

قراءة نقدية بيئية للحيوان والنبات تحت الغزو الأمريكي للعراق في الروايات الأمريكية والعربية

حليمة محمد بني مفرج

باحث ، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية ، كلية اللغات الأجنبية ، الجامعة الأردنية ، الأردن

الأستاذ الدكتور محمود فليح الشتيوي

أستاذ دكتور ، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية ، كلية اللغات الأجنبية ، الجامعة الأردنية ، الأردن

An Ecocritical Perspective of Flora and Fauna under the 2003 Invasion of Iraq in American and Iraqi novels

Halima Mohammad Bani-Mfrij

**Research Scholar , Department of English , Faculty of Foreign
Language , University of Jordan , Jordan**

hallemahmfrij@yahoo.com

Prof. Mahmoud F. Al-Shetawi

**Department of English , Faculty of Foreign Language , University of
Jordan , Jordan**

alshetawi_m@ju.edu.jo

المستخلص

تناول هذا البحث قراءة نقدية بيئية للحيوان والنبات تحت الغزو الأمريكي للعراق من وجهات نظر الروائيين الأمريكيين والعراقيين. الهدف من هذا البحث تحليل رواية الطيور الصفراء للكاتب الأمريكي ديفيد ابرامز و رواية كتاب الأضرار الجانبية للكاتب العراقي سنان انطون لمعرفة كيف قام كلاهما بتوسيع مهمتهم الأخلاقية المتمثلة في غزو العراق، والذي يتجاوز العنصر البشري ليشمل الغطاء النباتي والحيواني في ضوء النقد البيئي. و تحديداً أكثر تحاول الورقة البحثية فضح الممارسات الفظيعة التي عكسها أنطون وباروز والتي سببها الغزو الأمريكي للنباتات والحيوانات، وتم تجاهلها رسمياً. يقوم البحث ايضا بدراسة استخدام الرموز والصور الفنية والتقنيات؛ لتعزيز قيم الحفاظ على البيئة.

وكما أوضحت الدراسة النتائج، بأنه على الرغم من الاختلاف الثقافي و اختلاف التجربة الحربية فانهم يتفقون بالمثل في خلق وعي بيئي. حيث لخصت الدراسة أنه على الرغم من الاختلاف الثقافي واختلاف تجربتهم الحربية، يتفق كلاهما بالمثل في خلق وعي بيئي يأتي من استيعاب فكرة ان تكاليف الحرب لا تقاس فقط بخسارة البشر فقط، بل تقاس أيضا بتدمير النباتات والحيوانات لخلق معارضة قوية تجاه الحرب في العراق.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النقد البيئي، النظرة البيولوجية، العدالة البيئية، الاخلاقيات البيئية، علاقة الإنسان بالحيوان، فقدان التنوع البيولوجي، الاستدامة البيئية

Abstract

This essay offers ecocritical discussions of Iraqi flora and fauna under the 2003 invasion of Iraq from the point of view of both American and Iraqi novelists. The purpose of this paper is to examine how the American Kevin Powers's in *The Yellow Birds* (2012) and Iraqi Sinan Antoon's in *The Book of Collateral Damage* (2019) extend their moral mission of the 2003 invasion of Iraq which moves beyond the human species to include flora and fauna in light of ecocriticism. More specifically, the paper attempts to expose the outrageous things reflected by Antoon and Powers that the US invasion has done to flora and fauna which are officially ignored. It also examines the proper employment of different forms of symbolism and techniques to strengthen their ecological conservation values.

The study concludes that despite the selected writers' different experiences of colonialism, they similarly stand in creating eco-consciousness that comes from their understanding that the costs of war are not only measured by the loss of humans, but also by the devastation of flora and fauna to institutionalize a strong oppositional stance towards the war in Iraq.

Key words: Ecocriticism, Biocentric Vision, Eco-justice Perspective, Environmental Ethics, Human and Nonhuman Relationship, Loss of Biodiversity, Sustainability.

Introduction:

Ecocriticism seeks to evaluate literary texts and other art-works, in order to generate more ethically committed to promoting human survival on earth and grants moral standing to human beings and their ecosystems since humans are considered to be a central and dominant component of the overall ecological system. However, the dramatic concept of “deep ecology” introduced by Arne Naess rejects the anthropocentric view which believes that the whole purpose of nature is to serve mankind and humans are the masters of nature and superior over other living beings, animals and plants. Deep ecology’s biocentric vision, instead, says “that all living things are equal in value and possess the inherent right to grow and flourish” (Gottlieb, 1997,299) and that humans, animals and plants are all valuable. Taking into consideration the deep ecological perspective, this moral standing takes a next step and extends to include the nonhuman world. Bill Devall and George Sessions in their *Deep Ecology: Living as If Nature Mattered* argue that “the deep ecology sense of Self requires a further maturity and growth, an identification which goes beyond humanity to include the nonhuman world” (65). Likewise, Stacy Alaimo states that “the predominant understanding of environmental ethics has been that of a circle that has expanded in such a way as to grant 'moral consideration to animals [and] to plants” (2010,16) which is necessary to face up to the environmental crisis. Thus, the traditionally anthropocentric ethics has been extended to a biocentric perspective.

As war is one of the most violent force, the environmental crisis behind the war has the potential to alter the structure and function of ecosystems. Indeed, the human costs of war—in deaths, physical diseases, mental diseases, suffering, and permanent loss—cannot be calculated. However, the costs of the war cannot be measured in human alone, as deep ecocritics argue. War and its military activities can promote further destruction of the landscape with its flora and fauna. For instance, the U.S invasion of Iraq with its military activities has more tragic costs for flora and fauna. The use of explosive and chemical agents as weapons has given rise to deaths, injuries and diseases to animals and plants. Furthermore, human activities in the chaos of war such as exploitation, poaching, and fire affect negatively flora and fauna.

