and metaphors. Ricoeur's “double intentionality” defines icons and metaphors as disparate elucidations of similar or seemingly similar images. The “double intentionality” becomes part of the formulation, transformation and redefinition of icons and metaphors (Ricoeur 1967; 1991). In this sense, the double intentionality of trees in Uzuner's writing is integrated into the internal and external landscapes, constantly making them both factual and mythical. Yet, examining the iconography of arboreal entities as they crop up in different sections of Uzuner's work reveals that be-

yond the “transparency” and “opaqueness” of their meaning which shapes the “double intentionality”, there is also a “tertiary” level of complexity (Batur, VanderLippe 2013). The “tertiary” level is about controlling icons as Uzuner serves as witness to the future. They morph to become the shaman’s porthole to the future, such as the “Tree of life” in her novels, or the olive trees as she depicts them in our conversation with her. This tertiary level of complexity does not take away from the representation of the fabric of nature, but rather introduces a fabric woven of cherished epics and the ancestral tales of the far-away lands and once-upon-a times, and together they become a way to reveal both the possibilities and the inevitable continuities leading to the future.

The “double intentionality” and the “tertiary” tension adds enhanced layers of meaning in Uzuner’s novels. In *Water* one of Uzuner’s main characters, Defne Kaman, was born as a bolt of lightning struck a beech tree, an ancestral tree of lineages. The tree shatters, yet it remains strong, conveying the challenges and the change the child is destined to bring to the family and the world (Uzuner 2012, 225-6). As Umay, Defne’s grandmother, explains, “[i]n Turkic mythology, every leaf on the ‘Tree of Life’ represents a living person and corresponds to our future life in the World beyond”. Yet, her granddaughter brought both strength and destruction to the ‘tree’ that was in the family’s garden. Defne, in Uzuner’s words, becomes “a misfit” but integral to a better future for the land and society. Defne is a “misfit”, who dares to dissent. She is the critic and enabler of change. In another context, Umay reflects that the Anatolians who protest the building of hydroelectric power plants today are “the grandchildren of the Tree of Life” whether they are aware of it or not. They have roots in the ancient soil (Uzuner 2012, 233). But those whose roots are young, those who support the building of the dam are also part of the same tree. In contrast to the protestors, they, without knowing, are sowing the seeds of destruction of the very earth. As an eco-shaman novelist, Uzuner displays probabilities for the future to present the possibilities in conflict today.

When we interviewed Uzuner the tension between the allegorical iconography of the arboreal entities was ever present. Our questions and her answers regarding the olive trees reveal our collective belief that destruction of olive groves signals destruction of the future, in contrast to economic arguments favouring the growth of mining in Turkey. While the olive tree embodies longevity, survival and continuity, the beech trees stand for family, lineages, and life. They mark the boundaries of the past and they stand to witness the future. Afterall, due to climate change the water is rising to claim their roots and wildfire is coming to burn their branches. John Burroughs told us that “the book of nature is like a page written over or printed up on with different-sized characters and in many different languages,

interlined and cross lined, with a great variety of marginal notes and references" (Burroughs 2008, 153). Uzuner's work represents arboreal collectivity with many facets, connecting present to myth, and myth to the future. She connects the icons and metaphors to generate an alternative inventory of meanings, but also to redefine the conflict and uncertainty embedded in the future. Uzuner's book of arboreal environments is full of marginal notes and references.

Seven years will have passed since COP 21, the UN climate negotiations at Paris, and the prospect of global carbon neutrality in 2050 still remains an elusive promise. When we talked about her upcoming work *Fire (Ateş)* with Uzuner, we kept referring back to the flames of 2021 that claimed beloved forests and trees. As Barry Lopez points out at the end of *Horizon* (Lopez 2019, 512),

what we say we know for sure changes every day, but no one can miss now the alarm in the air. Our question is what is out there, just beyond the end of the road, out beyond language and fervent belief, beyond whatever gods we've chosen to give our allegiance to?

