

Article

Ecocritical Concerns in the Selected Poems of Mahmoud Darwish and Naomi Shihab Nye

Amna Shamim

Department of English Language and Literature, College of Arts and Letters, University of Bisha, Bisha P.O. Box 61922, Saudi Arabia; amshmim@ub.edu.sa

Abstract: Ecocriticism is an advancing field in literature that has opened up avenues in reading world literature from a whole new perspective. This paper seeks to flesh out ecocritical concerns in the selected poems of Mahmoud Darwish and Naomi Shihab Nye by using selected concepts of the theory of ecocriticism given by Greg Garrard: pastoral, wilderness, and the sublime. An analysis of the poetry by the selected writers, sharing their roots from the Arab world, reveals their agenda of using nature as a trope in the form of resistance to colonialism. The writers give a glimpse of the people of their homeland and their culture imbued in nature.

Keywords: ecocriticism; nature poetry; pastoral; wilderness; sublime; Mahmoud Darwish; Naomi Shihab Nye; Greg Garrard

1. Introduction

Ecocriticism came to the forefront of literary studies by the end of the 20th century. This does not mean that there was no humdrum of ecocriticism before that. Writers since ages, knowingly or unknowingly, directly or indirectly, intensely or just through a passing thought, have been mentioning and depicting their environmental surroundings, but the traces of the theory of ecocriticism could be seen beginning from William Rueckert's essay published in 1978 entitled "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism". The term was later revived in 1989 by Cheryll Glotfelty, a renowned scholar of ecocriticism now, at the Western Literature Association meeting. In the year 1996, Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm edited the book *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* highlighting the relevance of this field; the theory has grown ever since. The need for the study of ecocriticism arose with the depletion of natural surroundings that started affecting the normal living conditions of human beings due to our own activities, according to Raymond Williams (Malay 2014). It is about the interconnectedness of the relationship of humans with their surroundings. In the words of Friedrich Schelling, there is a "profound kinship between the human spirit and nature" (Taylor 2005, p. 23). "Environmental literature seeks to tell stories in and about nature, to weave a complex cloth from the individual threads that represent the paths of men and women, flora and fauna, time and temperature, as they intersect and inscribe a space that resonates with their multivocal presence" (Bealer 2012). Tajane enunciates, "ecocriticism provides a vital lens for interpreting literature in the context of pressing environmental challenges" (Tajane et al. 2024, p. 2162).

Garrard (2014) states that human beings must have a sense of humaneness and should develop a cordial relationship with the wild. He further finds out that humans have done indelible harm to the environment, which the scholars of ecocriticism are trying to make people realize. "The interrelationship between human beings and nature, which exists in every society, is clearly stated and introduced in the study of ecocriticism" (Ismail 2024, p. 142). Because of human intervention in the environment, ecocriticism was a much needed theory that saw its development in the previous decades. "Garrard's focus is on developments within British and North American ecocriticism, but his approach, which is



Citation: Shamim, Amna. 2024. Ecocritical Concerns in the Selected Poems of Mahmoud Darwish and Naomi Shihab Nye. *Humanities* 13: 135. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h13050135>

Received: 5 August 2024

Revised: 8 October 2024

Accepted: 11 October 2024

Published: 16 October 2024



Copyright: © 2024 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

rhetorical or tropological, clearly has relevance to ecocriticism elsewhere as well" (Rigby 2021). Hence, his theory of ecocriticism can be applied to the literature belonging to any country. Garrard revised the content of his book *Ecocriticism* to add chapters on Earth and Indigeneity. This revised version of the book "addresses the issues of climate change and justice throughout" (Garrard 2023).

In the words of Soper and Bradley (2013), "ecocriticism has been hailed as one of the most timely and provocative developments in literary and cultural studies in recent decades" (p. xiii). Heise (2006) observes, "ecocriticism has imposed itself as convenient shorthand for what some critics prefer to call environmental criticism, literary-environmental studies, literary ecology, literary environmentalism, [or] green cultural studies" (p. 506), which was further agreed upon by Lawrence Buell in *Ecocriticism: Some Emerging Trends*, who considers using ecocriticism as "the usual lumping term for convenience" (p. 88). Ecocriticism is a trend that has dominated humanity in recent decades. This trend has made way for the existing theories and concepts to expand their horizons. Ecocriticism has "branched out from literary ecocriticism to other disciplines, media, art forms, and knowledge cultures that are being assembled under the new epistemic umbrella of the environmental humanities" (Zapf 2016, p. 1).

The already established theories such as postcolonialism, posthumanism, and ecofeminism, like other theories, see a burgeoning alliance with ecocriticism. The theory of postcolonial ecocriticism emerged with the joint effort of the two most influential postcolonial theorists—Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffins. Ecocriticism's movement from postcolonial ecocriticism to posthuman ecocriticism has succeeded in merging the base root of human existence and the future of human life. Posthuman ecocriticism, in the words of Serpil Oppermann, "expands and enhances material ecocritical visions and includes such material agencies as biophotons, nanoelements, and intelligent machines" (Oppermann 2016, p. 23).

