

Decentering the Human in *Sir Alzafaranah*: Albeshr's Anti-Anthropocentric Perspective

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Abstract Ecocriticism as an interdisciplinary lens for scrutinizing the relationship between literature and environment has been growing rapidly in literary studies and criticism since 1990, reaching many parts of the world (Johnson 2009). In Arabic literature, however, ecocriticism is still in its early stages (Hamoud et al. 2012). In other words, such studies remain relatively rare; hence, opening up the field in Arab academia is greatly valuable for diversifying and enriching contemporary debates. Drawing on ecocritical theory, particularly Glotfelty's insights, among others, this paper examines Badriah Albeshr's *Sir Alzafaranah* (2023) through an ecocritical lens, focusing on the novel's portrayal of the interrelationship between humans and other creatures. It argues that Albeshr has challenged human-centered narratives by emphasizing the agency of nature and the interconnectedness of all living things. Through close textual analysis, the study reveals Albeshr's subtle yet profound engagement with ecological thought and environmental concerns. The story intricately describes the interrelation between humans and nature. Through the characters of Nafiah and Zafaranah, the author skillfully illustrates the strong bond between humans and nature and other world creatures, emphasizing the connectivity and affinity between women and nature, in particular. Such keen environmental consciousness positions Albeshr as a distinctive voice in contemporary Arabic/world ecocritical literature.

Keywords anti-anthropocentrism; ecocriticism; Badriah Albeshr; Saudi Novel; ecological consciousness

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Introduction

As a female author in a traditionally conservative society, Albeshr has established a unique space for herself. She used literature to explore complex social issues, particularly those related to women, identity, and the evolving nature of Saudi society. Albeshr's works have been pivotal in highlighting the evolving roles and challenges of women in Saudi society. Her writings often integrate personal narratives with broader social commentary, making her a prominent voice in contemporary Arabic literature. Her contribution to literature and her influence in discussions about gender and society accentuate her prominence in the literary world.

Algahtani (2016) considered Badriah Albeshr a leading member of a new generation of women writers representative of a developmental phase within the Saudi novel who have addressed a range of feminist concerns to advocate for their rights and challenge the patriarchal society. She further observes that those writers used their novels to highlight certain topics such as love, tradition, and sexuality, disseminated through the voices of their protagonists (28).

Indeed, Albeshr has dedicated many of her novels and short stories to feminist issues. Her insight into the inner dynamics of her society has influenced her fictional writings. Hence, Albeshr's novels are characterized by sharp critical discourse and opposition to patriarchal traditions and radical religious restrictions of Saudi society. The central theme in al-Urjūha (*The Swing*), for instance, is the resistance of young Saudi women to patriarchal dominance, traditional norms, and the rigid constraints that cause their suffering (Almarhaby 193). Indeed, this has been a defining feature of the Arabic novel since its inception. As Alkodimi observes, a sustained

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engagement with social issues has constituted an essential aspect of the Arabic novel from its early stages (1).

Her recent novel, *Sir Alzafaranah* (2023), however, shifted the focus to environmental issues. This novel manifests what Glotfelty calls deep “ecological awareness” (xxiii). It is deeply concerned with the human-nature relationship, reflecting the interconnectedness and interaction between humans and the rest of the earthly world. The story, thus, lends itself well to ecocritical interpretation. In other words, Albeshr’s description of the interrelationship between humans, animals, plants, and all living things showcases that this text is an ecologically oriented literary work. This paper, therefore, reads Albeshr’s *Sir Alzafaranah* through the lens of ecocriticism to highlight how Albeshr’s text portrays the intricate relationships between humans, nature, and the interconnectedness of all living beings, and by extension, shows the significance of literature in highlighting such connections. As Veenstra rightly observes, “[t]he relationship between art and society is characterized by processes of negotiation and exchange that are as complicated as those in the economic domain” (186). In this regard, the study highlights Albeshr’s anti-anthropocentric perspectives, which align with ecological critiques that challenge the human-centered worldview. As Madsen (2024) puts it, anthropocentrism as a philosophy of life promotes a view of humanity as the conqueror of nature, which has led to environmental degradation worldwide. This perspective, Madsen argues, should be replaced with ecocentric or biocentric worldviews, in which the biosphere becomes the primary focus of ethical and ecological concern.

