

**Metaphors of Ashes and Rebirth: Existential Healing and Ecological Regeneration in Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees***

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**Abstract**

Recent trends in literary criticism demonstrate a continued interest in the intersections of trauma, memory, and ecology, particularly in postcolonial and diasporic narrative traditions. In *The Island of Missing Trees*, Shafak's novel situates individual and collective grief within a living, breathing world of ecological presence, especially from the fig tree's "non-human" narrative voice. This study examines the novel's exploration of existential crisis stemming from cultural dislocation, intergenerational pain, and postcolonial identities. It explores how metaphors of ecology operate not merely for semiotic flourish but for narrative purpose, mediating grief, memory, and continuity rather than mere separation or division. At its most fundamental, the research project endeavors to understand how Shafak's ecological narrative practice reshapes the notion of trauma as a process with non-human temporalities. Focusing on textual critique using principles of existential humanism, trauma theory, and ecocritical approaches, the project examines explanatory narrative events mediated through silence, migration, and memory using the fig tree's narrative voices. In so doing, the text connects personal to collective memory through the fig tree's voices against the spatial, temporal shifts between places and time. In doing so, it becomes evident from this research that the fig tree stands not merely for passive meaning but is instead a constitutive factor initiating events from crisis spaces towards opportunities for continuity rather than closure. By so situating, this research projects a healing practice from belonging, relational, and ecological frameworks. By maintaining a narrative interface between memory and ecology, this research project continues the work related to postcolonial literary study, trauma narrative study, and environmental humanities to recognize the capacity for literary practice regarding postcolonial narrative traditions towards coexistence with responsibility for past historical, environmental experiences.

**Keywords:** The Island of Missing Trees; Ecological Metaphor; Existential Humanism; Intergenerational Trauma; Fig Tree Symbolism

**Introduction**

Literary critics have been interested in the way trauma stories are shaped by memory, place, and feelings of connection that the person recalling the event didn't originally have. This interest is based on an awareness that the historical violence and displacement cannot often be absorbed in the linearity of personal affliction, but rather flow through families, places, and the memory of the people (Berger, 1997; Nora, 1989). This has taken center stage in the postcolonial and diasporic writing, where writers are employing more forms of narration that do not seek to find a way to resolve loss into meaning or resolution. This ecological shift is indicative of a wider critical attempt to comprehend the way trauma is carried, observed, and passed through

other than purely human constructs. In this regard, ecological imagery is not merely a literary resource but rather a narrative tool that allows maintaining endurance and memory during the temporal and spatial gaps (Visser, 2015; O'Neill, 2024).

*The Island of Missing Trees* by Elif Shafak is one of the postcolonial fiction books that deals with postcolonial afterlives of displacement, silence, and political division. The story is set in Cyprus and London, and follows the story of a family life influenced by ethnic strife, migration and the long shadow of separation. Instead of focusing on human consciousness, the story resorts to the fig tree, which is a non-human witness and has endured a long-term testimony of connective histories of attachment, loss, and survival (Shafak, 2021). It is not a figurative or allegorical voice that the fig tree has; it creates a form of narration that is based on ecological time; memory is transported beyond the scope of individual human experience. This narration decision enables the text to conceptualize trauma not as something already past but as a part of the living body that is sustained by continuity, nurture and surroundings.

The way that the text deals with the subject of trauma is strictly intertwined with how it deals with the subject of cultural displacement, as loss in *The Island of Missing Trees* is not the result of single personal experience, but that of historical discontinuity. According to Hall (2015), the diasporic identity is not created by stable origins but by constant negotiation with the absence, displacement, and fragmented belonging. Displacement in the story of Shafak thus goes beyond geographical travel between locations and defines how characters find their way to family history, inherited memory and home meaning. The silences around the Cypriot conflict are relevant since they are passed on indirectly, through what has not been said, as opposed to narrating. According to trauma theorists, this process is referred to as intergenerational transmission, where the burden of violence in the past is transferred between generations through affect, behaviour and absence (Kellermann, 2001; Kirmayer et al., 2014). This process is examined in the text in the manner in which the various generations are unequally connected to the past, whereby subsequent generations carry emotional loads that they are not able to name properly or even point to. These unequal legacies justify the confusion and emotional violence repeated in the story that can be explained by a single event, as they are the result of historical accumulated histories, but not events that are distinguishable.