Amidst the human, non-human, and posthuman societal structures, exists a feminist theory that has a close connection with the environment. Sharon Doubiago explains ecofeminism as "women have always thought like mountains, to allude to Aldo Leopold's paradigm for ecological thinking. (There's nothing like the experience of one's belly growing into a mountain to teach you this.)" (Doubiago 1989, pp. 41–42). Ecocritical discourse analysis is yet another theory that focuses on how language and discourse impact our understanding of environmental issues.

The environment finds a significant place in the poems of both Darwish and Nye. On analyzing their works from the perspective of nature, a strong environmental consciousness is revealed through the manner of depiction of their natural surroundings, which can be said to be related to their roots. Mahmoud Darwish was born in 1941 in Al-Birwa village in Mandatory Palestine and died in 2008 in Houston, Texas, USA. At the age of six, he suffered the pangs of dislocation when the Israeli army destroyed his village and other such 416 villages. He fled with his family to Lebanon, only to return a year later. Munir Akash and Carolyn Forché write about the city, "In 2001, Israeli bulldozers began paving a new road through the graves, unearthing human remains throughout the site" (Darwish 2003, p. xvi). Such instances left an indelible mark on him that he penned in his poems. He continued studying and writing poetry, through which he became "the voice of the fragmented souls" of Palestine (Darwish 2003, p. xvii). Darwish wrote volumes of poetry, the lyrics of which were later used by singers from different parts of the world. He is considered the national poet of Palestine due to his contributive literature depicting a native's anguish towards dispossession, dislocation, and the feeling of non-belongingness.

The poetry of Naomi Shihab Nye also uses nature as a trope. She is a Palestinian-American poet who was born on 12 March 1952 in the United States to an Arab father and an American mother. She graduated from Trinity University in 1974. Her published works include young-adult fiction, novels, picture books, and poetry collections. She received numerous prizes and awards for her works, including NSK Neustadt Prize for Children's Literature, Pushcart prizes, etc. Some of her poetry collections are *Different ways to pray*,

Yellow glove, Red suitcase, 19 Varieties of gazelle: poems of the Middle East, and Tender spot: selected poems. At the age of fourteen, she moved to the city of Jerusalem along with her parents to take care of her ailing paternal grandmother. But soon after, they moved to San Antonio, Texas to escape the escalating tensions in the country. Her brief encounter with the country of Palestine influenced a couple of her poems.

This paper is an analytical study of the poems of both the selected writers, which looks into how the two poets have depicted the impact of nature from the perspective of the concepts of Garrard's the pastoral, the wilderness, and the sublime. It seeks to analyze the following: (1) What are the differences in the manner of projecting nature, in the poems of the two selected poets, due to the differences in the experiences of their homeland? (2) What kind of help/support are the poets looking for in their surroundings? (3) Are the authors making a comparison between the impact of natural surroundings and modern constructions on the psyche of the natives? (4) Are the poets depicting the pastoral, the wilderness, or the sublime with reference to their homeland to make readers feel the estrangement that they are feeling?

The purpose of selecting these two poets for study is to see the way nature has emerged as an important trope among modern Arab poets. The works of these two seminal poets have not been taken up as a comparative study by previous researchers in the field of ecocriticism.

2. Literature Review

Poetry had been the base for all early theories, but ecocriticism focused on prose (Gerhardt 2016) and did not pay much attention to poetry until 2002, when J. Scott Bryson edited the book *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction*. After that, diverse studies on the combination of environment and poetry started coming to the forefront. These works were Jonathan Bate's *The Song of the Earth*, published in 2000. David Gilcrest's *Greening the Lyre: Environmental Poetics and Ethics*, published in 2002; *Earth Shattering Ecopoems* (2007) by Neil Astley; *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry* (2009) edited by Camille T. Dungy, which is the first anthology by African American poets to have incorporated nature in their writings; *Ecopoetics: The Language of Nature, the Nature of Language* (2012) by Scott Knickerbocker; *Outcrop: Radical Australian Poetry* (2013) edited by Jeremy Badius and Corey Wakeling; *Ecopoetic Place-Making: Nature and Mobility in Contemporary American Poetry* (2023) by Judith Rauscher; and *Ecopoetry Anthology: Volume II* (2023) edited by Kendall Dunkelberg, published by Trinity University Press.

