

# Humanizing Natural Environment in (Al-Wasmiya) Novel by Abdelaziz Mashri: An Ecological Vision in Light of Environmental Criticism

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## ABSTRACT

Environmental or ecological criticism is the criticism that establishes a textual link between creativity, whether poetry or narrative, and the natural environment with its material components to produce stylistic connotations linked to the environment psychologically, socially and historically. Thus, the link will have an impact on the parties to the creative process, especially the recipient. This will contribute to humanizing and preserving the environment. Examples of preserving the environment include mitigating the effects of climate change, protecting terrestrial ecosystems, combating desertification, halting land degradation and the loss of biodiversity, especially after the exacerbation of the climate crisis, emissions and environmental pollution in the contemporary world. This environmental literary criticism appeared in America in the 1990s of the twentieth century (1987 AD) at the hands of the American (William Rueckert) in an article entitled (Literature and Ecology, an Experiment in Environmental Criticism). After that, in the last decade of the twentieth century, the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) was established for environmental criticism, and it had a magazine and a newsletter. Al-Wasmiya Novel by Abdulaziz Mishri is one of the green narratives with environmental poetry due to its interest in the place and the natural environment of the village whose people were waiting for Al-Wasmiya as an indicator of rain time on their land and complete their natural life cycle in that remote part in the south of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the Al-Baha region. This was in the fifties of the last century. Naturally, there is no life without crops and no crops without rain. The plot of the novel is based on depicting the village/ rural household and the peaceful life of the people and their connection to nature and its components and what it contains of rain, water, land, trees and stones in a reciprocal relationship that is sometimes identical and sometimes similar. The novel also highlights the impact of social transformations and aspects of civilization that began to appear after the flow of oil in Saudi Arabia on people's lives and their natural environment and the features of the conflict between the village and the city. Based on this perspective, the idea of this research has emerged to add an effort in the context of environmental studies of literary creativity because literature has a lofty message in spreading awareness and correcting the mistakes that humans have committed against this green planet by standing on the manifestations and aspects of nature and its relationship with humans in that novel.

**Keywords:** Environmental factor, environment, ecology, climate change, life in the desert, literary criticism, rural household, right to land, Saudi novel.

## Introduction

Ecology is the science that studies the interrelationships between living organisms and their environment.<sup>1</sup> Environmental or ecological criticism is the criticism that establishes a textual link between creativity, whether poetry or narrative, and the natural environment with its material components to produce stylistic connotations linked to the environment psychologically, socially and historically. Thus, the link will have an impact on the parties to the

<sup>1</sup> See: This is Biology, Ernst Mayr, translated by: Afifi Mahmoud Afifi, World of Knowledge Series, Kuwait, 1st ed., 1997, p. 23.

creative process, especially the recipient. This will contribute to humanizing and preserving the environment. Examples of preserving the environment include mitigating the effects of climate change, protecting terrestrial ecosystems, combating desertification, halting land degradation and the loss of biodiversity, especially after the exacerbation of the climate crisis, emissions and environmental pollution in the contemporary world.

In other words, ecological criticism is “that criticism which is concerned with studying literary and creative texts and discourses in light of various and different environmental and ecological theories, which seek the status of the environment, nature, place, land, or life within literary and artistic creativity, through theorizing, analysis, reading, examination, and study in order to monitor the visions of writers, creators, and intellectuals towards the environment.”<sup>2</sup>

This environmental literary criticism appeared in America in the 1990s of the twentieth century (1987 AD) at the hands of the American William Ruecker in an article entitled (Literature and Ecology, an Experiment in Environmental Criticism). After that, in the last decade of the twentieth century, the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) was established for environmental criticism, and it had a magazine and a newsletter.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most important critics of environmental literature in the twenty-first century is the American critic Lawrence Buell. He is a professor specializing in literature and environmental studies and is considered one of the most prominent researchers in the field of environmental literature. He has written many influential works that have contributed to the establishment and development of this field of knowledge. Among his most prominent books are:

- "Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Shaping of American Culture" was published in the late twentieth century in 1995. This book is considered one of the foundational works in environmental literature, as Boyle focuses here on the works of Henry David Thoreau, especially *Walden*, to explore how literature can reflect the relationship between man and nature and shape environmental awareness.
- "Writing for a Threatened World: Literature, Culture, and the Environment in the United States and Beyond" was published in the early 2000s in 2001, when interest in environmental awareness began to be raised by international organizations, after the global sense of the dangers that began to threaten the environment. In this book, Boyle discusses the role of literature in dealing with contemporary environmental issues, such as pollution, global warming, and the loss of biodiversity, and explores how literature can contribute to promoting environmental awareness and defending the environment.
- "The Future of Ecocriticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination" This book was published in 2005. In this book, Boyle discusses the development of environmental criticism as a field of study, and presents a future vision for the role of literature in confronting environmental crises. The book is considered an important reference for understanding modern trends in environmental literature.

Lawrence Boyle is therefore a pivotal figure in the link between literature and the environment, as he believes that literature can be a powerful tool for changing human awareness of nature and promoting environmental sustainability. His works are widely studied in universities and are considered essential references in the field of environmental criticism.