Instead of considering crisis as an inward mental state, *The Island of Missing Trees* resorts to ecological terms to keep the loss, memory, and survival together. The repetitive use of trees, soil, seasons, and transplantation acts is important since they provide a language to survive, which takes note of the harm without collapsing into a definitive end. The ecological image in the text does not make historical violence gentle; rather, it offers a way of thinking continuity where there is discontinuity.

Current ecocritical readings have focused on the fig tree as an important narrative element, but too much of this focus has been kept disconnected from the text when it involves the experience of suffering and existential doubt (Elgamal, 2024). This distance makes the interpretation difficult, since the power of the fig tree story is precisely in the fact that it connects the ecological continuity to the human precariousness. Trauma does not get canceled or redeemed by the fig tree, but offers a narrative form where a loss may be carried, remembered and endured without being committed to resolution. This form of narration aligns with Berger's (1997) argument that trauma calls for practices that can sustain unresolved issues without prematurely resolving them.

Existential humanism thought also sheds light on this narrative movement by explaining the reason why crisis in the text cannot be easily explained. According to Frankl (1984) and May (1980), existential crisis occurs when people face loss, responsibility and mortality in the absence of stable meaning structures. Histories of violence and displacement, in the story by Shafak, enhance such confrontation as the established models of belonging and continuity are shaken. The text, however, does not find meaning in the individual interiority. Rather, it places meaning in the context of relations of care, memory and continued attention to what still lives despite harm. This focus portrays how Frankl believed that meaning is created through responsibility to other people and the world as opposed to abstraction or withdrawal.

The consistent appearance of the fig tree as an element in the story provides a contrast to the infallibility of human beings, by exemplifying the tenacity as gradual, established, and interpersonal. It does not overshadow the story as its voice is attentive, patient and persevering constantly, and it enforces the notion that survival is often achieved through silent persistence and not dramatic change. By using this narrative position, the text takes a diversion rather than focusing on heroic resolution and instead focuses on practices of care that occur over time.

The fig tree narrative voice is the key element of movement in the narration, as it takes the remembrance across generations and does not require a sense of closure. The textual memory is not like an unchanging storehouse but a living process that is constructed through repetition, silence and return. This role can be explained using the concept of lieux de memoire as proposed by Nora (1989), since a fig tree turns out to be a place where the memory is retained and restored rather than ended. The fig tree, in contrast to human narrators with their memory, can retain memory over time and not solve it, so the past and the present can stay in relation without collapsing on each other.

This openness in time can be considered ethically important due to its opposition to the idea that suffering has to be defeated in order to be relevant. As observed, the fig tree is not presented as a passive icon but as what shapes existence by offering points of crisis to continuity and not to an end. Crisis in the text reveals helplessness and, at the same time, demands cautiousness, tolerance, and nurturing. This interpretation can be compared to the focus of trauma theory that the experience of survival is a process and not a story of recovery (Wilkinson, 2017).

*The Island of Missing Trees* is thus based on the principles of rootedness, relational care and ecological belonging as an underpinning of healing. These healing forms are not guarantees of restoring wholeness, but they provide a means of living with the loss in a responsive and ethically involved manner. This reading seeks to add to the current discourse in the field of literature by locating memory and ecology in a sustained relationship, demonstrating that narrative has the capacity to envision the coexistence in the developed form of a responsibility, as opposed to a form of mastery. In the aftermath of historical and ecological loss, Shafak's text affirms literature's capacity to hold suffering without containment and to sustain forms of life oriented toward care rather than forgetting.