Several studies have been conducted on Albeshr as an important emerging female voice in Saudi Arabia. Those studies, however, are mostly concerned with her treatment of the patriarchal social system, the changing gender roles, and social transformation. Perhaps this is because gender issues and patriarchal social systems are inseparable aspects of female Saudi novelists, including Albeshr. As Huda Al-Matrafi (2023), for example, notes, a “female novelist is understandably influenced by her life, and gender issues are inseparable for these emerging writers” (179). In her article entitled, *The Power of the Saudi Woman's Novel: From Silence to Empowerment*, Al-Matrafi, for example, points out that *Sitr (Covering)* by Raja Alem (2005) and *al-Urjūḥa (The Swing)* by Badriah Albeshr (2010) introduce a world revolving around the concerns of the Saudi woman and the uprising of Saudi women against social restrictions and women's conditions, hopes, and difficulties. Both novelists narrate the Saudi woman's inner personal and social world and, explicitly or implicitly, they reflect the details of their suffering, problems, and

vulnerability as a result of the complexity of the social system. It was not possible to ignore the role of their female characters. In short, the female voices throughout these novels announce an attempt by Saudi women to demand their rights, an ongoing issue that stimulates women's empowerment (Al-Matrafi 184).

Ali M. Alshhre (2024) also rightly observes that Albeshr's writing "endeavors revolve around a dominant literary vision that prioritizes the investigation of women's issues within her social context" (3). In *Gender in revelations: Unraveling gendered struggles and revisiting the Construction of Cultural Identity Paradigms in Badriyah Al-Bishr's Hend Wa al'askar (2006)*, Alshhre explored the intricate workings of gender dynamics in Badriyah Albeshr's *Hend wa al'askar*. His study attempted to investigate how the author challenges traditional gender norms through the representation of female characters who strive for liberation. Alshhre states that his reading attempts to explore how the author disrupts established gender norms through the discursive representation of male and female characters striving for liberation and independence. According to him, Albeshr skillfully unravels the complexities of gender roles and constructs a compelling counter-narrative that explores women's journeys towards empowerment in the Saudi context. He simply puts it, she exposes the intricate dynamics of gender roles in the Saudi Arabian context (1-2).

Similarly, in his PhD. thesis, Almarhaby (2016) claims that Albeshr's novels are characterized by "sharp critical discourse and opposition to the patriarchal traditions and radical religious restrictions of Saudi society" (193). According to Almarhaby, criticism of the radical views and behavior of religious extremists in Saudi Arabia is a recurrent theme in all of her novels. In his discussion of Albeshr's *al-Urjūḥa* as part of his thesis, Almarhaby states that the central theme expressed in the novel's fifteen sections is the struggle of young Saudi women against the patriarchal system, traditions, and authority, as well as the radical religious restrictions that cause their suffering. Hence, Albeshr's *al-Urjūḥa*, according to him, is concerned, as in all of her novels, with the issues of male domination and injustice against women, adding that Albeshr reveals her theme mainly through the stories of the major female characters, Maryam, Salwā and 'Unnāb, who are all from Riyadh but from different social classes. Maryam, the problematic heroine, is tribal and middle-class, whereas the others belong to marginalized social groups. Salwā is also middle-class but of Khaḍīrī (non-tribal) origin and 'Unnāb is of black origin (193).

Alkodimi and Mustafa (2026), on the other hand, using New Historicism as the conceptual framework, analyzed the contextualization of Saudi history in *Albeshr's*

Sir Alzafaranah, providing an in-depth analysis of the representation of social changes as depicted in the novel (4). They argue that the author skillfully employed history as a narrative framework to illuminate the complexities of Saudi society and highlight the profound dynamics of social transformation. Alkodimi and Mustafa have rightly observed that many Saudi novelists, including Albeshr, rely upon social history as a source for writing their novels; consequently, such novels provide detailed descriptions of significant societal issues. As such, these novels primarily focus on portraying the past and present of Saudi society, emphasizing the social changes that have occurred over several decades. Yet, although their study focuses on social transformation that occurred in Saudi Arabia over many years as depicted in Albeshr's story, they contend that those social changes brought about significant social changes pertaining to the empowerment of women and the changes of gender roles (8), which further emphasize that such a theme is a recurrent issue in her work.