We wanted to know Uzuner's approach and we started our conversation on Zoom, on a cold day in March 2022:

BUKET UZUNER I have a couple of things to point out at the very beginning of our conversation. Even though I work in literature, and storytelling is my way of life at this stage of my life, I come from a science background. Like many people in our generation, I didn't study social science, or mythology, but I studied science. In Turkey, the social sciences were seen as second class, irrelevant and irrational. This is how the Turkish education system prepared us to be scientists at the end of the 20th century. But as I learned from the characters in my novels: people change. I found out that water, earth, and air represent similar ideas in different realms, and I am inspired by mythologies now. I am studying them and learning from them. I find it interesting, but from the very beginning, thinking and writing about fire presented a challenge for me. What is the point of fire? Conflict, clash, and struggle are embedded within the symbol of fire. Depicting these struggles and conflicts - the multifaceted, conflictual yet complementary, and all together complex, aspects of *Fire* - is tearing me apart, and these aspects of fire are shaping my struggle with the narrative: fire is melting me! So, of course, I dedicated this novel to Prometheus. Prometheus epitomises humanity's struggle to obtain knowledge, even though it burns us continually. Fire is the way to understand mortality and immortality, our first claim to civilisation and humanity.

PINAR BATUR We are interested in the place of fire in Turkish mythology, as well as other mythologies. Japanese mythology also includes icons of water, earth, air, fire, but also one more element, and it is 'nothingness', the 'void'. The void embodies all the knowledge of what we know and what we don't know, creativity and mystery. We are wondering if you also find a place in your novels for such a concept?

B.U. 'Nothingness' (*hiçlik*) is an integral component of Turkish Mythology and Sufism, the Alevi-Bektashi tradition of Anatolian Turkish heritage. It appears as not an emptiness but a hole with a circle around it, like the number zero. It is a hole, there is an emptiness inside, but it still has a value, maybe even more than all other numbers! Mevlâna Celaleddin-i Rumi valued 'nothingness' and mentioned that eternal circle around the nothingness. This eternal circle is life circle, ecological circle; nothing will ever disappear forever. I myself discovered eternal continuity while writing *Fire*. 'Nothingness' is like fire, it has contradictory and complementary facets.

UFUK ÖZDAĞ You tell your readers that women should be the writers of history. You told us in *Air (Hava)* "if ever one day there will be a city founded by women, world history and fate, full of male destruction on the earth, may surely change" (2018, 46). We are wondering how a woman would write the history of nature. How does a woman write about nature?

B.U. First, let me point out how I enjoy these questions, asked by two women scholars to a woman writer. I don't believe that any male writer, or any male academic has ever asked a woman that question, but I have been asked this before! I think because it takes a woman to think about this. I'm very grateful that you ask how a woman writes about nature, because it is as essential as how women shape science, medicine, art, or literature. With your question, I think of Shahmaran, a mythical symbol depicted as a woman and snake combined in one body, and she represents knowledge of healing, recovery, and wisdom. It is up to us to see ourselves as daughters of Shahmaran, to carry this inheritance with us, and it is up to a female writer to write with these principles in sight. Because the image was seen as 'feminine', it became a symbol of intrigue and negative toxicity, instead of being what it is: the symbol of medicine. It is a symbol that promises life. Even a professor-turned-medical doctor drinks lemony mint tea to feel better, because his grandmother taught him to have it when he has a bad cold, whether they are a Turkish professor or an American one, here in Turkey, or the US. Because our mothers and grandmothers teach us fairy tales, lullabies, and mythologies as well as nature and nurture, we maintain our sensibilities about life, nature, and the world.

When we write about nature, we write about all women's experiences with it.

- U.Ö. In your writing you state that fire has a paradoxical role in the ancient Turkish belief system. What is the role of fire? Does it bring illumination or chaos?
- B.U. I am interested in how fire changes us, human beings, and how it changed our relationship with nature, what we want to learn and what we want to control. Heating, cooking, and having fire altered our minds and bodies. There was no invention of fire. Fire already existed because it is part of nature, and our history as humans became how we tried to control fire. Our first assumption regarding the control of fire enabled us to define the beginning of human civilisation. Of course, we can't live without water, soil, or air, but without fire, we might not have been able to think; we think, because we try to control fire.
- P.B. How does Turkish mythology influence our understanding of nature, especially of the forest and the trees? While I am asking this, I am thinking about how integral the symbol of the "Tree of Life" is to Turkish mythology, and how it is considered to connect earth, heaven, and hell together.
- B.U. The tree is precious! The other day, at Gönen, in the Marmara Sea region, they named two olive trees after "Umay" and "Defne", two main characters in my novels. The trees became the symbols of that region's commitment to protect olive trees. A relationship with a tree develops in a different sensibility: it is sacred. How to approach a tree becomes a challenge. For example, talking with a tree is the very essence of this challenge, because it is very difficult to interpret the conscience of a creature that isn't one's own kind yet is an integral part of our own being. We all come from nature. Dolphin, deer, eagle - the beings that I talk about in my books, *Water*, *Earth* and *Air* - all share something in common with all of us, as well as the next symbol I employ in *Fire*, the horse. We all live in nature as a part of its web. We are inheritors as well as interpreters of this web. The climate crisis destroys this web, as well as what led to this era, the Anthropocene, and we destroyed our own understanding, our own approach and the peaceful coexistence within this web. The wildfires were symbols of this separation.
- P.B. In Turkey, many think of olive trees as trees of life, spreading their roots and branches. Olives trees symbolise longevity. Protecting olive trees is a way of life, a way to protect life. In fact, since 1939, Turkey has championed laws protecting wild and cultivated olive groves. However, according to the recently updated laws, and since March 1st, 2022, olive groves are open for exploration and mining. What are your feelings about this?