### **Research Gap and Contribution**

Although Elif Shafak's work has attracted increasing critical attention, discussion of *The Island of Missing Trees* has largely remained oriented toward questions of migration and identity, often treating these themes in relative isolation. Readings that address inherited suffering have tended to anchor their analyses in the political history of Cyprus and the dynamics of silence within familial and national narratives, thereby limiting attention to how such histories are lived, carried, and reshaped within the text itself.

Meanwhile, ecologically oriented interpretations have often dealt with the fig tree as a narrative unit rather than as a whole, focusing on the non-humanness of its point of view, and not relating it to the broader involvement of the text with memory, loss, and ethical obligation. Consequently, the patterns upon which ecological imagery, affective memory, and existential reflection educate each other in the story are not examined fully. This kind of tunnel vision can be seen in the comments on the metaphor of ashes to rebirth that is repeated throughout the text. Although this metaphor has been identified in terms of its symbolic power, it has rarely been interpreted as a consistent organising principle that distils the text in the perception of loss as well as continuation. It is important because it is not merely evocative, but it can provide a unity between the experiences of being damaged and the experience of renewal without downgrading one to the other. In isolation, the metaphor can be seen as ornamental instead of structural; it can be difficult to see how the text fits human suffering into the ecological processes of decay, endurance, and renewal. The current critical situation is therefore an indication of a compartmentalization of interpretation, where interdependent parts of the text are approached individually and not in relation to one another.

This study addresses the shortcomings by examining *The Island of Missing Trees*, an account that examines existential fragility, cultural memory, and ecological survival as interdependent factors. The focus is not on arranging these dimensions in proximity, but on how the text connects them through repeated metaphors, narrative voice, and temporal movement. The use of this approach in Shafak's narratives brings about ethical difficulties, making it difficult to understand both healing and recovery. This way, the text implies that the process of restoration is not a restoration back to sanity but a state of coexistence that is maintained through care, continuity, and thoughtfulness. This view explains why literary accounts can envisage types of living with loss that are ethically responsive and provides an image of survival not based on resolution but in connection.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To discuss how *The Island of Missing Trees* uses the metaphor of ashes to rebirth to signify existential crisis and human searching for meaning.
2. To explore the interconnection between cultural displacement, historical trauma, and ecological regeneration in the text.
3. To examine the way that the ecological image of the fig tree created by Shafak serves as a metaphor of the process of reconciliation and renewal.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the way *The Island of Missing Trees* uses the metaphor of ashes to rebirth to describe personal existential crises?
2. What are some of the crises of characters that are related to larger trends of cultural displacement and historical identity?
3. How do ecological metaphors and the fig tree in particular perpetuate regenerative and healing processes?

### **Literature Review**

The inability to narrate the experiences that cannot be told directly has long been stressed in literature discourses of trauma, which have taken place when these experiences are mediated by historical acts of violence and mass loss. The provocative explanation of trauma as an unclaimed experience introduced by Berger (1997) continues to be the focus of this discussion, as trauma is not described as an isolated experience, but it comes back, albeit too late, in the form of narrative gaps, repetition, and silence. This knowledge is important in the analysis of literature since it changes the focus on plot resolution to the formal and temporal frameworks in which loss is carried. Instead of pursuing narrative closure, trauma-oriented criticism has thus given priority to modes of narration that have the capacity to retain what is yet to be resolved. This has influenced the later interpretation of postcolonial and diasporic texts, in which histories of displacement tend not to be chronologically expressible and require other modes of narration.

In this wider critical framework, scholars have paid increased attention to the issue of intergenerational transmission of trauma instead of focusing on individual experience. The article by Kellermann on inherited suffering (2001) highlights the importance of silence and effect on how past violence still has an influence many years after the actual violence has taken place. Equally, Kirmayer et al. (2014) stress that historical trauma works based on cultural memory, patterns of relationships, and social settings instead of operating based on explicit recollection work. These attitudes can prove useful in terms of literary research due to the fact that they make it clear that characters can have emotional baggage that can be bigger than their own experiences. In the literature created by displacement, this generational relay may manifest itself by indecision or perplexity and emotional unrest instead of direct testimony. These understandings give us a way to read fiction that inscribes trauma indirectly, by feeling, by the contradiction between relationships.

