

## Vibrant Connections: The Effectiveness of Humans and Nature in Taher Al-Zahrani's Novel *Nahwu Al-Janub*

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### Abstract

This article explores the interconnections between humans and nature in Taher Al-Zahrani's *Nahwu Al-Janub* (*Towards the South* [2010]). The natural world of the southern part of Saudi Arabia plays a central role in many of Al-Zahrani's novels, with *Nahwu Al-Janub* serving as a prime example. Anchored in an ecocritical approach, this study examines how this novel captures the dynamic relationship between humans and nature, positioning it as a narrative focal point highlighting the human-nonhuman condition, the power of nature, and the self-defence of humans in the environment. It addresses the construction of eco-awareness through the protagonist, Zahran, whose name is derived from the surrounding natural environment. The natural world informs Zahran's identity, reflecting broader societal shifts in the understanding of nature, culture, and heritage in a rapidly changing Saudi Arabia. The ecocritical analysis engages with the village's natural elements such as mountains, valleys, farms, farmhouses, traditional attire, rare animals like the rock hyrax (rock rabbit), and other such elements which reveal an intimate connection between the author's narrative and the southern environment.

### Keywords

Ecocriticism, Saudi novel, *Nahwu Al-Janub*, village life, urban growth, Taher Al-Zahrani

### Introduction

Ecocriticism is one of several modern disciplines that highlights increasing awareness of nature in the study of literature. It is a western movement that began in the 1970s and gained momentum in the 1990s, with an attempt to organise it by Patric D Murphy, Cheryl Glotfelty, and Mike Branch in order "to support the study of nature writing" (Branch and Slovic xiv). Ecocriticism has emerged as a

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significant scholarly approach to examine the relationship between human culture and the nonhuman world (Branch 14). It has evolved from its initial inception in the early 1970s on nature writing and wilderness literature to encompass broader environmental perspectives in literary analysis (Armbruster and Wallace 2001). This interdisciplinary field studies the relationship between literature and the environment and explores how literature reflects ecological issues and shapes readers' views about them (Rishma and Gill; Tajane, Suchitra Sharad). Diverse voices have arisen to promote such movements to protect landscapes and the natural world, and to combat environmental predicaments and their impact on humans (Glotfelty xxv).

Lawrence Buell (b. 1934) is one of the pioneers of ecocriticism and has contributed extensively to this discipline by exploring environmental criticism in his seminal book *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005). He maintains that “one of the marks of culture(s) of environmental criticism today is that the place of culture in relation to nature has become a matter of lively debate” (Buell 2005, 136). In *Writing for an Endangered World* (2001), Buell argues that human interactions with their surroundings have existed since the beginning of history (Buell 2–3). In the same vein, Greg Garrard (2012) emphasises that “ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between the human and the nonhuman, throughout human history and entailing critical analysis of the term ‘human’ itself” (5). Borg et al. (2024, 3) also observe the significance of this field which is conceived as an organic and ecological household, an ever-expanding architectural structure that is continually extended and rebuilt to accommodate new members of the community.

Human-nature relationship trust must be promoted towards a better understanding of future sustainability. Strengthening this bond between humans and nature has become a universal concern: “Major environmental institutions around the world are realising that a sustainable future requires a new relationship with nature; there is a growing recognition that the human–nature relationship is a tangible target for driving that behaviour change” (Lengieza, Aviste, and Richardson 1). Some studies depict nature as a vibrant force in maintaining sustainable life, yet it sometimes remains vulnerable to human actions that alter natural surroundings and ecosystems, endangering wildlife and humans. Others highlight the interdependence between humans and nature, emphasising nature’s role: “Nature is a supreme being and human beings depend on it for everything. ... All the things in the universe, even the sand of desert helps a man to reach his destination” (Pervaiz 441). Harmony and coexistence between humans and nature are also addressed in some works, stressing the ecological consequences of human actions: “Through such compassionate actions, environmental

organizations play a pivotal role in fostering harmonious coexistence between humans and wildlife, thereby contributing to the preservation of biodiversity and the protection of our planet's ecosystems" (Insany et al. 33). The stress on harmonious coexistence serves a constructive role in promoting ecological balance, a concern that has been explored across various disciplines. These initiatives cultivate ecological awareness and responsibility within human communities.