Tracing the influence of the environment on Arab creativity since ancient times, along with how poets and writers have harmonized with it, we find that the Arab individual has always been deeply connected to and attached to their environment – describing it, conversing with it, and living alongside its features, whether deserts, mountains, plains, or valleys, during both their settlement and travels. This emotional bond became deeply rooted in the Arab imagination since the pre-Islamic era, when the pre-Islamic poet stood before the ruins, weeping over the deserted abodes, describing the she-camel, the hunted prey, the gazelle's eyes, the water springs, and everything his gaze fell upon within that desert landscape. This connection continued to appear in Arabic poetry across different historical periods.

<sup>2</sup>- Environmental or ecological criticism in literature and art, Jamil Hamdawi and Hassan Aarab, Dar Al-Rif for Printing and Electronic Publishing, Kingdom of Morocco, 1st ed., 2020, pp. 44-45.

<sup>3</sup> - See: Literary Theory, David Carter, translated by Basil Al-Masalma, Dar Al-Takween, Damascus, 1st ed., 2010, pp. 152-153.

In the modern era, the novel — in the works of some novelists — has revealed, through narrative techniques, another dimension of this relationship, using new storytelling tools and forms that together shaped what can be termed "environmental narrative literature." This literature refers to storytelling in which the narrator establishes a connection between literature and the environment, exploring the relationship between humans and their surroundings, both positively and negatively. Eco-criticism, in this context, views nature with all its elements as dynamic, interactive, and effective within time and space. It searches for this interaction across different creative genres, whether poetry, prose, or narrative, placing a magnifying lens on the patterns within these expressive texts in order to reread them through a new lens that aligns with the principles and foundations of environmental cultural criticism.

The novel *Al-Wasmiya*, which is the subject of our study, by Abdulaziz Al-Mushari<sup>4</sup>, is considered one of the *green narratives* characterized by *environmental poetics*, due to its focus on place and the natural village environment. The villagers eagerly awaited the *Wasmiya* rains to water their land, completing the natural cycle of life in that remote part of southern Saudi Arabia, in the Al-Baha region, during the 1950s. Life itself depended on agriculture, and agriculture depended entirely on rainfall. The novel's plot revolves around depicting the village, the peaceful lives of its inhabitants, and their deep connection to nature and its elements — rain, water, land, trees, and stones — in a relationship that is sometimes harmonious and sometimes conflictual. The narrative also captures the impact of social transformations and the emergence of modernity, which began to surface following the flow of oil wealth in Saudi Arabia, and how these changes affected people's lives and their natural environment.

From this perspective, the idea for this research emerged, aiming to contribute to the growing body of environmental studies in the field of literary creativity. This is driven by the profound role that literature plays in promoting awareness and correcting the mistakes humanity has committed against this green planet. Through an in-depth examination of the manifestations of nature and its relationship with humans — and the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature — as depicted in this novel, the study seeks to highlight the environmental consciousness embedded within the narrative.

### Study objectives:

There are general objectives related to environmental criticism and specific objectives related to studying this novel ecologically:

### General objectives:

1. One of the objectives of environmental criticism or green criticism is to move the critical vision of creative literary effects in literary criticism from focusing on man as a producer, recipient and subject of literary work to focusing on the natural environment and place to humanize it and preserve it from the injustice of this man and his tampering with the ecosystem. This is done through the interaction between environmental

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<sup>4</sup> **Abdulaziz Al-Mushari** was born and raised in the village of **Mahdara**, located in the **Al-Baha** region. During his early years, he learned the traditional craft of stone construction in his village. He began his formal education at the primary and intermediate levels, but was diagnosed with **diabetes** at an early age, which prevented him from completing high school and further studies. As a result, he settled for an intermediate school certificate and decided to pursue **self-education** in 1968. He soon discovered within himself an insatiable desire for reading and learning, devouring every book he could find. At the age of 18, he wrote his first book, titled *A Bouquet from the History of Arab Literature*. His talent for **drawing** also emerged during his early school years.

Al-Mushari published his first short story collection after moving to **Jeddah**, titled *Death on the Water*. He subsequently published several works in short stories, novels, and autobiographical writing, some of which were translated into foreign languages. However, as his illness worsened, it once again hindered him from maintaining regular employment, prompting him to fully dedicate himself to **drawing, creative writing, and reading**.

He was honored by the **Jeddah Literary Club** and the **Society of Culture and Arts** in **Al-Baha**. One of the most prominent themes in his literary works is the **clash between modernity and tradition**, particularly the **conflict between village and city life**, while his narrative style leans heavily toward **realism**.

During his lifetime, Al-Mushari published approximately **17 books**, including short story collections such as *Asfar Al-Sarwi*, *Whispers of the Ears of Wheat*, *Flowers Searching for a Vase*, *Conditions of the Abodes*, and *Gardenia Yawning at the Window*. As for his novels, his works include *Al-Wasmiya* and *Reeh Al-Kadi*. He also documented his creative journey in his autobiographical book *Revelations of the Sword and the Rose*.