The origin of Arabic poetry dates back to even before the pre-Islamic period—to the 1st century (Margoliouth 1925). The Arab poets then drew "on forms foreign to their vernacular for metrical purposes" (Al-Jallad 2020, p. 32) to express emotions, ridicule, motivate, pass on wisdom, record events, flirt, and praise (Zwettler 1978; Abandah et al. 2022). Arab poets used images of nature in their poems much before it gained a significant spot in western poetry. In the words of Aburqayeq, "the poetry of nature grew up dramatically, becoming a distinct genre in the Andalusian poetry" (Aburqayeq 2020, p. 54). Andalusian poetry was the poetry majorly written in Arabic in the Muslim-ruled Iberian Peninsula, which began in 711 AD. Grunebaum finds Arabic poetry before 600 AD devoid of sentiments. He refers to the pre-Islamic poetry in Arabic when he says so. In the words of Salma Jayyusi, the pre-Islamic poet was "deeply involved with the fauna and flora of the desert world around him, but . . . remained a separate entity, existing either in dialogue with nature or in opposition to it" (Jayyusi and Manuela 1992, p. 367). Grunebaum also compared Arab poetry to western poetry and opined that "the poesy of nature does not, in the realm of Arab literature, hold the importance it attained in the literatures of the west" (von Grunebaum 1945, p. 137). Grunebaum's claim about sentiments on nature in Arabic poetry stands true but his comparison between the use and importance of nature in Arabic poetry and western poetry is inadmissible because nature was a part of Arabic poetry much before it gained momentum in the western literature. The western movement towards nature started in the eighteenth century and culminated in the poetry of the nineteenth century

poets (Williams 1930). Early Arab geographers, philosophers, and poets had material for “environmental exegesis”, but they lacked “nature writing” that would focus specifically on the environment and inspire people towards conserving it (Elmusa 2013, p. 12). The reason for such approach in Andalusian poetry, rich in nature imagery, was because it was written purely for “aesthetic purposes” (Jayyusi and Manuela 1992, p. 375). Neil Evernden (1996) asserts that “environmentalism without aesthetics is merely regional planning” (p. 103).

In modern times, the interest of ecocritics in various disciplines like anthropology, history, journalism, and philosophy led them to collaborate with scholars from these disciplines who were environmentally sensitive (Heise 2013). These related disciplines developed ecocriticism’s horizons by providing it with substantial theories of planetarity that developed the concept of Anthropocene (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000; Chakrabarty 2009; Heise 2013, pp. 641–42), i.e., humans impacting the geological activities on this planet. Modern poets display their sensitivity towards the environment and are becoming adept at displaying its importance through attaching it with the necessary day-to-day activities of humans, which are not possible without a healthy environment.

Mahmoud Darwish was one such poet who displayed the idea that nature is present around them, at times to console them and at other times, only as a witness to the human suffering, even during the times when humans are suffering the harshest of times.

Mahmoud Darwish “is regarded as the father of the Arab resistance poetry” (Yahya et al. 2012, p. 77); he died in 2008. The term “literature of resistance” or *adab al-muqawamah* was coined by Ghassan Kanafani, a political activist and author. Kanafani in his 1987 book *Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948–1966* proclaimed that no literature will be counted as resistance literature unless the writer has directly been a part of the movement inside Palestine; writers in exile are not counted as resistant poets (Yahya et al. 2012, p. 77). Hence, according to this definition, Nye does not fall under the category of a resistant poet.

The University of Arizona gives Naomi Shihab Nye’s biographical details mentioning that she “describes herself as a wandering poet” (Poetry Center 2024). Most of her works are the result of her childhood memories and her extensive travelling. She is 72 years old and is still contributing greatly to literature with her latest novel *The Turtle of Michigan* being published in 2022. The element of nature can be seen in majority of her works.

The poetry of both writers includes the dynamics of the relationship of humans and nature.

3. Materials and Methods

The theory of ecocriticism started by the end of 19th century. It was later disseminated by critics like Greg Garrard, whose book *Ecocriticism* (2004) explicates concepts of pollution, positions, pastoral, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, and animals. The concepts used in this research to analyze the selected poems of Darwish and Nye are pastoral and wilderness (and a subcategory—sublime) due to the inexhaustive use of nature in the selected poems of both the poets.

The concept of “pastoral” sees two major divisions. First is Terry Gifford’s “three kinds of pastoral” (Gifford 1999, p. 2). Garrard categorizes Gifford’s pastoral in the following manner: (a) Classical pastoral is a retreat from the city to the countryside. Raymond Williams considers classical pastoral as being always characterized by nostalgia. Later, he and Leo Marx “identify the progressive potential” that “pastoral, then, need not always be nostalgic, but may be utopian and proleptic” (Garrard 2004, p. 37). (b) Romantic pastoral is characterized by the contrast between country and city life. (c) Gifford’s third kind of pastoral idealizes rural life that obscures the realities of hardship and labor. The second division deals with “pastoral ecology”, which promotes the harmony of nations that is still prevalent in environmental discourse. Frederick Clements, a US ecologist, “firmly believed in nature’s original and intrinsic identity” (Coates 1998, p. 143). This idea was rebutted by Daniel Botkin who rejected Clements’ theory arguing that “nature undisturbed is not constant in form, structure, or proportion, but changes at every scale of time and space” (Botkin 1992, p. 62).