Since animals and plants do not have a voice to represent themselves, interest in flora and fauna was on the fringe; the wartime victimization of

animals and plants was vastly forgotten and unexplored in previous discussions. Furthermore, the impact of war on flora and fauna is not documented during human combat because it is seen as inconsequential when so much human life is lost. But because animals and plants impact positively on the health and well-being of the biosphere, ecocritics have offered sophisticated arguments to take the interests of living animals and plants into consideration. In the same vein, because animals and plants have long been silent casualties of the U.S invasion of Iraq, prominent American and Arab literary works like Powers's *The Yellow Birds* and Antoon's *The Book of Collateral Damage* are ecological conscious literary works that ethics are extended beyond human beings and that moral standing is accorded to the world of animals and plants. In spite of their different experience of colonialism (western occupier and Arab occupied), they stand in the same line with employing genuine tactics and strategies to raise ecological awareness that comes from their understanding that the costs of war are not only measured by the loss of humans, but also by the devastation of flora and fauna.

This paper proceeds from the convictions that it is necessary to bring the fringes to the fore, to move beyond the human ecology that has characterized so much of the critical work on war contemporary literature, to discuss flora and fauna in ways consistent with ecocritical ethical claims. For further illustration, there is much debate in past studies about the ethical issues raised by the impacts of the US invasion of Iraq on human beings in American and Arab literature. For example, in his book *Going Scapegoat: Post-9/11 War Literature, Language and Culture*, David A. Buchanan examines *The Yellow Birds* as American war novel in which he relies heavily upon Kenneth Burke's dramatic concept of scapegoating which targets the suffering of American soldiers during the invasion to challenge the official discourse of the war in Iraq. In another book titled *War and Occupation in Iraqi Fiction*, Ikram Masmoudi explores fictional works by a new generation of leading Iraqi authors, focusing on the human suffering caused by the war in the experiences of different war actors such as the soldier, the war deserter, the camp detainee and the suicide bomber. Thus, the significance of this paper lies in its extended moral mission in wartime which moves beyond the human species to include other living species in light of ecocriticism. Bringing living animals and plants into the discussion gives a much wider perspective on war and contributes to creating a comprehensive

picture of a future system that would adequately protect all living creatures during wartime. In the process, this paper contextualizes and builds on ecocritical attempts to determine the moral obligations toward living animals and plants employed by Powers and Antoon to project both ecological and political awareness. These moral obligations are guided by either interpreting the content of a text through an ecocritical lens, with an eye towards flora and fauna, or examining an ecocritical trope within the text to have a broader perspective. Furthermore, the author's style of writing simply adds on a pathetic or ethical appeal to the core content in terms of ecological awareness. Regarding, an ecocritical approach to *The Yellow Birds* and *The Book of Collateral Damage* may stimulate the following questions: How is the central theme of the fictions related to flora and fauna? How are animals and plants represented in these fictions and what is their relationship to humans? How does war affect animals and plants? What is the influence on metaphors and representations of animals and plants on how we treat them? And how can the author's style and techniques be a great way to strengthen the ecological conservation values in terms of flora and fauna? Answering these questions identifies the core values of the selected literary works to the study.

Sinan Antoon is an Iraqi-born poet, novelist, and translator. He left Iraq to the United States after the 1991 Gulf War. He was educated at Georgetown and Harvard where he obtained a doctorate in Arabic Literature in 2006. He returned to his native hometown in 2003 to co-produce and co-direct a documentary film about Iraq under occupation. His fourth novel, *Fihris*, was published in 2016 and was longlisted for the Arabic Booker. It was written in Arabic and translated to English in 2019 by Jonathan Wright under the title, *The Book of Collateral Damage* which is inspired by his personal experience of war. Like his creator, Nameer, who is the protagonist of *The Book of Collateral Damage*, is a young Iraqi scholar earning his doctorate at Harvard. He is hired by filmmakers to help document the devastation of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. During his venture to Baghdad, Nameer encounters Wadood, an Iraqi eccentric bookseller trying to catalogue everything destroyed by war in a manuscript. After he returns to America, Nameer becomes obsessed with Wadood's manuscript to the point of neglecting his academic duties. Nameer quotes a prosaic expression from Esther Leslie's *Walter Benjamin* which points to the importance of bringing the

destruction of war to the center of consciousness. He quotes: “But now the moment has come when you must allow me to shake a few meager fruits from the tree of conscientiousness which has its roots in my heart and its leaves in [Wadood’s] archive” (196) in which Wadood attempts to determine the moral obligations toward nonhuman animals and plants. He says:

I trained myself to listen to the tree first, and I succeeded. The tree says everything. After that I listened to the birds, and between the two of them I can hear everything. The scene is permeated by an additional logic that isn’t apparent (242).

Allegorically, these lines represent that Wadood succeeded in his attempt to listen to the voices of plants and animals to bring them into the discussion of his war manuscript. He aims to add logical formulation to his political and ecological ethics to flora and fauna that it is not apparent to all human beings and is not officially concerned.

Kevin Powers is an American fiction writer and poet who served with the U.S. Army in Mosul and Tal Afar, Iraq, in 2004 and 2005. Powers’s *The Yellow Birds* is one of the first critically acclaimed works of contemporary war fiction to emerge from the United States’ invasion and occupation of Iraq. The novel was met with dozens of positive reviews, and it received the Guardian First Book Award and the 2013 Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award. The novel is set in Al Tafari in northern Iraq during the invasion of Iraq, paralleling Powers’ time as a US Army soldier. The novel tells the story of two young American soldiers, John Bartle and Daniel Murph, who are sent to fight in Iraq where they soon find war cruel and difficult to endure. Chronic war stress turns into thorough disenchantment leading Murph to walk towards his own death. Murph’s death in Iraq is the central rupture of Bartle’s world after he promises Murph’s mother that he will bring him home safe. *The Yellow Birds* seems to stir a consciousness in readers in terms of the brutality and violence of the invasion. In his author’s note in the paperback edition, Powers writes that his intention was “to create a cartography of one man’s consciousness” (3). It seems that his cartographic consciousness is not limited to one dimension, but shifts to give the reader a holistic perspective on the brutality of the US invasion in Iraq. Bartle, the novel’s protagonist and narrator, represents that the brutal consequences of the war are not just on human ecology, but also on animal and plant ecology. Bartle notes: “We were unaware of even our

own savagery now: the beatings and the kicked dogs, the searches and the sheer brutality of our presence. Each action was a page in an exercise book performed by rote” (159). He draws the attention of the public to the immorality of beating and kicking animals in wartime, reflecting that violence against nonhumans is analogous to savagery and brutality perpetrated “by rote” without thinking or understanding; without officially engaging any conscious processes. The ecocritical attention that has focused on this phenomenon is significant to our understanding of the novel which brings animals and plants into an eco-ethical discussion, calling for preventing war and cruelty to all living things in wartime.