B.U. Olives, figs, and grapes are integral to life in the Mediterranean. It is our obligation to future generations to protect them, but not only in the Mediterranean. I've been to Mardin, a city in the heart of Anatolia, and I was surprised to find out about the olive trees there. They call Mardin "the motherland of olives" because they believe that olives are the fruit of Mesopotamia. Goethe talks about olives in his *Italian Journey*. We must develop increased awareness in Turkey, even if it sometimes feels too late. All over the world, as Atatürk said, "the farmers and peasants are the masters of the nation". If a nation doesn't have food, the nation has nothing. If we lose our olive trees, we will lose our history and our future.

P.B. If you allow me, I would like to read a short passage from *Air*. You wrote "In the end, when it is time to move on from this world, only this remains to be seen: Did you plant a tree on this earth or did you uproot one? Did you stand for justice or close your eyes to injustice? Did you mend hearts or break them? Life is that plain and simple" (Uzuner 2018, 166). This passage reminded me how Aegean people respect olive groves: plant a tree for your children to enjoy its olives. Would you elaborate more on the centrality of trees in your world?

B.U. I started a novella called *The Woman Under the Olive Tree* which I'll finish after *Fire*. The olive tree is very symbolic in it. When I first started writing it, I was taking notes to develop my story when a group invited me to İzmir for an interview. Tunç Soyer Bey, who was the mayor of İzmir at the time, was also present at the interview. Tunç Bey wanted me to write my book under this very old tree: "I invite you to Seferihisar, where we have an 1,800-plus-year-old tree". Seferihisar is very close to İzmir, you know, and it was a pleasure to go there. Here I stood underneath the olive tree whose branches shaded ancient thinkers and philosophers. It's in the ancient city of Teos. Every year, they have an olive oil auction. Local folk line up chairs under this 1,800-year-old tree, and the olive oil is all bottled up on the table, a table covered in a white tablecloth, and the auction begins. On that day, they sold one type of oil for a record prize. I believe it came from the "Umay Tree". It is an olive oil auction, but it is also a celebration of the region, of its olives and life; they claim "this is our tree" as a part of the history and the future. It was amazing. The tree is 1,800 years old, and still alive! I went up to the tree - I just wanted to touch, kiss, and be close to it. Later, when I returned, I heard that they had decided to name the tree after one of the central characters of my book, the "Umay Nine (Grandma Umay)". So now the second olive tree in Gönen, which I talked about earlier, is the second "Umay". Of

course, I care deeply about the olive trees, and how they have stood for peace and merging of cultures for centuries.

U.Ö. You talk about beech trees in your novels. One of your chapters in *Water (Su)*, "The Beech Tree of Life", is a contemplative study of the sacredness of the beech tree in Turkish thought. In *Air (Hava)* you tell your readers that a family's lineage is traced through the branches of the beech tree, known as the "tree of life". Your main protagonist, Defne Kaman, was born as a bolt of lightning struck the beech tree in the garden. What are you hoping to convey to your readers with the image of the beech tree? What do beeches represent?

