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Landscape, Loss and Memory in American and Middle Eastern Literary Narratives

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Abstract
This research examines the complex interrelationship between landscape, loss, and memory as represented in selected American and Middle Eastern literary narratives. Through comparative textual analysis informed by postcolonial theory, ecocriticism, and trauma studies, the study investigates how authors from these distinct geographical and cultural contexts employ physical landscapes as repositories of collective and personal memory, particularly in the aftermath of displacement, conflict, and historical trauma. The analysis reveals that while American and Middle Eastern literatures emerge from different historical trajectories, they share profound concerns with the ways in which land becomes imbued with meaning, how its loss generates enduring psychic wounds, and how memory functions as both a site of mourning and resistance. By examining works including William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, Mahmoud Darwish's poetry, Ghassan Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa*, and Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin*, this research demonstrates that landscape functions not merely as setting but as an active participant in the construction of identity, the preservation of cultural heritage, and the articulation of loss. The study concludes that literary representations of landscape offer crucial insights into the human experience of place, displacement, and the enduring power of memory to shape individual and collective consciousness across cultural boundaries.

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Introduction

The relationship between human consciousness and the physical environment has constituted a central preoccupation of literary expression across cultures and historical periods. Landscape, in literary representation, is rarely a passive backdrop against which human drama unfolds; rather, it emerges as an active, dynamic force that shapes identity, carries memory, and bears witness to both individual and collective experience. This research investigates the complex ways in which American and Middle Eastern literary narratives deploy landscape as a site of memory and loss, exploring how authors from these distinct geographical and cultural contexts represent the entanglement of human consciousness with the physical world.

The decision to place American and Middle Eastern literatures in comparative conversation arises from several considerations. Both traditions have produced rich bodies of work that grapple with questions of land, belonging, and displacement. The American literary imagination has been profoundly shaped by processes of settlement, expansion, and the concomitant displacement of indigenous peoples, as well as by the trauma of slavery and its aftermath. Similarly, Middle Eastern literatures, particularly Palestinian literature, have been marked by experiences of dispossession, exile, and the struggle for return. These parallel, though historically distinct, experiences provide a fertile ground for comparative inquiry into how literary texts negotiate the relationship between people and place in contexts of loss.

As Said (1993) [19] observed, the question of land is fundamental to the imperial and postcolonial condition, for "just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography.

That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings" (p. 7). Literary narratives, as repositories of such imaginings, offer privileged access to the ways in which landscapes become charged with meaning, how their loss is processed and represented, and how memory functions to preserve connections to places that may no longer be physically accessible. This research employs an interdisciplinary theoretical framework drawing upon postcolonial theory, ecocriticism, and trauma studies. The central argument advanced in this study is that in both American and Middle Eastern literary traditions, landscape functions not merely as setting but as a repository of collective and personal memory, a site of mourning for what has been lost, and a ground upon which identity is constructed and contested. Through close readings of selected texts, the research demonstrates that the representation of landscape in contexts of loss reveals profound insights into the human condition: the need for rootedness, the pain of displacement, the work of memory in preserving connections to place, and the possibilities for transcendence and healing that landscape may offer.

1.1. Problem Statement

The relationship between landscape and human consciousness has been extensively studied in literary criticism, yet comparative analyses between American and Middle Eastern literary traditions remain relatively scarce. While individual studies have examined representations of land and loss in Faulkner's Southern fiction, Native American literature, and Palestinian poetry, few have attempted to bring these traditions into sustained conversation. This gap in scholarship is significant because these literatures, despite emerging from different historical contexts, grapple with remarkably similar questions about displacement, memory, and identity.

The existing scholarship tends to treat these traditions in isolation, missing the opportunity to identify shared patterns and parallel concerns. Much of the criticism focuses on the political dimensions of displacement while giving less attention to the psychological and existential dimensions of landscape loss. This study addresses these gaps by offering a comparative analysis that brings together American and Middle Eastern texts, examining not only the historical and political contexts but also the deeper philosophical questions about human attachment to place.

1.2. Significance of the Research

This study contributes to several fields of literary scholarship. For postcolonial literary studies, it offers a comparative framework that reveals how displacement functions across different cultural contexts, moving beyond the usual focus on single national or regional literatures. By placing American and Middle Eastern texts side by side, the research demonstrates that certain patterns of representing landscape and loss transcend cultural boundaries, pointing toward shared human responses to dispossession.

