Journeying in and out: Revisiting the Concept of the "Journey" in Naomi Shihab Nye's Writing

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Abstract The journey is a common theme in the works of Naomi Shihab Nye. As early as her two chapbooks *Tattooed Feet* (1977) and *Eye-to-Eye* (1978), the framework of the journey has been present to shape her nomadic convictions. Many of her later works, such as *Habibi* (1999), *There is No Long Distance Now* (2011), *The Turtle of Oman* (2014), adopt a travel-specific approach as well. Wherever encountered, Nye's journeys involve an act of travelling though not in the traditional sense and this shows in four features by which those journeys are characterized: continuity, circularity, multiplicity and spatiality. To prove this point, the study aims to examine Nye's employment of the journey which, as the discussion of a number of her poems, short stories and novellas will show, draws on and departs from the conventions of the traditional journey in older literature. Though Nye does employ the journey as a means of geographical mobility and discovery, her ultimate purpose is to redefine the journey as a discursive practice through which resistance to different aspects of life becomes possible.

Key words journey; travel; continuity; circularity; multiplicity; spatiality; resistance; discursive act

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Introduction

It is no coincidence that Naomi Shihab Nye describes herself as a"wandering poet."[1] Her being the daughter of an exiled Palestinian father and an American mother of mixed origins is one knot in the string.[2] Another is the talent that she has exhibited from an early age for writing. To travel, therefore, is no new thing to Nye; in real life, she has spent around forty years travelling between countries in Asia, Europe and the Middle East; in the world of fiction and poetry, she has spent a lifetime excavating new places and new cultures. With this said, a number of questions come to mind: What function does the "journey"perform in Nye's writings? Why has Nye chosen this specific literary device? And what contribution has she added to the art of travel writing? These questions, among others, form the center of the article which digs into the representation of the "journey" in the works of Nye.

A quick reading of Nye's major works shows that the journey is a common theme that she repeatedly visits. As early as her two chapbooks *Tattooed Feet* (1977) and *Eye-to-Eye* (1978),[3] the framework of the journey has been present to shape her nomadic convictions. Many of her later works, such as *Habibi* (1999), *There is No Long Distance Now*(2011), *The Turtle of Oman* (2014), adopt a travel-specific approach as well. The recurrence of the journey, however, should not, be mistaken for lack of creativity on her part. Whether in her older or recent works, Nye employs the journey as a literary technique to help her approach the experience of travelling on less traditional grounds.

Nye is curious by nature; and she nurtures an innate passion for the unknown. Commenting on this point in her *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Jane Tanner remarks that Nye possesses a wandering mind that

> …observes the business of living and continuity among all the world's inhabitants, whether separated by oceans or time. She lives in Texas but is regional only in so far as she has a strong sense of place wherever she happens to be; she is international in scope and internal in focus, as her poetry demonstrates. (Tanner 1)

Tanner's words testify to Nye's expansive literary vision. When her characters

travel, they travel everywhere. They do not choose a single destination. Under her supervision, they embark on journeys which not only evade geographical categorization, but question the traditional concept of place in geography as well. Writing to *The Four Winds Press*, Nye stresses the importance of this expansiveness in her career as a writer: "[She] never [gets] tired of mixtures,"so that though a poem could begin with"the voices of [their] neighbours, mostly Mexican American" ("This Same Sky: A Collection of Poems from around the World" 1), it can end elsewhere.

Wherever encountered, Nye's journeys involve an act of travelling though not in the traditional sense. To this end, the study aims to examine Nye's employment of the journey as a literary device in her writing, which, as the discussion below will show, draws on and departs from the conventions of the journey in previous literature. Though she does employ the journey as a means of geographical mobility, she extends the act of travelling beyond this physical function into the realm of the written word. The lines of her poetry and fiction, therefore, become the land where her characters journey, discover, and redefine themselves and their surroundings. Thus, by being simultaneously complicit with and subversive of the traditional notion of the journey as employed in previously written literature, Nye proposes to redefine the journey as a discursive practice through which resistance to different aspects of reality becomes possible.

Overview: The Journey as a Literary Device in Literature

The Journey is no new theme in literature. Works as old as Homer's *The Odyssey* (8 B.C), Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1322), Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (1478) and the more recent Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) center around journeys. In many cases, long, time-consuming and perilous, those journeys take the form of an adventure, at the end of which a discovery is achieved. In *Literature and Quest* (1993), Christine Arkinstall dwells on this point by explaining that quest, i.e. discovery, exists in a symbiotic relationship with the act of travelling:

> Quest as a means of spiritual exploration of the self is…perceived as most radically expressed in terms of the initiative journey in certain nineteenth and twentieth century literary texts. That self-displacement only leads to the utopic elsewhere of spiritual fulfillment of it is concomitant with allowing space to other modes of existence is the message present in [many] works… (Arkinstall 3)

Arkinstall's words show that the journey is meant to result in some kind of a discovery. Thus, Odysseus' ten-year journey which ends in his temporary return home is in many ways similar to Columbus' voyage which has led to the accidental discovery of the New World. Both men have launched a project, accumulated experience and arrived at some kind of a discovery that has changed their perception of one or more angles of the project. Columbus' discovery of a new land, though mistakenly interpreted within an old framework, has changed his perception of the geography of the earth at that time. Odysseus's journey is similar in encompassing an element of discovery, but is more personal in nature. Self-realization and accumulation of experience are among the direct outcomes of his journey. This explains why Arkinstall equates the experience of travelling with the "spiritual exploration of the self" (Arkinstall 3), which, as she argues, is the cornerstone for this symbiotic relationship. All journeys, whether classic or modern, aim at self-exploration, yet not all of them regard symbiosis as a condition to balance the equation. Unlike traditional journeys, the modern journeys break this blind interconnectedness.

This change, it must be mentioned, comes as a result of the shift in the phenomenological approach to knowledge starting with the second half of the twentieth century.[4] Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) captures the gist of the change as one necessitating a shift from totalitarianism towards relativism (Lyotard 60-65). Dispensing with the myth of the "grand narrative,"[5] Lyotard notes that the question of contemporaneity is one of legitimation. The current times bespeak of a crisis in legitimation where knowledge is no longer there for the reader to unravel. Commenting on this point, Jeanne Willette explains that "the collapse of the overarching narrative"(Willette 22) anticipates the change in the status of knowledge, which, in Lyotard's words, is no more than "a tool of the authorities…but the inventor's paralogy" (Lyotard 61). To define knowledge as a form of paralogy is to acknowledge the presence of multiple conflicting discourses and this is enough to dismiss the need for legitimation. Small narratives are no metanarratives; and they lack the controlling characteristic of the older narratives. The kind of knowledge they purport to produce is transient, fragmented and changeable, and this adds to the feature of multiplicity that Lyotard emphasizes in the postmodern time. In such a context, the question of credulity becomes irrelevant since what matters now is not the end product of the attempt, i.e. knowledge, but the experience that is born out of this attempt, i.e. the process.

