



## DEVELOPING ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH MOVIES; THE REDDEER<sup>1</sup> (ALAGEYİK)

Fatma KALPAKLI\*

### Abstract

Adapted from Yaşar Kemal's trilogy entitled *Three Anatolian Legend, Red Deer*, is directed by Süreyya Duru and has become a wonderful film; full of natural images and imagery, reflecting the beauty of Antalya and its surroundings.

The protagonist of the movie, Halil (acted by Cüneyt Arkın) is a very passionate deer-hunter, who likes spending many days in the mountains in order to nourish his people with deer-meat. He also likes the solitude and peace offered by the mountains. However, his duties towards his mother and his fiancée call him back to his village and he has to defend his village and his people against the attacks of ağa<sup>2</sup>. His stance against ağa's unfair treatments to establish peace and order in the village is very noteworthy. In *Red Deer*, it is illustrated that the feudal system carried out by ağa is definitely neither human nor environment friendly. On the contrary, it actually threatens human and environmental security as well as denying their rights to exist and to live. Under this chaotic atmosphere, Halil, whose only passion in life is deer-hunting, goes through a transformation as a result of the guidance of a mysterious red deer during his adventures with ağa and bandits in the mountains.

Thus, in this study, we will focus on the image of deer and how environmental consciousness is developed through movies such as *Red Deer* since "the ecological knowledge" (Greenberg 2013: 52) contained in Anatolian legends and beliefs are reflected in *Red Deer/Alageyik* is remarkably well.

**Keywords:** *Red Deer*, Anatolian/Turkish environmental ethics, the gazelle/deer motif, eco-consciousness, environmental justice in ecofilms, Yaşar Kemal.

### INTRODUCTION

Halil is torn between his loyalty to his fiancée, to Zeynep and his passion for deer-hunting as it takes much of his time by taking him away from Zeynep to the mountains. He is carried away by his passion for the reddeer and cannot help himself from following the reddeer in the mountains day and night<sup>3</sup> as he has an excellent time hunting there, despite the widespread belief in his village that deer-hunting brings bad luck to the hunter.

#### I. DEER IN ANATOLIAN BELIEFS AND TALES

In relation to this, his mother acts like the oracles in Greek tragedy and warns Halil against the curse fall on the heads of the deer hunters. She says, "My dear Son, do stop going for deer-hunting. Who destroys a deer's family, cannot start a family himself (see also Özdağ, 2014, 19, 20, 29). That is what we believe in the village for centuries. If you have any respect for me, please do stop it"<sup>4</sup> (*Reddeer*).

By decreasing the "opportunities of seeing deer" (Fulton, 2004, 1170), the mother figure in the movie tries to prevent "unnecessary pain and suffering" (Fulton, 2004, 1170), which might fall upon to both his son and deer and tries to convince him to stay in the village.

The villagers' attitude and his mom's as well as his fiancée's sayings very clearly reveal that "they have internalized the ecoethicality inherent within many traditional stories" (Greenberg 2013: 53). In other words, Yaşar Kemal's *Reddeer* has "an ecoethical world view" (Greenberg 2013: 52) and "teach[es] morality, especially environmental ethics" (Greenberg 2013: 47). This situation also significantly represents the nature writings of another Turkish novelist and short story writer Refik Halit Karay, who was "interested more in our treatment of nature than any other relevant subject, he does not hesitate, for instance, to associate the love for a tree with morality" (Metz, 2016, 188). Thus, "the 'folk wisdom' of [Anatolian people] have proved to be invaluable". Folk wisdom, or 'traditional ecological knowledge' (TEK) (qtd. in Greenberg 2013, 46) prove to have universal ecoethical values like the belief in Anatolia, which suggests that if you hurt a living thing, then you will be cursed and cannot settle down anywhere and cannot start a family (see also Şahin, 2014, 71), which is used as a kind of foreshadowing in the movie and it is about to come true very soon, if the protagonist does not change his attitude towards the deer and the environment, he lives in.