However, while Alkodimi and Mustafa's view is generally true, I would argue that Albeshr's *Sir Alzafaranah* reflects a profound engagement with ecological thought and the complexities of the ecosystem relationships. In other words, it illustrates her anti-anthropocentric perspectives. Yet, as far as this study is concerned, no studies and/or little attention has been paid to Albeshr's ecological perspective, especially as expressed in her recent work, *Sir Alzafaranah*. This paper aims to examine Albeshr's anti-anthropocentric perspective, which posits that all living things are equally important. This will be achieved through textual analysis of the narrative, focusing on the novel's portrayal of the man-nature relationship.

Thus, this article contributes to Arabic ecocriticism by extending existing scholarship on ecological consciousness to theorize the environmental imagination in Arabic literature, particularly that of Mohsen and Hashim, Al-Ghafees, and Alkodimi. It highlights how contemporary texts articulate human-nonhuman relations, environmental ethics, and healing practices, providing a nuanced reading that foregrounds ecological themes within Arabic literary traditions. Concurrently, the study engages with global ecocritical debates by examining how local ecological imaginaries intersect with questions of identity and gendered environmental experience. In this way, the article situates Arabic literature within broader ecocritical conversations, demonstrating both its cultural specificity and its resonance with international scholarly frameworks. By bringing Arabic literary ecology into dialogue with international ecocritical frameworks, the article underscores the importance of a more plural, multilingual, and globally attuned environmental humanities.

This paper argues that Albeshr's literary text is widely engaged in ecology,

offering a nuanced exploration of environmental issues and the interdependence between human society and the natural world. In other words, the relationship between man and nature appears to be the driving force behind Albeshr's narrative style, offering rich material for ecocritical analysis. The study employs an ecocritical close-reading approach, examining how the text portrays relationships between human and nonhuman beings, cultivates ecological consciousness, and fosters environmental imaginings. The analysis involves close textual and thematic attention to narrative structure, characters, scenes, and descriptive details that thematize interspecies relations, including moments of direct interaction, empathetic alignment, or shared vulnerability. It also considers the articulation of healing practices connected to the land, nonhuman agencies, or ecological attunement. Furthermore, the analysis examines the engagement of celestial bodies and atmospheric phenomena, exploring how they shape characters' perceptions, ethical orientations, and ecological imaginaries. Passages were selected according to these thematic criteria, focusing on scenes that most clearly illustrate interspecies relations, healing practices, and interactions with celestial or atmospheric elements, ensuring that the analysis highlights the text's ecological and ethical concerns.

Ecocriticism, as Glotfelty puts it, is the "study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii). Similarly, Sheenam (2014) defines it as "an approach analyzing the representation of nature in literary texts" (155). Glotfelty further pointed out that "ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies", just like feminist criticism, which "examines language and literature from a gendered perspective", and Marxist criticism that "brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies" (xviii). Buell (2009), on the other hand, provided a more inclusive definition when he viewed it as an "umbrella term used to refer to the environmentally oriented study of literature and the art, and the theories that underline such critical practice" (138). Buell's view was emphasized by Glotfelty and Fromm, who rightly observe that ecocriticism is not just a means of analyzing nature in literature; it implies a move towards a more bio-centric world-view, an extension of ethics, a broadening of human conception of the global community to include non-human life forms and the physical environment. According to them, texts that indicate an engagement with the world around can be evaluated eco-critically (*The Ecocriticism Reader* 1996).

Indeed, the notion, "all living, mutually interdependent entities as 'persons' that draw on ancient traditions is at the center of Ecocriticism" (Monani 4). According to ecocriticism, readers appreciate nature, which is represented in literary texts as

beautiful natural aspects, such as plants, flowers, rivers, and animals, as well as the overall structure of the physical environment that encompasses all human and non-human beings (Ismail 1). This critical method, de facto, has been widely used by critics and researchers to analyze works of literature related to nature writing and ecological themes in literature. Drawing on Glotfelty's insights, among others, this paper examines the profound ecological consciousness embedded in Albeshr's text. It focuses on the author's anti-anthropocentric attitude through the representation of the interrelationship between humans and other creatures such as animals, plants and trees.