Harmony between Human and Nonhuman Animal and Plant:

The eco-ethical discussion to flora and fauna is grounded in various ecological notions within the above-mentioned fictions. One aspect of ecoconsciousness is reflected through the Romantic notions to the roots of the modern environmental movement. Ecocritical scholars explore “the relationship between human and non-human life as represented in literary texts” (Coupe, 2000, 302) and believe in the harmony between them. In his article “The Ecologically Noble Savage Debate” (2007), Raymond Hames argues that the Romantic notion “that native peoples lived in harmony with the environment was reinforced indirectly in the field[s] of cultural ecology” (179). Comparing the romantic view to that of ecocriticism, it can be understood that humans respect animals and plants and aim to develop eco-ethics towards them as Frederick Suresh, in his book *Contemporary Contemplations on Ecoliterature*, points out:

The modern ecological consciousness has a feeling that the balance between human and the natural world must be maintained. A perfect ecology is one in which plants, animals, birds and human beings live in such harmony that none dominates or destroys the other (147).

The above quote indicates that a harmonious relationship between humans and nonhuman animals and plants prevails a healthy eco-system for the benevolence of the human as well as the non-human species and that humans and nonhumans can coexist in various ways. Thus, this provides many ecological benefits such as maintaining ecological balance and conserving the bio - diversity. Likewise, novels of such great authors as Powers and Antoon remind readers of an idyllic life where the man lived in harmony and accord with flora and fauna in ways consistent with eco-ethical principles which seems to move them to ecstasy and inspire them to create prosaic descriptions. The characters, in the selected

novels, often reestablish a harmonious relationship between humans and nonhuman animals and plants.

In *The Yellow Birds*, Powers pours these senses into his fiction in which the war prompts him to refer to animals and plants as a real integral part of human life. To metaphorically represent his harmony with animals, Bartle dreams of his mother's porch "lying there on the warm wood in the cool air thinking only of the sound of the bullfrogs and cicadas on the water, hoping I would dream only of that sound" (108). He describes a community, in which all the elements of the natural world, including humans, live together, where he is able to enjoy the sound of animals. He enunciates his complex emotion of longing only to the sounds of the bullfrogs and cicadas that are lost in the midst of chaos and combat, but remain in the memory. Despite the simplicity of the romantic scene, it includes a harmony that exists between humans and animals. Furthermore, the eco-ethic deeply rises in the heart of Bartle who romanticizes the pleasant green lands with its lush flora in spring. As Bartle is flying, he rejoices at the greenery below:

It was spring and some trees bloomed and from this height even the blooms were green and it was so green that I would have jumped from the plane if I could have, to float over that green briefly, to let it be real and whole and as large as I imagined. (102)

Factually, this quote shows that Bartle wishes "to float over that green" to escape from the war's environmental destruction. He also wishes that this moment would "be real and whole", seeming to wish himself in complete harmony with these green lands. As such, it is expressive of the desired harmony and at the oneness of human and plants.

Antoon's novel is concerned with the same ethical notion towards animals and plants. Nameer depicts the professors of the American university as having a settled life without war because "most of the faculty were settled, with children, beautiful houses, and dogs" (110). An ecocritical step toward a settled life was achieved through having animals as members of their family. This ethic also arises in Nameer towards the tall elm trees who lives in harmony with. It can be seen through the following quotation: "I felt a peace of mind I hadn't previously known when I walked under the tall elm trees" (113). According to Nameer who works in the almond farm, he says that these natural fields: "made [him] feel that [he] was part of the earth and in harmony with the seasons"

(176). Apparently, he is immersed in greenery and he is in absolute harmony with trees, strongly indicating that the relationship between the Nameer and the trees is intimate.

In these previous scenes, Bartle's and Nameer's adoration of flora and fauna is more comprehensive and thorough than that of any of the romantics. Interestingly, the inclusion of this state of harmony aligns with Suresh's ecocritical perspective of the benefits achieved through this state of harmony. In a world of war with deep ecological and environmental crises, their interest in Romanticism and their concern and involvement in the sympathetic relationship between man and flora and fauna are the manifestations of their ecological consciousness. They seek to live in harmony with animals and plants to reduce human-wildlife conflict which an urgent conservation priority and a key to coexistence between humans and nonhumans. So long as human lived in close association with animal and plant there will be no ecological threat. In allowing us a glimpse into peaceful coexistence between human and nonhuman, they make a change in the reader's attitude to animals and plants. Any insights gleaned on achieving coexistence in conflict scenarios could be critical to retaining ecological balance and biodiversity that can only be achieved through prevention of the war and through safeguarding peace. Upon reflecting on such a harmonious relationship, readers would be ecologically informed of the intrinsic value and inherent worth of the harmonious relationship inspired in them and therefore better contribute to their ecological thinking in the hope of respecting and preserving animals and plants.