Following his death, his **complete works** were published in **four volumes**, the last of which was released in **2012**.

**Source:** SaudiPedia – The Saudi Digital Encyclopedia, an official platform launched by the **Ministry of Information** in 2025 to serve as a **national reference and documentation source**.

<https://saudipedia.com>

activity and literary criticism to return man to his natural environment to be closely related to it, sharing with it rights and duties with all its living components in its various environments, whether wild or marine, animal or plant. Human is not the center of this planet, but rather a component of its components and a building block in the structure of its architecture and development, not its destruction and devastation by pollutants and unjust encroachments on nature and its components.

2. Analyzing narrative texts in their storytelling and discourse in light of environmental issues achieves multiple goals related to cultural criticism and its social systems that extend across time in human societies, and their transformations in time and place according to a social ecological vision that achieves an enlightening function for those environmental texts.

### **Specific Objectives of Studying this Novel:**

1. To shed light on the novel *Al-Wasmiya* by Abdulaziz Al-Mushari, published in 1984, a novel of particular significance as it is the only Saudi novel selected among the top 100 Arabic Novels of the 20th Century by the Arab Writers Union in Cairo.
2. To link literary creativity, using this novel as a case study, to the environment and nature, with the aim of humanizing the environment to foster its preservation and protection.
3. To apply the tools of eco-criticism, as one of the branches of cultural criticism, to examine the social and environmental patterns that shape the narrator's imagination and the characters in the novel, in order to uncover the impact of the natural environment and the consequences of modern transformations resulting from the socio-economic development in Saudi Arabia's villages and cities.
4. To deconstruct the social and cultural life of a village in the Al-Baha region in southern Saudi Arabia during the 1950s, with the aim of identifying the governing social patterns and their relationship to the environment and place.
5. To raise awareness about the importance of preserving natural ecosystems that are human-friendly, as depicted by the author in the novel, by showcasing village life, the people's relationship with their environment, and the threats posed to their ecological surroundings.

### **Literature Review:**

#### **The following is a list of some of the previous studies related to the topic:**

1. The book *Environmental Criticism: Introductions, Approaches, and Applications*, written by a group of Western authors and prepared and translated by Najah Al-Jubaili, explores the field of environmental criticism, its terminology, and its origins in the West. The book also links environmental criticism to literary theory, particularly in relation to narratives, and highlights its connection to feminism, gender studies, and the modes of writing within these various frameworks.
2. The book *Environmental Criticism: Concepts and Applications*, published by the Narrative Studies Unit at King Saud University in collaboration with Arab Diffusion Foundation, is a collaborative work by a group of Arab researchers and academics, edited by Dr. Abu Al-Maati Al-Ramadi and Dr. Mu'jib Al-Zahrani. The book is divided into two main sections: a theoretical section containing three research papers, and an applied section containing four research papers by Arab scholars and critics. These papers applied environmental criticism to four contemporary Saudi novels.
3. The book *Environmental Literary Criticism: A New Reading of Classical Arabic Poetry* by Dr. Fatima Al-Zahraa Mohammed Fawzi, published by Al-Adham Publishing House in Cairo, examines the concept of place and its components in pre-Islamic poetry. The author links place to the poetic imagination of pre-Islamic poets, analyzing their emotional and intellectual responses to these places and the events and memories associated with them, all of which shaped the poets' consciousness and found expression in their verse.
4. The book *Environmental or Ecological Criticism in Literature and Art* by Jamil Hamdaoui and Hassan A'rab, published by Al-Reef Electronic Publishing House in Morocco, first edition (2020), discusses the concept of environmental criticism and the contexts of its emergence in the West during the 1990s. It also highlights the most prominent global figures in the field of environmental criticism. The book concludes with an evaluative perspective on environmental criticism, examining its suitability for approaching creative texts.

5. A research paper titled *The Importance of Environmental Criticism in Literary Studies* by Prof. Dr. Mohammed Abu Al-Fadl Badran, published in the proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on the Arabic Language in Dubai (2015). This paper offers a critical vision, clarifying the concept and theories of environmental criticism in the West. It also applies green criticism to select poetic and narrative texts, examining their ecological significance through an environmental lens.

Additionally, numerous academic studies on environmental criticism (also referred to as ecocriticism) have emerged during the second and third decades of the 21st century. According to Dar Al-Manzoma Library's records, thirty research papers on this subject have been published. Of these, twenty-three papers were published between 2018 and 2023.

### Research Methodology:

In this research, I will adopt an ecological criticism approach that connects creativity with the environment, examining this relationship in the novel through its thematic, social, and cultural dimensions. I will utilize relevant contextual and systemic methodologies that illuminate the text within its external context and internal structures. This will enable a comprehensive analysis, understanding, and interpretation of the novel *Al-Wasmiya*, providing a social, cultural, and ecological interpretation. This approach bridges literary theory with environmental criticism, establishing a foothold for ecological methodologies in the critical analysis of creative texts within contemporary literary studies. It is my hope and aspiration that this will contribute to increasing the attention toward the humanization of the environment and its preservation from pollution and harmful emissions that threaten the future of humanity.