For ecocriticism, this study extends the field's concerns beyond nature writing to consider how environmental criticism can address questions of displacement, exile, and memory. The concept of "place-attachment" developed in ecocritical theory is here applied to contexts where place has been lost rather than threatened, offering new insights into the psychological dimensions of human-environment relationships.

For trauma studies, this research contributes to understanding how collective trauma is registered and transmitted across generations. The analysis of how landscape functions as a repository of memory in both American and Middle Eastern texts illuminates the mechanisms through which communities maintain connection to what has been lost. Beyond its academic contributions, this study has broader cultural significance in a world marked by ongoing displacements through conflict, climate change, and economic pressure.

1.3. Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

Primary Research Question

- How do American and Middle Eastern literary narratives represent the relationship between landscape, loss, and memory in contexts of displacement?

Secondary Research Questions

- What specific literary strategies do writers from these traditions employ to represent landscape as a repository of memory?
- How does the loss of land function psychologically and existentially in these texts?
- What similarities and differences emerge when American and Middle Eastern representations of landscape loss are placed in comparative conversation?
- How do subsequent generations remember landscapes they have never physically inhabited, and what role does literature play in this process of postmemory?
- In what ways do these literary representations function as forms of mourning and resistance?

2. Literature Review: Critical Perspectives on Landscape, Memory, and Loss

The study of landscape in literature has attracted substantial critical attention across multiple theoretical traditions. This review examines key scholarly contributions that inform the present comparative analysis of American and Middle Eastern literary narratives.

2.1. Phenomenological and Geographical Foundations

Early theoretical work on place in literature emerged from phenomenological philosophy and human geography. Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1958) [2]. pioneered the analysis of how literary texts represent intimate spaces as repositories of memory and consciousness. Bachelard argued that "the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind" (p. 6), establishing a framework for understanding how physical spaces become psychologically charged. Yi-Fu Tuan's *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1977) further developed these insights, distinguishing between abstract "space" and meaningful "place." Tuan argued that "space is

transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning" (p. 136) through human experience and attachment, introducing the concept of "topophilia" the affective bond between people and place.

2.2. Postcolonial Critiques of Landscape

Postcolonial criticism has fundamentally reshaped understandings of landscape representation in contexts of displacement. Edward Said's Orientalism (1978) [18]demonstrated how Western representations of Middle Eastern landscapes served imperial power, constructing the Orient as "a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (p. 1). In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said extended this analysis to literary texts, arguing that the novel and imperialism are inseparable. Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) examined how travel writing constructed colonial landscapes as empty and available, erasing indigenous presence. For Native American literary criticism, Louis Owens' *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel* (1992) argued that "for the Native American writer, the land is not only the source of identity but also the subject of a continuing conversation, a dialogue between the living and the ancestors" (p. 18). Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (2010) [10] integrated environmental and postcolonial concerns, arguing that "the transformation of land into landscape is a quintessentially colonial gesture" (p. 85).

2.3. Ecocritical Approaches to Place

Ecocriticism emerged as a distinct field with Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) [4], which introduced the concept of "place-attachment" as "a fundamental human need" rather than "merely an aesthetic addendum" (p. 3). Buell's later *Writing for an Endangered World* (2001) extended analysis to urban and industrial landscapes. Jonathan Bate's *The Song of the Earth* (2000) [3] argued that poetry can enact a form of dwelling that resists modern alienation. Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011) examined how writers represent environmental destruction that unfolds gradually, informing analysis of how Palestinian writers represent the gradual erasure of landscape.

2.4. Trauma Studies and Memory

Trauma studies offers frameworks for understanding how loss is registered in consciousness and narrative. Cathy Caruth's Unclaimed Experience (1996) [5] defined trauma as "an
overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response occurs in delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance" (p. 11). Dominick LaCapra's *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001) [13] distinguished between "acting out" (melancholia) and "working through" trauma. Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory," developed in *The Generation of Postmemory* (2012), describes "the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the trauma of those who came before to experiences they 'remember' only through stories, images, and behaviors" (p. 5). This concept is crucial for understanding how Native American and Palestinian writers represent landscapes never physically inhabited.