Arabic Literature is characterised by many works that focus on sustainable environments and the importance of green efforts. Such works can be studied through ecocritical perspectives to increase such consciousness. Calls for Arab scholars to incorporate diverse voices to contribute to the growing ecocritical discourse are much needed for a better sustainable future (Sinno 126). The human-nature relationship has received widespread attention in recent years among scientists and researchers in the Arab world who have addressed this global concern and advocated for eco-consciousness. This global concern, maintained through collaboration among nations and regions, is important for a sustainable universe, as it creates opportunities to preserve nature and resolve challenges. The Islamic tradition, like many other global traditions, cares for the environment and emphasises that "a solid ethical foundation for environmental stewardship, human interactions with nature often face criticism from various perspectives" (Karimullah 198), leading to its degradation.

The relationship between literature and the environment has gained significant attention in recent years, examining how humans interact with their physical environment. Ecocritical themes are found in the works of Arab writers as well as in the works of Geoffrey Chaucer and Romantic and Victorian writers. Among Arab writers, Imru' Al-Qais vividly depicted landscapes in his *Mu'allaqah*, including "the scene of ruins, the scene of storytelling, the scene of the night of tragedy, the scene of the horse, and the scene of rain" (Abbas 76). Other writers such as Thu Al-Rummah, Al-'akhtal, Al-Firazdaq and Jarir in the Umayyad period, Abu Al-Taib Al-Mutanabbi, Ibn Al-Mu'taz, Al-Sunubari and Al-Buhturi in the Abbasid period were inspired by nature. Similarly, Romantic poets like William Wordsworth, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and John Keats celebrated nature in their works. In the Victorian age, Alfred Tennyson, Thomas Hardy, and Gerard Manley Hopkins depicted nature in their works. In the modern Arab literary scene, ecocritical studies need more focus. Amna Shamim pointed out these ecocritical concerns in the Arab world in the following words: "Ecocriticism in Arab literature is yet a recent study that needs more focus to cherish and conserve the landscape, sublime, wilderness and animals of the Arab countries, which will be a vast step towards focusing on its greenery"

(Shamim 9). It has become a modern discipline with an organised framework concerned with nature, and it is prominent across various disciplines and genres.

In the modern era, several Arab writers have addressed ecological concerns in their works, including Rajaa Alem's *Tawq Al-Hamamah (Dove's Necklace)* [2010], Ibrahim Al-Koni's *Nazif Al-Hajar (Bleeding of the Stone)* [1990], Abd al-Rahman Munif's *Al-Nihayat (Endings)* [1977], Sabri Moussa's *Fasad Al-'Amkinah (Seeds of Corruption)* [1973], and Taha Hussein's *Duaa' Al- Karawan (The Call of the Curlew)* [1934]. These novels, for example, serve as a powerful modern genre to build environmental awareness and advance eco-literacy by shaping societies' views of the environment. World-famous novels like Tejo and Kamba's *Komat Kamit*, emphasise human gratitude and respect for nature (Siwi et al. 2022); *Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya and *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh demonstrate the interactions between humans and their environments using an ecocritical perspective focusing on the impacts of industrialisation and modernisation on the natural world (Kukade 2021; 2022). This approach is relevant to studying literature that highlights the mountainous regions and explores human survival in wilderness as exemplified in *Nahwu Al-Janub*.