An eco-justice perspective:

Another eco-ethical discussion to flora and fauna is reflected through an eco-justice perspective. Nik Taylor notes that "the boundaries between human and animal are not 'natural' but are constructed and policed in order to maintain the purity of the different categories" (2012, 39) through different narratives and actions. Ecocriticism is particularly modern in its breaking down some of the boundaries. Out of this has grown another aspect of ecoconsciousness to animals and to plants grounded in an eco-justice perspective which considers them, quoting Robert L. Grant's words, as "an appropriate subject of rights, equality, and moral considerability" (Grant, 2007, 120). It challenges the notions of otherness and inferiority of animals and plants which are clearly situated within the ecocritical discourse. Both Powers and Antoon

highlight not only the principle of harmony in which both animals and plants are not depicted as a threat to humans but also the principle of ecojustice in which they are depicted as humans; as victims of war cruelty.

The central theme of Antoon's novel fits explicitly with ecojustice perspectives, Nameer becomes obsessed with Wadood's manuscript in which Wadood is trying to catalogue everything destroyed by war, from objects, flora and fauna, to humans. Wadood's manuscript which is explicitly introduced in the novel as :

a project of a lifetime, an archive of the losses from war and destruction. But not soldiers and equipment. The losses that are never mentioned or seen. Not just people. Animals and plants and inanimate things and anything that can be destroyed (47).

Nameer aims to give voice to animals and plants as if they are beings equal to humans and exposes the outrageous things that the US invasion has done to flora and fauna which are not officially mentioned. In another scene in the novel, Nameer confirms and strengthens his view of eco-justice perspective in which he draws a balance between human rights and the rights of animals in wartime. His dream comes as he saw himself living "a quiet life without wars...immigrants and refugees had all the rights and freedoms that humans could dream of. Even animals were respected and had rights" (129). The notion of animal rights puts forth an alternative image for both humans and non-human species by suggesting equality between the two. This alternative image becomes the crucial identifying characteristic that dissolves the gap between humans and non-humans.

Writing about the importance of Powers's *The Yellow Birds* in the field of ecocriticism, it is worth noting that the eco-justice perspective can be captured in the following story of Murph's father's canaries. The story reflects the fact that animals deserve respect and freedom. In the guard tower in Iraq watching the war, Murph remembers "when his father brought a dozen caged canaries home from the mine" (139). His father gave them the opportunity of freedom to fly in the orchard because he is aware of animal rights. He thinks "that the birds would not return by choice to their captivity, and that the cages should be used for something else: a pretty bed for vegetables, perhaps a place to string up candles between the trees" (ibid). Animals deserve total freedom and respect is to assert animal rights and achieve equality among all created beings.

Ecocritics explore “the relationship between human and non-human life as represented in literary texts” (Coupe, 2000, 302). Regarding, the principles of harmony and the principles of ecojustice employed by Powers and Antoon encourage eco moral responsibilities through the fact that animals and plants are as deserving of rights and respect as are humans. While at the same time ecocritics discuss “the place of literature in the struggle against environmental destruction” (ibid). Regarding, Power’s and Antoon’s ecocritical perspectives are strengthened further by exposing the details of the negative effects of the US invasion on Iraqi flora and fauna in their fictions. They condemn the destruction of Iraqi flora and fauna in order to convince the public that war is a problematic situation in its ecological sense and must be changed.

The effects of the military activities on the flora and fauna:

The larger portion of *The Yellow Birds* exposes the effects of the military activities on the flora and fauna that have given rise to deaths, injuries and diseases to animals and plants. The reader is sated with the constantly repeated scenes to this notion within the narrative to raise the issue and concern of how war risks transcend human kingdom to include the flora and fauna. For example, Bartle refers to a scene when the mortar fell in the orchard, “small fires burned. The smoke rose from among the frayed leaves” (95), and another scene when “a few small juniper trees were turned up and on their sides where the mortars fell” (19). He criticizes the outrageous things that the explosive weapons have done to plants such as burning trees with fire, ripping leaves apart, uprooting full trees. The narrative cautions us, and the images of the “green grasses that waved in the breeze were burned by fire” (14-15), “fires burned in the grove of thin and ordered fruit trees a little to the south (16) and “[t]he smoke rose through a gently tattered canopy of leaves” (ibid) are artfully used to segue into an argument about the vanishing green fields, and the ultimate consequences to flora from explosions and their fires in war zones. At the same time, the author's purpose which relies on ecocritical discourse has remained implicitly or explicitly present in different areas of the literary work with special emphasis on animals and plants. For example, “a withered clump of trees” (117) and wounded horse(147) reflect his focus on acts of violence towards animals and plants in wartime to convince the reader that the war is the greatest threat to flora and fauna and must be prevented.

Additionally, Bartle points out that the effects of explosive weapons on animals and plants come faster and stronger than the many natural climate changes. According to him, however, "It was September [, autumn in Iraq,] there were few trees from which leaves could fall" (24) because they "shook off the scarred and slender branches, buffeted by the wind" (ibid). This quote is about farmers' efforts to shake off all the unhealthy branches of the trees to increase its ability to adapt to the changing seasons, reflecting the presence of awareness to preserve them. But the leaves of the trees were rapidly and strongly devastated by explosive weapons expressed when Bartle "tried to count the leaves as they fell, removed from their moorings by the impact of mortars and bombs" (ibid). Powers also points out that the images of burning plants are increased further and faster by the wind in the chaos of war. For example, an American lieutenant looked scared and tired because the "wind seemed to pick up a little and [he] watched the fires again in the hills" (90). Moreover, powers recites that no effectual provision had theretofore been made for preventing the burning of plants during the invasion as shown in the following scene. The lieutenant "turned to look at the orchard burning to the south" (17) and asked, "[h]ow long have those fires been going?" (ibid). Murph answered, that it "[p]robably started last night" (ibid), showing that fire burning is left for a long time without using any efforts to extinguish it. Fires resulting from military activities burn faster and more intensely and last a long time in the chaos of war. The admission that the military activities of the invasion destroy the Iraqi flora and fauna and how the destruction comes faster and stronger is an ecological and political mission.

To develop his themes, Bartle selects wisely scenes employed within the framework of ecocriticism. For further illustration, he first romanticizes the pleasant natural scenes of animals and plants. We read:

When we neared the orchard a flock of birds lit from its outer rows. They hadn't been there long. The branches shook with their absent weight and the birds circled above in the ruddy mackerel sky, where they made an artless semaphore. (115).