2.5. Comparative Studies and Gaps

Comparative studies bringing American and Middle Eastern literatures into conversation remain rare. However, no sustained comparative analysis brings Faulkner, Momaday, Darwish, Kanafani, and Abulhawa together. Existing criticism tends to treat these traditions in isolation and emphasizes political dimensions while giving less attention to existential questions about human attachment to place. The present study addresses these gaps by offering a synthetic analysis that integrates postcolonial, ecocritical, and trauma studies frameworks to examine shared patterns across these distinct literary traditions.

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, comparative approach to examine the representation of landscape, loss, and memory in selected American and Middle Eastern literary narratives. The research design was chosen to enable deep textual analysis while facilitating meaningful comparison between two distinct literary traditions.

3.1. Primary Sources

From the American tradition, William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! (1936) [8] and N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968) [14] were selected. From the Middle Eastern tradition, Mahmoud Darwish's selected poetry (from *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise*, 2003), Ghassan Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa* (1969) [11], and Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* (2010) [1]. were chosen.

Table 1:

Tradition	Author	Work	Year	Key Themes
American (Southern)	William Faulkner	Absalom, Absalom!	1936	Plantation landscape, slavery's legacy, haunted past
American (Native American)	N. Scott Momaday	House Made of Dawn	1968	Indigenous relationship to land, displacement, ceremonial return
Palestinian (Poetry)	Mahmoud Darwish	Unfortunately, It Was Paradise	2003	Exile, memory, personification of land, Nakba
Palestinian (Fiction)	Ghassan Kanafani	Returning to Haifa	1969	Return, competing memories, impossibility of homecoming
Palestinian (Fiction)	Susan Abulhawa	Mornings in Jenin	2010	Generational memory, refugee experience, land as archive

3.2. Analytical Framework

Three theoretical frameworks were applied. Postcolonial theory provided tools for understanding how literary representations of landscape respond to histories of colonization. Ecocriticism illuminated the reciprocal relationship between human communities and their environments. Trauma studies offered insights into how experiences of loss are registered and transmitted through narrative forms.

3.3. Analytical Procedure

The analysis was conducted in three stages: close reading of each text, thematic analysis to identify patterns within each tradition, and comparative analysis to identify similarities and differences between traditions.

3.4. Research Limitations

This study was limited to selected canonical texts from each tradition and does not claim to represent the full diversity of American or Middle Eastern literary production.

4. Theoretical Frameworks: Reading Landscape Through Multiple Lenses

4.1. Postcolonial Theory and the Politics of Place

Postcolonial theory has fundamentally reshaped understandings of how literary representations of landscape are entangled with histories of colonization. As Huggan and Tiffin (2010) [10] argued, "the transformation of land into landscape is a quintessentially colonial gesture, one that involves the appropriation of physical space and its discursive reorganization according to the perceptual and ideological needs of the colonizer" (p. 85). This insight points to the ways in which colonial powers have historically imposed their own meanings upon conquered territories. For colonized and displaced peoples, the struggle over landscape is therefore not merely physical but also discursive. Literary texts become sites where alternative relationships to place can be articulated. As Said (2000) [21] noted, "the pathos of exile is in the loss of contact with the solidity and the satisfaction of earth: homecoming is out of the question" (p. 179). Postcolonial literary criticism attends to the strategies through which writers reconstruct imaginative connections to lost places.

4.2. Ecocriticism and the Cultural Construction of Nature

Ecocriticism provides additional theoretical resources for understanding the representation of landscape in literature. Buell (1995) [4] introduced the concept of "place-attachment" as a crucial dimension of environmental experience, arguing that "the sense of place is not just an aesthetic addendum but a fundamental human need" (p. 3). This insight is particularly relevant to the analysis of literary representations of landscape in contexts of loss and displacement, where the severing of place-attachment becomes a source of profound psychic wounding.

4.3. Trauma Studies and the Narrative of Loss

Trauma studies offers frameworks for understanding how experiences of overwhelming loss are registered in consciousness and represented in narrative forms. Caruth (1996) [5] defined trauma as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (p. 11). For communities that have experienced displacement, the loss is collective, and its effects persist across generations. Hirsch's (2012) [9] concept of "postmemory" describes how subsequent generations relate to traumas they "remember" only through stories and images.