Just as small narratives have come to replace their grand predecessors,

multiple, fragmented and mapless journeys in those narratives have come to replace the traditional ones. No Odyssey is expected anymore. Its length and serialized framework refute its authenticity. Its singularity is even too good to be true. No contemporary hero can match Odysseus' ecliptic powers; not even his determination to come back home after the long years. The end also is beyond human expectations, for ten years of wandering are enough not only to dispense with the idea of homecoming, but with looking for a new home as well.

All in all, the contemporary hero's expectations have become more realistic compared to the traditional hero who held a more steadfast approach. Growth, self-realization and disillusionment, among others, are still common themes between traditional and postmodern journeys, but the extent to which these can answer to Lyotard's question of legitimization remains a matter of controversy in the latter. While a traditional journey is a journey that aims at self-development, the postmodern journey is not necessarily defined by this criterion. The experience which the hero goes through is given precedence over self-improvement. Thus, while a traditional journey is designed to fit into the *bildungsroman*[6] framework, a postmodern journey is designed to prioritize the importance of the experience from which spiritual welfare arises. In "Narratives of Travel and the Travelling Concept of Narrative: Genre Blending and the Art of Transformation" (2006), Fiona J. Doloughan sheds light on this point by noting that a postmodern travel narrative:

> ...is clearly not a traditional linear narrative in which a main character is seen to develop over time, having encountered series of obstacles to overcome situations of conflict from which s/he has gained insight and been transformed…spatial juxtaposition, rather than linear sequence, is the guiding principle and coherence is to be found at the level of the presentation of themes and of discourse rather than at the level of the story. (Doloughan 137)

Doloughan's words show that the process, not the result, is what counts in a postmodern journey. Whether self-development is achieved or not at the end of the journey becomes secondary compared to the quality of the experience the journey offers. This brings the point of reward to the discussion. A traditional journey is one which usually ends in reward since self-development is necessarily achieved. A postmodern journey, on the other hand, is one that dispenses with the reward to guarantee achieving the maximum from the process (experience) itself, not the end. Another point to consider is that while the former is usually described as linear, the latter is described as circular. Traditional heroes embarking on journeys expect a

closed cycle with predetermined points of departure and arrival. Such an enclosure would serve as the map which guarantees the must-haves of the traditional journey; self-development and reward. A non-traditional journey, on the other hand, necessitates no presence of a point of departure or arrival. The circularity of its nature makes every step a point of departure and arrival at the same time. In her discussion, Doloughan links this dispersal of fixed beginnings and endings to the fact that temporality is displaced with spatiality in postmodern travel narratives. Those non-traditional journeys, she explains, "...disrupt temporal sequence, thereby creating a kind of spatial extension," which is "reinforced by the presence of (real) images which invite the reader to suspend or step out of the on-going narrative and take in the visual representations chosen to give another, complementary, mediated cultural perspective on travel" (Doloughan 141).

With spatiality replacing temporality, the process of traveling comes to gain more precedence over its destination. Doloughan describes a non-traditional journey as a "universe of signs in its own right" (Doloughan 143) in an attempt to emphasize the continuity which characterizes it. There is no place for fixity in a non-traditional journey; on the contrary, the bits and pieces that the reader finds in a non-traditional travel experience show that all is in a state of flux. Two points are worth mentioning here. First, we do not speak of a single journey in postmodern travel narratives. Journeys are multiple, fragmented, intersecting and liquidated. No single journey is self-sufficient; all intermingle to make the total miniature experience of an on-going act. In *New Approaches to Twentieth Century Travel Literature in French Genre, History, Theory* (2006), Charles Forsdick et al. shed light on this point by explaining the changing nature of travel literature since the 1970s. Focusing on French travel literature, they attribute the "shift from a geographical to an ontological understanding of travel" (Forsdick et al. 109-110) to the fact that contemporary French writers "challenge the idea that travel requires displacement to geographically remote territories in order to qualify as travel" (Forsdick et al. 109-110), which is so often the case in postmodern literature. Second, we do not speak of the act of journeying as an act of geographical traversal in a non-traditional journey. Traveling becomes a state of mind that exists beyond the conventions of geographical representation. This is also clear in the discussion since Forsdick et al. problematize the relation between travel and mobility by emphasizing their different constitution. While mobility is spatial in nature, travel is more about an idea. Such a view allows the writer to go beyond "restrictive notions of travel and identity" (Forsdick et al. 111) introducing the journey as a potential site of resistance to traditionally fixed concepts such as identity.

> ...while such travel literature affirms the historical, cultural and political specificity of postcolonial identities, it simultaneously serves to critique essential notions of identity, and particularly to demonstrate the heterogeneity of...identity. It might be said to provide a response to Hooks' call for "a postmodernism of resistance..." (Forsdick et al. 112)

The authors' words bespeak of a deconstructive approach to the journey. First, this approach defines the journey as a process. Second, it challenges the kind of identity formed through the act of travelling. Doloughan also hints at this point by emphasizing the "migratory aesthetics" (Doloughan 144) of the journey. If space is contracted onto the words of the text, then the journey becomes a metaphor for other types of traversal. "The space of the imagination is given material extension through travel",meaning that "vast distances" (Doloughan 140) need not be traversed for a journey to materialize. A journey holds infinite"imaginative possibilities" (Doloughan 140) so that any act of travelling becomes the discursive space that the text is; and a potential site of resistance enacted through its language. Once geographical, then imaginative, the act of journeying eventually becomes a linguistic act of resistance which challenges the traditional fixed notion of what a text ought to be. Doloughan refers to this as the "travelling concept of the narrative" (Doloughan 135), meaning that the journey is not outwards or inwards; it becomes textwards. The text enacts the act of travelling not only to represent it, but also to turn it (the text) into a rich ground for resisting its fixity in two ways. First, journeying textwards challenges the structure of the text, its genre and conventions. Second, journeying textwards liquidates the boundaries of the text so that there remains no limits to the act of travel enacted by its words. In the words of Doloughan, not only is "the legitimacy of fixed notions"questioned but a text which "travels across discoursal and generic boundaries" (Doloughan 143) is produced to complete the infinitesimal act of journeying.