Saudi Arabian novels have explored a wide range of themes such as terrorism in *Al-Irhabi 20* and *Jangi*, ramifications of epidemics in *Humma Qifjar* and *Safer Berlik* (Ahmad et al., 2025) as well as ecological concerns. As part of those vibrant voices in the world, Saudi novelists explore environmental and ecological challenges depicting the importance of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. They address the migration of people towards urban cities highlighting the conflict between tradition and modernity. Urban cities like Jeddah, featured in many novels, have witnessed rapid developments in all facets. Contemporary Saudi novels, such as *Nahwu Al-Janub* and *Jabal Habyah (Mountain of Haliyyah)* [2009] by Ibrahim Mudwah Al-Almai use ecological perspectives to tackle human interactions with natural and urban environments focusing on village life. The novel *Al-Hizam (The Belt)* [2001] by Ahmed Abu Dahman explores human connections with the environment, tradition and culture, stressing the spirit of a southern Saudi village distinguished by its beautiful, harmonious natural landscape and its rich heritage. In a different context, Muḥammad Ḥasan 'Alwān's *al-Qundus (The Beaver)* [2011] explores ecological awareness and the integration of the Saudi Arabian protagonist and his relationship with nature in North American society, as examined by Ramsay (419). These works stress the human-nature connectedness in literature and show how ecocritical analysis can help people better understand environmental challenges and promote discussion to create a more sustainable future. One such voice in Saudi Arabia is Taher Al-Zahrani (b. 1987), who raises ecocritical issues

in his works, which focus on the nature and the environment of the southern part of the Kingdom.

Taher Al-Zahrani was born in Jeddah in 1978 and graduated from the College of Arts and Humanities, Jeddah University. His writings explore many themes related to Saudi society and broader cultural contexts. Though some of his writings focus on the environment and urbanisation of the southern part of Saudi Arabia, they also deal with global concerns such as terrorism as introduced in *Jangi* (2000) which “was his personal account of the 9/11 attacks and the War on Terror. This experience is re-told through a seemingly real story of a friend who is unexpectedly caught in the US war in Afghanistan” (Al-Moghales et al. 369). Although Al-Zahrani has lived in the city of Jeddah with its noise and diversity, he remains loyal to his roots in the south of the Kingdom, the setting of many of his eco-fictions. The events of *Nahwu Al-Janub* take place in Al-Zahrani’s native place, where Zahran, who probably represents Taher Alzahrani’s personal experiences, spent many difficult years in his grandfather’s company. Zahran, who had lived in the city for a long time, left for his village upon his father’s belief that the village would mould him. He adapted to village life guided by his strong and resilient grandfather. However, he later became angry when the road and electricity were introduced, considering them scars on the landscape. These childhood experiences marked by environmental commitment shaped Al-Zahrani’s works about the south. Children need to be exposed to nature which will help them in their life as Rosemarie Rowley states in her review of *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* (2014), “Buell believes that experiences the children have between the ages of five and twelve can morph into an adult lifetime of commitment to the environment and offer a prosthetic help to those who worry about children being nature-deprived in our cities” (Rowley 2). This view is noticed in Zahran’s father, who is determined to instil in his son a connection to his natural roots.

To address this environmental concern, *Nahwu Al-Janub* unpacks a wide range of environment objects interacting with one another such as different kinds of animals, farms, mountains, pools, plants, trees, and humans. From the novel’s start, the author engages us with the natural world creating a vivid picture of village life, with even the minor details highlighting the human conditions of the residents in his village. Using an ecocritical approach, this study will analyze the human-nonhuman connectedness and the interwoven layers of this relationship in *Nahwu Al-Janub*, manifesting the author’s worldview of human-environmental interactions. This paper seeks to address several questions arising from the analysis of the novel. Are humans culpable for the conflicts and imbalances in their relationship with nature? What do the beauty and wilderness of nature

signify? What does love between humans and animals and vice versa signify? Furthermore, what does Zahran's leaving for Jeddah at the end of the novel signify? Lastly, does nature's wilderness impact humans, which in turn affects their behaviour and approach towards life? These questions will guide the analysis of the novel's ecocritical concerns and their broader implications.