This research will consist of an introduction and three main sections:

1. The first section will discuss the features of environmental literature in *Al-Wasmiya*.
2. The second section will elucidate the conflict between the village and the city through the narrative elements of *Al-Wasmiya*.
3. The third section will reveal to the reader the most important artistic characteristics of *Al-Wasmiya* from an ecological perspective.

The research will conclude with a summary of key findings and a list of references and sources.

### **First Section: Features of Environmental Literature in the Novel *Al-Wasmiya***

The environment, as a general concept, represents life in this vast universe. It is composed of natural and human details, forming its space. It is influenced by human actions, behaviors, and civilizational technological achievements, which are the highest fruits of the historical interaction and relationship between humans and nature.<sup>5</sup> The environment also refers to the set of natural elements surrounding living beings, defining the framework of their lives. In other words, it is the science that studies the relationships between humans and various earthly contexts, thus forming an essential part of ecology.<sup>6</sup>

The novel *Al-Wasmiya* exhibits multiple features that clearly demonstrate the relationship between narrative and the dimensions of environmental literature. The novel highlights nature as a moral narrative element that connects humans to their surroundings and their fluctuating relationship with that environment, whether positively or negatively. This makes the novel an environmental literary text that reflects a deep awareness of the importance of maintaining balance between humans and nature. "Preserving the natural and biological environment, with humans as an integral part, is a necessary condition for improving the quality of human life and safeguarding the future."<sup>7</sup>

Upon reflecting on the novel, we find that the most significant manifestations of environmental literature lie in considering *Al-Wasmiya* (the awaited season) as a season of life and an environmental identity for the farmers in that village. The novel begins by depicting the rains that fall during the *Wasmiya* season, symbolizing renewal, hope, and life. The monsoon winds arrived, and joy awakened. The lovers of the earth prepared their tools for the *Wasmiya*.

<sup>5</sup> Environmental Media, Dr. Shaker Al-Haj Mukhlef, Dar Dijlah, Amman, 1st ed., 2016, p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> See: Environmental Threats, George Kadi, Awidat Publications, Beirut, 1st ed., 2008, p. 46.

<sup>7</sup> Ecology, Community and Lifestyle, Arne Naess, translated by: Laila Abdel Razek, Egyptian Lebanese House, Cairo, 1st ed., 2009, p. 154

In it is the season of rain, the season of planting, and the fruits of their labor and sweat.<sup>8</sup> Here, the narrator describes the villagers as lovers of the earth, portraying their deep-rooted connection and love for the land they cultivate after the rain and for which they toil. The rain is depicted in a way that makes the reader feel its value in the lives of the villagers, capturing their emotions and interactions with the rainy season, their anticipation of it, and their discussions about it in their gatherings. This rainy *Wasmiya* brings life back to the dry land and revitalizes the villagers as they tend to their crops, which are their source of income, along with the natural components of the environment, including animals and livestock. This sustains the lives of those in agricultural communities, highlighting the role of the natural environment as a crucial element in the cycles of life and human existence on this earth.

However, there is another side to the *Wasmiya* in the imagination of the people. The narrator portrays their fear of the dark clouds, likened to kohl in their blackness, accompanied by thunder, lightning, and heavy rain that threatens floods and the destruction of crops. "A cloud spread like kohl... scattering light drizzle, and the people exclaimed with love and caution..."<sup>9</sup> After this scene, Saeed, the blind man, describes to his wife the delayed arrival of the clouds, assuring her that "when the rain withholds for too long, it falls heavily and strongly, and sometimes hail falls... pieces of ice like banana fruit."<sup>10</sup>

This latter description of hail leads us to trace the poetics of the environmental details in the novel. The description is based on portraying the daily lives of the farmers and their relationship with the components of their environment, including trees, animals, birds, water, crops, and diverse produce, from the moment of sowing to the anticipation of the harvest season. Nature, with its details in the novel, is not merely a backdrop but shapes the identity of the people in those villages, as they depend on it for their social and spiritual lives. The narrator says, "Those who descended to the market on Thursday came with their donkeys loaded with dates, jujube, myrrh, basil, kadi, sugar, tea, coffee, ginger, cardamom, green tobacco, and other things. They sold grapes, figs, apricots, and sugarcane in the Thursday market among the neighboring villages and bought their necessities with the proceeds."<sup>11</sup> These descriptions link humans to their agricultural and natural environment, aligning with environmental literature that documents human activities connected to nature and how they shape the identity of people in rural, natural communities.