These discussions have been further refined by the postcolonial theory in predicting how identity becomes unstable in exile circumstances and in the historical rupture. The way Hall (2015) explains cultural identity as a process, but not as an inheritance, is especially influential since it explains the ruptures of colonial pasts and migration. According to this opinion, identity is constructed, not created, through memory, loss, and negotiation. This is a particularly applicable view of the stories that cross borders and generations, as it elaborates why belonging seems temporary and so disjunctive. Literary works that address diaspora in this way often cannot be closed, as even identity is not fully resolved. This opposition corresponds to the continuity over resolution of the theory of trauma that requires the maintenance of ambiguity without failure to form coherence by the use of narrative forms.

In tandem with these developments, the study of memory has made valuable contributions with regard to mediating the association between the past and the present through literature. The concept of lieux de memoire by Nora (1989) emphasizes the importance of sites, objects and stories in the retrieval of memory in the case of disrupted lived tradition. This framework is relevant to literary criticism as it makes the focus of the literature more towards memory as practice than it is as recollection. In fiction, memory can be not just in the mind of characters, but in landscape, objects and in repetitive images. This kind of externalisation would enable the narratives to work with the collective histories without necessarily depending on the individual consciousness. In documents that are displaced and violated, this method is one of preserving memory that does not need control of the past.

More current work has shifted to ecological imagery as a way of expressing such types of continuity. The ecocritical readings have also maintained that non-human aspects of literature tend to act as witnesses to the human past, providing insights that surpass individual lifestyles. The arboreal presence, as discussed by O'Neill (2024) in *The Island of Missing Trees* emphasizes the fact that trees may be used as the anchors of the narratives, which bind time, place, and memory. Such thinking is important as it questions anthropocentric beliefs about telling stories and implies that the ecological forms can be involved in ethical contemplation. Such narratives open up space where endurance cannot be erased by the human being because it extends the memory.

The ecocritical reading of the text by Elgamal (2024) also highlights the part the fig tree plays in the process of carrying historical pain that Shafak takes part in. Placing the tree in circles of destruction and reproduction, Elgamal focuses on ecological imagination in the text. Nevertheless, ecocritical readings have tended to take the fig tree as a representation of non-human agency without attaching much importance to its ethical role, but instead to its narrative textuality. This emphasis, taken separately, would run the risk of disuniting the fig tree with the rest of the text in terms of its prolonged interaction with pain, memory and existential fragility. Consequently, eco-imagery can seem decorative instead of being structurally part of how the trauma is dealt with in the narrative.

Simultaneously, the debates of the work conducted by Shafak have often been focused on the topic of migration, cultural translation, and identity. The paper by Aydin (2024) discussing the interaction of Shafak with movement and the city space exemplifies the influence of migration on narrative voice and the theme of concern in her works. The importance of such readings is that *The Island of Missing Trees* is placed in the wider context of diasporic writing. That a focus on movement also has the potential to mask the stillness, rootedness and stammer of the text. Migration in the text is not merely a state of movement between places, but it is also a condition that develops memory and belonging across time. An ethical complexity of the text will be influenced by critical interpretations of the text without paying attention to these temporal dimensions. Existential thought provides one further way of interpreting crisis and meaning in the text. The idea that the meaning can be created out of responsibility and not abstraction, as expressed by Frankl (1984), can be a valuable contribution to the readings that consider crisis to be confined to personal psychology. Equally, the relationship-oriented nature of meaning in an uncertain situation is highlighted by the observations of May (1980) on human vulnerability. These concepts are echoed by the story of Shafak because the characters go

through loss not in introspection and neglect but in relationships, memory, and care. Existential viewpoints are important in this situation as they help explain how the crisis in the text does not result in a resolution but in a prolonged attentiveness. It is not a process of restoring meaning; it is a process of perseverance.

