

Poetic Imagination in Communion With Nature: A Case Study of Mary Oliver's Selected Poems

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Abstract

Considering the significance of ecopoetry and how it widens the ecological horizons of the readers, tracing the ecopoet's mental transition from the moment of direct sensual experiences in Nature to the act of composition enables the readers to fathom out what lies behind the poetic imagination, bringing about the ecological sense of union with the natural. As for the purpose of this study, the researchers intend to examine the ecocentric-ecopoetic elements of the selected ecopoems out of Mary Oliver's *New & Selected Poems, Vol. 1* with the aim of bringing to light the fact that Oliver's main attempt is inviting her readers to reach mental growth through her bringing forth the consciousness that derives from the power of imagination and acute attention given to the world of the non-human, enabling the speaker-poet and her readers to do away with the barriers of self-centeredness and take part in a collective reunion with Nature. Accordingly, the general framework that has been used to conduct the following research is Ecocriticism and its celebration of ecological wholeness between human and non-human agents.

Keywords: poetic imagination, Mary Oliver, nature, ecopoetry, ecological wholeness

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Introduction

Human beings' faculty of imagination is the main gate through which one can contemplate the most unthinkable and the farthest places. Agreeing that human mind is the medium that conditions all the situations, it can be deduced that we are transformed by its impact both within us upon us (Abram, 2010). Be that for real or not, it is the wing of imagination that carries human mind over all the universe and makes it travel with the natural. Probably Mary Oliver had the same point in mind when she wrote, "Said the river: imagine everything you can imagine, then / keep on going" (2009, p. 51). In order for the human beings to be able to imagine Nature and natural elements, they need to go beyond their selves, egos, and join the melodious tune of Nature. As such, they reach a unified insight that leads to a concordant bond between man and Nature in the end (Matthew, 2008). Yet, reaching such holistic vision requires the eco-poet to grant the readers the insight to fathom out the fact that we should counter "the singular totalitarian idea of control" and make room for "the old ideals of harmony, symmetry, balance, order" (W. Berry, 1983, p. 4). A good starting point, as Iovino has remarked, is to "restore ecological imagination as our fundamental 'survival unity,'" for it can reunite man with the land (Lynch et al., 2012, p. 107). That said, the present research intends to examine the role of poetic imagination as the facilitator in bringing about ecocritical unity between man and Nature, observed in a number of selected eco-poems taken out of Oliver's *New & Selected Poems*, Vol. 1, in the hope of putting an end to man's one-sided treatment of Nature; accordingly, the main lens through which the following ideas will be discussed relate to the notion of man/Nature reciprocity inherent in ecocritical studies.

Method

The methodology in this research is qualitative, since, after all, the aim of this study is to show the role of the poetic imagination as the unifying force between the speaker-poet and the non-human in the selected poems of Oliver. Besides, this research paper will be descriptive and based on the library research and authentic internet sources such as books, e-books, articles, magazines, etc. Thus, the researchers will put forward an ecological examination of Oliver's selected eco-poems in an effort to show how Oliver's poetic imagination acts as the mediator between human mind and the non-human, shedding more light on the eco-poetic-ecocentric awareness of the eco-poet in employing the ecological issues with the hope of putting an end to the man/Nature dualism.

Review of the Related Literature

Nature and discussions related to Nature writing have always been the center of attention in literary studies. However, with the advent of Ecocriticism in the 1980s the "interconnections between nature and culture" (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xix) came to notice more than before. Among the researches done on the poetry of Mary Oliver the ones used in this paper include, McNew (1989), Bonds (1992), Graham (1994), Burton-Christie (1996), Lucas (2006), Davis (2009), and Zona (2011). As such, McNew has compared and contrasted Oliver with the English romantic poets and offers an anti-patriarchy model that is at

