

Nature at the Edge of the Machine: Eco-Poetics and Technological Modernity in the Works of Alice Oswald and Adonis

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Abstract

This study looks at how nature and technology intersect in modern poetry, focusing on the works of Alice Oswald and Adonis. By exploring how these poets address the challenges and opportunities of today's technological world, the research emphasizes the connection between ecological awareness and poetic creativity. Oswald's nature-focused poetry highlights the life and vulnerability of the natural world. In contrast, Adonis weaves in elements of cultural memory and modernity, showing the clash between tradition and technological change. Through detailed textual analysis, this study examines whether technology is seen as a threat, a neutral element, or a potential partner for nature, revealing the poets' thoughtful engagement with ecological and technological issues. The research uses an eco-poetic lens, combining literary analysis with environmental philosophy to explore the moral and artistic implications of modern life. Ultimately, the study shows that both poets express a vision where ecological awareness and technological understanding inform each other, providing important insights into how poetry engages with today's environmental and technological conversations.

Key words: Technology; Echo-poetics; Ecological imagery; Machinery metaphor

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INTRODUCTION

The fast pace of technological development in the twenty-first century has created a significant tension between human creativity and environmental sustainability. Literature, especially poetry, provides a unique way to express this tension. It gives nature a voice while examining the promises and dangers of the machine age. Alice Oswald, a well-known contemporary English poet, is praised for her eco-poetics that highlight rivers, landscapes, and the vulnerability of natural ecosystems. In contrast, Adonis, a key figure in modern Arabic poetry, places nature within a larger cosmic and philosophical context. He critiques modernity as a civilizational success that also leads to alienation.

Although there is much scholarship on each poet individually, few studies compare Oswald and Adonis. Even rarer are analyses that combine eco-critical and posthumanist perspectives to look at how poetry addresses environmental crises in a technologically driven world. This research aims to fill that gap by examining how these two poets, from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, respond to humanity's changed relationship with nature in a machine-dominated age.

Oswald's poetry in works like *Dart and Memorial* focuses on the elemental voices of rivers, earth, and air. In contrast, Adonis's modernist Arabic poetry in collections such as *Aghani Mihyar al-Dimashqi* and *The Blood* of Adonis presents nature as a spiritual and cosmic force affected by mechanization. These different poetic viewpoints have yet to be discussed together. The lack of a comparative eco-poetic analysis misses the opportunity to explore how English and Arabic poetic traditions can jointly highlight the cultural and philosophical implications of environmental crises in the machine age.

This research significantly contributes to comparative literature and the environmental humanities. It shows

how poetic discourse can express ecological awareness across diverse cultural traditions. Oswald illustrates a deep connection to the nonhuman world in her river-centered poetry. She invites readers into a “quiet world” filled with vibrant matter, highlighting nonhuman life. Her work exemplifies an ecological ethics grounded in literary form (Bennett in Farrier, 2014). When combined with Adonis’s modernist Arabic poems, characterized by transformative innovation and existential urgency, this study uncovers shared environmental concerns and unique cultural interpretations of modernity. It thus promotes a comparative eco-poetics between Western and Arab literatures. Moreover, by emphasizing literary imagination as a humanistic approach to environmental challenges, this research enhances scientific and policy discussions about the environment. (Buell, 2005; Morton, 2007).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between ecological awareness and technological advancement is a lively and important topic in literature. Poets such as Alice Oswald and Adonis explore this connection by blending ecological insights with thoughts on current technological changes. They offer deep reflections on how humanity’s relationship with nature and technology continues to evolve.

Alice Oswald’s poetry represents eco-poetics, which maps the natural world through both language and ethical considerations of ecological processes. Farrier (2014) points out that Oswald’s *Memorial* is an ecological and moral work. It combines the classical idea of *enargeia*, or vividness in poetry, with a sense of ethical time, showing the deep connection between humans and the natural world. Oswald encourages readers to see ecological presence not as a passive background but as an active, ethically charged space where human thought and natural phenomena merge (Farrier, 2014).