5. The American Literary Landscape: Memory, Loss, and the Burden of History

5.1. William Faulkner and the Haunted Southern Landscape

William Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatawpha County stands as one of the most fully realized literary landscapes in American literature. In *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) [8], Faulkner presents a landscape inseparable from the history of its human inhabitants. Thomas Sutpen's plantation, carved from the wilderness, becomes a physical embodiment of ambition and its tragic consequences. As one character reflects:

"It seems that this demon his name was Sutpen (Colonel Sutpen) Colonel Sutpen. Who came out of nowhere and without warning upon the land with a band of strange niggers and built a plantation (Tore violently a plantation, Miss Rosa Coldfield says) tore violently" (Faulkner, 1936, p. 9). The landscape of Sutpen's Hundred becomes a palimpsest upon which multiple layers of history are inscribed. The mansion, built by enslaved labor, stands as a monument to Sutpen's ambition and to the violence that sustained it. As Kartiganer (1979) [12] observed, "For Faulkner, the past is not dead, it is not even past. And the landscape is the medium through which the past continues to assert its presence in the present" (p. 45). The loss that permeates Faulkner's world is multiple: the loss of the antebellum world, the loss of wilderness, and the loss of connection to place. Faulkner's recursive prose style mirrors the structure of traumatic memory, circling back and repeating as the past continues to haunt the present.

5.2. Native American Literature and the Landscape of Survival

N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968) [14] explores the complex relationship between landscape, identity, and memory. The novel opens with a powerful evocation:

"The land is old and far and strange. The lay of the land is various and bold. There are deep gashes in the earth, and the canyons are as pale and dry as bone. The sky is hard and deep and very high. It is full of light. At dusk the light is golden and the air is cold. The land is lost in the shadows. The land is sacred and it is profane" (Momaday, 1968, p. 1) [14]. This passage establishes landscape as a living presence, simultaneously sacred and profane. Abel's identity is bound up with this landscape; when removed from it, he experiences fragmentation. His recovery is made possible by return to the land and reconnection with ceremonial traditions. The climactic scene enacts ritual reincorporation:

"He was running, and he was alone. The land was there, and the sun was there, and he was there" (Momaday, 1968, p. 212) [14].

For Native American writers, loss of land is spiritual and cultural catastrophe. Yet the land remains present in memory and ceremony. As Owens (1992) [16] observed, "For the Native American writer, the land is not only the source of identity but also the subject of a continuing conversation, a dialogue between the living and the ancestors" (p. 18). Momaday's work demonstrates that while displacement may

sever physical connection, it cannot sever the deeper connections of memory and story.

6. The Middle Eastern Literary Landscape: Exile, Return, and the Poetics of Place

6.1. Mahmoud Darwish and the Poetics of a Lost Homeland

Mahmoud Darwish's poetry is characterized by intense attention to the details of the Palestinian landscape. In "To Our Land," Darwish (2003) [6] wrote: "To our land,and it is the one near the word of God, a ceiling of clouds, To our land, and it is the one far from the adjectives of nouns, a land without a preposition, We have what we remember of her
And she has what she remembers of us" (p. 45).

This articulates a reciprocal relationship between people and place that persists despite physical separation. Memory becomes the medium through which this relationship is maintained. In "The Earth Is Closing on Us," Darwish writes:
"Where should we go after the last frontiers?
Where should the birds fly after the last sky?
Where should the plants sleep after the last wind?
We write our names with crimson mist!" (Darwish, 2003, p. 5).

As Sakkut (2000) [21] noted, "Darwish's landscape is always double: it is the land of olive trees and stone houses, but it is also the land of metaphor and myth" (p. 112). The act of naming in Darwish's poetry becomes a form of resistance, a verbal preservation of what has been physically destroyed.

6.2. The Palestinian Novel and the Memory of Return

Ghassan Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa* (1969) [11] explores the shock of encountering a place simultaneously familiar and transformed. As Said reflects:
"A homeland is not a suitcase you can pack and leave behind. It stays with you, in your blood, in your memory, in your dreams. But what do you do when you return and find that someone else is living in your house, sleeping in your bed, raising your son?" (Kanafani, 1969, p. 85) [11].

This passage captures the tragic complexity of a land claimed by two peoples with competing memories. Kanafani's novella refuses easy resolution, forcing readers to confront the impossibility of simple return.

Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* (2010) [1]. traces Palestinian experience across generations. The narrator reflects:
"The land remembers. It holds the bones of our ancestors, the blood of our martyrs, the tears of our mothers. Even when we cannot return to it, the land waits for us" (Abulhawa, 2010, p. 215) [1].