The concept of “wilderness” rests on the Judaeo-Christian culture and history combining the opposites of trial/danger to redemption/freedom/purity without either of them being privileged over the other. Wilderness refers to the state of nature that is undisturbed by civilization or cultivation. The term “wilderness” was derived from the Anglo-Saxon word “wilddeoren”, which refers to beasts that exist beyond the boundaries of civilization. This concept also deals with the idea that Neolithic farmers believe the fruits they succeed in attaining from nature are a result of their struggle against nature instead of a form of nature’s blessings. Descartes was of the view that when humans learn the action of fire, water, and the heavenly bodies, they are likely to become “masters and possessors of nature” (Descartes 1998, p. 35); though this view has been attacked by ecocritics as reductionist. With the advancement of scientific forestry, the German word *Forstgeometer* (forest geometer) came into existence, reducing the trees in wilderness to mere calculable resources for which Heidegger used the term “bestand” or “standing timber”. The idea of old world wilderness, new world wilderness, and the sublime have been meticulously studied to apply in the selected poems.

The third concept that Garrard mentions under the chapter Wilderness in his book is the concept of the sublime, which is a feeling of terror or excitement and exhilaration that one feels before a powerful and awe-inspiring mountain, waterfall, storm, etc.

These three concepts will be used to analyze the selected poems of Darwish and Nye. The poems picked up from the collections of Mahmoud Darwish for this current study are “A Lover From Palestine”, “Passport”, “Victim#18”, “Identity Card”, and “The Everlasting Indian Fig”. The poems picked up from the collections of Naomi Shihab Nye are “A Palestinian Might Say”, “My Father and the Fig Tree”, “Blood”, “and “Jerusalem”. To make a reasonable comparison between the works of the two poets, Nye’s poems that directly or indirectly address the Palestinian state, have been selected.

4. Discussion

4.1. The Pastoral

Nature is the predominant force in the poetry of both Mahmoud Darwish and Naomi Shihab Nye. On analyzing the selected poems of both the poets, it has been observed that different forms of pastoral can be applied to their works, but the imagery of nature in the works of both the poets is not seen responding to human emotions. Darwish’s poem “Victim#18” deals with the impact of human violence on nature wherein the green olive grove turned into a red pool “the blood of fifty victims/Has turned it into a red pool”. The grove that was symbolic of life gets covered with human blood. This heinous incident affected even the sky, which was like “a blue forest” earlier. Both the colors green and blue depict serenity. The poem makes a scathing remark on the occupants trying to govern them and control their lives by stopping their truck and turning them east. This, too, denotes that nature is a muted spectator watching what’s happening, being directly impacted every now and then. This feature is also present in Nye’s poem “Jerusalem”, where she shares an anecdote of her father getting hit by a stone on his head as a child. The pears kept in his mother’s doorway “are not crying” as they are not emotionally connected to him. The pears are not displaying any human emotion regarding the troubled state of her father.

The Classical Pastoral can be evidently seen in the poem “Blood” by Naomi Shihab Nye. This poem is about the qualities of a “true Arab”. The poet’s father discloses his identity (being an Arab) to her and then they discuss the heart-wrenching news of a Palestinian child. The headlines of the news “clot in my blood”, after which she retreats from the city to the countryside to find solace amidst the grazing sheep and cows as well as to plead with the air to provide her comfort. She finds a contrastive atmosphere between the countryside and the city, with its suffocating air, to which she states “Who calls anyone civilized?/Where can the crying heart graze?/What does a true Arab do now?”

Some of the selected poems of both the writers display the imagery of Romantic Pastoral, too. The selected poems have images of the contrast between the city life and the countryside, which is represented more in the poems of Darwish than Nye. In “My

Father and the Fig Tree”, the speaker connects her father’s past and his Palestinian heritage passed on to his daughter, with a fig tree that is seen by the speaker’s father in Dallas, Texas (Bujupaj 2015, p. 15). The poet’s father is seemingly obsessed with the fruit ‘fig’, which is a sign of knowledge and wisdom, as it has been mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, the book of Genesis, that Adam and Eve used the leaves of fig tree to sew garments for themselves (Bible n.d.) when they realized that they needed to cover themselves after eating from the prohibited tree. His love for figs makes him nostalgic and he wishes to consume “the largest, fattest, /sweetest fig”.

The poem “My Father and the Fig Tree” makes a passing contrast between the countryside and the city through the story of Joha, who “tied his camel to a fig tree and went to sleep. /Or, later when they caught and arrested him, /his pockets were full of figs”. Joha is a Jewish trickster who “on the one hand, is innocent and stupid; on the other, a trickster” (Koen-Sarano 2003). He was travelling in the countryside with his camel as a means of transport. Nature seemed to give him comfort, whereas the people with their civilized rules created problems for him. Joha, the trickster, appears to be an innocent passerby who is later caught with figs stuffed in his pockets, i.e., he deceived the people and took away their knowledge and wisdom, which is referred to by the figs and the fig tree. The same admiration for figs is seen by her father in the city. He does not seem to be interested in “cherry trees. . . lima beans, zucchini, parsley, beets” but would look for a fig tree everywhere. The poem closes with the father’s joy knowing no bounds when he finally succeeds in finding a fig tree in Dallas, Texas in the new yard where he moves to settle. With this, he becomes nostalgic about his past, and finds a strong connection to his roots through the fig tree in this new country. Before this, he was feeling a sense of estrangement.