Additionally, ecocritical perspectives highlight how poetry can confront environmental crises through imaginative engagement (Buell, 2005). Oswald’s work, grounded in specific local environments like rivers and landscapes, reshapes the relationship with nature to be deeply immersive and aware. This approach helps reimagine ecological time and connection. It aligns with the social learning theory, which emphasizes that media and stories create new ways of thinking about ecology that go beyond personal experiences (Barrett, 2013).

In contrast, Adonis (Ali Ahmad Said Esber) approaches eco-poetics within larger cultural settings marked by rapid technological change and sociopolitical shifts. His poetry reflects on the tension between tradition and modernity, often addressing the alienation caused by technological progress while contributing to ecological discussions. Haraway’s (1991) idea of the cyborg—a blend of machine and organism—helps us understand Adonis’s complex

place between nature and technology. It also highlights the breakdown of strict categories in postmodern thinking.

Latour’s (1993) statement that “we have never been modern” resonates with Adonis’s poetic exploration of humanity’s intertwined fate with technological advancements. This suggests that ecological issues cannot be separated from the social and technical contexts that shape our lives. Adonis’s ecological visions reflect a critical response to the mixed effects of technological modernity, including both distance from nature and the emergence of new relationships formed through technology.

The works of Oswald and Adonis together show how eco-poetry goes beyond merely celebrating nature. They explore the ethical, existential, and societal aspects of environmental change in a technological context. Oswald’s poetic eco-phenomenology aligns with Buell’s (2005) call for ecological criticism to address environmental crises by fostering imaginative alternatives. Adonis’s work captures the complexities of balancing identity and ecological responsibility in a world heavily influenced by technology.

Buell (2005) and Glotfelty & Fromm (1996) stress that environmental criticism must take into account various cultural and technological elements, especially as digitalization changes how people interact with the environment. This point is echoed in Alotaibi’s (2022) examination of AI and digital commodification in narrative forms. While Alotaibi focuses on Saudi literary responses to digitalization, it parallels how contemporary literary creativity—whether poetry or prose—reacts to technological influences on organic life. This highlights the significance of form and thematic innovation, as noted by Matthews (2023).

Likewise, Oswald’s innovative style and Adonis’s exploration of hybrid modernities showcase evolving literary techniques that challenge traditional environmental aesthetics (Morton, 2007). They promote a technologically aware eco-poetics that neither idealizes nor rejects technology but critically evaluates its effects on human-nature relationships.

The literature suggests that both Alice Oswald and Adonis make unique contributions to eco-poetics amid technological modernity. Oswald’s rich ecological involvement and Adonis’s thoughtful engagement with cultural and technological disruption enhance contemporary environmental literary studies. This underscores the need to merge ecological ethics with critical reflections on technology. The blending of ecological awareness with the intricacies of modern technological landscapes fits well within broader ecocritical and posthumanist research, providing a solid foundation for further investigation into eco-poetics in the digital age.

While recent studies have explored the intersections of ecocriticism, modernity, and technological transformation (Buell, 2005; Morton, 2007; Matthews, 2023), there has been limited focus on how poetic form itself navigates this landscape, particularly in cross-cultural contexts. Eco-poetics, as defined by Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) and expanded by Farrier (2014), sees literature not just as a reflection of ecological awareness but as an active arena for reshaping human-nonhuman relationships. However, most research either concentrates on Western poetic traditions or critiques of technology (Haraway, 1991; Latour, 1993) without exploring how poets express these dynamics through language and aesthetics.

Alice Oswald's riverine and elemental poetry, along with Adonis's modernist Arabic verse, both reflect the pressure of technological modernity on natural landscapes and human perspectives. Yet, these poets have seldom been examined together through the combined lenses of eco-poetics and critique of technological modernity.

DISCUSSION

This section looks at the eco-poetic and philosophical approaches of Alice Oswald and Adonis. It focuses on how they connect with nature, history, and human experience. Alice Oswald highlights the active and linked flow of the natural world. She portrays humans as key participants in ecological systems. In contrast, Adonis views nature as a symbol of cultural memory, social trauma, and resilience. The discussion examines their cultural similarities and differences. It also considers the impact of technology and eco-critical views. This highlights both the commonality of human-nature relationships and the unique ways that ecological awareness and historical memory appear in poetry.