Yet, the novel also highlights environmental changes and their impact on society. It details the transformations in the natural environment due to urbanization and the accompanying threats to the environment. The villagers' attitudes varied between support and opposition to these changes, for example, using a motor to bring out water from the well instead of a bucket: "Farhan had brought a gasoline-powered motor. Everyone went to watch it; it was the talk of the town... The well's throat filled with choking smoke until the man disappeared from sight. Then the motor started and pushed the water upward. They said, 'Praise the motor!'"<sup>12</sup> Another environmental threat was the use of cars for transportation instead of camels and donkeys. The narrator quotes the elder as he watched the people paving a road for cars with their simple tools: "Our fathers and grandfathers used to carry their loads on donkeys and camels. Donkeys and camels walked on paths trodden by feet. They climbed mountains and descended valleys, eating from trees and grain fodder, and they needed no roads or other things."<sup>13</sup> Here, the novel addresses one of the important themes of environmental literature: the impact of environmental changes on human societies, especially rural communities that rely entirely on nature.

This complete reliance on nature and its components in the village led the author to portray the mixed feelings toward the awaited *Wasmiya*. On one hand, there is a desire and love for the rain to fall on the prepared fields, and on the other, there is fear and apprehension of heavy rain that threatens to destroy the crops and ruin the effort expended throughout the agricultural season. The narrator says, "The children sought forgiveness from God, and it thundered. It thundered, and the water fell in large drops, filling the valleys and streams. The water flowed to the planting areas and trees. If it exceeded this limit, it would harm the crops... harm the ears and scatter them. The people said, 'We have been watered and quenched.' Fear spread in their hearts. It would harm the almonds, apricots, and all the

<sup>8</sup> Al-Wasmiyah, Abdulaziz Mishri, Athar Publishing and Distribution House, Dammam, 1st ed., 2018, p.5

<sup>9</sup> Al-Wasmiyah, p. 17

<sup>10</sup> Al-Wasmiyah, p. 18

<sup>11</sup> Al-Wasmiyah, p. 95

<sup>12</sup> Al-Wasmiyah, pp. 47-48

<sup>13</sup> Al-Wasmiya, p. 102

budding fruits."<sup>14</sup> In this text, nature is treated as an independent entity with its own existence, interacting with the characters. It is not merely a backdrop for events but is embodied as a living entity with its own will and laws, ordained by God. Rain can sometimes be a mercy that grants life, and at other times, a warning to humans when it comes in destructive abundance. This treatment brings the novel close to environmental literature, which focuses on nature, with its celestial and earthly realms, as an inseparable part of the narrative.

Thus, the novel serves as a model for green narrative, connecting humans to nature with its seasons and transformations of time and place. It sheds light on the challenges faced by rural communities due to environmental changes, critiquing those who exploit the environment in ways that threaten its presence, growth, and prosperity. This is conveyed through subtle messages embedded in the gaps within the text, where the narrative pauses to allow the reader to reflect on the deeper meanings beyond the direct representations of presence and absence in the novel's chapters. After finishing the novel, the reader is invited to empathize with nature, respect its laws, and acknowledge its existence.

### **Second section: The conflict between the village and the city through the elements of the story in the novel *Al-Wasmiya***

One of the signs of industrial development in the twentieth century was the emergence of a difference in the lifestyles of people in their human societies between adherence to origins, roots, customs and traditions and the temptations of material life that began to invade villages and countrysides around the world. From this perspective, "the philosophical environmental awareness appears at the level of personal lifestyle through ways of living in a dramatic exchange that provokes conflict with the prevailing way of life in our industrial societies."<sup>15</sup>

In the novel *Al-Wasmiya*, there is a close connection between environmental literature and the factors of conflict between the village and the city. This becomes evident through several elements of the story in the novel, which highlight the manifestations of this conflict and its reflection on a deeper understanding, which the novel seeks to convey to the reader. In the novel, nature serves as the starting point for life in the village, and the characters appear interacting with nature in a way that reflects their harmony with the environment. When the time comes to plant crops that rely on rainwater and groundwater, the villagers actively plow their lands and prepare them for the seeds they scatter, using simple tools derived from nature itself. This represents a sustainable use of resources. This interaction reflects environmental values based on respecting nature, which gives to humans when they give to it and preserve it.

The inherent environmental presence of nature in the village also represents a simple, peaceful life, where the scene of the village — with its trees, farms, and animals of various kinds, as mentioned in the novel (horses, donkeys, camels, oxen, cows, sheep, dogs, cats...) — forms part of the villagers' daily fabric, making nature a natural and constant presence. This model reflects the values promoted by environmental literature, such as preserving nature and its components and living in harmony with it. A passage from the novel illustrates the connection between the villagers and the natural environment: The narrator says: "Behind their oxen... the people work... when it is time for the midday break and lunch, they tie their oxen and donkeys to the tree trunks... they eat lunch under the shade, drink coffee infused with cardamom and ginger, and sip tea."

Abu Jamaan sat leaning on his elbow under the acacia tree, taking his time to roll his tobacco and enjoy his smoke.

Seven or eight days passed as they sowed barley, wheat, and lentils into the earth's skin, covering them with moist soil. They sat for a while, counting the weeks according to the stars, following the calculations of the cold star and the Pleiades, and wondering how much time remained until the pre-harvest rains would fall... all while offering countless prayers for God's care and blessings.