Literary studies, too have investigated the role of fiction as a stimulus to ethical thought as it involves a reader in a prolonged experience of suffering. The fact that literature is able to shape moral understanding is emphasised by the discussion of fiction as a simulation of social and emotional aspects by Mar and Oatley (2008). Especially important to this ability is the ability to ethically engage in stories of trauma, where judgment cannot be applied, and patience is required. This extension of the ethical invitation by a non-human narrator highlights Shafak, who asks the readers to pay attention to other perspectives beyond the human urgency. Such narrative techniques support the notion that care is something that takes time and that persistence often relies on some sort of attention that is not immediate.

Although these works have been diverse, there is a tendency to focus on *The Island of Missing Trees* in existing literature that is usually disjointed, discussing the issues of trauma, ecology, and identity as independent issues, but not linked to each other. Silence and inheritance have been highlighted by trauma studies, ecocriticism has been prospective of the non-human presence and postcolonial criticism has been in the displacement and identity formation. What is not clearly stated is the way in which these aspects integrate in the text's narrative structure. It is the ability of the fig tree to attach ecological continuity to human fragility, and it provides a narrative form that incurs a loss without resolving it. In the absence of such an integrated reading, the ethical stakes of the storytelling of Shafak may well be underestimated.

The present reading is thus placed in a critical space which is not divisive, as in this literature review. It addresses the demand of interpretations that are mindful of the way narratives bear suffering over time, by initiating the sustained relationship between trauma theory, existential reflection and the ecological thought. That is not the aim of such an approach, but instead explains why *The Island of Missing Trees* defies the reductionist accounts of the process of healing or recovery. By so doing, it confirms the ability of literature to envision ways of co-existence based on the caring, continuity, and responsibility, an ethical stance that is all the more urgently needed in the aftermath of historical and ecological loss.

### **Research Methodology**

This study uses qualitative textual analysis to look at how Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* (2021) embodies existential healing and ecological restoration via the primary metaphor of "ashes to rebirth." To grasp the symbolic framework of the narrative, character development, and ecological themes, the technique draws on an interdisciplinary approach incorporating existential-humanistic psychology, trauma theory, and ecocriticism.

This is mainly achieved through close reading, which allows for a thorough analysis of certain passages that emphasise existential crisis, cultural displacement, and intergenerational trauma. This work serves as its main source, with the selection of excerpts based on their symbolic density and emotional intensity, in addition to being relevant to both the narrative (and metaphorical) elements of the fig tree. It emphasizes the importance of moments of psychological rupture, silence and ecological transition.

The idea of logotherapy by Viktor Frankl (1962) provides a framework for the story's portrayal of meaning-making in the face of suffering, drawing on an existential-humanistic aspect. Frankl emphasizes the importance of the will in examining characters psychological responses to their emotional trauma and subsequent meaning during an existential crisis. The hierarchical model proposed by Abraham Maslow (1943) is a useful way to describe the shift from basic survival needs to self-actualization and moral duty. Rollo May's (1980) theories on relational engagement and existential courage offer more insight into how characters deal with loss and make moral judgments in the context of a sense of brokenness.

Through the integration of an existential foundation and trauma theory particularly, Kellermann (2001), Kirmayer et al. (2014), and Hirschberger (2018) examine the transmission of traumatic effects across

generations, using both memory and environmental metaphors to explore how they are transmitted. The fig tree is perceived as an ecological memory, which records the effects of trauma and regeneration across time and space. Ecocriticism informs the reading of the fig tree's symbolic and narrative function, particularly in how it mediates between human and non-human worlds, and how its seasonal cycle model processes of decay, resilience, and renewal.