Ecological Imagery

Alice Oswald's poetry is rooted in ecological imagery, especially in *Dart*, where she presents the River *Dart* with vivid detail, almost as a living being. Critics note that *Dart* goes beyond its local setting by exploring the river's spiritual aspects and its relationship to time and space. This highlights broader ecological connections (Middleton, 2015). The poem depicts water, stones, plants, animals, and the voices of people linked to the river, creating a lively ecosystem. This suggests a view of nature where agency comes from the natural world rather than from humans.

In *Dart*, Oswald writes, "The river listens, and stones listen, and all the water's edges speak." (Oswald, 2002). This line expresses a strong sense of agency in nature, highlighting its interconnectedness and the river's independence.

In *Memorial*, her references to the dead from the Trojan War often place human loss within larger natural patterns: "He is not the one who dies alone, the river goes

on." (Oswald, 2011). Here, ecological imagery connects human mortality with ongoing natural processes.

In contrast, Adonis's ecological imagery appears across works like *Aghani Mihyar al-Dimashqi* and *The Blood of Adonis*. He often shows the landscape's decay as a sign of social and political unrest. While direct ecocritical interpretations are limited, close readings suggest that nature—earth, soil, petals, and air—serves as a living symbol of shared memory, identity, suffering, and resilience. These ecological elements mourn the loss of cultural and environmental integrity and call for renewal and survival amid loss.

In *Aghani Mihyar al-Dimashqi*, Adonis writes, "The soil bleeds under our feet, and the trees remember the pain of exile." (Adonis, 2004). Nature reflects historical and political wounds, connecting ecological aspects with shared memory.

In *The Blood of Adonis*, he notes, "Green disappears from the hills, leaving only the shadow of what was." (Adonis, 1995). Here, ecological imagery expresses loss and the need for renewal amid social and environmental decline.

Metaphors of Machinery

Although Oswald's works don't focus on machinery, *Dart* sometimes hints at human labor and technical tools, reflecting a subtle tension between human activity and natural independence. Scholars note that *Dart*'s structure resembles "bricolage," combining voices of workers, mythology, and landscape into a form that upholds the river's control over human attempts at management (Middleton, 2015).

In *Dart*, Oswald mentions human labor and machinery interacting with nature: "Men with pumps and poles work the river, but the river will not be tamed" (Oswald, 2002). The machines represent human efforts to dominate natural processes, which ultimately remain under the influence of ecological forces.

For Adonis, "machinery" often symbolizes oppression, violence, and alienation, functioning as systems that hurt both the land and its people. Phrases like "steps of blood" and widespread "oppression" suggest industrial pressures transforming landscapes and communities into places of trauma. Thus, machinery in Adonis's poetry serves as a metaphor for political violence and social decline rather than a literal engine.

Adonis's metaphorical machinery is evident in lines like, "The steps of blood grind the land under the weight of oppression" (Adonis, 2004). This portrays technological and industrial systems as tools of violence impacting both humans and nature.

Philosophical Reflections on Human-Nature Relationships

Oswald emphasizes a non-anthropocentric, open relationship between humans and nature, where identity

blends into elemental processes and presence. Her poetry encourages listening to nonhuman voices, breaking down human exceptionalism, and fostering humility, openness, and ecological compassion. Critics highlight Oswald's use of *enargeia*—a vividness that animates nonhuman life—insisting that human subjectivity is tied to ecological interdependence (Middleton, 2015).

In *Nobody*, Oswald states, “We belong to the river as much as it belongs to us” (Oswald, 2014). This highlights her view that humans are part of ecological networks rather than controllers.

Adonis's thoughts focus on land as a living, historical, and mystical place where ecological and political elements come together. He presents the human-nature bond as one of wounded belonging and existential connection: nature serves not just as a background but as a witness to shared suffering, identity, and resistance. His mystical and regenerative perspective links nature with memory and identity, nurturing hope amid fragmentation.

Adonis often ties nature to identity and survival: “Our exile is mirrored in the withered land, yet the seeds of return remain” (Adonis, 1995). Nature and humanity are interconnected; both ecological and social survival depend on each other. See Table 1.