\* Assoc. Prof. Dr, Selcuk University, Faculty of Letters, English Language and Literature, fkalpakli@selcuk.edu.tr.

<sup>1</sup> This article is an extended version of the paper entitled "Deer Imagery in the Movie, *Reddeer*" presented in "International Conference on Environmental Justice-Culture, Resistance and Ethics in India in 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Ağa is a very powerful person in a village and can be likened to lord in Western culture.

<sup>3</sup> "Generally, deer can be approached more closely by night than by day" (Wright, 1868, 473).

<sup>4</sup> Translations of all Turkish sources are done by the author of this article.



Hunting baby-deer is forbidden in Anatolian/Turkish culture and “those who defied these restrictions were subject to punishment and death” (Greenberg, 2013, 33) as we see in the variations of the *Red Deer* legend.

Throughout the movie, this point is reminded to Halil by his fiance and by his mother very often, but whatever he does, he cannot help going to the mountains for deerhunting. While he runs after the deer in the mountains, Karaca Ali (Blackish Ali) lord of the village, *ağa* runs after Halil’s fiance in order to gain her hand. This analogy (the similarities between deer-hunting and women-hunting) used in the movie is very reminiscent of the one Shakespeare uses in his plays (see Woodcock, 2002, 834). And Zeynep’s glances are likened to that of the gazelle, which is also seen in Arabian and Andalusian literary works; “the murderous eyes of the gazelle [or of the beloved one]” (Bürge, 1989, 5). Likewise, Bürge also states that “one of the major topoi of traditional Arabic love poetry is the comparison of the beloved with a gazelle” (XX). In relation to it, he says,

It is difficult to decide which reflects more of the reality of those days: the man-killing look of the Lady Gazelle[/of the beloved one] or the gazelle-killing dreams of man? However this may be, it remains a fascinating phenomenon that in a culture where religious law subdued the gentler sex to the almost absolute authority of man, lyrical poetry-and, to a certain extent, epic fiction too-created a realm where woman existed not only unsubdued but ruling, even tyrannically, and yet adored. This realm is that of an ideal love, somewhat crazy, somewhat perverse, it is true, but with all the features of an elaborate system like a philosophy and indeed a religion, the religion of love, in which man adores a Lady Gazelle and willingly submits to her whims, even to the extent of being killed by her murderous glances (Bürge, 1989, 10)

In addition to the literary works, the theme of deer-hunting is also touched upon in the holy books as well. For instance, deer-hunting is forbidden during the times of pilgrimages made to Mecca. Hunting during the times of pilgrimages means crossing the line by disregarding the eco-friendly religious rules demanding respect to all living things.

Likewise, *ağa*’s following the gazelle-eyed girl, Zeynep who is engaged to another man, Halil means also crossing the line in terms of the ethics of community. Thus, killing a deer without any logical reasons (such as to satisfy one’s hunger or to survive) is seen as something to be punished in terms of morals, ecoethics and “ethics of the community” (see Shweder, 2003, 1120).

In Anatolian culture, reddeer is given some other qualities such as being spiritual guides and helpers to the ones in need (Karadavut and Yeşildal, 2007, 103-111). Likewise, in *Reddeer*, the deer guides the protagonist, Halil both spiritually&literally and accompanies him in his journey to his innerself. At the heart of the nature in the mountains, away from the villagers, on his own, Halil begins to know himself better. And this situation strengthens Thomas Hardy’s very well known argument that “people closer to nature tend to be closer to their inner-selves” (“G. Onur, “Personal Interview-Thomas Hardy and Nature”). During Halil’s inner journey we, the audience and Halil himself begin to realize that deerhunting and Zeynep is his weakest points. And the former one will bring his end and within the terms of Anatolian cultural values and ethical norms, it is not something unexpected:

Among the Turkish people killing deer is supposed to bring bad luck as deer is perceived to be a sacred animal and bringer of fortune. Moreover, according to the common belief, domestic animals are seen as belonging to the human community, but wild animals such as deer living in the wilderness are accepted as belonging to the community of divinity (Bonney, 2000, 375).