This quotation clarifies Bartle's political and ecological persistence to idealise Iraqi orchard trees and birds before the military activities. He aims to record the existence of flourishing plant and animal communities before the military. Then, he narrates the annihilation of the orchard trees and birds by the explosive weapons:

When the mortars fell, the leaves and fruit and birds were frayed like ends of rope. They lay on the ground in scattered piles, torn feathers and leaves and the rinds of broken fruit intermingling. The sunlight fell absently through the spaces in the treetops, here and there glistening as if on water from smudges of bird blood and citrus (116).

What becomes more apparent through the narration is how the military activities affect the plants and animals of the orchard. He describes how the pleasant orchard of fruits and birds lies in “scattered piles” when the mortars struck. Through his beautiful language and from an environmental perspective, the flourishing and destruction sequence on Iraqi flora and fauna, in particular, resists aesthetically the effect of war on flora and fauna.

According to Powers, environmental damage during the war is a fundamental source of depression and wistfulness. He allows the reader to listen to Bartle's agonized thinking, describing how he is traumatized by the negative effects of the invasion not only on humans but also on animals. Bartle says, “I feel like I’m being eaten from the inside out and I can’t tell anyone” (144). Bartle’s tortured aftermath winds back to his nightmare with the inability to control images of “the ghosts of the dead filled the empty seats of every gate [he] passed: boys destroyed by mortars and rockets and bullets and I.E.D.’s” (104). Bartle also suffers from Murph's guilt; “the one person [he] promised would live is dead” (144). In an extended eco-consciousness, he adds “that you didn’t even realize you had until only the animals made you sad, the husks of dogs filled with explosives and old arty shells” (145). This moment is part of feeling “like there was acid seeping down into your soul and then your soul is gone” (144). The scene of the “husks of dogs filled with explosives and old arty shells” resulting from military activities is gut-wrenching and heartbreaking for the narrator which is turned away into compassion. In the preface introduced by Carol Adams to a 2014 book titled *Taking the Adventure: Faith and Our Kinship with Animals*, she concludes that “compassion involves imagination and attention. Attention to suffering makes us ethically responsible” (xii). In this regard, his compassion towards human suffering as well as animal suffering develops a higher sense of moral responsibility towards animals and plants.

The echoes of the themes of the annihilation and destruction of plants and animals in wartime to stir a reflexive eco-consciousness in readers

are meticulously mirrored in the author's style. In an article titled "Theorizing Ecocriticism: Toward a Postmodern Ecocritical Practice", Serpil Oppermann brings the principles of postmodernism into ecocriticism for the purpose of expanding the ecocritical practice beyond its present limits. She questions if fragmentation, discontinuity, and other devices of postmodern fictions suggest any ontological alienation from the natural world (122). She comes up with the conclusion that in a world much shaped by the processes of discontinuity and fragmentation of interactions with the ecosystem within the human communities today, it is not possible to ignore the postmodern condition and write according to the nostalgic desires of realist traditions (124). In this regard, it is worth evaluating the author's fragmented style, a central feature in postmodern, in light of ecocriticism.

Writers attempting to capture war experiences and their impact on ecological systems tend to convey them through narratological patterns. Such exploitation of writing techniques definitely matches the content and theme of their writings. Powers tells a series of fragmented and non-linear episodes in his novel which replicates its themes. This fragmented style serves to mirror the chaos and destruction of the ecological systems in wartime. Additionally, it is clearly meant to reflect a narrator whose sense of self has been shattered by the effects of war and to reflect his alienation from the natural world. Yet such a narrative style is also classically hysterical; it reflects a certain inability to tell one's own story clearly and concisely. One sure symptom of PTSD is a speech disorder characterized by the inability to speak or to represent the experience reflected directly in the fragmented style of Power's novel. Powers reflects thematic and stylistic parallels constitute. What distinguishes his traumatic experiences from many other experiences is that he is traumatized by the costs of war which extends far beyond the human cost to include the animal and plant. *The Yellow Birds* can be described as a proto-ecological narrative in both content and style which propagates the idea of the protection of flora and fauna in war.

Ecocritics from Greg Garrard, Lawrence Buell and Jonathan Bate have clear pedagogical ambitions to foster environmental sustainability. Greg Garrard points out in "The Introduction" of his edited book *Teaching Ecocriticism and Green Cultural Studies* (2012) that "the point of ecocritical pedagogy is to make existing environmentality explicit, and, above all, sustainable" (9). Sustainability as a process designed to

“[meet] today’s needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Quoted in Christopher Schliephake, *Ecocriticism, Ecology, and the Cultures of Antiquity*, 2017, 212). Indeed, military activities which cause damage to vegetation and animal life takes hundreds of years to recover. They are responsible for pushing at risk animals and plants closer to extinction which was rightly seen to be part and parcel of wider questions about the sustainability of ecosystems. Powers exposes how the invasion disrupts the prospects for sustainability of flora and fauna. He uses the wildernesses to explore the concept of sustainability during wartime. Malik believes that the concept of sustainability is based on nostalgia for the past. Malik’s nostalgia for past life, before the war, is depicted where plants were healthy and in abundance, celebrating the pulsing colors and sinuous shapes of Iraqi flowers “hyacinths” as his evocative neologism for the vibrant flowers that “Mrs Al-Sharifi used to plant her hyacinth in this field” (10). This is why “[t]he women in the neighborhood were so jealous of those flowers” (ibid) who “accused her of using magic to make them grow the way they did” (ibid). Then, Malik exposes the visible deleterious effects of the war on the wildernesses and plants which do not promote the sustainability of flora in many aspects. The first aspect, the hyacinth flowers “were burned up in the battle last fall” (ibid) in the chaos of war. The second, farmers frequently do not even attempt to grow them in wartime as Mrs Al-Sharifi “did not try to replant them this year” (ibid). Malik’s reference to these aspects is to emphasize that the invasion disrupts the prospects for sustainability.