Albeshr's Ecological Consciousness: Human and Non-Human Bonds in *Sir Alzafaranah*

Arguably, Albeshr's novel offers rich material for ecocritical reading as it is deeply engaged in the "reciprocal interdependence" between man and nature, to use William Rueckert's words (112). The narrative reflects Albeshr's non-anthropocentric perspective by centering the interrelationship between human beings and nature. Such ecological consciousness is largely depicted through the mysterious characters, Naflah and Alzafaranah. Naflah, for example, expresses such engagement when she explains how Zafaranah, her mentor, teaches her to love nature and other creatures. As Naflah explains, "she taught me how to love trees, animals, and rocks, she said to me one night: "These are our partners in this life, they have a soul (nafs) but not a spirit (ruh)" (23). Hence, Zafaranah's biocentric attitude succinctly sums up the main concern of Albeshr's text, that man should appreciate other creatures as they are our partners or equally important. In this sense, the author appears to emphasize what Glotfelty refers to, "the reciprocal relationships between humans and land" (xxi).

This view is further emphasized when Naflah reveals that Zafaranah "gave [her] a wondrous talk", then she says, "[d]on't deny beings. Give them your brotherhood and be kind to them, because in God's world, we are human beings who perceive what other beings perceive. Our light is only obscured by pride and vanity" (23). This anti-anthropocentric view of Zafaranah further illustrates Albeshr's ecocritical concern. In other words, through Alzafaranah and Naflah, Albeshr disseminates the ecocritical perspective that other creatures are equally important. In doing so, she elucidates the intrinsic value and interrelationship of all living beings, expressing ecocriticism's view of the concept of "horizontal society" as an ecosystem that emphasizes the coexistence among all living beings (Ismail 142). She seems to articulate in Rueckert's words, the 'first Law of Ecology' that "[e]verything is

connected to everything else” (108).

Having learnt that other creatures are equally important, Naflah admits that she has been completely changed and enlightened. She admits that Zafaranah “took away the darkness from [her] heart and planted light in its place” (25). This symbolically captures Naflah’s emotional and intellectual transformation, which has been fully realized through her ecological awareness. This invites the reader to explore the interconnections between humans and the nonhuman world, emphasizing how literature reflects and shapes ecological consciousness. This, indeed, emphasizes the message that the author aims to communicate: “how language and literature convey values with profound ecological implications” (Glotfelty xxv). As Glotfelty points out, in an “increasingly urban society, nature writing plays a vital role in teaching us to value the natural world” (xxiii). This, indeed, is the essence or the main concern of ecocriticism, according to Sheenam (2014), “creating awareness in society about environmental degradation” (155).

In this sense, Naflah’s psychological development is not merely an individual awakening but also a reorientation toward a more inclusive, ecological worldview. Her experience of enlightenment, transition from ‘darkness’ to ‘light’, reflects a shift from anthropocentrism (human-centered thinking) toward ecocentrism, wherein the intrinsic worth of all living entities is acknowledged. It is as though Naflah was metaphorically wearing dark glasses, blind not only to her inner turmoil but also to the significance of the nonhuman ‘other’ in her life. Yet, through her exposure to teachings that emphasize the interconnectedness of all beings, she starts to perceive the world in a new way. This ecological “consciousness raising”, to borrow Glotfelty’s words, has transformed Naflah into a different person, a person who appreciates nature and all living things (xxiv).

In this light, the transformation she undergoes is both psychological and ecological. While the light planted within symbolizes awareness, empathy, and environmental awareness, the darkness removed from her heart may represent ignorance or emotional detachment from the more-than-human world. This metaphor resonates with the ecocritical idea that reconnection with the natural world can lead to personal healing and a deeper understanding of one’s place in the web of life. In other words, this shows how engagement with natural environments can promote psychological wellness, foster empathy, and ecological awareness. From an ecocritical perspective, disconnection from nature, especially among children, has profound negative effects on physical health, emotional well-being, creativity, and ecological consciousness. Conversely, reconnecting with nature fosters emotional balance, creativity, resilience, and a deeper sense of identity awareness (Louv 2005,

Kimmerer 2013). Thus, Naflah's enlightenment is not merely a personal awakening but a shift toward environmental consciousness, realizing that the human psyche is intimately tied to the health of the environment and the well-being of all its inhabitants.