Mahmoud Darwish’s three out of the four selected poems make vivid use of Romantic Pastoral. In the poem “A Lover From Palestine”, the “ever-verdant orange grove” poses a serene imagery of countryside but it is instantly contrasted with the image of man-made prison and port that are majorly seen in cities. A similar contrast is seen in the poem “Passport” where “wheat fields” are contrasted with “prisons”, “tombstones”, and “boundaries”. The fourth stanza of the poem “A Lover From Palestine” begins with “briar-covered mountains” and “shepherdess without sheep”, which is contrasted with “the doors and windows, the cement and stones”. On comparing the imagery of nature and human construction, the poem gives a glimpse of the inhabitants from the times nature was in its pristine form until the modern times. Darwish turns to nature as well as the constructions by humans on his land as a form of shelter in whose embrace he finds relief from the rough world. This can be evidently seen in the line “That once, behind the doors, there were two of us” (ALP); where once he and his homeland found shelter from the outside world. The poems of both Darwish and Nye project nature in its original and pristine state, considering it as a caregiver that consoles their souls.

Frederick Clement’s idea of Pastoral Ecology is nature’s “original and intrinsic identity” (Garrard 2004, p. 57) can be distinctly seen in the poem “A Palestinian Might Say” by Nye where she projects the imagery of a “tree in bloom” that is undisturbed by human forces from either side. The people are seen fighting their battles but nature keeps on looking at them without taking sides and gives shelter and access to its resources to both the sides. Such images are reflected in the poem “A Lover From Palestine” through the following images: “sylvan arbours”, “virgin garden”, “a palm tree in the mind. . . Its braids uncut”, and “a panel of almond wood”. Darwish directly and Nye indirectly can be seen seeking warmth and solace in the embrace of nature, which was then untouched by war and human interference.

4.2. The Wilderness

On applying the concepts of old world wilderness in Darwish and Nye’s poems, it has been found that all the poems of Darwish make references to wilderness but there is hardly any of it discussed by Nye in her poems. Out of the four selected poems of Nye, only two give a passing reference to wilderness whereas all the four poems of Darwish deal with it.

In the poems, “A Palestinian Might Say” Nye depicts the natives in their own country as unwanted and ‘insulted’, and in “My Father and the Fig Tree”, she deals with the nostalgia her father feels for his homeland, which he displays through his love for ‘fig tree’ in the second poem. Both these poems talk about gardens, which are a miniature form of farming done by the “Neolithic farmer [as] a ‘fall’ from the primal ecological grace” (Garrard 2004, p. 60). In “My Father and the Fig Tree”, poet’s father is happy at the sight of a fig tree and sings a song while “plucking his fruits like ripe tokens,/emblems, assurance” depicting his possession for that tree as in Descartes’ view people become “like masters and possessors of nature” (Merrill 2008, p. 91). This act reflects the father’s attachment to all the wild as well as the tamed natural habitat of Palestine with which he associates himself.

In the poems of Darwish, the concept of old world wilderness is evidently seen. His poems “A Lover From Palestine” (ALP) and “Victim#18” have instances of grove and garden tilled by humans. The “ever-verdant orange grove”, “my garden” (ALP) and “olive grove” (Victim#18) gives us a glimpse of human interaction with nature, which shows his possessive attitude towards it and displays it as a matter of attaining fruits through constant struggle against nature. He seems to love “oranges and hate the port” in “A Lover From Palestine” because oranges are a result of humans’ struggle and success with nature whereas port is not giving any natural fruit to humans even after putting in lots of labor. In the same poem the poet says that “our songs/Keep alive the fertile soil when we plant them” insisting that the relevance of human interference in nature makes it alive. Similarly saying “my garden” is in sync with Descartes’ view of masters and possessors of nature.

Darwish’s poems are also symbolic of the Judaeo-Christian concept of wilderness referring to both trial and danger as well as freedom, redemption, and purity. The poem “A Lover From Palestine” talks about Palestine as a shepherdess who does not have sheep and is pursued among the ruins in the “briar-covered mountains”. This imagery of wilderness is symbolic of danger lurking ahead. This danger that Darwish is talking about deals with a wilderness that is untamed and is symbolic of the “Palaeolithic hunter-gatherer” ideology (Garrard 2004, p. 60), the nomadic, hunter-gatherer lifestyle where people did not distort nature to suit their needs. On the contrary, in the same poem, Darwish makes a passing reference to Palestine as “the beauty of the earth of children and of Arabian jasmine”. This signifies that humans tamed nature in the form of planting flowers to beautify their lives as well as their lands. He makes a similar reference in Victim#18—“and bring you jasmine”. Here, the speaker in the poem is talking to his beloved whom he has promised to meet, but the circumstances on the way are horrific because of which he cannot fulfil his promise and eventually lies dead with other fifty people who have been murdered in the olive grove. This idea of wilderness is the binary opposition of the Judaeo-Christian concept of the combination of positive with negative. The flower “jasmine” symbolizes purity in form and intense, sweet, and warmth in smell. In both the poems, “jasmine” signifies purity of human souls, which has been made apparent in the first poem with the use of the imagery of children who are innocent and pure.