After Malik died, Bartle afterwards likewise, upon the same notion, gives a reference to the extinction of the hyacinths. He says: “There was a sharp disquiet in the way days passed into other days and the dust covered everything in Al Tafari, so that even the blooming hyacinth flowers became a kind of rumor” (51). Bartle’s reference to “the blooming hyacinth flowers became a kind of rumor” as the war progressed encapsulates that as they do not exist any longer; as they are extinct. This creates a sensation of “sharp disquiet” in the narrator through whom the reader views the scene. The overall theme of this reference, without any doubt, is to emphasize Bartle’s notion that war is incompatible with sustainable. The need for sustainable flora and fauna as the war progressed which the eco-writers portray in their texts has become increasingly urgent in a world that is now universally regarded as

under the threat of war. The ecological dimension of the sustainability agenda is driven by a notion of care for nonhuman animals and plants.

From a similar perspective, Antoon's *The Book of Collateral Damage* powerfully and engagingly captures the ecological situation in Iraq, tracing the consequences of the vicious war that has been waged in Iraq; a war whose victims are not only humans but also animals and plants. An aspect that matches the ecological content of Antoon's novel is his style. He tends to unleash one's imagination, reflects higher levels of environmental awareness through his anthropomorphic style. Anthropomorphism is defined as the attribution of human traits, emotions, or intentions to non-human entities. He creates a society of anthropomorphic animal and plant characters with which he criticizes the outrageous things that the invasion has done to Iraqi flora and fauna. The creation of such characters requires a careful balance between giving them anthropomorphic traits and having them act as real living nonhuman species. Animals and plants are given some human traits that Antoon has created for this novel. They are able to speak, are able to communicate efficiently and have real emotions. These traits allow them to explore the components of the world around them and critique them. These traits are introduced by the anthropomorphized tree in an explicit language:

Did you not know that trees have colloquies, like birds and people? We talk to each other just like you do. If you listen you can hear the wind carrying what our branches say to each other. Even our roots in the ground call out until they hear an answer from the trunk of a nearby tree, or a tree far off (58).

As the above quotation illustrates, the trees live in communities similar to human society, where there are able to speak and communicate efficiently. They also use their parts such as "branches" and "roots" or a natural phenomenon such as "wind" to effectively deliver their ideas.

Indispensably, anthropomorphism and ecocriticism are noticeably intertwined as the former gives voice to non-human entities which have been illicitly silenced by imperial and ethnocentric prejudices. Moreover, this can be viewed, persuasively, in Jane Bennett's deliberate emphasis, in the preface of her 2010 book titled *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, on the "need to cultivate a bit of anthropomorphism — the idea that human agency has some echoes in nonhuman nature — to counter the narcissism of humans in charge of the world" (xvi). In this

regard, Antoon's creation of a society of anthropomorphic animal and plant characters is an implicit attempt to collapse the imagined binary between humans and nonhuman animals and plants. It is an attempt to rebut the presumption of treating animals and plants as voiceless and soulless objects, reflecting that animals and plants should be treated with the same dignity and respect as humans during war. Furthermore, Antoon's use of anthropomorphism seeks to give voice to animals and plants to convey messages about their ecological sentiment that have been repeatedly refuted by the humans during the war as Nameer told us that "we rarely hear their voices, their whispers, because we don't try" (22). Most importantly, what makes the novel so distinctive and unique are the coherence and uniformity of style and content in which the anthropomorphized animal and plant protagonists try to catalogue the effect of the invasion with its military activities on Iraqi flora and fauna.

In a 2015 scientific article titled "The Effects of Modern War and Military Activities on Biodiversity and the Environment", Michael J. Lawrence, et al. document that military aircraft is known to cause elevations in animal mortality because of aircraft fire (2). They also document that the auditory system is more sensitive in many animals compared to that of humans, adding that the production of noise from military aircraft has negative physical effects on animals (ibid). These physical effects are reflected in Antoon's fiction. The anthropomorphized bird created by Wadood aptly expresses his ecological anguish aesthetically through "the Colloquy of the Last Bird", the bird says:

I'm afraid of the flocks of massive metal birds. They might come back, as they have done in the past. To hover over us and pursue us. Their roar is deafening. I don't know how they can fly when they're blind. And why do they excrete fire everywhere? The last thing my father said before we parted was that he had never seen so many of them or such big ones.

Where did my father go?

Where's my mother?

And where are my siblings?

I'm still flying.

But I'm tired (297-298)

The significance of the above quote lies in its emphasis on Glenn Love's ecocritical thought. In *Practical Ecocriticism. Literature, Biology and the Environment* (2003), Glenn Love claims that "we have to keep

finding out what it means to be human” (6) since our biological needs are the same as those of other animals (6). Animals and humans are biologically alike in both physical and psychological processes. In the same vein, the quote emphasises the harmful physical consequences of the invasion on animals. Within the framework of of ecocriticism, the bird in its colloquy refers to the technological revolution in military weapons as material ecocriticism. The bird hates military aircrafts; it knows that these military aircrafts excrete fire everywhere causing the death of its family. The bird also chillingly describes the sensation of deafness caused by the noise of the aircraft. The above quote additionally travels to the corner of the harmful psychological animal suffering in war. It is mentioned by the anthropomorphized bird that the use of military aircrafts arouses fear in the bird’s psyche, fear of violent untimely death, fear of isolation and loneliness and fear of destroying its habitat. The same psychological issue is repeatedly mentioned in Antoon's book by the anthropomorphized eye in its colloquy. The eye says: “I saw days when planes flew around high in the sky and the birds took fright and went into hiding” (196). The eye reflects how animals are sentient creatures capable of the same emotions felt by human beings. They feel the same fear that human beings experience during times of conflict. The ecological significance of this notion lies in its attempt to dissolve the boundary between human and animal that both can be traumatized by abusive war environments calling for proper care and respect for the animals during the war. The mythical stories told by that the anthropomorphized bird or the eye about physical and psychological effects of technological military weapons on animal ecology are similarly designed to improve the audience’s environmental consciousness and to reject the invasion.