B.U. I talked about the beech trees in *Earth* - trees of heart, lineage, ancestry, and the home. Trees, all of them, are perhaps the greatest symbol of human life because they represent nature. In *Earth*, I talked about how beeches also represent a family, and their branches and roots support the tree of life. But as Turks, we have somehow begun to overlook this connection and unity. Even though we want equal rights for all, and equal wages for all, we also want to be the head of the organisations which embrace equality. It leads to the formation of factions and oppositions - and to what end? Having a title - like the head of something, or president of something else - hurts the unity and natural connections, and it fosters prejudice and discrimination, especially gender discrimination. If a woman is a rebel, that woman pays the price of being pushed out of the community. Even the simplest acts, like wearing lipstick or smoking in public, become divisive issues. There are generational gaps, but we are, deep down, one and the same; we come from the same branches and roots of the tree. We need to plant the tree of life with love, and we need to learn to embrace everyone and the changes and the differences that they are experiencing. We need to own our own prejudices, because I am human, and we belong to the same family. Writing about this is good for me, I learn as I write. I unite heart and justice within the branches of the tree.

P.B. Last year, in 2021, July and August were two of the hottest months on record. In these months alone, more than two hundred wildfires destroyed 1,700 km² of forest land in the Aegean and Mediterranean region of Turkey. Not only in Turkey - last summer, these fires burned stretches of land from Turkey to Greece to Italy to Spain. We all felt the pain. I kept wondering, how did witnessing this catastrophe influence you and your writing of *Fire*?

B.U. I suffered as if I was dying. The forest burned and animals died. Tell me how is this different from watching people die? Here we are celebrating March eighth, International Women's

Day in Turkey, and meanwhile we hear that women are being killed in increasing numbers. What's the difference? An animal, a tree, a woman, or a child: they all represent life. We've lost our sense of respect for life! Unfortunately, killing women in Turkey has reached epidemic proportions. So far this year, men have killed over 290 women, which puts Turkey on course to far exceed the over 300 hundred women killed by their fathers, lovers, husbands, and brothers in 2021. If half this number of men – husbands, fathers, brothers – were killed in a year in Turkey, all the Turkish parliamentary parties would come together and unanimously pass a law to prevent women from killing men in three days! But it is just in headlines and in the news. We only passively hear about them except when we live through one. Basically, we don't value women's lives in our country. We can change this by cherishing women's lives, and also by respecting life in Turkey. When I was invited to New Zealand to talk about my novel, *Gallipoli (Gallipoli: The Long White Cloud, 2013)*, the first thing I saw when I got off the plane is etched in my memory. There were posters hanging on poles, and stickers, everywhere. They had a picture of a young man, his mouth taped shut, announcing the men's march protesting women killings. The only example I can think of in Turkey is the protest of men in skirts in 2015. But, why is the skirt the symbol of women? It was a tragic, if hopeful sign of protest. One day, we will all need to march in protest of all acts that disrespect life, all murders, and all intentional forest fires. We need to teach men to respect life, to respect animals and forests, but also to start respecting their mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters. They all go to their mothers when they are in trouble, why not respect women?

U.Ö. Are you expecting yet another hot summer, marred by wildfires?

B.U. Yes, I am. I'm not saying it's going to be hotter this summer, but however it turns out, we need to be ready. We need to think about what we can do before the wildfires. We need more fire-fighting planes. We need to take other precautions, for example, to develop a healthy food system. We need to raise our own food sustainably in Turkey, and with climate change in sight, we need to build an integrated food system. In the '70s and '80s, as Turks, we used to brag that we would not go hungry if Turkish borders closed, because we had a healthy food system, built upon our "seven regions, embodying seven climates". Our soil is still healthy, even though we're still short of water. We need to take precautions, and we especially need to ask women to help with these resilience efforts. Women dominate agriculture, and also the vast majority of readers in Turkey are women. That's

why women matter so much. If they organise, they will pressure parties, mayors, governors. We need to strengthen the relationship between women, and we need to provide a platform to show their strength and unity, not just sitting behind their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons. We need women leaders, even if they have different opinions. When I talk about my books or current issues, people with different opinions can come and listen to me. It means a lot to me because I think that's what democracy is like, because these fires are going to get worse. We want to take precautions. I want knowledge to spread like wildfire! Here I am thinking about Scott Slovic's *Going Away to Think* (2008).

P.B. Would you like to elaborate?

B.U. I like that Slovic gives weight to responsibility in the ecocritical approach. Slovic advises the writer to take ecocritical responsibility seriously, saying that literature is more than just making intellectual plays for intelligent but irresponsible critics. As he points out, literature is an area where human values and behaviours are explained, which means environmental and especially climate issues are also the responsibility of writers and literary critics.