The poem “The Everlasting Indian Fig” uses similar positive imagery but attaches the idea of freedom to it. The poem is about a father taking his son away to a far off place to escape the tumultuous situation in his native place. The poem refers to “plains”, “ground”, “mountain”, and “hill of oaks”, which needs to be passed by or climbed to attain freedom and to secure oneself. The father in the poem is telling his son that they both need to climb a mountain in the north to escape the tumultuous situation of the place, but he must not be sad as it is only temporary and they’ll be back once the soldiers leave for their homes. The poem “We Journey Towards a Home” by Darwish also “makes a reference to chestnut trees, mountains, seas, and sun, stating that trees, mountains, water, have their own glory but their glory cannot give solace to a parched soul, which is enduring innumerable hardships” (Shamim 2024, p. 93). The next poem, “Passport” mentions trees and valleys and advises the readers not to reduce them to being calculated or just being considered “bestand” in Heidegger’s metaphor. The scientific forestry extended to *Forstgeometer*, meaning that nature is being considered a mere resource and calculated to which Darwish’s advise can

be considered when he proclaims “Don’t ask the trees for their names/Don’t ask the valleys who their mother is” (“Passport”). “The Everlasting Indian Fig” ends with the depiction of wilderness overtaking the desolated fortresses of the crusaders, which are “eaten by April’s grasses”. This wilderness of the land is giving them goals of defiance. They must remain steadfast because the father believes that as one day their situation will change, they will return to their land and will find it in its original form.

Garrard uses ‘sublime’ as a subcategory in the chapter *Wilderness*, but the sublime holds a significant spot in the study of nature and ecology. The concept of the sublime dates back to the treatise “On the Sublime” written by Longinus in the 1st century CE ([Encyclopaedia Britannica 2014](#)) who considered powerful thoughts and strong emotions as the sources of sublime power ([Flynn 2022](#)). For Longinus, the sublime meant anything that is great and elevated ([Doran 2015](#), p. 41). Thomas Burnet came up with another concept on the sublime. He stated in *Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1684) that God sent floods due to which “a general destruction and devastation was brought upon the Earth” (p. 28). Later, the waters retired into their channels and caves within the Earth “and the Mountains and Fields began to appear” ([Burnet 1691](#), p. 29). Burnet’s sublime was more of an “apocalyptic terror”, which was found appealing by Edmund Burke ([Garrard 2004](#), p. 63). Burke’s idea of the sublime rests on the view that “anything horrible or terrible is sublime” ([Mahmood 2021](#), p. 76). He states that “the passion caused by the great and sublime in nature. . . is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror” ([Burke 1990](#), p. 53). Ultimately, the sublime found its “literary apotheosis” in Romantic poetry ([Garrard 2004](#), p. 64).

Kant’s concepts of mathematical sublime and dynamical sublime added to the existing ideas. These forms of sublime, called Kantian sublime, refer to the feelings we get when we are “confronted with something that threatens us” ([Flynn 2022](#)). Emily Brady seeks to “reconstruct and rehabilitate a basically Kantian theory of the sublime for contemporary philology” ([Shapshay 2014](#)). She furthers Kant’s ideas by stating “sublime qualities cause intense, mixed emotional responses characterized by feelings of being overwhelmed and anxious, combined with excitement and pleasure” ([Brady 2013](#), p. 187). Garrard points out that if the sublime requires terror to induce bewilderment, then “it would always be vulnerable to technological and cultural change [as] European civilization largely mastered its mountains with trains, roads, and ski-lifts” ([Garrard 2004](#), p. 66). Darwish’s poems see instances of the sublime, which is missing in Nye’s selected poems about the Palestinian land. In her other poems, she makes use of the sublime like the military sublime, wherein she tries to make American kids and kids from other countries see good in each other. In doing so, Nye “deploys an aesthetic of smallness to counter the military sublime. . . [articulating] a countersublime of universal human connectivity for our times” ([Najmi 2010](#), p. 151).

The two out of the four selected poems of Darwish point to Immanuel Kant’s theory of the sublime through the vastness of natural bodies and the projection of their overwhelming power. The speaker in “A Lover From Palestine” says that he’ll shield her eyes, that are like thorns in his heart, from the powerful “wind” and the darkness of the “night” as well as the “agony” or torment associated with it. In the fourth stanza of the same poem, the poet is filled with terror and empathy at the same time for his homeland while seeing from a distance that the huge “mountains” in their pristine state are now covered in “briar”. Briars that have sheathed the mountain are being equated with the power of the enemy. The seventh stanza again points towards the sublimity as the speaker of the poem is seen referring to the night and its darkness that spread everywhere: “On a night of storms, I opened the door and the window / To see the hardened moon of our nights. / I said to the night: Run out, / Beyond the darkness and the wall” (“ALP”). The speaker speaks to the night asking it to fade away beyond its own darkness, which would bring an end to his horror too. In “Victim#18”, the speaker is feeling exalted on referring to the sky as “a blue forest”. As the blue color is symbolic of serenity and tranquility, the speaker finds the

vastness of the sky as friendly and comforting, which has been lost tonight. The sublime is seen as a massive onlooker in the poems of Darwish.