Uncle Saeed, the blind man, asked his eldest son, Hamdan:

- "Have you sown all the fields?"  
His son replied, washing the mud off his feet:

<sup>14</sup> *Al-Wasmiya*, p. 96

<sup>15</sup> Ecology, the group and the lifestyle, Arnie Naess, translated by: Laila Abdel Razek, Dar Al-Masryia Al-Lubnaniyya, Cairo, 1st ed., 2009, p. 153.



- "Yes."<sup>16</sup>

This manifestation of nature is precisely what environmental literature celebrates, as it reflects a model of simple life with minimal pollution and limited overexploitation of environmental resources. While the inherent environmental presence of nature in the village represents a peaceful, simple life, urban life in the novel represents the other side of the conflict — when the features of rapid urbanization gradually begin to invade the village. Examples include some industrial devices replacing the natural tools previously used for extracting water from wells, such as the motor pump, along with the pollution it brings. There is also urban expansion and road construction that encroach upon villages, bringing with them industrial pollution and gradually severing the bond between humans and nature. This urban sprawl leads to the destruction of green spaces, air and water pollution, and overall environmental harm. These issues reflect the environmental challenges raised by environmental literature, such as the loss of biodiversity, excessive resource consumption, and climate change resulting from destructive human activity.

The contrast between urban and rural life in the novel reflects the environmental transformations brought about by urbanization and their accompanying consequences for both humans and the environment. The novel strives to present a balanced perspective through its characters' views on the manifestations of modernization, which began encroaching upon these villages in the 1950s.

The narrator describes the use of a motorized pump in the village to extract water from the well instead of using a traditional bucket, depicting rural life and the villagers' reaction to this technological innovation:

*"From the early morning, just as the rooster crowed at the first white thread of dawn, people had already dispersed into the valleys, watering their crops... Farhan had arrived with a gasoline-powered pump... a machine that could draw water from the well. It required a long ladder made of strong ropes and a sturdy wooden platform to support it, securely fastened and positioned close to the water... Lowering it into the well required the hands of many men working together."*<sup>17</sup>

In an environmental reflection, the narrator describes the moment the motor started operating inside the well and the smoke it produced:

*"The well's throat filled with suffocating smoke, obscuring the man from sight. Then, the pump roared to life, pushing water upwards. The villagers exclaimed: 'How wonderful this machine is!'"*<sup>18</sup>

The characters in the novel play a central role in painting a narrative environmental portrait, as they actively interact with and are influenced by the environment in a direct relationship with the land and water. Many of these characters strive to preserve these resources in a sustainable manner — a goal that proves unattainable in the urban setting, with all its industrial development. The characters living in the village experience an internal conflict when they move to the city and then return to the village, as they lose their connection to nature and struggle to adapt to the industrial way of life. Here, the role of environmental literature emerges, advocating for the importance of maintaining a close relationship with the environment.

One environmental scene that illustrates this deep connection with nature is described in the novel:

*"To the 'Water Springs,' the women and girls set out, carrying their black tar-coated water skins. Drawing water from the 'Water Springs' required neither buckets nor physical strain to hoist and pour. Water flowed generously from beneath the rocks, rushing along until it found a channel, then disappearing and reappearing at a distant point in another stream, or vanishing into a deep runoff. The women sat along both sides of the stream, scooping water with empty ghee cans, filling the water skins with the warm water — two at a time, one woman holding the mouth of the skin while the other scooped and poured."*<sup>19</sup>

This scene, along with many others in the novel, depicts the social relationships among villagers, portraying them as a tightly-knit family whose lives are intertwined. This reflects a lifestyle based on cooperation and mutual dependence, which in turn helps sustain the shared environment. When people become detached from the village setting, they often experience social isolation, with growing distances between individuals. This dynamic highlights

<sup>16</sup>Al-Wasmiyah, p. 27

<sup>17</sup> Al-Wasmiyah, p. 47

<sup>18</sup>Al-Wasmiyah, p. 48

<sup>19</sup> Al-Wasmiyah, p. 69



the complex relationship between humans and their environment in urban societies, where direct interaction with natural resources is lost, contributing to environmental degradation.

This is a scene that depicts the interconnected religious presence of the villagers. The narrator describes this by saying:

*"Friday prayers had been performed. No one was absent from the lower part of the village or from the upper part of it. A group...a group, and one large group. The word is one, the opinion is one, and the advice is one, in good and bad, in the bride's yard, or attending the funeral of the dead when a calamity strikes, or an attack occurs from neighboring villages, or from distant tribes...the whole group is one, they meet in the sheikh's house to consult, each expressing his opinion, they mix the consultations and come out with a decision that does not run out of water."*<sup>20</sup>

The novel highlights the role of sustainable natural practices in rural life and the importance of protecting these practices from the technological threats posed to the environment. This is illustrated through the narrator's depiction of farmers relying on traditional agricultural techniques, using natural methods for planting, tending, and harvesting crops. This sustainable use of natural resources reflects the novel's environmental consciousness, particularly in the scene depicting the ripening of crops in the village, where food sustainability is achieved through these agricultural practices. The narrator says:

*"The wheat ripened, and alongside it stood the barley spikes. As for the lentils, their green pods swelled — passing through stages of paleness, yellowing, greening, and finally ripening. All morning, until the noon call to prayer, the sky would send its blessings, and people would gather for their meal — often lentil stew or leftover boiled corn seasoned with salt and spices. After lunch and a brief afternoon nap, cool winds would rise, and the sky would turn cloudy."*<sup>21</sup>

The novel also explores the consequences of the conflict between rural and urban life, comparing the lifestyles of people in both settings. Through this comparison, the novel seeks to emphasize the need for a balance between modernization and environmental preservation, inviting readers to reflect on how environmental factors influence urban growth and highlighting the importance of returning to the foundations of sustainable living. It advocates for interacting with nature in ways that promote sustainability while preserving the purity, sincerity, and honesty characteristic of rural communities.