Allegorically, Nameer’s subtitle “the Colloquy of the Last Bird” fits in perfectly with another notion of ecocritical discourse. “The Last Bird” mirrors the notion that the bird is much closer to extinction. Metonymically, he emblematises that these species are on their way to becoming extinct from the military weapons which can wreak havoc with the lives of the animals, calling for ecological sustainability by saving plants and animals from extinction.

Antoon is also keen to dramatize Wadood’s ecological sentiment through creating of an anthropomorphized tree through “The Colloquy of the Ziziphus”. The Ziziphus tree starts to reflect how plants have

such significant roles in environmental protection and in meeting human and animal needs. it says:

Children born in the house grew up and started playing beneath me in the garden. When I was bearing fruit, from my third year on, they asked their father to shake me so that they could enjoy the fruit. They rubbed my bark and were surprised to see gum oozing from my trunk. In my shade they read and played.... The bees fed on the nectar of my flowers and sometimes birds nested in my branches (59).

We are aesthetically told how a single tree provides outdoor living and enjoyment for people in addition to food and shelter to many humans and species of animals. The quote leaves no doubt in the reader's mind that moral standing should be accorded to plant ecology which provides ecological services. Then, we are told how the trees are affected by human activities resulting from urban sprawl. While humans came with machines to build "a towering house" (59), the anthropomorphized tree narrates:

I heard a wail in the distance, a scream from roots being pulled up and branches being broken. I thought my fate was sealed. They uprooted all the trees in the orchard but they left me and several palm trees (58).

However, human activities resulting from urban sprawl are not introduced as an ecological crisis because humans are aware of the importance of plants in their houses. Hence, they replanted their gardens with the "young orange, mulberry, and fig trees [which] grew taller" (59) and the Ziziphus tree "had a delightful life and was the princess of the garden" (60). But the Ziziphus narrates how the war with its explosive weapons is a worse and more devastating threat on plants than the many human activities as its mythical narration in the following quotation:

Then a day came when I heard the sky splitting open and volcanic ash raining down. It was as if the bottom of hell had burst. A flame found its way into the remains of my heart and started a fire inside me (62).

"The volcanic ash raining down" is an indication of the application of military weapons during the US invasion which causes a fire inside the tree, portraying the destruction of vegetation in wartime. Thus, the novel's burnt tree screams out silently against the cruel wars which destroy the world's innocent vegetation. Finally, the colloquy of the tree is closed with the following quotation:

I was frightened but I saw it as a good sign. It may be painful but now my long drawn-out death, which had started years earlier, would finally

come about. I thought my soul would fly off to heaven, content and satisfied to be close to our big sister, the lote tree of the far boundary. But I'm still here hovering around my memory, and I feel as if my trunk is still here. (62-63)

The tree enunciates the emotion of being satisfied because its dream to be in heaven close to its big sister, the lote tree, will become a reality. But its satisfaction with its death is a reflexion of a sentimental ache caused by its war experiences. It authenticates the everlastingly and perpetually exterminatory tortures against plants caused by military weapons. In short, the quote mourns the degradation of flora which has lost all hope to regain the peaceful and abundant flora. Taking this point further, "the lote tree of the far boundary" is the heavenly tree described in the Holy Quran that none amongst the creation has the power to praise its beauty. And because of its holiness, the gardener flatly refused to get rid of it, as the reader is told in the colloquy of the tree (60). The lote tree seems to be an indication of the greenery of planet earth, a wonderful gift from a loving God, which human beings are ruthlessly destroying.

The Book of Collateral Damage can be described as one of the most poignant anthropomorphic stories. The dominant anthropomorphic mode in Antoon's novel may be well suited than other literary genres which attempt to remedy that ecocritical silence in war zones in which the costs of this war go beyond the human cost to include the animal and plant cost. Aesthetically, Antoon's use of anthropomorphized animal and plant makes his novel a valuable resource for stimulating environmental awareness in readers to adopt an oppositional stand to the US invasion of Iraq.

Eco-symbols and Eco-images:

Interestingly, ecocriticism defined by Peter Auger in his book *The Anthem Dictionary of Literary Terms and Theory* happens to highlight the same ecological issues presented in Ralph Emerson's *Nature and Other Essays*. Auger defines ecocriticism as an examination of "how humans interpret and represent nature, and how natural images are used in symbols" (90) and Emerson states that [e]very natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind, and that state of mind can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture" (10). Greg Garrard explains in his book *Ecocriticism*, that ecocritics "tie their cultural analyses explicitly to a green moral and political agenda" (2004, 3). In

light of ecocriticism, eco-symbols and eco-images in a literary work can be ecocritically, politically and aesthetically evaluated.

They aim to add further force to their argument for projecting an ecological awareness and in making a comprehensive analysis of a text's aesthetic value. The selected writers employ various natural figures of animals and plants as literary symbols and images in their texts raise ecological concerns rampant in the US invasion scenario.

In *The Yellow Birds*, Powers's prose style – with its metaphoric associations by which every artifact or phenomenon of animal and plant means more than itself – enriches the story with ecological and political awareness. The most powerful ecological and political images of animal and plant can be initially captured in the title, epigraph and the opening sentence of the novel. The title, epigraph and the opening sentence are effective literary tools that some authors utilize to focus the reader toward the theme or concerns behind their works. In *The Yellow Birds*, one of the most powerful ecological images of animal is introduced in the title and the epigraph which is about the war while paying scrupulous attention to “a yellow bird”. The title is taken from American military song which powers includes as an epigraph to his novel:

A yellow bird
With a yellow bill
Was perched upon
My windowsill
I lured him in
With a piece of bread
And then I smashed
His fucking head

The above quote is a description of the surprising shift from the peaceful setting for a bird in the first stanza and extreme violence or cruelty to the peaceful bird without reflecting moral values of the actions towards the bird in the second stanza. Here, the yellow bird is a victim of the artful strategies of human dominance in a malicious way. In a context of war, the scene of the yellow bird is a reference to the animal cost of human dominance and a symbol of the consequences, especially to the innocent civilians and soldiers, that war can bring with no compassion for its victims. In the conjunction found in the title of the book along with its epigraph, we are meant to know that Powers's narrative has to do with and encourages the readers to sympathize with

humans as well as animals as victims of human dominance. In this regard, his sympathy towards humans as well as animals develops a higher sense of moral equality between them.