P.B. In our work, we have described you as an eco-shaman, as an intellectual and novelist, leading your readers to environmental consciousness. We especially emphasised three components which we feel dominate your role in society and facilitate communication regarding 'eco-wisdom': making connections within the ecosystem, and its past, present and future; emphasizing 'eco-continuity', providing alternative knowledge and understanding about 'eco-coherence'; and advocating for balance to restore peaceful coexistence with nature as 'eco-harmony'.

B.U. Yes, I like that very much. That is why I thought of Slovic's approach.

P.B. So, I have to ask you a question for the future: what do you think we should do?

U.Ö. I would like to add to this question, by asking about your thoughts regarding the project on the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. It's become a global movement. I always think of the Green Belt that Wangari Maathai created in Africa: an astonishing number of millions of trees. I wonder if Turkey can start a Green Belt movement in our country in the ten years of UN Ecosystem Restoration. We have only nine years left.

B.U. I will be the moderator next week at a symposium attended by İzmir Metropolitan Mayor Tunç Soyer, who is the only member of the International Climate Organization from Turkey. I was thinking about bringing it up, so if they can get funding, it'd be great for something like this, and I hope we'll all be re-

membered there. Maybe we can make a decision like that there. That'd be great. Actually, a man in Mardin began planting millions of trees: an amazing effort, an amazing forest all his own. There are individual things like that, but I think that kind of move would be inspirational, and that's exactly what I had in my notes. It's so good of you to remind me of that.

P.B. If only every woman who reads also planted trees. I think it would give great results if every woman who reads a book, planted a tree for every book she reads.

B.U. Let's read from *Fire*. It will be a good way to end our discussion, until we meet again.

Uzuner reads from *Fire*, and ends our conversation with:

The book of *Fire* contained these lines, which appeared to have been written in green ink after the above pages written in black, red and navy ink by different female-ancestors and wise grandmothers who read it at different times and contributed different handwritings:

I received the Book of Fire as its new protector and keeper in the 18th year of the 21st century: Defne Kaman. I, the child of the Caucasian Bayülgen family, who have maintained the tradition of medicine for generations with the Asian Otacı family, whose paths are united in İstanbul for generations, promise on my conscience that I will add information of my own time, try to prevent it from being lost or damaged, until, I, Defne Kaman, will deliver this valuable treasure to its next owner.

I received the Book of Fire from my wise herbalist and pharmacist grandmother Umay Bayülgen only this year. I've been waiting for years to be able to read this ancient book that blessed wise women ancestors for generations. My grandmother Umay, since we ended up living in different cities due to life events, sent the Book of Fire from İstanbul to Mardin, where I now live, with a close friend, a messenger we trust, and who delivered it to me by hand.

The ancient Book of Fire, full of historical information about our roots, differs from the *Water*, *Earth* and *Air* Books, which were previously delivered to me. After reading it over and over again, I understood why grandmother Umay gave me the Book of Fire as the last of four elements. My grandmother apparently waited for me to realise the complexity what I now understand.

Because *Fire* is the book for those who comprehend the books on *Water*, *Earth* and *Air*, and still survive, *Fire* needs to be trusted to those who deserve it, who appreciate this blessed knowledge, a cult or culture, because it might burn.

Mevlâna is one of the people who taught me the importance and meaning of “nothingness” when I was a little girl. He explains that those who can accept it without fear of it, who can accept “nothingness” (hiçlik) by living without vanity and pure, will comprehend the truth, the essence of life. Mevlâna taught me that there can't be one, two or more without it before “nothing”, not without “zero”, because “nothing” has an inherent value. By saying that he was “immature, but now I am burned and learned”, Mevlâna teaches us that maturation is the result of going through various stages of challenges, loss, defeat, failure, loneliness. I understood by experience that ‘suffering’ purifies one's self, purifies like fire, and only then one matures.

Now it's time for me to tell you about how I am tested by fire. The title of my book will be: *Climate Catastrophe will be the Fire of the 21st Century*.

As Uzuner finished reading from *Fire*, we all sensed the dread and fear in our hearts that we might witness yet another summer of wild-fire flames in Anatolia and the entire Mediterranean region, stretching from Turkey to Spain. Losing trees to wildfire is akin to losing lives. And perhaps that is the very reason Buket Uzuner ended our conversation with this reading, emphasizing that “climate catastrophe will be the fire of the 21st century”. With the fourth book of the series, Uzuner as a novelist continues as an eco-shaman. This is her call to the reader to unite for climate struggle to build an alternative future.

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