As in line with these cultural and ethical values in Anatolia, in the legend of *Red Deer*, the bridegroom could not help going after the deersounds and leaves the bride all alone at their first night and falls into pool and gets drowned as a punishment (Seyidoğlu, 1985, 137).

In this version of the story, “the hunter’s sudden discovery that he himself is being hunted by the deer” (Bürge, 4) is important in terms of environmental justice. He is not allowed to destroy the deer and the environment. Similarly, “... in *Erzincan Legend (Erzincan Efsanesi)*, the deer hunters, who killed a woman’s deer are turned into stone as a result of the curse put upon them by the lady, who was the owner of the deer and who used to milk the deer” (Sakaoglu, 1989, 76).

## II. DEER IN ISLAMIC STORIES

Deer is also given an important place in Islamic stories. For instance, in one of the religious anecdotes, Prophet Mohammed sets a deer free:

... ad-Damir mentions three versions of a hadith in which the Prophet Muhammad releases a female gazelle, not, it is true, because she resembles any of his wives, but because the deer



addresses him and appeals to his pity. Suffice it to quote one of the versions of this report: Umm Salamah related: The Prophet was in the desert when suddenly he heard somebody calling: O Messenger of God! So he turned around, but did not see a soul. When he turned a second time, however, there was a female gazelle tied up. She said to him: Come near to me, O Messenger of God! So he went up to her and asked her: What is your request? She said: I have two youngsters in these mountains. Untie me that I may go and suckle them. Then I'll come back to you. The Prophet said: Will you really do this? She said: May God punish me, as he punishes the tax-collector, if I do not! So he released her and she ran away and suckled her two youngsters. Then she came back and he tied her up again. Now, the bedouin (who was the owner of the deer) noticed him and asked: Have you any demand, O Messenger of God? He answered: Yes, indeed! Could you release this gazelle? So he released her and she ran away crying out: There is no deity but God, and Muham- mad is his messenger! (Bürgel, 1989, 7).

And this anecdote shows that Prophet Mohammed becomes a role model for all the humanity and suggests to show respect to animal rights and not to give burden to animals in any way.

Here, we also see the concept of "holiness of life" and "respect to all living things" (see Özdağ, 2014, 25) as significant issues. On a wider coverage, in Turkish culture since the Shamanist days, it is believed that everything has a soul (like it is believed in the Celtic and Redskin culture) and thus everything does deserve respect. And later, in more modern times, in holy religions, it is also stated that "every living thing has the right to live and do deserve respect". All in all, Halil is punished since he killed a deer and what makes his mistake or sin even bigger is that he kills a baby-deer, which is almost a taboo. This punishment might be considered as a consequence of universal rules or of divine justice, whatever it might be considered, without any hesitation, it can be said that he deserves to be punished as he breaks a taboo and kills a baby-deer. An extension of this belief is also observed in "the Legend of Baby Gazelle", in this legend "Blonde Hunter (*Sarı Avcı*), who had just killed a gazelle, has found his little son already death out upon his arrival to home and he never hunts a gazelle ever" (Karadavut and Yeşildal, 2007, 105). In relation to the respect to everything in the universe and human-centered thinking, Chakrabarty states that

[w]e still do not know how to think conceptually... about justice towards non-human forms of life, not to speak of the inanimate world. Thinkers of animal rights have extended questions of justice towards some animals, but their theories are limited by strict requirements relating to the threshold of sentience in animals. Besides, some philosophers also argue that, whatever the practical value of a category such as life in biology, 'life as such' cannot be a strict philosophical category. Yet we cannot think 'extinction' without using the category 'life', however difficult it may be to define it. The really difficult issue that arises when scholars write about humans being stewards of the planet is what our relationship, conceptually, would be to bacteria and viruses, given that many of them are not friendly to the human form of life (while many are). Yet it is undeniable that the natural history of species life on this planet involves the histories and activities of bacteria and viruses. So while I agree that politics as we know it continues and will continue into the foreseeable future, and that there is no politics of the Anthropocene as such (but much politics about the label 'Anthropocene', as we know!), a deepening of the climate crisis and of the ecological overshoot of which it is a symptom may indeed lead us to rethink... (Chakrabarty, 2017, 8).