Different forms of pastoral, wilderness, and the sublime cater to the different facets of the land of Palestine depicted by the poets—Nye making no reference to wilderness or sublime in her selected works, which makes up a major category in Darwish's poems. Lastly, it must be mentioned that both the poets have adeptly narrated stories in the form of poems that revolve around nature and the people of Palestine with both intersecting each other's existence.

5. Conclusions

The analysis of the selected poems of Mahmoud Darwish and Naomi Shihab Nye reveal that both poets have depicted nature in pastoral form in a mostly similar fashion, but their depiction of wilderness and the sublime are surpassingly different. Whereas Nye makes passing references to wilderness in her poems, Darwish can be seen delving into the depths of it—mostly comparing his homeland to the freedom of wilderness. Darwish's works focus solely on the landscape of Palestine, but Nye makes references to the landscape related to both Palestine as well as of the country of her residence. Further analysis reveals that Darwish is considering nature as his twin self and using it as a means of political resistance. He depicts nature in its original form to project his identity of the place that dates back to the same times when the pastoral and the wilderness covered a major part of his homeland. Nye, on the contrary, is seeing nature as a form of emotional support to her father, who is living his past through the memories of nature from his early days.

The selected poets made comparisons between the natural surroundings and modern constructions, but both did it differently. Whereas Darwish refers to the natural habitat and human constructions as belonging to the people of his homeland and as a form of shelter, Nye's depiction of the environment reflects her father's feelings of nostalgia, and the constructions of Texas symbolize the security that he attained in his new country of residence away from the past anguish. The depiction of nature in the poetry of Darwish and Nye refers to the sense of belongingness that they associate themselves with their country. The pastoral and the wilderness in the poems captivates readers and drags them to feel the sense of 'estrangement' or being 'unwanted' as compared to the feeling of nostalgia.

There seem to be fewer instances of the sublime in the poems of Darwish and no example of it in Nye's poems because the vastness and power of nature could no longer arouse terror or exaltation in their minds, which they believe had become less receptive to the sublime due to the political horror they were a witness of.

Ecocriticism in Arab literature is yet a recent study that needs more focus to cherish and conserve the landscape, sublime, wilderness and animals of the Arab countries, which will be a vast step towards focusing on its greenery. Future studies can also focus on mobility studies in the context of Arabic ecopoetics.

Funding: I am thankful to the Deanship of Graduate Studies and Scientific Research at University of Bisha for supporting this work through the Fast-Track Research Support Program.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

References

- Abandah, Gheith A., Mohammed Z. Khedher, Mohammad R. Abdel-Majeed, Hamdi M. Mansour, Salma F. Hulliel, and Lara M. Bisharat. 2022. Classifying and diacritizing Arabic poems using deep recurrent neural networks. *Journal of King Saud University—Computer and Information Sciences* 34: 3775–88. [CrossRef]
- Aburqayeq, Gh. 2020. Nature as a motif in Arabic Andalusian poetry and English romanticism. *Journal of Critical Studies in Language and Literature* 1: 52–61. [CrossRef]