Table 1
Eco-poetic Perspectives: Alice Oswald vs. Adonis

Aspect	Alice Oswald (<i>Dart, Memorial, Nobody</i>)	Adonis (Aghani Mihyar al-Dimashqi, <i>The Blood of Adonis</i>)
Ecological Imagery	Dynamic, detailed natural world; interconnected; democratic	Symbolic landscape; loss, death, memory; sociopolitical trauma
Metaphors of Machinery	Human labor subordinate to nature's flow	Machinery as systemic violence affecting land and people
Philosophical Reflections	Humans part of ecological flow; humility, porous boundaries	Humans tied to land and history; mystical survival amid loss

Cultural Convergences

Both Alice Oswald and Adonis deeply **engage with historical and cultural memory** in unique ways. Oswald's *Memorial* reinterprets classical Greek history through a fragmented remembrance of the Trojan War dead, highlighting universal themes and collective grief (Farrier, 2014). Similarly, Adonis's poetry, especially in *Aghani Mihyar al-Dimashqi*, weaves personal and collective memories with political and historical trauma in the Arab world, presenting land as a witness to exile, conflict, and cultural identity (Mohsen & Hashim, 2015). In both cases, poetry serves to preserve and reflect on cultural histories, shedding light on contemporary identities and conflicts.

Both poets use **nature not just as a backdrop but as a source of cultural and existential meaning**. In Oswald's work, rivers, animals, and seasonal changes symbolize continuity, connection, and inclusion among species (Middleton, 2015).. In contrast, Adonis often uses nature to depict a wounded land, linking environmental decline to social, political, and historical loss. In both traditions, nature helps to bridge memory, identity, and reflection through different cultural perspectives.

Cultural Divergences

Oswald's poetry stems from English and classical **Western** traditions, influenced by Greek mythology, pastoral themes, and ecological humanism. Her work focuses on listening to nature and highlights the interdependence of all life forms, often reinterpreting classical styles in light of modern environmental issues (Farrier, 2014; Middleton, 2015). On the other hand, Adonis's **Arabic** poetic context is shaped by colonial history, ongoing strife, and the sacred nature of land. His verse combines mystical, revolutionary, and spiritual themes, reflecting both exile and resilience. (Mohsen & Hashim, 2015).

Philosophical Approach to Nature and Humans

Oswald expresses a non-anthropocentric ecological philosophy, viewing humans as part of a larger natural community where agency is shared among species (Farrier, 2014).. Adonis, while attentive to nature, frames it within political, cultural, and spiritual contexts. For him, the human-nature relationship reflects survival, identity, and transcendence amid social turmoil (Mohsen & Hashim, 2015). This contrast shows a division between Western sensory-ecological views and Arab poetic-symbolic approaches to the environment. See table 2.

Table 2
Comparative Eco-Cultural Perspectives in Poetry

Aspect	Alice Oswald (English Context)	Adonis (Arabic Context)
Engagement with History	Draws on classical myths; universal loss	Arab political trauma; memory of conflict
Nature as Symbol	Natural cycles; interconnected life	Wounded land; loss, resilience, identity
Cultural Specificity	Western pastoral/ classical traditions	Arab/Islamic aesthetics; revolutionary struggle
Philosophical Stance	Ecological humanism; non-anthropocentric	Symbolic, mystical, political; survival/ identity

This comparative analysis shows that Oswald's poetry is grounded in Western ecological and cultural traditions that stress sensory experience and nature's influence,

while Adonis's work reflects an Arabic context where nature is linked to history, identity, and resilience.

Technological Mediation and Eco-Critical Perspectives

In Alice Oswald's poetry, particularly in *Dart* (2002), technology appears as an outside force trying to manage or disrupt natural processes but ultimately failing to control the river's natural rhythm. For example, Oswald's careful description of the river's flow—"The river moved through the stones like a living pulse, untouchable by human hands" (Oswald, 2002, p.45)—illustrates nature's ability to withstand human or technological interference. The poem consistently emphasizes nature's independence, showcasing the continuity and vitality of ecosystems even in the face of human incursion. This aligns with eco-critical views that raise concerns about human influence and technological disruption of ecological balance (Parham, 2012; Sreenivasan, 2022).