Journeying in and out of Nye's Writings

To say that the journey is solely a means of geographical excavation in Nye's writings is to underestimate the complexity with which the various acts of travel are represented in those works. In fact, Nye herself has spent a long time of the sixty years of her life traversing continents and crossing borders, and indeed nowhere has the geography of those places been her sole concern. Many of those journeys are started and finished within the pages of the books she has written and this explains

why those journeys are hard to classify.

Regardless of the nature of the journey, what goes without saying is that Nye's journeys are non-traditional. Whether in form, length, purpose or destination, her journeys fail to adhere to the requirements of the traditional journey by having no point of departure or arrival, no predetermined destination or a set purpose; the intention here being to propose a new approach to the journey in literature. In an interview with Judy Woodruff (2013), Nye emphasizes the human need for a "placeless" and "timeless" somewhere to undo the feeling of brokenness that reality sometimes creates:

> You know how they talk about breaking news, you start feeling really broken. And you need something that takes you to a place that's a little more timeless, that kind of gives you a place to stand to look out at all these things. Otherwise, you just feel assaulted by all if the tragedy in the world. (Woodruff 1)

Nye's words bring to mind two points. First, a journey needs not be temporally or spatially defined. It can be timeless and placeless, meaning that it is the act of journeying itself, rather than the "when" and "where" of the journey, that matters. Second, with the journey becoming timeless and placeless, the act of journeying is transferred from the physical reality of the world to the discursive realm of the text. In the works of Nye, this is seen in four features by which her journeys are characterized: **continuity, circulatory, multiplicity and spatiality**.

1. Continuity

One feature of the journey in many of Nye's works is continuity, which shows in the accumulative experience that characters gain throughout the different journeys they undertake. No journey is a single, complete act, neither are the experiences encountered. A journey is an act in progress in which the traveler builds on previous experiences and anticipates future ones. Thus, unlike traditional journeys, Nye's journeys do not fit into the predictable journey mould which sees experience as a means of achieving self-improvement and gaining reward.

Nye's treatment of travel as an on-going act is clear in several of her works. One example is her short story collection *There is No Long Distance Now* (2011). The title itself alludes to the fact that distance between countries and people is contracted and the act of travelling has become part of any average person's daily life routine ("There is No Long Distance Now" 1-2). In the introduction, Nye

remarks, "There used to be a very big difference between local calls and long-distance calls, but now, usually, there is not" ("There is No Long Distance Now" 3). As the concept of distance has changed, the kind of experience undergone traversing that distance has changed as well. Experience, which once used to be continuous, monotonous and a route to self-realization, has become short-termed, fragmented and diverse. One of the short stories, "Stay True Hotel," represents the fragmented nature of experience that a teenage girl is exposed to in the many travels she and her father experience. The beginning of the short story gives the reader the wrong impression that the girl has got bored with this recurrent change. Nevertheless, the reader realizes not long after that every time they move to a new place, the experience seems to diversify. Just as the reader is introduced to Jane's father at the beginning of the short story, Nye explains that from the perspective of the daughter, "He had a better offer (always) from a fine company. Transferring her from her London school into a school in Germany would be no problem (He would probably feel contented for a year before he got restless again.)" (*Ibid*).

Jane's thoughts reflect the conflict arising from the recurrent moves that her father makes. Though she is most probably unhappy with the "every-now-and-then" change of place, which is understandable in the case of a teenage girl,[7] she seems to be comfortable with the idea that every act of travel entails a different, and by all means, an enriching experience; a new aspect of her father or herself she has never paid attention to. As Jane watches her father drink a German beer in the airplane, she realizes that his travels can be an attempt on his part to"leave his sadness behind him" ("Stay True Hotel"4) especially that he has told her recently that her mother used to love Berlin. Discovering this new aspect in her father's personality, which she usually saw as"guarded", has given her enough, and probably reasonable, justification as to why they "keep moving" ("Stay True Hotel" 4).

The hotel where they spend the first couple of days helps Jane welcome the new experience. Its name, Stay True Hotel, describes the act of searching for truth as on-going. The more diverse the experience, the more true the individual is to himself. For the young Jane, the experience might be overwhelming, but precious enough to give her a new glimpse to the truth she might be looking for:

> Ponytailed women in dressy clothes and high heels riding bicycles, miniature dogs in their baskets. Couples gripping hands. Tattoos, canes, studded purses, peaks... Something snazzy in the pace here. Jane stared at a street sign, Kurfürstendamm, wondering, will a name that long ever feel familiar in my

> head? (“Stay True Hotel” 5)

The newness of the experience could not hinder Jane from enjoying its beauty. Though for a woman in dressy clothes and high heels to ride a bicycle might have made no sense to Jane, she has been able to fathom the uniqueness of the scene. Likewise, her inability to understand the language spoken in this country has not stopped her from admitting that its foreign words“around her tongue felt hopeful” (“Stay True Hotel” 5). Nye tells the reader that not long after Jane arrives a “hunger for absorption overtook her” (“Stay True Hotel” 6) and made her enthusiastic to “sit here a while. Watch people” (“Stay True Hotel” 8), and contemplate the“ways you could turn” (“Stay True Hotel” 7).

Habibi (1997)[8] and *The Turtle of Oman* (2014) are two novellas which represent the journey as an on-going act of experience. Based on a personal experience, *Habibi* narrates the experiences of a teenage girl who, after having settled in America for a relatively long time, finds herself forced to accept her Palestinian father’s decision of going back home. Dazzled, Liyana Abboud finds it hard to understand her father’s desire that they, Liyana and her brother Rafik, “know both sides of their history and become the fully rounded human beings they were destined to be” (“Habibi” 3). The Journey to her father’s homeland adds no new experience to Liyana at the beginning. At one point in the novella, her father warns her against wearing short pants in Jerusalem saying, “You don’t need those shorts, no one wears shirts over there” (“Habibi” 19). Liyana could not at that point accept the newness of the experience, even though the words she utters make her seem to:

> She slammed her bedroom door…Poppy would enter…and say, ‘Would you like to tell me something?’ Liyana muttered, ‘I’m just a half-half, woman-girl, Arab-American, a mixed breed like those wild characters that ride up on ponies in the cowboy movies Rafik likes to watch. The half-breeds are always villains or rescuers, never anybody normal in between. (“Habibi” 20)