The novel delivers a number of environmental awareness messages through the narrator's reflections on the contradictions shaped by the struggle between rural and urban life. The narrator states:

*"They say cars are useful — they carry loads much larger than donkeys and camels could. They transport passengers from their homes to Mecca, bring gasoline, firewood, and American grains. Instead of transporting these goods on the backs of donkeys and camels, the cars arrive with their loads. It's true that the car driver is a stranger, who only visits the village a few days a year and charges far more than the camel owner ever did. It's true that the distant became near, and the near became distant; iron began to speak — a sign of the end times. It's true that the state can now build roads. But with all this good came a decline in blessings. From the day friends began forgetting their friends, and kin became estranged from their kin, and money became the measure of a man — controlling both close and distant relationships. Crops began to fail, blessings became scarce, the land grew barren, and people started preferring American wheat and Ceylonese tea. They traveled back and forth, and ever since oil began luring people away, the youth have forgotten their lands, their farms, and the rights of their fathers and grandfathers."*<sup>22</sup>

By examining these elements in detail, we can discern the impact of this conflict on the lives of the novel's characters, as well as the social events unfolding within the temporal and spatial context of the villages of Al-Baha.

It becomes clear that the novel uses the conflict between village and city as a tool to raise important environmental issues. While the village represents a model of environmental harmony, the city embodies the environmental challenges brought about by urbanization and the detachment from nature.

<sup>20</sup>Al-Wasmiyah, p. 73

<sup>21</sup>Al-Wasmiyah, p. 95

<sup>22</sup> Al-Wasmiyah, p. 102

### Section Three: The Artistic Features of the Novel *Al-Wasmiya* from an Ecological Perspective

Ecology views environmental problems as the result of imbalances within the environmental system and its components, caused by increased pressure on the environment — pressure directly linked to human actions and their harmful impact on nature.<sup>23</sup>

Within this ecological framework emerges the novel *Al-Wasmiya*, considered one of the pioneering works in Saudi literature. The novel vividly portrays life in Saudi villages in the Al-Baha region during the 1950s, adopting an ecological lens to reflect the reality of the simple rural individual who faces daily life challenges and social transformations. The writer focuses closely on the rural environment, portraying its details with meticulous care and highlighting the deep relationship between humans and nature, and how this relationship shapes human life and identity. Through characters with profound psychological and social depth, the novel captures internal and external struggles — between self, society, and the broader environmental space within which these characters exist and interact. This environmental space encompasses both celestial elements, such as rainfall and the eagerly awaited *Wasmiya* rains, and terrestrial elements, including the agricultural lands, valleys, mountains, and plains, all threatened by the encroaching forces of urbanization. This conflict between village and city is embodied through the novel's plot, characters, and temporal and spatial settings, all delivered in a smooth narrative style enriched with poetic language that immerses the reader in the atmosphere of the novel and enhances its appeal.

*Al-Wasmiya*, therefore, is not merely a narrative about life in a Saudi village; it is an ecological literary text par excellence. It highlights the deep interconnection between humans and nature and raises both environmental and humanistic issues, aiming to promote environmental awareness among readers. Through its distinctive literary narrative, the novel fosters dialogue between humans and the environment in which they live, emphasizing their attachment to it and their efforts to protect it. Abdulaziz Mishri succeeds in presenting a vivid depiction of nature as an inseparable part of daily life in the villages of southern Saudi Arabia, firmly placing the novel within the broader currents of contemporary environmental literature.

Among the most significant artistic features embodied in *Al-Wasmiya*, particularly through the narrative techniques employed by the narrator and the interactions between characters within the novel's spatial and temporal environment, are the following:

#### 1. Human-Nature Symbiosis

The natural environment in the novel is depicted as a living, dynamic entity that directly influences the lives and destinies of the characters. Mishri highlights the characters' close relationship with their surrounding environment, where agricultural labor and seasonal cycles are intricately woven into the fabric of daily life. Agricultural seasons, particularly the *Wasmiya* (the rainy season), shape the rhythms of life, reflecting a clear environmental awareness that emphasizes the role of natural factors in shaping both place and identity. Nature is not merely a backdrop but an essential component of the novel's plot. Even the title, *Al-Wasmiya*, derived from the name of the rainy season, underscores the centrality of nature in the text. The characters do not exist in isolation from their environment; they either live in harmony with it or enter into conflict with it. Farmers rely on the *Wasmiya* rains for their survival, though these rains can also become a source of danger, especially in the mountainous terrain with its difficult roads. In this novel, nature and its components are not passive; they are alive, interacting with the characters, and together they form a distinctive narrative space.

