

Call for Papers

EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR MODERN ARABIC LITERATURE

The 15th EURAMAL conference hosted by  
Charles University in Prague, 2024

**Ecocritical Approaches and Environmental Issues  
in Modern Arabic Literature**

The environmental situation in the world, including in the Arab countries, is causing growing concern. Harmful consequences of climate change, such as a long-term drought in Syria and heatwaves in Kuwait and United Arab Emirates, are already visible. It is possible that environmental disasters even played a role in fueling the popular revolts that broke out in North Africa and the Middle East in 2010-2011. In the coming years, climate change may render parts of the region inhabitable and lead to conflicts over resources and the displacement of millions of people.

Apocalyptic visions, linked to climate change and environmental degradation, feature in several recently published literary works from the region. A number of Arabic dystopian novels explicitly deal with the issue of global warming, such as *Istikhdām al-ḥayāh* (2014) by Aḥmad Nājī and *Ḥarb al-kalb al-thāniyah* (2016) by Ibrāhīm Naṣr Allāh. These novels focus on dystopian environmental catastrophes and future green utopias caused by the use of genetic engineering and renewable energy. While their depictions can be linked to today's global anxieties about climate change, representations of the ecological environment and nature are not new to Arabic literature. They have been described in many literary works since the pre-Islamic period and have become one of the structural elements of Arabic poetics.

In modern times the diversity of the natural landscape is a dominant feature in Egyptian literature: see, for example, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal's *Zaynab* (1913), Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's *'Awdat al-rūḥ* (1933), as well as the village novels of 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sharqāwī, 'Abd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim, Khayrī Shalabī and others, published in the post-revolutionary period. The commitment to nature is not exclusive to Egyptian literature, though. Post-1948 Palestinian literature, too, reveals a close relationship between the Palestinian people and their land, frequently through a focus on the feeling of attachment to their lost home, as well as the denunciation of the erasure of Palestinian landscape carried out by the Israeli military following the Nakba. At the same time, authors such as the Libyan Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, the Saudi Rajā' 'Ālam and the Tunisian Ibrāhīm al-Darghūthī have chosen the desert as a figurative and actual space in several of their novels. Literary responses in Arabic to the oil boom have also been plentiful, the most famous example being, perhaps, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf's quintet, *Mudun al-milḥ* (1984-1989).

Despite the abundance of these themes and narratives, Arabic literature remains still at the margins of the global dialogue on ecological and environmental concerns in literary studies. Scott Slovic defines ecocriticism as "the study of explicit environmental texts by way of any scholarly approach, or conversely, the scrutiny of ecological implications and human-nature

relationships in any literary text, even texts that seem, at first glance, oblivious of the nonhuman world” (2008: 160). In his view, ecocriticism and environmental literature are “large and contain multitudes” because no text resists ecological interpretations or should be considered “off limits” to green reading (op.cit.: 160). Similarly, in the introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), Cheryll Glotfelty stresses the need to open up to a realm beyond Anglophone literatures, including languages such as Arabic.

In recent years, theories of ecocriticism have been applied to a number of Arabic literary texts, highlighting different forms of “nature writing” in modern fiction and poetry (Yahya et al. 2012; Elmusa 2013; Sinno 2013; Fuad & Said 2013; Ramsay 2014). These theories are used to a certain extent in studies of Arabic speculative fiction (Rooke 2017; Pepe 2022), as well as novels that focus on encounters between humans, animals and the land (Olszok 2020). Yet, Arabic ecocriticism remains in its infancy and needs to be explored further.

EURAMAL welcomes contributions exploring modern Arabic literature on environmental issues, including IPAF-listed novels, which are directly related to the general theme of the conference. Special emphasis may be given to topics such as climate change, species extinctions, toxic environments and pollution, as well as sustainable models for interacting with nonhuman animals and environments. Papers may draw their critical and theoretical approaches from disciplines such as ecocriticism, environmental humanities, geo- and eco-poetics, eco-feminism, environmental justice, human-animal studies, or posthumanism.