Liyana’s words leave the reader with the impression that she is one of this half-breed, while she in reality is not. Had she been one, she would have thought more about her father’s words and accepted the new experience. At another incident, Liyana describes her family’s journey to Jerusalem as an adventure though her days there are in no sense so. She could hardly label the Jerusalem experience as “different”. The fact that kissing is not allowed on the mouth in Jerusalem, for example, has made her question whether people have “reverted to the Stone Age

because everything in Jerusalem was made of stone?" ("Habibi" 60-61)[9]

Nevertheless, it cannot be said that Liyana completely rejects her new experience in Jerusalem. As she prepares her new room in Jerusalem, she does not mind trying blank walls in place of her raisin walls back at St. Louis. For her, it is "just an experiment to try" ("Habibi"66). This happens repeatedly during her stay in Jerusalem though not always with the same degree of excitement. Nye tells us that though "Liyana's whole family seemed to be joining things" ("Habibi"215), Liyana did not. "She belonged to nothing" ("Habibi" 215). Even the experience of learning Arabic does not stir in her the same excitement it has stirred in her brother. Nye explains that one day Liyana "grew so irritated with the dull text" ("Habibi" 216) of Arabic words that she "ripped a whole page out of her book" ("Habibi" 216).

Liyana's meeting the Jewish boy Omer serves as a turning point in her Jerusalem experience. Unlike her, Omer is more keen on getting to know new experiences. When Liyana invites him to her house in the West Bank, he explains that he has always wanted to visit this part of Palestine, since for him, this place is "a different world" ("Habibi" 251). Like Liyana, he has moved from one world to another and from one experience to another, yet, unlike her, the newness of the experience has not posed a threat to the older experience he has already internalized. At the house of Sitti, Omer "stare[s] at [Sitti] with complete attention" ("Habibi" 259) as she is telling one of her stories. Sitti also shares the same interest in this new experience by remarking that they have "been waiting for (him) a very long time" ("Habibi" 258).

Omer's visit plays a crucial role in changing Liyana's attitude to the new experience. Writing in her notebook, she ponders on the themes of the map and the many roads which people travel in their lives. No experience, she eventually realizes, is self-sufficient; and in life there are multiple experiences which span an endless map: "Nothing will be enough...Every day is a new map. But it's just a scrap if it, an inch" ("Habibi" 265-66).

Like Liyana, Aref Al-Amri, the young protagonist in *The Turtle of Oman*,[10] is forced to leave what he has for ten years called a home. The journey to America is not a gate to a new experience, but an enclosure putting an end to an experience he has already internalized. In the novella, his mother repeatedly asks him to pack his suitcase, but he always refuses to do so. Even when he tries to pack his things, he finds it hard to decide what to take and what to leave. In fact, the first couple of pages in the novella tell us what kind of a boy Aref is. Like Liyana, he does not believe that the new experiences resulting from the journey to America will

do him any good. His experiences in Oman are enough to define his perception of the world around him. Moreover, his fear of not being accepted in the new place he is journeying to makes it hard for him to accept the idea of calling it a home. At one point, Aref imagines how horrible it would make him feel to have different ways of dressing, eating, praying and talking. Will they accept him when he is different? Aref's fears of being rejected prevent him from looking forward to the new experiences the three coming years in America will bring. Unlike Jane, he cannot accept the fact that the journey to America will introduce him to new aspects of himself or his parents. His parents will become PhD holders by the end of that period and he will not only become fluent in English, but will also expand the circle of his acquaintances and experiences. The adventures Aref joins Sidi (his grandfather) in play a role as important as the role Omer plays in *Habibi* in making him (Aref) appreciate the significance of the new American experience. Just as Liyana's perspective to her life in Jerusalem changes after she meets Omer, Aref's perspective changes after those adventures. Prior to his departure to America, Aref spends some nights with Sidi outside home. They run, climb up the roof, sleep in nature in an attempt to make those days stay alive in the memory of Aref to take with him to America. As every adventure ends, he puts a stone from every corner they visit in Aref's pocket hoping that those memories will be the older experiences that Aref will build on with new ones in America.

2. Circularity

Another feature which characterizes Nye's journeys is circularity. Her journeys are rarely the linear journeys usually found in traditional travel narratives; they go in endless loops. One reason could be that Nye sees the journey as an on-going process, rather than as an enclosure with predetermined points of departure and arrival. In her introduction to the short story collection *I'll Ask You Three Times, Are You OK*? (2007), Nye explains that taxi drivers are among the luckiest to be observers of road journeys, which, though shorter and less time-consuming, fall under the same category of "travel"."I don't know when it hit me that what happened in the margins, on the way to the destinations of any day, might be as intriguing as what happened when you got there" ("I'll Ask You Three Times, Are You OK?" 8). She even extends the metaphor to the extent of imagining herself a taxi driver:

> Riding around the neighbourhoods in the evenings, in the backseat of anyone's car,…, one might spy on other families through their lit windows …To this

> day, riding in taxis between places often seems as memorable as the places on either end. I suffer the delusion that I too am a taxi driver. My passengers are groceries, books, friends. I do not want to go back home. ("I'll Ask You Three Times, Are You OK?" 8-10)

Nye's words trigger two points. First, Nye refuses to view the journey as an enclosed act; as one having a beginning and an end. For her, any journey, be it as simple as shopping for groceries or as complex as touring the world, is characterized by a circularity that defies enclosures. This leads to the second point. Nye cares not about the destination as much as she cares about the process of the journey itself. The shopping example applies here also. Despite knowing that shopping starts by leaving her house and ends by coming back to it, Nye insists that she never "(wants) to go back home" ("I'll Ask You Three Times, Are You OK?"10).

Examining the circular journey in the works of the Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani and a number of contemporary Palestinian films, Nadia Yaqub (2012) argues that the reason behind the recurrence of the circular journey can be attributed to the resisting powers that the rewritable circularity adds to the traditional journey (Yaqub 305-307). A circular journey becomes a potential site of resistance in two ways. First, describing the journey as "circular" challenges the conventions employed in writing travel narratives. Hence, the tendency to write narratives where journeys are less consuming in terms of time, distance and human effort. Second, a circular journey helps build an identity as flexible as the journey itself. Regardless of "how much" experience the character gains throughout the journey; his identity is not solely the product of one specific experience, but an amalgam of all of them.