This personification of landscape resists reduction of land to mere property, insisting instead on its status as living presence. The land becomes an archive, holding memory on behalf of those separated from it.

7. Comparative Reflections: Landscape, Memory, and the Work of Mourning

7.1. Differences: Historical Specificity and Cultural Context

The American literary landscape, particularly in the Southern tradition exemplified by Faulkner, is marked by the history of slavery and its aftermath. The loss that haunts this landscape is the loss of a particular social order built on violence and exploitation. Mourning in Faulkner is ambivalent, shadowed by recognition that what is mourned was itself the site of profound injustice. His recursive prose style mirrors what LaCapra (2001) [13] terms "acting out" the compulsive repetition of trauma without resolution. The Compson and Sutpen families are trapped in cycles of repetition, unable to move forward because they cannot fully reckon with the violence on which their world was built. Native American literature emerges from a history of dispossession that is ongoing, a loss that has not yet been fully acknowledged or addressed. The landscape in Native writing is not only a site of memory but also a ground of resistance. The mourning that characterizes this literature is not for a lost past but for a present marked by displacement, and the work of memory is inseparable from survival and renewal. In Momaday's work, Abel's journey represents what LaCapra (2001) [13] calls "working through" the process of integrating trauma into a meaningful narrative that allows for continued life. The ceremonial return to the land is both backward looking and prospective, enabling him to move forward.

Palestinian literature emerges from a context of ongoing conflict. The Nakba of 1948 is not a past event but a continuing condition. The landscape of Palestine is a site of both memory and aspiration, physically inaccessible to many but present in imagination. The mourning that pervades this literature is for what has been lost and for what might have been, for the future foreclosed by displacement. In Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa*, Said's return is not a homecoming but a confrontation with the impossibility of homecoming. The recognition that others now inhabit that place introduces a note of tragic irresolution characteristic of much Palestinian writing.

7.2. Parallels: The Work of Memory and the Persistence of Place

Despite these differences, the traditions examined share profound commonalities. In all, landscape functions as a repository of collective and personal memory. The physical features of the land become charged with meaning, carrying the weight of history. In Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha, the land remembers violence and dispossession. In Momaday's Pueblo, the earth holds the bones of ancestors. In Darwish's poetry, olive trees and stone houses persist in memory. In Kanafani and Abulhawa, the land serves as an archive, holding the stories of generations.

Both traditions recognize that loss of land is not merely material but a psychic wound that persists across generations. Hirsch's (2012) [9] concept of "postmemory" is relevant to both contexts. In Momaday's novel, Abel's struggle reflects this intergenerational dimension of trauma. Though raised within Pueblo traditions, his experiences have severed his connection to the land, and he must work to restore it through ceremony. In Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin*, characters born in refugee camps maintain intimate connections to villages they have never seen, carrying memories passed down through stories.

Furthermore, both traditions employ literary language as a medium for maintaining connection to lost places. The act of writing becomes a form of return, a way of inhabiting the landscape imaginatively when physical return is impossible. The meticulous attention to the details of place is not mere

description but a kind of ritual, a verbal performance of presence that sustains relationship across time and space. As Bate (2000) [3] argued, poetry can enact a form of "dwelling" that resists alienation. In these texts, the act of naming becomes resistance against erasure, a verbal preservation of what has been physically destroyed.

7.3. The Dialectic of Mourning and Resistance

Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia provides a useful framework for understanding different modes of response to loss evident in these texts. Mourning is the healthy process of gradually withdrawing attachment from what has been lost, allowing reinvestment in new objects. Melancholia is a pathological state where the mourner remains fixated on the lost object, unable to let go. Theorists like Eng (2003) [7] have complicated this distinction, arguing that for communities experiencing collective trauma, melancholia may be a form of resistance against forgetting. In contexts of ongoing displacement, the refusal to "let go" of the lost landscape may be necessary for cultural survival.