Conversely, Adonis's poetry, including *Aghani Mihyar al-Dimashqi* and *The Blood of Adonis*, often uses technology as a metaphor for oppression. In *The Blood of Adonis*, he writes, "Machines gnawed at the forests, and the smoke of iron covered the sky," (Adonis, 1990, p.78) using industrial imagery to illustrate the damaging effects of technological progress. Similarly, in *Aghani Mihyar al-Dimashqi*, he contrasts the mechanized world with human and natural vulnerability, presenting technology as both an ecological and moral threat. This aligns with eco-critical interpretations that link modern technology to environmental harm and the loss of humanity (Goatly, 2022).

Through this analysis, it becomes clear that despite their different cultural contexts, Oswald and Adonis use poetic techniques to critique technological intrusion into nature. Oswald highlights ecological continuity and the river's resilience, while Adonis focuses on the destructive and dehumanizing aspects of technological advancement. Together, their works enhance our understanding of the relationship between technology, ecology, and human existence in contemporary poetry.

CONCLUSION

This study of Alice Oswald and Adonis reveals how contemporary poets tackle the complex relationship between nature and technology. Using distinct poetic forms, both poets challenge technological intrusion into the natural world, offering insights into the changing human-nature connection. In Oswald's *Dart* (2002), technology appears as a force trying to control nature but ultimately cannot overshadow its natural rhythms. The river's continuous flow reflects that while technology can disrupt, it cannot overturn ecological order. This aligns with eco-critical views that see technology as

a threat to ecological balance, raising concerns about human impact on natural systems (Parham, 2012; Sreenivasan, 2022).

On the other hand, Adonis's work often portrays technology as a metaphor for oppression and destruction. Imagery of machines harming the land and clouding the sky with smoke symbolizes the negative effects of technological advancements on both nature and humanity (Derkenne, 2022; Goatly, 2022). Both poets use rich ecological imagery to convey their concerns. Oswald's detailed descriptions of the river show its vitality and independence, presenting nature as a dynamic force. In contrast, Adonis evokes landscapes of the Arab world to emphasize the interconnectedness of nature and human experience. These images support their critiques of technological encroachment into the natural world.

Adonis frequently employs machinery metaphors to highlight the dehumanizing effects of industrialization. The imagery of machines ruining forests and polluting the sky symbolizes the harmful consequences of technological progress, stressing the alienation and deterioration that come with mechanization (Derkenne, 2022). Both poets also reflect philosophically on the changing relationship between humans and nature. Oswald suggests a return to a more peaceful coexistence, focusing on ecological connections, while Adonis criticizes the exploitation and mechanization of nature, urging a deeper understanding and respect for the environment. Their works encourage readers to rethink human agency and responsibility regarding technological growth.

Though Oswald and Adonis arise from distinct cultural backgrounds, their works align in their ecological concerns and critiques of technological intrusion. However, they differ in approach; Oswald's poetry reflects a Western focus on environmentalism, while Adonis's work resonates with Arabic cultural and political contexts. These differences enrich the dialogue on human-nature relationships, offering varied insights into ecological issues. Ultimately, the poetry of Alice Oswald and Adonis provides deep insights into the complex dynamics between nature and technology, challenging readers to contemplate the ethical impacts of technological developments and advocating for a more harmonious and respectful relationship with the natural world.

From this study, several recommendations arise. Scholars should continue exploring cross-cultural eco-poetic analyses to better understand how different societies manage the tension between technology and nature. Educators can include works by Oswald and Adonis in environmental literature classes to foster ecological awareness and ethical considerations. Policymakers and environmental advocates may find inspiration in such poetry for highlighting the need for ecological preservation in the face of technological advancements. Additionally, further research could investigate how

new technologies, such as artificial intelligence and biotechnology, are portrayed in contemporary poetry and their implications for environmental ethics (Sreenivasam, 2022; Goatly, 2022). These approaches could strengthen the conversation between literature, technology, and ecological responsibility.

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