Yaqub's view fits well the kind of journeys Nye chooses in her works. She makes characters traverse spaces rather than places turning their journeys from linear travel acts into circular ones. Her poem collection *19 Varieties of Gazelle* (2002) serves as a good example.[11] In a poem titled "Two Countries,"Nye employs the metaphor of skin as a country which she describes as "never known as a land on the map" ("Two Countries" 104).It evades geographical categorization. Though skin in this poem has for long not been touched, not eaten, or dressed itself, it still has hope that its scars will heal.

> And skin remembers- silk, spiny grass,
> deep in the pocket that is skin's secret own. ("Two Countries" 104)

Nye's attributing the human quality of remembering to skin solves the riddle of the poem's metaphor. Skin is of different colours, just as humans who vary not only in color, but also in nationality, religion, etc. All humans eat, walk and sleep by themselves, but though they "(remember) being alone", they "(thank) something larger" ("Two Countries" 104). Nye is telling us here that all humans are travellers who journey to places "larger than themselves"; not found "on the map" ("Two Countries" 104). Nevertheless, they do not usually lose direction, simply because they learn by time that journeys are meant to be direction-less; otherwise, they lose the feeling of largeness which keeps them from turning into roads on a map.

The theme of the circular journey is also found in "My Grandmother in the Stars". The speaker's grandmother is way too far for her to reach; in fact, she is dead. Physically, she is beyond immediate contact; nevertheless, the speaker lives the experience of "You and I on a roof at sunset" ("My Grandmother in the Stars" 69). Just as the travellers Nye describes in the previous poem as ones going to "places larger than themselves" ("Two Countries" 104), her grandmother has also travelled to a place where "there is only the sky tying the universe together" ("My Grandmother in the Stars" 69). Her ties with the grandmother, however, have never been severed. Their "two languages" ("My Grandmother in the Stars" 69), though adrift, are brought together in a memory that she will take home with her.

Another circular journey is found in "19 Varieties of Gazelle", the poem after which this collection is named. Here, the diversity of gazelle in wild life corresponds to a deeper aspect of diversity in life. If the gazelles are diverse enough to create "A gash of movement" ("19 Varieties of Gazelle" 87), how diverse would the journeys they undertake be?

> Where is the path?
> Please tell me.
> Does a gazelle have a path?
> Is the whole air the path of the gazelle? ("19 Varieties of Gazelle" 88)

Ironically, the series of questions that the speaker poses make the answer more evasive. Gazelles are known for their mobility. They are also travellers traversing vast distances, but looking for no point of departure or arrival. The paths they take are not linear; they form a maze as branched as the road-like marks on the surface of the healing skin in "Two Countries". Their paths are also "never known as land on the map" ("Two Countries" 104). What is ironic, however, is the fact that the

hikers who are following the traces left by the gazelles see a sign saying "KEEP TO THE PATH" ("19 Varieties of Gazelle" 88) in English and Arabic. If the gazelles have chosen their journeys to be pathless, how come we humans insist on seeing them as marked? Is not the "whole air the path of the gazelle?"("19 Varieties of Gazelle" 88)

3. Multiplicity

A third feature that characterizes the journey in Nye's works is multiplicity. Her journeys are multiple, not single; fragmented, not continuous; mobile, not static. As a result, they feature multiple heroes who seek to build a flexible identity that defies fixation. In her introduction to *19 Varieties of Gazelle*, Nye describes identity as non-static; it changes with every experience the traveler encounters:

> We start out as little bits of disconnected dusts. No, we start out as birds. In a nest, if we're lucky. Then, so very soon, much too soon, we are toppling from nests, changing species, and we're not birds anymore, now we are some kind of energetic gazelle leaping toward the horizon with hope spinning inside us, propelling us... ("19 Varieties of Gazelle" xii)

Nye's words show that mobility plays an integral role in shaping"who we are." As we live, we move, we travel and we reshape our identities. At one point, we are birds; at another, we are gazelles. We keep changing and this is a result of the multiple experiences we are exposed to. As an Arab-American, it is no doubt that Nye has experienced a constant change of what constitutes "her" culturally, socially and religiously. Every experience she goes through contributes to "who"Nye has become and"who"she will be in the future. Commenting on the negative impact of the September 11th explosions on the image of Arabs in the USA, Nye notes that she has had to shed part of "who she is", of the "giant collective poem" ("19 Varieties of Gazelle" xiv) she was writing with other Arab American writers and of "an ancient culture's pride" ("19 Varieties of Gazelle" xv) in order to remind "others never to forget the innocent citizens of the Middle East who haven't committed any crime" ("19 Varieties of Gazelle" xvii).

In the same manner, many of her characters journey into multiple realms and go through experiences which contribute to shaping and reshaping who they are. A case in point is *The Turtle of Oman*, where Aref's multiple journeys serve in shaping who he becomes at the end of the novella. In fact, Aref never forgets that "Discovering Something New Every Day" ("The Turtle of Oman" 7) has always

been one of Al-Amri's family mottos; almost genetically inherited. His father's being a biology professor might have been what instigated the tendency to discover by observing his surroundings. Aref, as a boy, looks not at the act of discovering in the same specialized way, but, in simpler terms, he looks around observing the minute details filtered through the ten-year old mind of a boy of his age. His grandfather has also taken the habit of embarking on journeys of discovery, though in his case it is geography that interests him, not biology.

What is worth mentioning about those discoveries is that Al-Amris share them together. On dinner, each would talk about the discovery he/she had made by journeying into a specific field of knowledge emphasizing the effect it has had on the way he/she has come to see things. Aref, for example, undertakes several journeys into the world of turtles while in Oman. His observations are neatly recorded in a notebook to build on later. Sometimes, those notes take the form of questions to help instigate further research: "Did you know a turtle's shell is called a 'carapace'?" ("The Turtle of Oman" 8) For a boy of his age, such an observation shows that he is able to distinguish between the physical part of the adventure and the cognitive part of it.

Like most of Nye's journeys, Aref's journeys into the world of turtles are multiple, fragmented and various. And this is what results in the flexible kind of identity he learns to show in dealing with new experiences. His journey outside his homeland is a case in point. At the beginning, the idea does not appeal to him. He even finds it hard to see his parents' reason for travelling to America feasible. No reason ever could validate tearing someone apart from what he calls a home. And all this shows that, like Liyana, Aref could not see himself other than he is. His is a fixed identity that exists only because it is tied to a place. His investigative mind, however, helps him change. Researching the world of turtles helps him accept weird facts about their life. In the same manner, researching Michigan, his future home, makes him accept the new experience as integral to shaping who he is. Whether he likes it or not, the America experience will, like the other Omani experiences, fall under Al-Amri's shared motto of "Discovering Something New Every Day" ("The Turtle of Oman" 7).