Perhaps this is why Naflah ultimately perceives herself as a plant, aligning her identity with other nonhuman beings and engaging in intimate dialogue with them. She explicitly identifies with other creatures, a perspective shaped by her mentor, Zafaranah: "I walked, talking to everything I saw... "I am like them, a weed that grows in the land of the spirits, wakes up and goes away" (78). Hence, in this passage, Naflah's first-person narration and introspective focalization invite readers to inhabit her consciousness, blurring the boundaries between human and nonhuman. By representing herself as a weed, she emphasizes resilience, rootedness, and interconnectedness with the land, while the narrative mediation of her voice allows nature itself to be experienced as an active participant in her ethical and ecological sensibilities. Through this technique, the scene deepens our understanding of how identity, empathy, and ecological awareness converge in the text. Naflah's behavior is further emphasized as she addresses the weeds and trees directly, asking, "[d]o you recognize me now? Have you seen me ... The tree seems to know me and I know it" (79). By speaking to nonhuman beings, the narrative not only conveys her deep identification with the natural world but also mediates nature's "voice" through her perspective, allowing readers to experience a reciprocal relationship between human and nonhuman entities. This moment reinforces the theme of interconnectedness and positions the natural world as an active participant in both ethical reflection and personal transformation.

In doing so, the author appears to echo Ted Hughes's persona in the poem of the 'Wodow' in which the persona addresses the weeds and asks, "do these weeds know me and name me to each other, have they seen me before, do I fit in their world?" (All Poetry.com 2011). However, while the character in the 'Wodwo' seems to be uncertain about his connection to the weeds, conversely, Naflah is quite certain about her connection to them. Indeed, as the author's mouthpiece, Naflah appears to express Albeshr's ecocritical perspective, the anti-anthropocentric stance by "challenging dominant anthropocentric systems" (Endres 2) that "man is merely a member of the ecosystem and no longer the lord of nature" (Alkodimi 62). According to Endres, anthropocentric belief systems assume that nature is separate from culture, thereby raising humans to a special status outside of nature, the environment, animals, and other non-human beings (3).

To further reinforce the themes of interconnectedness and equality among all

living things, the text personifies various nonhuman creatures, particularly trees and animals. Palm trees, for instance, are addressed as sentient beings capable of feeling and sympathizing with villagers during the smallpox pandemic. In her portrayal of the village's conditions, Naflah elucidates, "only the palm trees remained standing tall, looking at us and raising their hands to the sky, as if praying for our hardship to be lifted" (83). Furthermore, in her exchange with Rahmah, Naflah conveys the notion that a dog can embody virtues that some people fail to demonstrate. She elucidates, "I hit her head lightly and said, "[...] doesn't know the value of a dog. It's more beautiful than humans sometimes. I had a dog that watched over me, even in my sleep, and ..." (227). Hence, the picture of the palm trees that continue praying for people during the pandemic that hit the village, and Naflah's remarks on the innocence of the dog, clearly illustrate how Albeshr uses her narrative style to challenge the 'dominant anthropocentric' discourse, in Endres' words, to convey her message and to emphasize her anti-anthropocentric attitude. This, indeed, demonstrates that the text is grounded in the decentering of the human, thereby reinforcing the notion of a deep interconnection between humans and the natural world.

However, not only is the earthly world important in Albeshr's text, but the sky, along with the moon and the stars. The narrative consistently emphasizes the importance of the moon and stars, particularly in shaping human experiences, which reflects the bond between them and human beings, serving as a guide for those villagers. "The chandelier has returned to decorate the clear sky" (51). Naflah, for instance, clearly admits this when she says that "the moon is almost full. Travelers will use its light at night" (56). She further refers to the significance of the stars in our life: "The star Aquarius hangs low, clouds obscure the sun, and a light, capricious wind blows, ..." (33). Hence, the stars and the moon not only adorn the sky and the natural world but also serve as guides for travelers on land, suggesting that the world is beautifully and meticulously created, with all elements intricately interconnected.