### ***Naḥwu Al-Janub*: Environment and the human-nonhuman condition**

Taher Al-Zahrani's deep observation and reflection on the natural world of the south are based on his repeated travels to the region. This demonstrated his profound environmental consciousness that eventually became evident in his later novels about the south. The gruesome nature that Al-Zahrani described in *Naḥwu Al-Janub* about fifteen years ago, which might be true as a personal experience in his village, has turned to be attractive and beautiful in his later novels as *Al-Faiyumi* (2016) and *Akḥīr Huqul Al-Ṭabgh* (2020). In these novels, Al-Zahrani depicts a blend of urban and rural life and how they influence one another. The language and beauty of the landscapes and environments in the novels reflect Al-Zahrani's creative skills in painting the people's village life, traditions, customs and rootedness in their village and the land.

Alzahrani's eco-consciousness in *Naḥwu Al-Janub*, which differs from his later novels, is to raise awareness towards nature and the environment of the south for sustainable and ecological practices through his resentment of modern construction, like the road leading to the south. He highlights the existing challenges of individuals moving towards the southern part of the Kingdom. The author's language seems sharp as he describes the gate of the south as dangerous and deadly, resembling "a long snake, with venomous fangs lurking in every inch" (Al-Zahrani 29–30). This vivid presentation of the road and the journey beginning convey the difficulties faced by the people heading towards the south. Once they finish the paved road, landscape becomes ugly and hostile, endangering humans passing through the rugged road which seems to be "baring its fangs in a vile display [and] sharp, jagged rocks jut out, and the scattered thorns of acacia trees lie in wait. Wolves, their bellies ripped open, hanging from the branches of the Sidr trees" (30). This gruesome imagery of the natural world described by Zahran represents his attitude towards nature in the southern part of the Kingdom, characterized as hard and rugged with its high mountains, wild animals and many moths of dry valleys. Either it imposes a lot of challenges on humans living there, or they adapt to it easily as is the case with Zahran, the central character in this novel. Zahran's father decides to send him to his village in the south of the Kingdom after he notices the influence of modern Jeddah on his son. Throughout the novel, Al-Zahrani describes the city as a place that

consumes the youth and corrupts their values, causing them to lose their identity and connection with their roots in the village. Zahran's apparent transformation has forced the father to return to his roots, where he was born, to ensure that his son's identity is restored by his grandfather. The novel addresses the deep connection between humans and their environment, affecting it or being affected by it. This interconnectedness is shaped by various social and cultural factors. The grandfather's way of dealing with his grandson, Zahran, stems from the environmental and cultural heritage he was raised in. A hard, natural life made the grandfather tough, as can be seen in his dealings with his grandson. To live in the village and cope with its surroundings, the grandson must take off his shoes and walk barefoot on the farms and in the mountains when he goes after the livestock. Weapons such as guns are mandatory, and everyone must know how to hold and use them properly. They must be carried wherever one goes, and if lost, it is considered an indelible disgrace (49). The grandfather begins to train his grandson in how to hold and position the gun, which needs strong muscles to balance his body so that he can shoot the target successfully.

The grandfather celebrates the victory of his grandsons over the hyena after a fierce battle that nearly cost them their lives. This act demonstrates humans' strong affinity towards their domestic animals. Such a victory is celebrated highly by tribe members, and this again stems from a cultural and social perspective rooted in the tribe. This is what Zahran's father intended to do by sending him back to the village to establish him as a man with a solid identity, away from the city where he started to lose the traditions of the tribe and the norms of tribal society. However, Al-Zahrani highlights this oppression of nature and animals, a concern that the ecologists and environmentalists frame as a crisis. He emphasises how human actions such as endangering and killing wild animals, especially rare species, contribute to this pressing issue. The celebration of the tribe with this victory after killing the hyena demonstrates the relationship between humans and nature and their ability to overcome the adversity of nature and its hardships represented through such wild animals and beasts surrounding them and their livestock. They continue to live there, coping with difficulties. They believe that in the harsh nature of rural life lies the essence of manhood that Zahran's father wanted to see in his son.