In *Habibi*, Liyana's experiences go along the same line. Though we are not told whether Liyana's family eventually returns to America, Liyana's journeys, like Aref's, are meant to make her discover new aspects of who she is. The first journey from San Francisco to Jerusalem marks the beginning of a series of short-termed journeys that Liyana embarks on. Like Aref's, her journeys are short, multiple, fragmented, but they prove to have an undeniable impact on the person Liyana will

become at the end of the novella. At one point, Liyana explains that part of what has attracted her to the new world of her father's native land are the stories of Sitti. Those stories are not what one expects them to be. Liyana's father describes them as fragmented; they "don't always hang together" ("Habibi" 89-90).Moreover, they seem to have "no logical sense of cause and effect"("Habibi" 90). Nevertheless, Liyana cherishes those stories and is able to understand the meaning behind them for "in this part of the world, the past and present are often rolled into one" ("Habibi" 90).

Many of those repeated experiences have at many times made Liyana "[feel] totally alone" ("Habibi" 99); nonetheless, they have also taught her, like Aref, the value of the cognitive aspect of every experience. As the novella draws to its end, Liyana comes to share Poppy's belief that "there must be a kernel of truth on every avenue" ("Habibi" 179), but she also learns that she is the one responsible for looking for this kernel of truth. When Rafik tells her that her father has been arrested by the Israeli police, she explains to him that this is not enough to be able to know how to act. Just like Aref, Liyana realizes the importance of "ALWAYS [getting] details" ("Habibi" 224)[12] to appreciate the new experience. Similarly, her journey into the world of Omer lends her the same sensitivity to details. She values Omer's inquisitiveness and his curiosity to "see more" ("Habibi" 256). Eventually, this inquisitiveness becomes a need; not a privilege. Writing in her notebook, she ponders on the idea that in life "roads [lead] every direction",and that no single journey "will be enough" ("Habibi" 265)."Every day is a new map. But it's just a scrap of it, an inch" ("Habibi" 266).

The feature of multiplicity is also clear in a number of poems. One is "19 Varieties of Gazelle"which marks the multiple experiences that life's journeys hold. In the poem, the speaker remarks, "Nothing better than 19 varieties of gazelle running free at the wildlife sanctuary..." ("19 Varieties of Gazelle" 88). The gazelles' physical freedom indicates that they journey into different places accumulating diverse experience. They "soared like history" ("19 Varieties of Gazelle" 87) with no path determined in advance. For Nye, we are all gazelles choosing to overlook the"sign that said KEEP TO THE PATH"("19 Varieties of Gazelle" 88) because it restricts our instinct to run as free as a gazelle would. Here again, those multiple realms we journey into re-shape who we become after we experience them.

4. Spatiality

Spatiality is a feature of Nye's journeys and a result of the three previous features

(continuity, circularity and multiplicity) at the same time. Put simply, a spatial journey is one that prioritizes experience over self-advancement, the process over the destination and multiple journeys over a single journey. In "Space and Spatiality in Theory" (2012),Yi-Fu Tuan defines spatiality based on his Chinese-American experience of the concept of space as a

> ...cultural and experiential construction, the meaning of which can vary widely from people to people, and from individual to individual. This fact- that space has an unusual range of subtly differentiated meanings- invites us to engage in… [the] tracing of their evolutionary course… In other words, space remains geography, not physics. (Tuan 12-13)

Tuan's definition of space as a "cultural and experiential construction" (Tuan 12) goes together with Nye's representation of the journey as a cultural act in her works. Space is not a fixed category; Tuan describes it as an instantaneous act constantly in flux. This brings up two points. First, to journey is not solely to move from one geographical place to another. Geographical mobility constitutes a part of the act of travelling, but the bulk of it relies on the traveler's ability to create a process that does not end as the point of arrival is reached. Second, as the act of travelling is transformed into an on-going process of simultaneous departures and arrivals, it becomes a means of resistance to challenge the stability with which many of the traditionally fixed concepts, such as identity, have been approached in the Humanities.

In literature, resistance to the form of the journey takes place at two levels: inside the text and outside it. Inside the text, the act of the journey serves to challenge the existing conventions of the travel narrative and proposes more space in writing about journeys (See discussion under Continuity and Circularity). Outside the text, the act of the journey helps to construct a more malleable sense of identity (See discussion under Multiplicity).

Regardless of whether resistance is enacted on the level of the text or outside it, it is clear that Nye's employment of the journey shifts from the traditional view of the journey as a literary device that contributes to self-knowledge to the view of the journey as a site of resistance where all fixed categories are deconstructed and approached on new grounds. It could be safely said, therefore, that Nye has been able to turn the journey from a solely geographical tool to a discursive component of the text. In her discussion of the development of the traveling nature of postmodern literature, Doloughan addresses this point by remarking that travel

narratives conduct a "textual act of travelling" (Doloughan 144).

> Likewise, the dialectic between word and image is seen to be embedded in"the fabric of signs that a culture weaves around itself" (Mitchell 1987, 43). In weaving together narrative and other discourses…as well as word and image, de Botton is not simply calling into question that legitimacy of fixed notions… but is actively using his knowledge of culturally available forms to produce a text which travels across discoursal and generic boundaries… (Doloughan 143)

According to Doloughan, the text embarks on multiple journeys into different realms through its language, allowing for more space of resisting what is conventional in writing travel narratives. And this is a point Nye pays attention to as a writer. In an interview with Robert Hirschfield (2006), she remarks that words themselves are travelers as much as twenty-first humans are.

> "My first images of Palestine were the things blue airletter sheets that he [her father] would mail to Palestine, then receive in the mail", his daughter recently recalled. "How the light would come through those translucent pages! There was something magical about words that had travelled so far."(Hirschfield 1-2)

Nye's words prove that her works are lively mediums through which her words are transferred. Whether her characters are in reality travelling or not, the words of the text are. Here rises the significance of her works as discursive spaces and sites of resistance. A case in point is her 2011 poetry collection *Transfer*[13] in which the journeys of her deceased father are represented in detail. What is unique about the poems in this collection is that they represent the act of travelling both ways: as a geographical traversal of borders and distances and as a discursive traversal of words in the poems, a fact seen in the title of the work, which, as Nye explains in an interview with Judy Woodruff, comes literally from "an actual airlines baggage tag," but stands for "all the different kinds of transfers we make in our lives from one stage of our lives to another" (Woodruff 2).