The portrait reaches its peak when Naflah effectively conveys Albeshr's ecocritical sensibility through her detailed depiction of Zafaranah's interactions with animals and plants. From Naflah's perspective, we see that Zafaranah treats animals with the same attentiveness and care afforded to humans: "Her gentle beings follow her. She distributes her greetings to them equally, feeds the chickens, laughs with the baby cattle and kisses them, waters the dam, and jokes with the maidservants" (111). The narrative focalization through Naflah emphasizes not only Zafaranah's compassion but also the seamless integration of human and nonhuman

communities. By presenting these interactions through Naflah's attentive gaze, the text mediates nature's 'voice,' allowing readers to perceive animals and plants as active participants in ethical and social life. This scene thus underscores the text's ecological vision, highlighting relationality, care, and interspecies empathy as central to its moral and environmental framework. This view is further emphasized through the episode with the long insect: "[a] long insect with spiny legs landed and jumped in front of me. I caught it and went to my mother, Saffron. She was hunched over a herb, groping its limbs and singing to it, as she always does, pampering the herbs like her own children ..." (119). Through Naflah's focalized perspective, this scene emphasizes the intimate, reciprocal relationship between humans and plants, highlighting the text's ethical and ecological vision. The narrative mediates nature's 'voice' by showing how attentiveness and care transform ordinary plants into participants in a shared, relational world.

Arguably, Albeshr is an ecocritic par excellence whose novel "manifests ecocritical awareness" that is carried over throughout the text in question (Glotfelty xxiii). The book shifts attention away from human dominance to value nonhuman life, the ecological ecosystems, and the intrinsic worth of nature. The story reflects the author's "deep ecology", to use Arne Naess' term, which emphasizes the "basic interconnectedness of all life forms and natural features" (qtd in Zimina and Sargsyan 244). As such, she used the two female characters, Zafaranah and Naflah, to highlight the interconnectedness of humans and the non-human other. The novel frequently emphasizes the significance of treating those creatures as human beings. This exaggeration reflects the extent to which this text tries to establish/emphasize the interrelatedness of man and nature. In this regard, she also maintains that human cures lie in the environment; trees, plants, as will be discussed in the following section.

Women, Identity, and the Politics of Healing in *Sir Al Zafaranah*

In *Sir Alzafaranah*, Badriah Albeshr crafts a narrative in which women, landscapes, and healing practices are deeply intertwined, offering fertile ground for an ecocritical reading. This section explores how the characters of Zafaranah and Naflah embody a convergence of gendered identity and ecological consciousness, positioning their relationship with nature as both subversive and restorative. Through healing rituals, embodied knowledge, and an intimate connection to the land, these women challenge the patriarchal system that seeks to exploit both female bodies and natural environments, asserting an alternative worldview grounded in interdependence and respect for nature. That is to say, Albeshr uses the figures

of Zafaranah and Naflah to critique dominant power structures and to reimagine healing as a political and ecological act. By foregrounding the intersection of gender, nature, and resistance, the novel engages critically with environmental discourse while articulating a regionally rooted ecofeminist vision, deeply grounded in Saudi cultural and ecological specificities.

Indeed, women play a significant role in Albeshr's text, as evidenced by the presence of two major female characters, Zafaranah and Naflah, which emphasizes the prominence of the female voice in the narrative. More significantly, they are portrayed in a way that shows an intrinsic connection between women and nature. Both of them suffer from the crisis of identity and the patriarchal social system that enslaved Zafaranah and marginalized Naflah. However, while Zafaranah seems to accept her situation as a slave, Naflah, on the other hand, continues to struggle until she changes her social status by marrying Hashem (215). She was a well-known 'Bedouin' figure among women in the village, recalling, "I was known among them as the Bedouin storyteller [...] What I tell became the most important event ..." (45). Naderah addresses her as Bedouin when Naflah visits her at home. "Bedouin! Come closer", Naderah said (34). She further reacts, "[w]e don't marry Bedouins" (34). This may explain why Naflah, as a storyteller, chooses to narrate an allegorical tale about a beautiful Bedouin girl who marries a leader of his tribe (50). She begins, "[th]e tale tells how humans are quick to judge others as inferior. That Bedouin girl's beauty was renowned across the lands" (49). This allegorical story serves as a critique of the human tendency to pass swift judgments and to perceive others as inferior. Through this allegory, Naflah not only highlights the social dynamics within the tribal context but also underscores a broader moral about prejudice and the dehumanizing effects of hierarchical thinking. In doing so, the narrative functions as both a cultural revelation and a commentator, demonstrating how storytelling can be employed as a subtle form of social commentary.