The study has a thematic progression, tracking the development of the theme “ashes to rebirth” on three different levels, from the struggle for meaning within the aftermath of collapse, through the psychic effects of displacement and migration, and finally to the possibility of rebirth within the newly imaginary ecology. Such patterns appear within the narrative voice, through the spatial metaphor of the book, and within its symbolic systems. Still interpretative rather than empirical, the approach does not seek to extrapolate beyond the chosen text. Although based on theoretical strictness, the research acknowledges that its qualitative methodology prioritises depth of meaning over breadth of textual comparison. However, its interpretive synthesis offers a framework that may apply to future ecocritical and trauma-informed readings of contemporary postcolonial literature.

### **Analysis and Interpretation**

The narrative voices in *The Island of Missing Trees* intertwine human and non-human perspectives to reveal existential crises born of trauma, displacement, and the longing for regeneration. Each selected passage illustrates how Shafak merges personal psychology with cultural memory and ecological renewal, framing existence as a dialogue between silence and survival.

### **Ashes to Rebirth As a Form of Existential Crisis and Meaning**

The narrative frames devastation as the first ground of meaning and allows the image of ash to become the medium through which renewal is cultivated. When the fig tree recalls the burning of texts at the British Institute, the scene condenses cultural erasure into a single residue that must be tended:

**“The library ... the finest English library in the Middle East, was set on fire by protesting youths, and all those texts, and manuscripts made of our flesh where buried to ash” (Shafak, 2021, p. 73).**

The fig tree's witness transforms destruction into testimony, and in doing so marks ash not as a terminal state but as a material that asks for care. The image gathers private and public losses into a shared ethical task and sets the rhythm for the long work of remembrance. In this way, the text names a path from erasure to attention and keeps the possibility of rebirth inside the scene of ruin. Existential crisis appears with equal clarity in intimate spaces, where inherited grief surfaces before language can hold it. Ada's collapse shows the body carrying what speech cannot yet say:

**“Ada gripped her phone tight, shaking... There was nothing she or anyone could do, not even her father, she was all alone. She slumped into her bed... and started to cry” (Shafak, 2021, p. 83).**

This outburst is not a failure of self-control but the threshold between denial and acknowledgment. It interrupts the habit of avoidance that silence has rehearsed and opens a passage where pain can be named. The text consistently treats such breaks as beginnings rather than endings, since they convert paralysis into the first movement of truth-telling and allow the character to step toward responsibility for memory. The slow conversion of crisis into meaning is staged in ordinary speech, where counsel turns the present into a workable site of life. The quiet insistence that life is already underway invites a shift from flight to presence:

**“You're young, and the young are impatient... But let me tell you a secret: it already has... Going to another school won't make things different. So you'd better stay” (Shafak, 2021, p. 149).**

The advice does not romanticise suffering, and it does not deny hurt. It asks the listener to receive the day that

is at hand and to build steadiness inside it. When such speech is heard, ash ceases to be a sign of endings and becomes a sign of the ground where work can begin. The existential movement is simple and exact, a turn from postponement to attention, and the text aligns this turn with the ethics of care that binds persons to one another and to place. The same arc is clarified by the text's insight into uneven inheritance, which explains why the burden of sorrow lies heavier on some members of a family than on others. The fig tree's observation about the passage of affliction across generations makes the point with precision:

**“The path of an inherited trauma is random... Sometimes family trauma skips a generation altogether and redoubles its hold on the following one. You might encounter grandchildren who silently shoulder the hurts and sufferings of their grandparents” (Shafak, 2021, p. 111).**

The recognition of uneven weight does not excuse withdrawal, and it does not naturalize despair. It clarifies the task, since those who carry the larger portion of pain must be met with steadier forms of attention and time. Through these scenes, the text teaches that ash gathers where histories brush against lives and that meaningful response requires patience, witness, and a willingness to remain.

### **Existential Crisis, Cultural Displacement, and Historical Identity**

The story translates displacement into a grammar of roots, soil, and climate and presents identity as the work of living in a transplanted life. The fig tree names the fracture without ornament:

**“Who I was in Cyprus and who I would become in England. The only difference was that I was no longer a happy fig” (Shafak, 2021, p. 48).**

The statement sets belonging and mood on the same plane as weather and soil, so that the loss of ease is not only psychological but environmental. The line teaches that identity can survive crossing and still lose ease in the process, which is why recovery in the text is not a simple return but a learned form of dwelling in altered conditions. The narrative turns this awareness into discipline, since one must learn again how to be anchored when the native climate has been exchanged for another.