The ability to endure a harsh life amidst the natural surroundings of the village is reflected in the behaviour and actions of the characters in the novel. Difficulties of living and the tough environment influence daily relationships in the most sensitive moments, such as death. The grandfather's death depicts this kind of relationship between humans and non-humans. The severity of life becomes painfully evident after his death. The long distances and roads prevent

his sons and relatives from being by his side during his last breaths. This isolation is imposed by rural life as it is far from urban services. People in these areas must face these obstacles alone and wait for the dawn prayers to perform the traditional death rituals. The silent nature of mountains increases Zahran's pain who must wait beside the dead body of his grandfather alone silently till morning. The process of washing the body with Sidr leaves shows how the people are connected to their community, traditions, and rituals. After they prepared the body for burial, they had to wait until the morning for the late arrival of his sons. This connectedness of humans to their environment in such moments causes deep sorrow and grief to those living there such as Zahran. The smell of the Sidr leaves after washing the dead body intensifies the feelings of departing dear ones. In addition, the writer contrasts the grief of humans—specifically, the grandsons—with that of nonhumans such as the dog named Marwan (a common male name), who has the responsibility of guarding the sheep. This scene reflects a touching moment of humanity amidst such harshness, in which the dog Marwan expresses his loyalty and love for his late owner through silent, mournful gestures. This loyalty demonstrates the deep bond and trust shared between Zahran's grandfather and his faithful companion. The grandfather's trust in the dog often surpasses his confidence in Zahran, as shown in instances like entrusting the dog with the responsibility of guarding the sheep—a testament to the dog's unwavering devotion and competence.

In the novel, animals exhibit clear signs of grief and trauma in response to environmental disruptions, reflecting on their deep entanglement with the natural world. Zahran states that the dog Marwan was “looking down at us from above while we were burying his owner, circling around himself and letting out a deep, painful moan” (87). This emotional scene of the dog highlights that feelings of loss are not limited to humans but extend to nonhumans, too. In this case, the dog, Marwan, was a part of the deceased's life. Humans appear less human in this scene as Zahran describes his relatives who arrived last to the graveyard covering their noses with their shemaghs (head coverings) to protect themselves from the dust during the burial (87). This complex image of rural life combines both toughness and emotion among its individuals and animals. The scene of the animal's loyalty appears again when Zahran decides to leave the village after his grandfather's death: “Marwan was running after the car ... for a long distance. If he gets tired, he stops and he lowers his head turning around himself” (105). The dog's obedience reflects a deep mutual bond shaped by their shared environment, though the owner's occasional harshness reveals tension in their human-animal relationship. The rooster also holds a strong connection with village life, and it is commonly found in nearly every household, often functioning as a natural alarm

to dawn. Zahran draws attention to the rooster, Humairan, during his grandfather's death, noting the rooster's unusual crowing as his grandfather lay dying, gesturing with his index finger. Through Zahran's monologue, Al-Zahrani points out the humans' interconnectedness with their natural surroundings, including the animals that inhabit these spaces and the symbolic roles they occupy. The rooster seems to sense his owner's imminent death, with his persistent crowing signalling the end of the journey of his companion, who has just breathed his last:

(حميران) يصيح

وجدي يشد على يدي يشد

...

ويتوقف حميران عن الصياح

ويسكن جدي

جدي ممدودٌ أمامي كأنه سنبله صفراء محروقة

ثم سکون يملأ المكان (الزهراني 2010:84)

(Humairan) crows.

My grandfather grips my hand tightly and keeps gripping.

...

Humairan ceases crowing.

My grandfather becomes still

My grandfather is stretched out in front of me like a burnt ear of grain.

Then silence fills the place. (84)

Al-Zahrani illustrates the dynamic interactions between humans and non-human beings. Zahran, the protagonist, understands the dog's loneliness and interprets his unusual behaviour and body language. He discovers a trait in the dog Marwan which is not evident in others: "[H]e hates to be rebuked and if one kicks him, throws stones at him or beats him with a stick he doesn't get deterred or responds, but gets upset, lowers his head or may abstain from food for a day or a couple of days" (40). Zahran's brother Ahmed understands and identifies the kind of animal which tore the belly of the sheep from one side while the rest of the body is sound. Later, the two brothers avenge their slaughtered sheep and prepare to protect them from predators, highlighting their deep connection and affinity with their animals.