Unfortunately, this inferior social rank has become a source of shame for Naflah. In her conversation with Naderah, Naflah, for instance, goes on, "[t]hen I said, opening my wound for her, "... I'm just a Bedouin, no one will care about me here ..." (91). Her remarks reveal a deep sense of pain and alienation, as she perceives herself to be unworthy of recognition or value within the village community. Her sense of loss is entirely elaborated later when she explains, "[m]y sense of inadequacy and shame of being a poor Bedouin still scratches my heart with the head of a scythe ..." (135). Hence, Naflah's reflection of her psychological state showcases that she is haunted by the fact that she is looked at as a Bedouin girl. "They look at a stray Bedouin like a stray animal ...", she said (136). Her

remarks showcase her deep psychological agony of being marginalized. This feeling tormented her, instilling a persistent sense of inferiority toward all those around her. Her agony has increased when she hears Naderah's mother rebuking her daughter for mixing with outcasts. "Didn't I forbid it, Naderah? What will people say about us? A free woman doesn't buy and sell with the outcasts by herself" (91).

Naflah further elaborates on this point by recounting the case of her brother, who, despite becoming one of the important men, remains defined by his Bedouin origins in the eyes of the village. "He became one of its men [...] but the village never forgot that we were the children of the mud nest ..." (52). Her brother used to fight against those who addressed him with such a low-ranking title. She remarks, "[h]e couldn't bear it as I do when he heard them mock him for being a Bedouin; he'd leap with his whole body and hurl himself at the offender" (54). Unfortunately, Naflah's sense of alienation and estrangement culminates in an identity crisis, encapsulated in her existential question: "Who am I?" (185). This moment signals a deeper psychological rupture, as Naflah grapples with a profound sense of insignificance that erodes her perception of self. Her experience of "transient memory loss" (189) functions not merely as a medical condition but as a potent metaphor for her fragmented identity and disconnection from her past and sense of selfhood. It is a metaphor of identity loss that she suffered from. Interestingly, when she regains her memory, she discovers her true identity, which symbolizes her complete transformation. "I realized who I was, I realized it with Saffron. She goes on, "I knew, despite my darkness, who I am" (190). As Mohsen & Hashim (2015) observe, Arabic literary texts frequently underscore the natural environment as a formative element in identity formation and resistance, revealing the interconnectedness of human and non-human worlds ("Greening of Resistance").

However, despite being marginalized and oppressed, Naflah and Zafaranah are introduced as agents of healing. Zafaranah, in particular, appears to possess extensive knowledge of all herbs and their medicinal uses. She is introduced as the agent of healing. She uses her medical skills to cure/heal illnesses in the village. This, indeed, makes her a significant woman as many people rely on her (30). She becomes a source of life who helps to heal illnesses, particularly during the pandemic (82-85). Naflah, who accompanies Zafaranah to her medical visits, learns the art of healing from her. As she explains, "Zafaranah noticed that whenever I accompanied her to treat a patient and helped in caring for them, I would end up experiencing the same symptoms for a day or two". Zafaranah then tells Naflah, "[t]his happens to every novice healer". She continues, "Do not entangle yourself in the fates of others [...] Do not think too much about your patients' past or future;

just look at them with eyes of compassion and love, and leave their fate to God” (82). “Since that day [...] I became nothing more than a humble servant guiding the patient on the path to healing”, said Naflah (82).

In this sense, their roles transcend mere survival; they actively mend the social and spiritual fractures within their communities. Healing, in this context, becomes an act of resistance and renewal, an assertion of agency in a world that has marginalized them. Through their care and resilience, they reimagine power not as domination, but as a means of restoration. *Sir Alzafaranah* thus draws a deep symbolic connection between women, the natural world, and traditional healing. This, de facto, highlights the internal and intricate connection between women and the environment. In other words, it underscores Albeshr's narrative strategies in using the characters of Naflah and Zafaranah to highlight the interrelationship between humans and nature, particularly in relation to women. Indeed, nature with its details in the novel, as Al-Ghafees (2025) puts it in another context, “is not merely a backdrop but shapes the identity of the people in those villages, as they depend on it for their social and spiritual lives” (641).