#### 2. The Importance of the Environmental Dimension

The novel highlights the fragility of the relationship between humans and nature, implicitly warning against exploiting nature or disrupting its balance. Nature in the novel is both powerful and fragile — a source of life that can also become a source of suffering if mistreated. Environmental changes, such as droughts or heavy rains, not only affect agriculture but also reverberate through the social fabric of the community. In this way, the novel expresses an ecological awareness that extends beyond mere descriptions of nature to include an exploration of how environmental changes shape human life itself. This vision aligns with the principles of sustainability and harmonious living with nature, which the novel implicitly advocates — a core theme of environmental literature.

<sup>23</sup> See: *The Environment and Its Problems*, Rashid Al-Hamad and Muhammad Saeed Saberini, World of Knowledge Series, Kuwait, 2nd ed., 1984, p. 78.

### 3. Nature as a Source of Cultural Identity

The novel highlights the cultural heritage of rural Saudi communities, showing how daily life is deeply tied to nature — from agricultural practices to social customs and even popular proverbs. The novel illustrates how the environment shapes traditions and cultural expressions, such as celebrating rainfalls and observing agricultural rituals. The *Wasmiya* season itself carries symbolic significance in the popular heritage, representing a fresh start or a chance to overcome drought and hardship.

### 4. The Environment as a Central Narrative Element

The environment in *Al-Wasmiya* is not merely a backdrop for events; it plays an active role in shaping characters' lives and behaviors. Rain is depicted as a symbol of fertility and renewal, but it also carries within it the seeds of conflict between the characters and the challenges posed by the natural world. Mishri effectively integrates nature into the structure of the narrative, allowing the seasons and natural phenomena — rain, farming, drought — to directly influence the unfolding of events and the development of characters.

### 5. Poetic Language in Describing and Embodying Nature

Mishri's poetic style in depicting nature enhances the beauty and richness of the environment. His sensory-rich language immerses the reader in the ecological experience, as if they were witnessing the transformation of nature firsthand. His detailed descriptions of rain, clouds, farmland, and seasonal changes create a tangible connection between the reader and the environment, making nature a living presence within the text.

### 6. Integrating Nature into Local Culture

Mishri seamlessly merges popular heritage with environmental traditions tied to seasonal changes, reflecting the deep-rooted connection between environmental literature and local cultures. The novel highlights how social customs are influenced by environmental changes, from celebrating rainy seasons to coping with droughts and floods. This integration underscores how nature is inseparable from cultural identity and daily life.

### 7. Implicit Critique of Environmental Exploitation

Although the novel does not explicitly denounce environmental exploitation, it can be read as a cautionary tale warning against the loss of the traditional harmony between humans and nature. The narrative reveals the tension between humans' attempts to control nature and the divine order inherent in the natural world — an order that humans must respect. This subtle critique serves as a reminder of the delicate balance that must be preserved between humans and their environment.

## Conclusion

The novel *Al-Wasmiya* stands as a prime example of *green narratives*, effectively illustrating the role of environmental elements in shaping the narrative framework and influencing the patterns of storytelling within the novel. Based on the analysis presented in this study, the following key findings have been reached:

1. Nature was not merely a passive backdrop for the events in the novel; rather, it actively guided and contributed to the development and escalation of the plot until the very end of the narrative.
2. The novel reveals a profound psychological connection between environmental elements — such as the land, rainfall and its seasons, agriculture, and animals — and the characters who were closely linked to these elements within the rural spatial setting. This connection significantly shaped the details of daily life and the characters' varied emotions.
3. Nature in the novel served as both a cultural and social identity, establishing a strong connection between the rainy seasons and all aspects of life in the villages. As a result, nature became a bearer of important social and cultural connotations, influencing moments of joy, sorrow, love, contentment, and discontent — all of which were rooted in the natural environment.
4. Through its vivid descriptions, the novel succeeded in presenting a living portrait of nature, allowing the reader to experience the spatial environment alongside the characters. This effect was achieved through the writer's mastery of descriptive language and narrative techniques, which enriched the novel's artistic style.

5. The novel also highlighted the emerging conflict between traditional rural life, with its reliance on natural and primitive methods, and the encroaching forces of urban life with its modern features. This tension reflects the varied responses — both acceptance and resistance — to the rapid social and environmental changes that took place in the 1950s and 1960s in the villages of southern Saudi Arabia.

In conclusion, the study recommends paying greater attention to eco-literature in academic literary and critical studies, particularly by examining poetic and narrative texts in which nature and the environment play a prominent role. Such studies would contribute to delivering environmental messages to readers and the public, encouraging greater environmental awareness and fostering efforts to protect the environment from various threats, including desertification, pollution, and destruction. This focus would also enhance the connection between literature and reality, thereby fulfilling literature's essential role as an active force within human societies.

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