### III. DEER IN MOTION PICTURES

And with the broadcast of the movie, *Reddeer*<sup>5</sup>, these old and nearly forgotten ethical values in long established cultures such as Indian&Turkish culture (going back to Turkish Shamanic days) are brought into the whitescreen again. Hence, it helps to raise consciousness about the species, which are in danger of extinction and tries to help to the preservation of these mammals such as deer and gazelle.

In relation to the evolution of the deer&gazelles and the ecosystem, it is suggested that "...the ecosystem... develop[s] checks and balances... As the lions became deadlier, so gazelles evolved to run faster..." (qtd. in Chakrabarty, 2017, 3). Hence, the harder it is the more joyful it becomes for Halil to go for deerhunting in the movie. His hunting skills also prove his "masculinity" in the eye of the villagers. He brings the game meet to the village and shares it with all of the villagers and they eat the game meat all

<sup>5</sup> In the movie, the events take place the mountains of Antalya since "Antalya is the habitat of the purest race of wild reddeer" ("Alageyik Dünya'da Sadece Antalya'da" and "Geyikler/Alageyik/Fallow Deer/ Dama dama",)



together. On the one hand, this makes Halil a good hunter and bread-winner, who shares his food generously with his folk and he becomes a hero in the eye of the villagers. Yet, on the other hand, the very same villagers also believe that deer-hunting brings bad luck to the hunters; sooner or later, they will be cursed. And they are afraid that one day something bad will happen to Halil and to his homeland, to his village. In other words, in the movie, neither the animals nor the people feel safe. The “sense of insecurity” becomes striking especially in the scenes, where the deer is bothered in the mountains by the humans and the villagers are bothered and abused by the bandits (*ağa's* men) in their own villages. In doing so, the writer and the director draws a parallel between “the violation of human rights and animal rights” and brings the ecoethics on the agenda and urges the audience to think about these ecoethics on a wider scale. In relation to deer, Hülya DüNDAR ŞAHİN, in her article underlines some features of the deer:

[Deer]...is very light on its feet as well as being a very sensitive and emotional animal. It has an elegant body and is very timid (see also Wright 1868: 466). It runs away from humans and the ones who follow it becomes exhausted. They live in solitude. Deer hunters are doomed and everything in the house of the deerhunter gets upside down, not even a single grass grows there, it loses its fertility (2014, 71).

As it is emphasized in the quotation above, “deer-hunter is doomed to be cursed”, but interestingly enough, deer is also a “mentor” to the deer-hunter and guides Halil in the mountains so that he can run away from the bandits, from the lords’ men. In the film adaptation of the reddeer legend, Halil does not die and by changing the end of the legend, the scriptwriter gives a more hopeful end to the audience and in so doing, he might give the message that as humans we can learn from our mistakes and take our lesson and choose to lead a more ecofriendly - ecoethical life so that everything in the universe and in the nature will gain a chance to live in peace and order. As in line with his optimistic approach, at the end of the movie, we see that Halil promises to stop hunting and to stay with Zeynep forever. Eventually, the reddeer leads Halil to the happy end. And ŞAHİN expresses that in Turkish folk tales “[deer] comes to the scene out of blue and shows the right path to the people. And then, it disappears all of a sudden. It leads people to the happy ends. It is also seen as a fairy of love. They are good luck charms as well as being divine creatures, accompanied by spirits” (ŞAHİN, 2014, 71). Thus, being also “the fairy of love”, the red deer<sup>6</sup> in the movie brings Halil and Zeynep back together.