Moreover, Zafaranah and Naflah's role as healers positions them at the intersection of womanhood and nature, both sources of wisdom and care, yet devalued in modern, patriarchal systems. The two women, for example, appear to have an intimate bond with nature, which highlights the interconnection between them. Their healing practices, rooted in traditional knowledge and intuitive connection to the body and environment, reflect an ancestral wisdom often passed down through generations of women. This alignment not only affirms their authority within their communities but also highlights how female agency can manifest through nurturing, care, and the cyclical rhythms of nature. Such interconnectedness has been powerfully expressed in the explicit comparison between women and the palm tree. “Women standing like palm trees, patient, fruitful, watching with envy those who come and go” (65). Hence, Naflah explicitly compares women to palm trees, a type of tree recognized by its resilience to environmental difficulties. In doing so, the story further emphasizes the close affinity between women and nature, that they are patient, fruitful, and resilient. Hence, the metaphor of the palm trees has been carefully used as a concrete image to highlight that intended connection between women and nature.

To conclude this part, *Sir Alzafaranah* draws a deep symbolic connection between women, the natural world, and traditional healing. The transmission of herbal knowledge can be seen as a form of ecological resistance, preserving indigenous knowledge in the face of elimination. Zafaranah and Naflah's

relationship to healing activities and the natural world places them in historically feminized realms: nurturing, caring and insight of both the corporeal and earthly realms. Their techniques suggest a holistic approach to health and security, vis-à-vis patriarchal models of control. It is, indeed, a thing that brings strength by reaffirming an agency and knowledge based on bodily and ecological awareness. Their work as healers becomes an act of resistance as they reassert their authority through healing practices. Yet, subversively, Zafaranah and Naflah are challenging dominant power hierarchies by adopting these roles as sites of power, rather than weakness. Their harmony with nature becomes a tactic of survival and rebellion, not of subordination. In summary, their interrelation with healing, the corporeal form, and the land encapsulates the tensions explored in ecocriticism, challenging conventional separations between the human and the natural, and exposing the mutually reinforcing structures of patriarchal and ecological oppression. This demonstrates the author's keen ecological awareness. According to deep ecology, the self should be understood as deeply connected with and as part of nature, but not separate from it. Deep ecologists often refer to that conception of human nature as the "ecological self," which represents humans acting and being in harmony with nature rather than against it (Madsen 2024).

Conclusion

This study has examined Badriah Albeshr's novel *Sir Alzafaranah* through the lens of ecocriticism, focusing on her ecological consciousness and the anti-anthropocentric perspective. The findings demonstrate that Albeshr presents a nuanced and deliberate portrayal of nature, challenging anthropocentric paradigms and foregrounding nonhuman agency. Through Naflah and Zafaranah, the author challenges anthropocentric narratives by decentering human dominance and recognizing the agency of non-human entities and ecosystems, affirming the intrinsic value of all life forms. That is to say, Zafaranah's respectful and empathetic engagement with other species reflects a worldview in which nonhuman lives are not subordinate to human interests but are instead recognized as co-inhabitants of a shared ecological space. This portrayal disrupts hierarchical binaries between humans and nature, reinforcing the ecocritical argument that genuine ecological awareness necessitates decentering the human perspective.

By introducing Naflah and Zafaranah as agents of healing, the text underscores the profound restorative power that nature holds for humanity. Their intimate connection with natural remedies and their roles as caretakers illustrate a longstanding association between women and the natural world. This bond is not

merely symbolic, it is rooted in traditional knowledge systems where women have often served as guardians of ecological wisdom and herbal healing practices. Nafiah and Zafaranah embody this legacy, illustrating how female figures can channel the nurturing forces of nature to restore balance and well-being. Their presence affirms that healing is not only a physical process but also a spiritual and cultural act, deeply entwined with both gendered experience and environmental awareness.

Hence, through a particular treatment of characterization and species, Albeshr's text demonstrates a strong resistance to the anthropocentric mode, which has dominated modern society. She devoted her language and imagination to creating an awareness of the interconnectedness of landscapes, animals, trees, and humans. Such environmental consciousness contributes to the social function of fiction as it raises environmental awareness. She shows a sense of ecological consciousness and a deeper understanding of the intrinsic connection between environmental awareness and sustainable human existence. In so doing, she introduces herself as a significant voice within contemporary ecocritical thought, deeply committed to environmental ethics and ecological awareness.

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