Zahran informs us how nature is painful. His grandfather cuts his shoes and throws them away so Zahran could understand nature by coming in direct contact with it: "I avoid sharp stones but end up falling onto a branch full of thorns" (36). The stagnant water of the pond filled with the waste of the monkeys and frogs was the only choice. After the sheep drank from the pond, he took off his *thobe* (clothes/dress) and put it on the surface of the water to filter it (36). He

fell several times before reaching the water because the algae were growing all around. Their fight with the wild animals, eating leaves of trees in their hunger and swimming naked in the pond show how humans can cope with and survive in the wild, forgetting their human selves. Their stay without food in the mountain to trap the hyena forced them to eat the leaves of the trees available to them and defecate like animals (58), which demonstrates how humans can act like animals in harsh and hostile environments. They drink from the same pond as their animals and eat leaves from trees like their livestock. Humans named everything in nature which shows their connection to the environment. The bull with a white colour on its head is called “Subaih” which also means a bull with a radiant face; the rooster was named Humairan after its red colour and even the farms were given names such as Om Al-Tunbak (Mother of Tobacco) and Abu Al-Saha (Father of the Courtyard) (40). The dog’s role in the village was important. Zahran’s grandfather first ordered Zahran to herd the sheep in the mountains where Marwan (the dog) was leading the herd and Zahran was at the back (35), walking through the paths to where the sheep should be. This kind of interaction with nature is what Martin calls “the complex interrelationship between the human and the nonhuman... the connectedness of all living and nonliving things” (Martin 208).

The harshness of nature is intertwined with the people’s deep love for the land, rendering them ultimately inseparable. After the mourning period ended, a bloody fight emerged between Zahran’s father and his uncle over the possession of the land. They were taken to the hospital, covered in blood. This scene of the fight over ownership of the land resembles a scene from the Middle Ages when the devils began to beat the drums as if announcing the death rituals when the two men “each of them brandished his white blade, which began to gleam under the midmorning sun’s rays” (Al-Zahrani 90). Another intense scene of a deadly battle emerges, which reflects how humans can act against each other to avenge their dignity and inheritance. Zahran narrates his grandfather’s legend about the Sheikh of the tribe who had two children, Kulaib and Rmadan. Rmadan felt the tribe was conspiring to take over their inheritance and their social status. Rmadan agrees with his brother and willingly chooses to act as a madman so that he can take revenge by killing a hundred men if his brother is killed. After his brother is killed, he plans to take revenge as he promised by hiding his sword under a tree where he requested the Sheikh and his men to meet to negotiate the ‘wrongful’ death of his brother. In that scene, Rmadan kills ninety-nine men before being killed and hanged from a tree for the beasts; eventually, his skull falls to the ground. When someone discovered the skull and kicked it, a bone

pierced his foot, leading to gangrene and ultimately his death, making him the hundredth victim (93–94).

Al-Zahrani presents humans in this part of the region as disturbing agents in nature, causing a harsher environment with their vile actions. He stresses disruptive human actions reflected in nature. Nothing changed for years when he watched the valleys and mountains on his way back to Jeddah: “Mountains remain as they are devoid of any signs of life and the barren land needs rain, but humans repel clouds” (105). The coastal road remained unchanged, and the driver continued to tell Zahran about the tragic accidents that happened after they had just seen an overturned car with moans coming from the inside. Stray camels surprised them (107), which were the cause of many accidents. Zahran’s return from the village, which he considers a form of exile, to Jeddah after he spent many years there was driven by his father’s desire to build up his character according to the traditions and culture of the tribe and village people. The village transformed his physical appearance: “I returned with nothing but with dry and cracked feet and torn-off nails and scars all over the body, each scar has a story. Returned with a face like a rusty knife, thick lips, dark gums due to smoking” (109). These testimonies of suffering vividly portray the trauma and hardships endured by the villagers. The harsh conditions, as reflected in Zahran’s words, illustrate the burdens he had to bear in adapting to the village life imposed by his grandfather. However, this connection to the environment was short-lived and was severe following his grandfather’s death. Moreover, he admitted that his time in the village brought him nothing but accumulated burdens.