Thematic sub-panels might include but are not limited to:

- Environmental crisis and climate change
- Literary strategies for mediating the environment
- Human/non-human agency in fiction and nonfiction, including attitudes towards ‘nature’
- The representation of animals and imagination of animals’ perspectives
- Pragmatics and aesthetics in environmental literature
- The environment and new literary genres
- Environmental challenges and gender
- Environmental social justice
- Environment disruption, wars and conflicts.

### **Special Panel**

In addition to the conference’s main topic, a side panel will be devoted to the cultural dialogue between the Arab world and the host country, more precisely the Arab literary reception of Kafka, who is one of the symbols of Prague, where the 15th EURAMAL conference will be held. Papers in this special section may, but do not need to, address ecocritical and/or environment-related questions.

### **Suggested Readings**

Elmusa, Sharif. ‘The Ecological Bedouin: Toward Environmental Principles for the Arab Region.’ *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 33, 2013, pp. 9-35.

Foltz, Richard C. *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2006.

- Fouad, Jehan Farouk and Alwakeel, Saeed. 'Representations of the Desert in Silko's Ceremony and Al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone*.' *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 33, 2013, pp. 36-62.
- Ghosh, Amitav. 'Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel.' *Energy Humanities: An Anthology*. Ed. Imre Szeman and Dominic Boyer. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017, pp. 431-40.
- Glotfelty, Cheryl and Fromm, Harold, eds. *The Ecocriticism Reader. Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996.
- Hallaq, Boutros et. al., eds. *La poétique de l'espace dans la littérature arabe moderne*. Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2002.
- Heise, Ursula K. *Imagining Extinction. The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016.
- Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Olszok, Charis. *The Libyan Novel: Humans, Animals and the Poetics of Vulnerability*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020.
- Pepe, Teresa. 'Climate Change in Contemporary Arabic Dystopian Fiction.' *MECAM Papers English*, 2022.  
[https://opendata.uni-halle.de/bitstream/1981185920/94212/3/Mecam\\_papers\\_2022-02-English\\_A.pdf](https://opendata.uni-halle.de/bitstream/1981185920/94212/3/Mecam_papers_2022-02-English_A.pdf)
- Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Ramsay, Gail. 'Breaking the Silence of Nature in an Arabic Novel: Nazif al-Hajar by Ibrahim al-Kawni.' *From Tur Abdin to Hadramawt: Festschrift in Honour of Bo Isaksson*. Ed. Tal Davidovich et al. Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2014, pp. 149-72.
- Rooke, Tetz. 'The Planet of Stupidity. Environmental Themes in Arabic Speculative Fiction.' *New Geographies: Texts and Contexts in Modern Arabic Literature*. Ed. Roger Allen et al. Madrid: Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2017, pp. 99-114.
- Selim, Samah. *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880–1985*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2004.
- Sinno, Nadine. 'The Greening of Modern Arabic Literature: An Ecological Interpretation of Two Contemporary Arabic Novels.' *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 20(1), 2013, pp. 125-43.
- Slovic, Scott. *Going Away to Think: Engagement, Retreat, and Ecocritical Responsibility*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2008.
- Trexler, Adam. *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*. University of Virginia Press: Kindle, 2015.
- Yahya, Hamoud et al. 'Eco resistance in the poetry of the Arab poet Mahmoud Darwish.' *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature*, 2012, 18(1), pp. 75-85.
- Westphal, Bernard. *La Géocritique, Réel, Fiction, Espace*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2007.

### Guests of Honour

Full members of EURAMAL are invited to suggest the names of critics or authors, especially writers who have been nominated for or awarded the IPAF, relevant to the theme of the

conference. Please provide their CV and full contact details for consideration by the Executive Board.

### **Submission Guidelines**

Please send a max. 200-word abstract (Times New Roman, Font size 12) including your name, email address, institutional affiliation and other contact details to

František Ondráš ([Frantisek.Ondras@ff.cuni.cz](mailto:Frantisek.Ondras@ff.cuni.cz))  
and Baian Rayhanova ([euramal2020@gmail.com](mailto:euramal2020@gmail.com)).

Deadline for submission of abstract: **31 July 2023**  
Decision about acceptance: **30 September 2023**