Another powerful ecological image of the plant is introduced in Powers's opening sentence of his novel to raise ecological message and to reject war in an aesthetical context. From the opening sentence, Bartle identifies his ultimate enemies not as Iraqi citizens, but as the war itself. The novel begins with the narrator's powerful words: "The war tried to kill us in the spring. As grass greened the plains of Nineveh and the weather warmed" (3). "The war tried to kill us" is frequently repeated through the first page by describing every season passing in a war zone with special emphasis on plants. Laurence Coupe writes in his book *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism* that nature is a "repressed memory" (63) and ecocritics appeal to "the idea of a repressed memory of nature in order to criticise modernity, characterized as it is by estrangement from both humanity's natural impulses and from natural scenes and seasons" (ibid), thus confirming the intimate relationship between men and nature. In briefly as we can say that, Bartle observes the changing of the seasons and the corresponding behaviors of the plants around him in the midst of horror and chaos of the battle is the delineation of an ecological aspect. The reader is left with a clear sense of horror and revulsion at the evil of war and a sense of eco-nostalgia to plant's life cycle through the seasons as repressed memory. Thus, the narrator's senses seem to illustrate his negative attitude toward the war and lead to the desire to go back to a peaceful green field.

Additionally, Powers introduces the philosophical allegory of the evil of war, illuminating that the sound of falling mortars and the caw of crows are related to each other which aptly clarifies the most important pillar in ecocritical discourse. Bartle comes home from the war zone, "hear[ing] the caw of ugly crows" (134) which "might strike in perfect harmony with the memory of the sound of falling mortars" (ibid). The caw of crows and the sound of the mortar symbolize a presage of the coming threat which is necessary to demonize war with its brutal ecological consequences. The ecological images and symbolism used in *The Yellow Birds* add force to his argument that war is nothing but an evil force with tragic effects on ecosystems.

According to the framework proposed by Auger and Emerson, *The Book of Collateral Damage* depicts the effect of war on animal and plant.

Hence, Antoon tries to refashion certain symbols or images to convey the prevailing eco-critical dilemmas of the violation of human, animal and plant rights, highlights crucial environmental issues by connecting them with ancient myths. This novel is indeed an attempt to fashion a mythical world applicable to the chaotic post-invasion environment. Symbols and images used in Antoon's novel are an inspiration for the content of literary texts. For example, Wadood writes:

I imagined, even felt, that I was inhabiting the gazelle (or any other prey) in this equation because it represents me and I represent it. I even feel I am it. I am the one who's been marginalized and disappeared at least twice. I'm the prey's prey (20).

The aesthetical utilization of synecdoche is well mirrored in this quote as the narrator imagined himself to be “the gazelle” or any other prey. Politically, the narrator illuminates that both the civilians and the animals are marginalized. Ecologically, the narrator aims to capture the reader's attention to the conflict and its dehumanizing effects on human and animal. These political texts reflect their deliberate and functional use of imagery, symbols, and what these elements mean both aesthetically and ecologically. Drawing from my discussion above, we might also observe that there is an interconnection between violence against humans and violence against animals.

Another powerful eco image is introduced by Wadood when he has great difficulty “write[ing] down the history of the first minute of the war” (22) in his war manuscript. Realism expressed in his novel to document the consequences of war on ecosystems mingles with symbolism. According to Wadood, the first minute “isn’t a moment, but in fact more like a tree” (21). He draws a parallel between the first minute of the war and the tree. He writes:

So I have to get down to the roots and listen to the earth’s conversation with the tree and what it drinks from the earth. Then there’s the trunk and everyone who has ever leaned on it or carved their name on it. And the branches and their memory and everything the wind has picked up and scattered far and wide. And all the birds that have perched on it on their way to distant places. And the ones that have nested in it and so on. (ibid)

In examining and interpreting this eco image in the previous quote, the reader is meant to know that “the first minute” and “the tree” are what he called “labyrinth” (ibid). The labyrinth symbolizes a

multidimensional approach. He seems to express a comprehensive picture of the consequences of war and to express a higher level of ecoconsciousness that war is unlimited violence; rather it is often a long-term process with several different directions and costs. The costs of war extend far beyond the human, to include animals, plants, inanimate things and anything that can be destroyed. The ecological images used in *The Book of Collateral Damage* add force to his argument that war is nothing but an evil force with tragic effects on ecosystems.

Conclusion:

Ecocriticism has expanded to grant 'moral consideration to animals and plants as represented in literary texts in terms of their usefulness in raising ecological awareness and their contribution in creating a comprehensive picture of healthy future ecosystems that would adequately protect all living creatures—human, plant and animal—from environmental crises. As this study has shown, the authors of the selected novels aim to integrate eco-consciousness into contemporary popular culture. They share the goal of changing human perceptions of the world of animal and plant. Their differing experiences of colonialism (western occupier and Arab occupied), for example, do not negate the fact that each advocates for better emotional relationships to non-human animals and plants. Each sheds light on the principles of harmony and the principles of ecojustice to encourage eco moral responsibilities through the fact that animals and plants are as deserving of rights and respect as are humans. Then, they shed light on the consequences of US invasion on animals and plants. This study also sheds light on the authors' symbolism and images of animals and plants and the authors' style and techniques which are great literary tools to strengthen the ecological conservation values in terms of flora and fauna. The analysis of the texts through an eco-critical lens establishes the fact that these texts can be considered as ecoliterary texts which challenge the established narratives of the official discourse, paying closer attention to the fact that the costs of war are not only measured by the loss of humans, but also by the devastation of flora and fauna.

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