In one of the poems in *Transfer*, "Storyteller," Nye invokes her long-gone father by making the words of the stories he used to tell her speak for him. Those stories are still narrated though he is gone; they still create the same feeling of warmth though his body is now cold:

Where is the door to the story?
Is the door left open?
…
We dropped our troubles
into the lap of the storyteller
and they turned into someone else's. ("Storyteller" 26)

Physically, Nye's father has travelled to a no-return destination. There is no coming back, Nye realizes; nevertheless, his words have never ceased travelling back and forth in an endless process. He lives in those words, reciprocates whatever feeling expressed towards him bridging the gap between the two different worlds he simultaneously inhabits; the world of geography and the world of discourse. In her introduction, Nye explains,

> My father wanted us to write a book together. A "dialogue," he called it. But he kept sending me monologues by email and fax. Rants on topics I'd heard him discuss many times- frustrations, difficulties, peculiarities of a long life-in-exile. Perspectives on this and that. ("Transfer" 11)

The fact that Aziz Shihab wanted to write a joint book with his daughter proves Nye's point about the ability of words to travel, to traverse distances and to shrink time. This also goes along the with Thomas Devaney's (2012) description of the book in his review as a "conversational bridge" (Devaney 2), for here the dialogue with her father represents the act of re-crossing which ties the two places they inhabit. His emails and faxes are no more than an invitation to start the process of transference, not to abort it.

In another poem titled "Dusk," Nye expresses a moment of emotional weakness where she almost comes to believe that Devaney's "conversational bridge" is no longer there.

Where is the name no one answered to
gone off to live by itself
beneath the pine trees separating the houses
without a friend or a bed
with a father to tell it stories... ("Dusk" 44)

No doubt, these lines represent a moment's weakness for a daughter who has lost a dear father. Yet, this does not last long. In fact, Nye's last lines in the poem restore the lost faith in the continuing possibility of writing the dialogue her father has always wanted. Eventually, the same name which has "gone off to live by itself"at the beginning of the poem is the same that "strangely...tried to answer" ("Dusk" 44).

In "We Can't Lose," Nye stresses the same point. The spirit of her deceased father lives in the words of her poems, which now, in response to her father's wish for starting a parental dialogue, have become the "conversational bridge" that ties the earth to heaven. His words have travelled from the memories Nye has of him to the world she lives in, and have helped her to resist the feelings of sorrow and grief for losing him.

> What we lost most
> even if it dies and disappears
> even if I only hear my father's voice
> when I drink a lot of rum
> and walk at night on a slick wall
> over the crashing Pacific. ("We Can't Lose" 106)

The last stanza in the poem shows that Nye is starting to see things with her father's eyes; like a navigator, she embarks on a journey that seems not to come to an end:

> Even in Honolulu — a place
> he didn't adore though they
> understood occupation
> I'm seeing with eyes he gave me
> I'm a bubble in the waves. ("We Can't Lose" 106)

These lines show that the poem charts not only Aziz Shihab's journey into the realm of death, but into the realm of lived relationships as well. *Transfer* is indeed a book excavating Nye's relation with her father, which Devaney in his review describes as "ever- revelatory" (Devaney 1) because it keeps moving on. It is not the static relationship which ends with the death of one of the parties; it lasts longer than expected, being re-shaped every time the words cross realms and traverse boundaries. This point is also made clear in another poem from the same collection, "Where Were We?" in which Nye explains that repeating her father's words and

stories breaks the monotony that his death has got their relationship into. His stories never cease travelling into and out of Nye's memory of him:

> I could go anywhere now
> (you are not at the end of any journey)
> This evening seems open for talking
> …
> No ladder no map no roundabout
> But a need to reach by climbing… ("Where Were We?" 78)

As memory is put into words, it is brought back to life to become the present that it once used to be. Like her relation with her father, the memory she has of him is a travelling body of words; they journey out of the world of his daughter into the world of her poetry to create a presence out of his absence.[14]

In another poem, "Scared, Scarred, Scared," Nye asks her father about the reason why they kept transferring from one bus to another.

> Why? Why Daddy?
> Because this bus
> only goes so far, then we need another one.
> A different direction. We need a
> different direction bus. ("Scared, Scarred, Scared" 21)

Her father's words show that the journey he has taken in life has not come to an end. The reason is simply that there is always a new direction to take. In doing so, Nye's father is spatializing the act of travelling so that it no longer necessitates moving from one geographical place to another.

Conclusion

Tanner's description of Nye as a writer "international in scope and internal in focus" (Tanner 1) is understandable at this point, for she has managed to spatialize the art of writing poetry by turning every line of her poetry into a performance. The space in which the words of her poems are born and nurtured is, like that described by Tuan, vast; not restricted by boundaries or borders. It defies the categories imposed by geographers and map-makers. In an interview with Rachel Barenblat (1999), Nye describes the effect of "the portable, comfortable shape of poems" on her. She liked "the space around them and the way you could hold your words at

arm's length and look at them. And especially the way they took you to a deeper, quieter place, almost immediately" (Barenblat 2).

Nye's words about the mobile impact of poetry proves that the "journey" is an intrinsic part of what she writes. Whether in prose or verse, she sees the act of travelling as the basis for a literary work suiting the globalised world of the twenty-first century. It is no doubt that Nye employs the journey as a literary device in her works, yet the conclusion which should be arrived at to validate the argument on which this study is based is that Nye employs the concept of the journey in many of her works in a non-conventional way. Her perusal of the act of travelling challenges the traditional definition of the journey as a physical act involving a geographical change of place and fits more into that of other postmodern writers who see the journey as not necessarily containing the elements of concreteness. Multiple, fragmented, experiential and circular, her journeys arise as unique enough to question the conventional representation of the journey. Thus, Nye's attempt not only aims to free the act of travelling from the restricting elements of geography, but also to redefine it as a discursive practice. Commenting on the contribution of Arab-American writers to the mainstream literature, Layla Al-Maleh (2009) notes that even at their beginnings, Arab-American writers[15]have made it a point to view the act of writing as a traversal of space, not a dissection of it.