Thus, stories and legends in Anatolia “cohere with traditional ecocultural knowledge and inspires ethical care” of environment (Greenberg 2013: 31). In other words, like the Indian-American narratives Anatolian legends and Turkish movies also “have potential as ecoethical discourse that ostensibly might be used” (Greenberg, 2013, 31) in the efforts to preserve wild life and wild animals. And relying on the examples of Anatolian narratives (such as *Blonde Hunter (Sarı Avcı)*, *Erzincan Legend (Erzincan Efsanesi)* and *Red Deer (Alageyik)* ) given so far, it can be deduced that Anatolian narratives on the environment are deeply related to culture, which is particularly sensitive towards the environment and its inhabitants. And “cultural issues... have a [big] role in the outcome of [preservation efforts of wild life]” (Erdem Mete, 2018, 217) through carrying eco-friendly narratives from generation to generation “for the use and enjoyment of the natural beauties and resources by current and future generations” (“Conservation and Natural Resources”).

## CONCLUSION

And not surprisingly, some official reports have shown that there has been an increase in the deer population<sup>7</sup> in the region of Antalya between the years of 1966 and 2017 (see “Alageyik Dünya’da Sadece Antalya’da”), which shows that with the adaptation of “ecofriendly literary works” (see Özdağ, 2014, 9) into the whitescreen, it is possible to reach a wider audience and hence, it also becomes possible to raise consciousness<sup>8</sup> about environmental issues and eco-ethics due to the fact that media is the fourth power today and the movie, *Reddeer* is a good example to illustrate that media should be made use of in the efforts to spread eco-ethics and eco-consciousness all over the world.

<sup>6</sup> Depending on the variety of the circumstances and “different contexts” (Tosun 2017: 46) of the stories, the roles given to the reddeer naturally change.

<sup>7</sup>And as it has happened in the case of the movie, *Reddeer* with the help of movies/media “effective management of formerly scarce ... game species” (Brent 2011: 161) can be realized and media can serve to the preservation of nature&environment.

<sup>8</sup> To raise consciousness about Environmental Issues and Eco-ethics is very crucial for the future of our universe and individual efforts would not suffice in the long run. It should also be supported by the governments and countries all over the world. In relation to this, Savaşan states that “the responsibility for global environmental problems such as global warming and ozone depletion belong more much to the industrialized countries rather than developing countries, the cooperation of all countries (even if they have different responsibilities) in the world is essential to lead to effective solutions for these problems” (2015: 80) and only with the cooperation of all the industrialized countries and the developing countries efficient solutions for the environmental problems can be found.





## REFERENCES

### Primary Sources:

Alageyik/Reddeer. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2r4ChKSUQ1M>. Access date: 5 January 2016.