### **The power of nature and defence**

Ecophobia is an element that manifests negative attitudes and behaviour of individuals towards the environment. Through Zahran, the author draws our attention to such fear and discomfort with nature and its various elements, “Here I am alone, battling the air in this cursed valley, with empty fortresses and lands faded away from all life” (43). Individuals living in urban cities like Jeddah are characterised with deadly idleness and laziness, as was the case with Zahran. Therefore, Zahran’s father found that nature is the best remedy for such a body to heal from the shackles of city life. Zahran in the village is confronted with many fears and hostile situations but manages to survive with the help of his grandfather and brother. Zahran describes the village as scattered like fort houses, which reflect the hardships and insecurities. Similar patterns and designs with basements and fortifications indicate how humans live in an environment full of dangers. However, Zahran’s progressive adaptation to nature and its inhabitants

continues till the death of his grandfather. Having no other options, Zahran adapts to nature and its power, linking with its surroundings, a process that resonates with Steele's words (2008): "When we allow ourselves to connect with our surroundings, the physical environments within which we place ourselves or find ourselves placed, shape our identities in concrete ways" (100). But at the end, Zahran finds it difficult to progress amidst this rigid nature with its challenges, so he decides to leave for Jeddah.

The novel depicts the circle of ecosystems and how humans and nonhumans coexist with limited boundaries and spaces. In one of the battles with the hyena, the two brothers had to spend nights in the mountain to kill it, which demonstrates their care for their domestic animals and their space among humans. This beast was a threat to their lives and their livestock; therefore, Zahran's brother killed it. This incident reflects human domination over the environment when threats are perceived within their boundaries. Zahran and his brother had to act to save their lives when they sensed the presence of a dangerous animal. The village people, amid those elements of nature, must adapt themselves to this ecosystem, for better or worse. The natural reaction of wilderness to human intervention is also part of this ecosystem that man must accept when he attempts to transgress the space of nonhuman wild animals for his advantage. Zahran's hunt of the rock rabbit, its retaliatory bite, and the subsequent eagle attack, triggered by his bleeding hand, illustrate nature's resistance to human threats within the ecosystem. Man's dominance of the ecosystem is also communicated through the grandfather's shooting of the eagles circling around his grandson to protect him. This bloody scene between humans and non-humans is for survival in the valley, where they must battle each other every now and then. Zahran thinks about hunting the hyrax, linking the act to tribal traditions that glorify the killing of wild animals as a mark of honour. He plans to affirm this status by adorning the butt of his rifle with the hyrax's fangs (Al-Zahrani 49). It will be a disgrace if the two brothers return without killing the predator, so they tolerated the cold nights and hunger. Defending itself against human intrusion, the hyena caught in the trap was fighting back veraciously to kill them. Ahmed was brave and jumped on its back, covering its head with his garment and killed it with his knife (61).

Humans' understanding of nature, along with their ability to interpret and anticipate certain events, assist them in navigating and surviving their environment. This informed knowledge of certain natural patterns based on the villagers' experience contributes significantly to predicting natural happenings and coping with them accordingly. Thus, people become in harmony with nature when it becomes friendly and productive, and their attitude and mode change for

the better. Zahran illustrates this shift by describing the village after the rainy season begins. The condition of the village improves as nature and the creatures become harmonious. This positive effect of nature marks the relationship between Zahran and his grandfather, who, eventually, develop good terms with each other. Zahran explains his joyful moments, “the lands have been ploughed, watered by the rain, and we’ve sown them, now waiting for the harvest. I’ve come to a near agreement with my grandfather, and I now have a group with whom I enjoy chatting” (63).