> One cannot fail to detect a note of jubilation, a certain delight in being able to negotiate boundaries beyond the space of their birthplace…quite unlike the expressions of pain and agonizing dislocation that characterize postcolonial hybridity of late...Theirs is a kind of "metaphorical" hybridity...that undoubtedly helped them negotiate the "identity politics"…with less tension… (Al-Maleh 4-5)

Al-Maleh's words show that the negotiation of space is handled differently by Arab-American writers. For though the opposing issue of their "place of origin" with their "chosen abode"is enough to create a dilemma, they have managed to lessen the tension by "(negotiating) boundaries" (Al-Maleh 3) beyond closed places. Nye excelled at doing this. At many times, she has succeeded in turning the confusion resulting from moving from one place to another into a "why-not-try-it"experience. Travelling needs not create the tension traditionally associated with it. For a change, travelling ought to be valued for the mere pleasure that it creates, for the new experience it fosters. This explains why many, if not all, of Nye's characters start the journey with a grudge but continue it with a smile. Nye herself

learned this lesson and is teaching it to her characters; Liyana in *Habibi*, Aref in *The Turtle of Oman*, the 19 gazelles in *19 Varieties of Gazelle*, and even her father in *Transfer*.

A major contribution of Nye's to the representation of the journey in contemporary literature is divorcing it from the physical aspects which have traditionally restricted it. Journeying into and out of spaces does not necessarily entail physically moving from one place to another: Liyana's experiences after her arrival in Jerusalem, Aref's before leaving Oman, her father's after death testify to this conclusion. Nye does not stop here. Her utmost contribution lies in extending the act of travelling to the text so that the words of the text come to share this human attribute. Far and above, Nye has managed to introduce the journey as a discursive practice that establishes the act of travelling as an act of resistance; an act of shaping and reshaping a world into/out of which we are constantly journeying.

Notes

1. Though she lives in San Antonio, Nye insists on describing herself as a wandering poet. This description accompanied her since her early two works *Tattooed Feet* (1977) and *Eye-to-Eye* (1978) which focus on the themes of the journey and the quest.

2. Nye's father, Aziz Shihab, was a young unmarried man when he left Palestine to go to the USA to study journalism after the 1948 Nakba. There a refugee, he got married to Miriam Allwardt, an American of German and Swiss descent. Nye was born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1952. She spent her adolescence in Jerusalem and San Antonio.

3. *Tattooed Feet* (1977) and *Eye-to-Eye* (1978) are among the first books of Nye. They are written in free verse and revolve around the theme of the journey. In his review of one of her works, "Someone I Love", Jordan Elgrably (2011) explains that it is these two particular books which have made Nye the"wandering poet""interested in travel, place, and cultural exchange" (Elgrably 2).

4. The second half of the twentieth century witnessed the rise of the postmodern movement in which borders and boundaries are liquidated in almost every aspect of life. This liquidation explains the reason behind relativizing knowledge. If there are no boundaries to restrict what defines a field of knowledge, then any piece of information can fit into any field of knowledge.

5. Lyotard's terms "grand narratives and small narratives" form an intrinsic part of postcolonial criticism. The first half of the twentieth century witnessed the publication and circulation of grand narratives of the colonizer, which were written and explained according to his point of view. In contrast, the second half of the twentieth century saw the rise of small narratives which

were written from the point of view of the colonized, who has been silenced for long in the grand narratives.

6. The term *bildungsroman* is originally German. It was coined by the philologist Karl Morgenstern in 1819 and was later legitimated in 1870 by Wilhelm Dilthey. As a novel of education or formation, it focuses on the journey of maturity that the character undertakes from childhood to adulthood. Maturity is achieved at the end of the journey though usually with difficulty.

7. It is worth pondering on the fact that many of Nye's characters are teenagers. Jane in this short story, Liyana in *Habibi*, Aref in *The Turtle of Oman*, among others, are young boys and girls. This could be ascribed to two reasons. First, Nye wants her characters to experience life and discover their surroundings through travelling and this needs young individuals who are physically and mentally ready for those experiences. The other reason would be that Nye herself experienced a lot as a teenager, the major experience of which being the period she spent with her family in Jerusalem before they decided to go back to the USA and settle down in San Antonio in 1967.

8. *Habibi* is an autobiographical work which is based on the period Nye spent with her family in Jerusalem before they decided to go back to the USA and settle down in San Antonio. Many of Liyana's experiences are originally those of Nye as a teenager.

9. When approached from a psychoanalytic point of view, "difference"is not usually accepted because psychologically it threatens the stability that the individual seeks when establishing his identity. What is different is what one works hard to suppress deep in the unconscious so as not to be seen as part of "who we are"by others and this explains why we project feelings of hatred and disgust towards what is different. In reality, we are scared that this suppressed "difference"will surface showing to others and exposing us as weak and vulnerable.

10. The title might give the wrong impression what the novella is about. The reader may mistakenly think that Nye's message is that turtles can only survive in Oman, outside of which they die. Reading the novella, however, proves the opposite. Those turtles migrate and are thus able to survive in different environments according to where they find their needs.

11. Nye's passion in writing about the gazelle can be explained in light of the following. First, the gazelle is an Arab animal and this makes it a symbol of Nye's Arab culture and upbringing. Second, the gazelle is known for its speed and love of adventure and this fits well with Nye's passion for travelling and discovering new aspects of cultures and people. After all, Nye's poetry and fiction are gazelle-like in speed and mobility.

12. Nye's poetry is an example on the "poetics of smallness",poems set in the kitchen, the garden, the grocery store, etc. Though those places might give the impression that her poems are not as serious or as significant as poems set in more public or open, a deep reading of these works renders it quite the opposite. In fact, a poem set in the kitchen, the garden or the grocery store is important enough to be taken seriously. It reflects the precious details of a particular culture

which are what makes that culture alive and existing.

13. In his review of Nye's poetry collection *Transfer*, Thomas Devaney (2012) notes that the book is an amalgam of different genres and forms: "Nye brings in elegy, stories, documents, odes, translations, and history to reveal the forces and mysteries that shape a life" (Devaney 2). These different genres are Nye's way of showing how diverse life and its journeys are.

14. Nye's poetry collection *Transfer* can be read in relation to Mahmoud Darwish's self-elegy *Absent Presence* (2008). Both works dig into the presence that is left after the absence created by death (the father of Nye in *Transfer* and Darwish's own death in *Absent Presence*).

15. Such as Gibran Khalil Gibran and Ameen Rihani.

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责任编辑：李敏锐