Transplanting saves a life and forces it to relearn the world. The text states the strain with exact clarity: **“The fig tree experienced a drastic climate change when Kostas moved it from Cyprus to England” (Shafak, 2021, p. 78).** The text points out that migration impacts attachment and daily routines, not only the environment. Similar to how people adjust emotionally to survive relocation, the fig tree adapts its growth. This comparison is key because it places adaptation at the core of identity, showing that belonging comes from adapting, not just arriving. The scene supports perseverance, accepting diversity rather than insisting on perfect integration into a new place. Thus, it reveals how care practices change under stress, allowing life to continue by accepting the need for endurance.

The text also looks at the social pressures of displacement, like feeling watched and judged. Worry about acceptance becomes part of daily life, shaping how people act in public and view their own visibility. A brief confession gathers this tension into a single moment of utterance, allowing the strain of border crossing to appear not as spectacle but as lived unease: **“I passed through customs with my heart in my mouth.”** The sentence matters because it binds fear, surveillance, and self-perception together, revealing how displacement is experienced as a constant negotiation with scrutiny rather than a single moment of transition: **“I passed through customs with my heart in my mouth. Because they always stop persons like me, Don't they?” (Shafak, 2021, p. 79).** The sentence binds space, surveillance, and self to show how mobility unsettles the foundations of esteem and belonging. In this register, existential crisis is the inner figure of a public condition, and the text links the two by letting the body register the weight that history places upon it; the text refuses to sentimentalize this weight. It names the pressure and then shows characters building ties, shaping routines, and keeping faith with memory until a workable identity holds. In this way, displacement becomes the school in which the characters learn patience with themselves and with others, and the tree's survival becomes the image of a self that remembers its origins while learning its new climate.

## Ecological Metaphors that Sustain Regeneration

The text presents the fig tree as a living architecture for communal life, so that regeneration is staged as a practice carried out under its shade. The tree names its function without exaggeration when it speaks of those who gather beneath it:

**“Both Arabs and Jews make their wedding preparations around us, hoping for marriages sturdy enough to weather any storms which may lie ahead” (Shafak, 2021, p. 54).**

Here in this extract, there is a space where difference is not the cause of hostility, but in the practices that are common and are developed over time. Here commitment, though, is more of the time than precision, and the understanding that it is endurance and not harmony that keeps community alive. However, the ceremony is more moderate in its hopes, which embraces the chance of suffering instead of the burden of history. This is significant since it is not abstract, but it has a physical location under that tree, where one can collect and retain continuity.

The reconstruction of social bonds, according to the story, is not done as a result of historical destruction but as a result of repetitive acts in the presence of a witness who has already lost interest. This is more accurate. Although time has passed, the fig tree makes these actions significant; the promises are given, reconciliations are made, and reckonings may be made without any illusion. The canopy integrates different human experiences, making the community a part of the healing process as opposed to seclusion. During these meetings, the story changes intentionally between promises and aggression, showing that renewal requires the recognition and acceptance of discontinuity as well as the establishment of contact.

**“Under our canopy, sacrificial animals are slaughtered, vows taken, rings exchanged, and blood feuds settled... it is not for no reason that they call us holy trees, wishing trees... soul-stealing trees” (Shafak, 2021, p. 57).**

The range is deliberate, and it announces that regeneration concerns the full breadth of life, from celebration to reconciliation. The language admits fear and reverence in one breath and shows why the tree functions as a moral archive. It keeps the memory of what people promise, it hosts the effort to end cycles of violence, and it draws the community into forms of attention that last. The passage, therefore, states healing in a practice of gathering and reminds the reader that peace is not a mood but a set of acts that can be repeated until they hold. The ecological logic of renewal is stated with particular clarity when the tree explains how life under stress produces new capacities that can be inherited. The teaching is concise and concrete:

**“A tree knows that life is all about self learning. Under stress, we make new combinations of DNA, new genetic variations. Not only stressed plants but also their offspring do this” (Shafak, 2021, p. 84).**

The image **acknowledges** suffering without romanticizing it, and it shows how change is passed on as an aptitude for survival. The text uses this biology to think about families and cultures, and it insists that renewal is the fruit of a patient practice of adaptation rather than a sudden return to what was. The same lesson is repeated in a different key when the narrator speaks of memory that persists across generations of trees, a “stored memory” that keeps the past present and helps the young endure what comes. **“Young trees have some kind of ‘stored memory’, like they know about the traumas their ancestors have gone through” (Shafak, 2021, p. 89).** These images gather time into the work of care and allow characters to imagine their lives as part of longer cycles of damage and repair.

Moreover, regeneration in the text also takes the form of attentive companionship between human beings and the non-human witness that shelters them. Defne’s quiet recognition of the tree’s presence reframes isolation as shared vigilance:

**“The fig tree then, buried all alone in the garden... tuned into her every movement, listening to every creak in the house, waiting, just like her, waiting without knowing for what” (Shafak, 2021, p. 81).**

Shafak's portrayal of the fig tree highlights the active involvement of the text's natural components. This portrayal questions the idea that the natural world is a passive background and instead shows an ecology of care wherein the environment helps to preserve memories. Friendship is not a remedy for sadness; rather, it creates circumstances under which mourning may be borne without total collapse and under which reconciliation and peace efforts may be carried out. The text's ultimate depiction of rebirth is neither immediate nor theoretical; it develops from consistent human activities of gathering, planting, honest speaking, and tending to what survives after damage. Within this framework, the fig tree serves as a central anchor, providing reconnections that lead to the gradual conversion of ashes into soil and the restoration of meaningful relationships among humans.

## Conclusion

In *The Island of Missing Trees*, the cycles of ashes and regeneration entwine to illustrate that sorrow and healing remain interwound. This is because the story recognizes sorrow but also means that sorrow cannot be the finale. But instead, regeneration is possible through hard work and patience, and the ashes represent the destruction that has happened. Also, instead of suppressing pain and trauma by putting it in a closet, the lessons from this novel position pain in a collective memory that requires moral response.

The text reveals that the personal experience of suffering is always intertwined with the broader narratives of displacement and split belonging. This implies that loss cannot be grasped without considering its history and culture. The fig tree, as a non-human witness, also exhibits the effects of displacement along with the characters, indicating that displacement alters the inner world and our relationship with land, memory, and time. Through caring, performing rituals, and being patient, the characters learn to adjust to new environments while remaining connected to what they have lost. Belonging is not perceived as a birth right or a return to the past but as a growth that emerges from our constant engagement with memory and place.

By means of environmental imagery, the writing expands its moral case and grounds renewal in natural cycles that recognize damage as well as continuation. The quiescent, flowering, and fruiting phases of the fig tree point to a paradigm whereby recovery requires planning, perseverance, and teamwork. These cyclical trends help to put replenishment in time, linking care with patience rather than with immediacy. The book advances a morality whereby responsibility goes beyond human contacts and calls for constant care to living surroundings by fusing the natural world into the moral arguments of the narrative. Here, care becomes a social as well as an ecological one.

Taken together, *The Island of Missing Trees* offers a moral framework that is fitting for an imperfect world, one that relies on witnessing, continuity, and mutual care. The moral framework of this novel is not abstract; it is derived from the simplest acts of caring, remembering, and witnessing what is left. In this tale, ashes do not represent an end but the foundation of a gradual process of renewal. Renewal is not a return to a state of perfection but a willingness to live with loss in a manner that sustains the connections rather than dissolving them. In this way, the role of literature in our ethical thinking is revealed in Shafak's oeuvre, one that offers not comfort but a hope grounded in patience, responsibility, and endless care.

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