The novel demonstrates how such villages in the south of the Kingdom have undergone environmental transformation through urban buildings and modern facilities such as electricity and roads, which have connected the urban with the countryside. Although not considered large-scale activities, these transformations, while beneficial to people, may reduce the green areas and destroy agricultural lands. Zahran criticises this transformation:

Oh, what a calamity ... electric poles have been erected in the village!!  
... Who ordered the devil to erect his poles here?

The place has been disformed with scattered poles here and there....  
They are the bells of war and erasure of identity. I poured petrol on the pole close to my grandfather’s house and set fire to it. I was looking at the other poles as if they are naked idols. (99)

His concern and resistance to alterations in the traditional and natural landscape of the village stress the impact of external influences on its identity and beauty. In response to these unwelcome elements that distort the village’s appearance, he removes his clothes and walks naked to the pond to wash away his anger. This was his final dip in the pond that stirred all his sorrows and painful experiences in the village, prompting him to decide to go back to Jeddah:

Between my jump and the surface of water hitting my body, lots of events flashed fast in my memory – my leave from Jeddah, hardships of herding, the death of my grandfather, the duel between my father and my uncle, ... and erected electric poles. (100)

Zahran keeps narrating to his friend the future course of transformation of the natural world in the village and the future generations. He predicts that disease will spread, stone houses will be demolished, farms will be levelled, and shops and malls will be built (103). The relationship between man and the environment has changed. In the near past, people lived in harmony with nature, working on the farm and looking after their livestock as their main source of living. However, with modern urbanisation and people’s migration to cities such as Jeddah, a void is created in villages. People leave their villages empty and visit them during vacations. Al-Zahrani draws attention to the importance of environmental

balance through a touching story. Zahran's grandfather dies alone, with no one around except his animals and Zahran, a tragic scene that confirms the extent of imbalance and disconnection within the community and the environment. Zahran felt this alienation at the beginning of his stay in the village where he found everything old and difficult to adapt to, not only because of social transformation but also because of the new place he must live in.

### Conclusion

*Nahwu Al-Janub* sheds light on the exploitation of nature and the rapid urbanisation which may severely damage the environment. It illustrates human vulnerability amidst the power of nature, if it repels, as happened to Zahran. This highlights the critical role of literary works in fostering environmental awareness and encouraging positive interactions among humans and nature. Such narratives expose the potential harm that human actions cause to the environment when they lack respect and consideration for nature. The novel highlights the interdependence between humans, animals, and natural surroundings with vivid descriptions of the village and its natural world. Al-Zahrani succeeds in humanising inanimate objects and animals with emotions and connections to the humans they live alongside, such as Marwan (the dog), and Subaih (the bull) and Humairan (the rooster). The migration of people from villages to the northern cities such as Jeddah and other cities has left villages barren and devoid of life. Al-Zahrani points out how modern advancement has distorted the village's natural world, relentlessly devouring everything natural.

This research has explored how humans are sometimes culpable for conflicts and imbalances in their relationship with nature and others. It has highlighted nature's beauty and wilderness and their deeper impact on human behaviour and perspectives. It demonstrated how wilderness impacted humans and shaped their behaviour and approach to life, as illustrated by the bloody fight between Zahran's father and his uncle over the land after his grandfather's death. This impact could be considered negative as it led to human disharmony, reflecting the land's agency as an active participant that shapes human relationships and conflicts. The analysis also highlighted the love between humans and animals, revealing the profound connections it represents. The significance of Zahran's leaving for Jeddah at the end of the novel seems to signify an inevitable disharmony between humans and nature. Wilderness seems to drive Zahran to modern infrastructure which is getting successful in pulling people from their roots, an interesting topic that could be explored further in Al-Zahrani's *Ākhir Huqul Al-Tabgh* (The Last Tobacco Field) as Khudhran, the protagonist, could be a symbolic evolution of Zahran in *Nahwu Al-Janub*.

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