### Secondary Sources:

- Bonnefoy, Yves (Yön.) 2000. *Antik Dünya ve Geleneksel Toplumlarda Dinler ve Mitolojiler Sözlüğü*. Çev. Levent Yılmaz. Ankara: Dost Kitabevi.
- Brent, A. Rudolph, Dwayne R. Etter and Sara M. Schaefer (2011). Ecology and Management of Deer in Developed Landscapes. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* (2011-), Vol. 35, No. 3. 161-167 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/wildsocioibull2011.35.3.161>. Accessed: 22-02-2017.
- Bürgel, J.C. (1989). The Lady Gazelle and Her Murderous Glances. *Journal of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 20, No. 1. 1-11 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4183181>. Accessed: 22-02-2017.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh (2017). The Politics of Climate Change Is More Than the Politics of Capitalism. *Theory, Culture & Society / Special Issue: Geosocial Formations and the Anthropocene*. Ed. Nigel Clark&Kathryn Yusoff. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0263276417690236>. 1-13.
- Erdem Mete, Defne (2018). Teaching Turkish Cultural Values through Narratives with a Plot-Structure Analysis Approach. *Selçuk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Vol.43, 215-226.
- Fulton, David C. , Kevin Skerl, Erin M. Shank and David W. Lime (2004). Beliefs and Attitudes Toward Lethal Management of Deer in Cuyahoga Valley National Park. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* (1973-2006), Vol. 32, No. 4 (Winter, 2004), 1166-1176. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3784755> Accessed: 22-02-2017.
- Greenberg, Joy H. & Gregory Greenberg (2013). Native American Narratives as Ecoethical Discourse in Land-Use Consultations. *Wicazo Sa Review*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Fall 2013), 30-59 Published by: University of Minnesota Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/wicazosareview.28.2.0030> Accessed: 22-02-2017.
- Karadavut, Z. & Yeşildal Ü. Y. (2007). Anadolu-Türk Folklorunda Geyik. *Milli Folklor*, 76, 102-112.
- Karaloğlu, Vali & Adnan Yılmaztürk. *Alageyik Dünya'da Sadece Antalya'da*. <https://www.haberler.com/alageyik-dunyada-sadece-antalya-da-9660165-haberi>, 26 May 2017. Access date: 1 June 2017.
- Mete, Barış (2016). Descriptions of Seasons, Trees, Flowers and Animals in R. H. Karay's Nature Writing. *Humanities and Social Sciences Review*, Vol. 05, No. 02, 185-188.
- No Author. *İhram Nedir?*. <http://www.on5yirmi5.com/haber/inanc/islam/92574/ihram-nedir-ihram-yasaklari-nelerdir.html>. Access date: 4 Mart 2016.
- No Author. *Conservation and Natural Resources-Richmond General Plan 2030*. <http://www.ci.richmond.ca.us/DocumentCenter/View/8812/70-Conservation-Natural-Resources-and-Open-Space>. Access date: 29 July 2018.
- No Author. *Geyikler/Alageyik/Fallow Deer/Dama dama*. <http://www.tramem.org/memeliler/?fsx=2fsdl17@d&tur=Alageyik> 12 Mart 2016.
- No Author. *Tür Koruma Stratejisi – Doğa Koruma ve Milli Parklar*. [www.milliparklar.gov.tr/.../TÜR\\_KORUMA\\_STRATE...](http://www.milliparklar.gov.tr/.../TÜR_KORUMA_STRATE...) Nisan 2014, Ankara, sayfaya erişim tarihi: 12 Mart 2016.
- Onur, Gülbün. (2016, May 11). *Personal Interview-Thomas Hardy and Nature*.
- Özdağ, Ufuk. (2014). *Çevreci Eleştiriye Giriş*. Ankara: Ürün Yayınları.
- Sakaoğlu, Saim (1989). *101 Anadolu Efsanesi*. Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları.
- Savaşan, Zerrin (2015). *The role of networks in ensuring compliance and strengthening coordination: a comparative analysis on Inece, Ecena, Rena and REC Turkey*. UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Seyidoğlu, Bilge. 1985. *Erzurum Efsaneleri, Erzurum'da Belli Yerlere Bağlı Olarak Derlenmiş Efsaneler Üzerinde Bir inceleme*, Ankara: Ankara Üniv. Basımevi.
- Şahin, Hülya Dünder (2014). Geyikler, Annem ve Almanya'da Geyik Motifi. (Tukas 2014) *Bildirileri: I.Uluslararası Türk Kültürü Araştırmaları Sempozyumunu*, Nevşehir: Hacı Bektaş Üniversitesi Yayınları., 67-75.
- Shweder, Richard A (2003). Toward a Deep Cultural Psychological of Shame. *Social Research*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Vol. 70, No. 4, Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40971963>. pp. 1109-1130. Access date: 24-07-2017.
- Tosun, Bahadır Cahit (2017). Simon Says It Should Be Contextual. *SEFAD (Selçuk Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi)*, June, 2017 (37). 45-54. .e-ISSN: 2458-908X.
- Woodcock, Thomas (2002). Review: *Shakespeare and the Hunt: A Cultural and Social Study* by Edward Berry. *The Sixteenth Century Journal*. Vol.33, No.3 (Autumn), 833-834. DOI: 10.2307/4144044, Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4144044>. Access date: 3 July 2018.
- Wright, Charles (1868). Deer and Deer-Hunting in Texas. *The American Naturalist*, Vol. 2, No. 9 (Nov., 1868), 466-476. The University of Chicago Press, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2447205> Accessed: 22-02-2017.