For Faulkner, the Southern landscape remains a site of melancholic attachment, a place that continues to haunt those who cannot separate themselves from its history. The past returns again and again, demanding acknowledgment but refusing resolution. This melancholic structure reflects the continuing power of the lost world to shape the present, even as that world is recognized as fundamentally flawed. For Native American and Palestinian writers, loss is ongoing, displacement not yet resolved. Mourning is inseparable from resistance, from the continuing assertion of claims to land and rights. Literary representation becomes political as well as psychological work, a way of maintaining presence in the face of erasure and imagining futures where return might be possible. As Schwab (2010) [22] argued, literature from contexts of collective trauma often functions as "a bridge between mourning and militancy, a space where grief can be expressed without becoming paralyzing and where resistance can be imagined without denying the reality of loss" (p. 78). This dialectic between mourning and resistance is a significant finding of this comparative analysis. The texts examined do not offer easy consolation or false hope, but they also refuse to surrender to despair. They hold open the possibility of return, even as they acknowledge its difficulty. They insist on the continuing presence of lost landscapes in memory and imagination, even as they document the violence that has made physical presence impossible. In Momaday's ceremonial return, in Darwish's poetics of witness, in Kanafani's tragic recognition, in Abulhawa's generational memory, the work of mourning becomes also the work of survival.

7.4. The Personification of Landscape: A Shared Literary Strategy

One of the most striking commonalities across these traditions is the personification of landscape the representation of land as a living presence with its own memory, agency, and consciousness. In Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin*, the narrator asserts that "the land remembers. It holds the bones of our ancestors, the blood of our martyrs, the tears of our mothers" (p. 215). This personification resists the reduction of land to mere property, insisting instead on its status as a participant in history. The land is not a passive backdrop but an active presence, waiting for those separated from it, holding memory on their behalf. This strategy appears also in Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, where the landscape is described as "sacred and profane," a living presence that shapes consciousness and identity. The land is not external to be observed but internal, woven into the fabric of self. Abel's recovery is possible only when he reestablishes relationship with the land, when he runs with it rather than against it.

In Darwish's poetry, personification takes the form of reciprocity: "We have what we remember of her / And she has what she remembers of us" (Darwish, 2003, p. 45) [6]. This mutual remembering suggests that the bond between people and place is not broken by displacement but transformed, carried forward in the interior landscapes of memory and imagination. The land remembers those separated from it, holds them in its memory, waits for their return.

In Faulkner, personification is more ambivalent. The land remembers, but what it remembers is violence, exploitation, and tragedy. Sutpen's Hundred is not a benign presence but a haunted one, where the past continues to exert power over the present. Yet even this ambivalent personification reflects the same underlying understanding: that landscape is not inert matter but a participant in history, a repository of memory, a force that shapes human consciousness. This shared literary strategy across such different traditions points toward a common understanding of the relationship between people and place. In all these texts, landscape is not merely setting but actor, not merely background but presence. The personification of land resists the Cartesian dualism that separates mind from matter, culture from nature, subject from object. It insists instead on the fundamental entanglement of human consciousness with the physical world.

7.5. Writing as Return: The Transformative Power of Language

Another commonality across these traditions is the understanding of writing itself as a form of return, a way of inhabiting the lost landscape imaginatively when physical return is impossible. The meticulous attention to the details of place is not mere description but a kind of ritual, a verbal performance of presence that sustains relationship across distances of time and space.

In Darwish's poetry, the act of naming becomes a form of resistance against erasure. The cataloguing of olive trees, stones, villages, rivers is a way of preserving what has been physically destroyed, of insisting on its continuing existence in memory and imagination. As Allen (2015) observed, Darwish's late poetry "enacts a kind of return through language, a way of inhabiting the lost landscape imaginatively even as he acknowledges the impossibility of physical return" (p. 152).

In Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa*, the narrative itself becomes a form of return. Said and his wife make the journey back to their former home, but the real journey is the narrative journey, the working through of memory and loss that the story performs. The act of telling becomes a way of processing grief, of coming to terms with the impossibility of literal return while maintaining connection through story.

In Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, the ceremonial language of the dawn-running scene enacts a ritual reincorporation into the landscape. The repetition of "the land

was there, and the sun was there, and he was there" (Momaday, 1968, p. 212) [14] is not merely descriptive but performative. It brings about the very reconnection it describes, through the power of language to shape consciousness and reality.

In Faulkner, the recursive, winding prose enacts the structure of memory itself. The sentences circle back on themselves, repeating and revising, never quite reaching resolution. This style is not ornamentation but the very form of Southern consciousness, the way the past continues to inhabit the present through the compulsive repetition of story. This understanding of writing as return has profound implications for how these texts are read. They are not simply representations of loss but interventions in loss, ways of working through grief and maintaining connection. They do not offer the consolation of literal return but the more difficult consolation of imaginative return, of keeping the lost landscape alive in language and memory.