- Al-Jallad, Ahmad. 2020. *A Manual of the Historical Grammar of Arabic: Notes on Key Issues in Phonology and Morphology*. (unpublished). Jallad, A al—A Manual of the Historical Grammar of Arabic.pdf. Available online: <https://www.academia.edu/> (accessed on 10 July 2024).
- Bealer, Adele H. 2012. Reading out loud: Performing ecocriticism as a practice of the wild. *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 19: 5–23. Available online: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44087064>. (accessed on 2 March 2024). [CrossRef]
- Bible, Hebrew. n.d. Genesis 3:7. Available online: <https://biblehub.com/genesis/3-7.htm> (accessed on 17 March 2024).
- Botkin, Daniel B. 1992. *Discordant Harmonies: A New Ecology for the Twenty-First Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brady, Emily. 2013. *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy: Aesthetics, Ethics, and Nature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bujupaj, Ismet. 2015. Nature in Arab American literature Majaj, Nye, and Kahf. *European Journal of American Studies* 10: 1–29. [CrossRef]
- Burke, Edmund. 1990. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burnet, Thomas. 1691. *The Sacred Theory of the Earth*, 2nd ed. London: R. Norton.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2009. The climate of history: Four theses. *Critical Inquiry* 35: 197–222. [CrossRef]
- Coates, Peter. 1998. *Nature: Western Attitudes Since Ancient Times*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Crutzen, Paul J., and Eugene F. Stoermer. 2000. The anthropocene. *Global Change Newsletter* 41: 17–18.
- Darwish, Mahmoud. 2003. *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise*. Translated and Edited by Munir Akash, and Carolyn Forché. London: University of California Press.
- Descartes, René. 1998. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, 4th ed. Translated by Donald A. Cress. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Doran, Robert. 2015. *Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant*, 1st ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Doubiago, Sharon. 1989. Mama Coyote Talks to the Boys. In *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*. Edited by Judith Plant. London: Green Print.
- Elmusa, Sharif S. 2013. The ecological bedouin: Toward environmental principles for the Arab region. *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 33: 9–35.
- Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2014. On the Sublime. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Available online: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/On-the-Sublime> (accessed on 12 September 2024).
- Evernden, Neil. 1996. Beyond ecology: Self, place and the pathetic fallacy. In *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens: University of Georgia Press, pp. 92–104.
- Flyn, Cal. 2022. Interview of Robert Clewis. *The Best Books on the Sublime. FIVE BOOKS*. Available online: <https://fivebooks.com/best-books/the-sublime-robert-clewis/> (accessed on 15 August 2024).
- Garrard, Greg. 2004. *Ecocriticism*. New York: Routledge.
- Garrard, Greg. 2014. *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Garrard, Greg. 2023. Ecocriticism. In *The New Critical Idiom*, 3rd ed. New York: Routledge.
- Gerhardt, Christine. 2016. Imagining a mobile sense of place: Towards an ecopoetics of mobility. *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 61: 421–43. Available online: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44982333> (accessed on 2 March 2024).
- Gifford, Terry. 1999. *Pastoral*. London: Routledge.
- Heise, Ursula K. 2006. The hitchhiker’s guide to ecocriticism. *PMLA* 121: 503–16. [CrossRef]
- Heise, Ursula K. 2013. Globality, difference, and the international turn in ecocriticism. *PMLA* 128: 636–43. [CrossRef]
- Ismail, Hisham Muhamad. 2024. Ecocriticism and children’s literature: Dr. Seuss’s the Lorax as an example. *World Journal of English Language* 14: 139. [CrossRef]
- Jayyusi, Salma Khadra, and Marín Manuela. 1992. *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Koen-Sarano, Matilda, ed. 2003. *Folktales of Joha, Jewish Trickster*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.
- Mahmood, Karzan A. 2021. The sublime: Edmund Burke on the French Revolution. *Koya University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 4: 76–85. [CrossRef]
- Malay, Michael. 2014. Raymond Williams and ecocriticism. *Key Words: A Journal of Cultural Materialism* 12: 8–29.
- Margoliouth, David Samuel. 1925. The origins of Arabic poetry. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 57: 417–49. [CrossRef]
- Merrill, Thomas W. 2008. Masters and possessors of nature. *The New Atlantis: Journal of Technology and Society* 19: 91–107.
- Najmi, Samina. 2010. Naomi Shihab Nye’s Aesthetic of Smallness and the Military Sublime. *MELUS* 35: 151–71. Available online: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20720720> (accessed on 4 August 2024). [CrossRef]
- Oppermann, Serpil. 2016. From posthumanism to posthuman ecocriticism. *Relations. Beyond Anthropocentrism* 4: 23–37. [CrossRef]
- Poetry Center. 2024. Naomi Shihab Nye. The University of Arizona. Available online: <https://poetry.arizona.edu/people/naomi-shihab-nye> (accessed on 25 June 2024).
- Rigby, Kate. 2021. Review of the book *Ecocriticism*, by Greg Garrard. *Altitude: An E-Journal of Emerging Humanities Work* 7. Available online: <https://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/7665> (accessed on 14 March 2024).
- Shamim, Amna. 2024. The trope of nature in the poems of Mahmoud Darwish. *International Journal of Scientific Development and Research* 9: 91–94.
- Shapshay, Sandra. 2014. *Review of the Book the Sublime in Modern Philosophy: Aesthetics, Ethics, and Nature*. Edited by Emily Brady. Bloomington: Indiana University.
- Soper, Ella, and Nicholas Bradley. 2013. *Greening of the Maple: Canadian Ecocriticism in Context*. Calgary: U of Calgary Press.

- Tajane, Suchitra Sharad, V. Brinda Shree, Punit Pathak, Vineeta Kaur Saluja, and Usha Srikanth. 2024. Ecocriticism in literature: Examining nature and the environment in literary works. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice* 30: 2162–68. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Taylor, Bron. 2005. *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*. London: Continuum.
- von Grunebaum, Gustave E. 1945. The response to nature in Arabic poetry. *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 4: 137–51. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Williams, George G. 1930. The beginnings of nature poetry in the eighteenth century. *Studies in Philology* 27: 583–608.
- Yahya, Hamoud, Zalina Mohd Lazim, and Ravichandran Vengadasamy. 2012. Eco resistance in the poetry of the Arab poet Mahmoud Darwish. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies* 18: 75–85.
- Zapf, Hubert, ed. 2016. 0. Introduction. In *Handbook of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology*. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, pp. 1–16. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Zwettler, Michael. 1978. *Oral Tradition of Classical Arabic Poetry: Its Character and Implications*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press.

Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.