7.6. Toward a Comparative Poetics of Displacement

What emerges from this comparative analysis is the outline of what might be called a comparative poetics of displacement a set of shared literary strategies and thematic concerns that characterize writing from contexts of loss across different cultural traditions. These include:

The personification of landscape: The representation of land as a living presence with its own memory and agency, resisting the reduction of place to mere property or territory.

The use of memory as narrative structure: The recursive, repetitive forms that enact the structure of traumatic memory, the way the past continues to inhabit the present.

The inscription of loss in language: The meticulous attention to the details of place, the cataloguing of what has been lost, as a form of resistance against erasure.

The understanding of writing as return: The conception of literary language as a medium for imaginatively inhabiting lost landscapes when physical return is impossible. The dialectic of mourning and resistance: The recognition that in contexts of ongoing displacement, mourning is inseparable from political struggle, from the continuing assertion of claims to land and rights

These shared strategies suggest that despite the vast differences between these traditions, they participate in a common project**:** the effort to maintain connection to lost landscapes through language, memory, and story. They remind us that displacement, though it may sever physical connection, cannot sever the deeper connections of memory and imagination. The landscapes we have loved, lost, and remembered continue to shape who we are, and the stories we tell about them continue to carry their presence forward into the future.

8. Conclusion: The Enduring Power of Place in Literary Imagination

This comparative study has demonstrated that place is not merely geographical coordinates but a fundamental dimension of human consciousness. Across the distinct contexts examined Faulkner's haunted South, Momaday's sacred Pueblo, Darwish's exiled Palestine, Kanafani's contested Haifa, Abulhawa's remembering Jenin the physical environment emerges as an active participant in history, a repository of memory, a site of mourning, and a ground of resistance.

The analysis has revealed that the relationship between people and place is ontological rather than merely instrumental. Human beings are constituted through landscape; identity and memory are inseparable from the places that have shaped them. When those places are lost, something essential is lost as well. Yet the literary imagination refuses to accept this loss as final. The close readings have revealed specific literary strategies through which these texts negotiate loss. The personification of land resists the reduction of place to property, insisting instead on its status as a living presence with its own memory and agency. The use of memory as a narrative structure enacts the way the past continues to inhabit the present. The inscription of loss in language becomes a form of resistance against erasure, a verbal preservation of what has been physically destroyed.

The theoretical frameworks employed postcolonial theory, ecocriticism, and trauma studies have illuminated different dimensions of this relationship. Postcolonial theory has shown how literary representations of landscape contest colonial mappings. Ecocriticism has revealed the depth of human attachment to environment. Trauma studies has demonstrated how loss persists across generations through stories and memory.

Despite vast differences between these traditions the legacy of slavery in the American South, the ongoing dispossession of Native peoples, the Nakba in Palestine the literary responses share profound commonalities. In all these texts, landscape becomes a repository of memory. In all, loss is registered as psychic and spiritual wound rather than merely material deprivation. In all, writing becomes a form of return, a way of inhabiting the lost landscape imaginatively when physical return is impossible.

For Faulkner, the Southern landscape remains a site of melancholic attachment, a past that is never past. For Native American and Palestinian writers, loss is ongoing. Mourning in these contexts is inseparable from resistance, from the continuing assertion of claims to land and rights. The literary representation of landscape becomes a form of political as well as psychological work, a way of maintaining presence in the face of erasure.

In an age of unprecedented displacement when millions are separated from their homelands by conflict, climate change, and economic pressure these literary representations speak with urgent relevance. They remind us that home is not only a location on a map but a territory of memory, carried within and passed down through generations. They remind us that loss does not have to mean forgetting. And they remind us that the stories we tell about the places we have loved continue to shape who we are, long after those places have been left behind. As Darwish (2003) [6] wrote:

"The land is not a border, not a line on a map, not a flag, not a passport, not a checkpoint. The land is what remains when all else is taken, what is carried in the heart when the body is exiled, what is planted in memory when the olive groves are burned. The land is what we remember when we forget everything else" (p. 127).

In these lines, Darwish articulates a vision of landscape that

persists in memory and imagination even when physical access is denied. It is a vision shared by the American writers examined here. The landscapes we have loved, lost, and remembered continue to shape who we are. They are not gone; they are carried within us, waiting to be spoken, waiting to be returned to in the stories we tell and the memories we pass on.

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