odds with the male poets' trying to achieve "an identity that transcends nature" (1989, p. 75). Bonds has concentrated on the way Oliver responds to the issues of Nature and language differently, believing that her eco-poetry renders the "move back and forth between modes of discourse, categories of perception and orders of experience," that is indicative of "the 'ownerlessness' of the word" (1992, p. 13). Graham's main attempt in her paper has been to juxtapose Oliver's dream of dissolving into Nature with the Western culture's emphasis on individualism and the need for "the formation of strong ego boundaries and stable identities" (1994, p. 352). Burton-Christie has focused on the role of Nature, spirit, and imagination in Oliver's eco-poems to cast light on Oliver's evoking an integrated sense of spirituality that stems from watching the ordinary in a world where Nature, spirit, and imagination follow one another (1996). Lucas has traced the concept of "drifting" in Oliver's eco-poems to demonstrate Oliver's eco-poetry "is a powerful visceral call to engage with a philosophy and an aesthetic of the drift," made possible through the attention paid to the tie between self and the world (2006, p. 10). Accordingly, Davis's examination of Oliver's eco-poetry has followed the motif of "incarnation" (2009) that stresses the eco-poet's "celebration of her longing and the ecstatic, even mystical moments in which that longing is fulfilled through art and spiritual devotion" (p. 620). Last but not least, Zona has summarized Oliver's method as "the selfless practice of full presence" and believes the act of writing for her is "a means of experiencing most fully her interbeing with the observable world" and of enclosing the gap between the self and the other, i. e. Nature (2011, p. 123). With that being said, the researchers believe that tracing the role of the poetic imagination can cast light on the immense power of the eco-poet's mind in creating an ecological interrelation between the speaker-poet and the world of the non-human and act as the supplement to the previous researches conducted on Oliver's eco-poetry, the result of which is the replacement of an egocentric mode of thinking with an ecocentric one.

Discussion and Analysis

A quick survey of Mary Oliver and her literary contributions to the canon of American literature justifies Herald's words which shed light on her outstanding power to express the beauty of the world in a memorable manner (2000). Indeed, her communion with Nature within her eco-poetry is one of the foremost aspects of her eco-poems that absorbs the attention of her readers more than any other thing. As the products of the Pulitzer Prize winning eco-poet, her eco-poetry offers a postmodern alternative to the concept of human beings' self-sufficiency (Bryson, 2002). In defense of the ecological stance of Oliver's eco-poetry, Christensen writes, "In particular, ecologically informed authors such as Mary Oliver devise strategies for cultural survival by proposing functional alternatives to narratives that no longer make sense in light of our evoking knowledge. Oliver's poetry replaces the old, pernicious myth of human independence with an ecological tale of inclusion in a community of interrelated presences" (2002, p. 135). Christensen's emphasizing the notion of interrelation clarifies the important ecological stance of Oliver's eco-poetry that relates to the all-embracing premise of Ecocriticism as it broadens the "notion of 'the world' to include all the ecosphere" (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xix). Accordingly,

it is through reading her eco-poems that readers can enter the world of the eco-poet's mind, imagine the inspirational moments, and sing her songs. To clarify this argument more fully, Felstiner writes, "Response starts with individuals, it's individual persons that poems are spoken by and spoken to. One by one, the will to act may rise within us. Because we are what the beauty and force of poems reach toward, we've a chance to recognize and lighten our footprint in a world where all of nature matters vitally" (2009, p. xiii). Genuinely, Felstiner is trying to touch on the substantial role of each individual human's mind in decrypting the hidden messages tied to the fabric of the eco-poet's words in order to get to the core of her mind. From this point it becomes evident that there is no better way to bind with Nature than through deep contemplation, made possible via the help of imagination, and putting those moments of deep interaction with Nature into words in the so-called eco-poetry. T. Berry, likewise, has written about the visionary impulse we go through during the moments of engagement with our being, the cosmic order which affects us in our sleep, and the visionary instants we face during our waking hours to show the coherence that is evoked through the remarkable power of imagination (2015). In line with that Felstiner casts light on the power of such simple recognitions that can "awaken us, poem by poem, to urban, suburban, or rural surroundings, east and west, at home or on the road" (2009, p. xiii). In an effort to create a link between the above-mentioned arguments and render an ecological reading of Oliver's first chosen eco-poem, mention should be made of the eighth part of Oliver's "Flare," which goes as such:

The poem is not the world.
It isn't even the first page of the world.

But the poem wants to flower, like a flower.
It knows that much.

It wants to open itself,
Like the door of a little temple,
So that you might step inside and be cooled and refreshed,
and less yourself than part of everything.
(Oliver, 2000a, n. p.)

As a flower, the seeds of the eco-poem grow in the eco-poet's imagination and come into fruition. The product is the reader's entrance to the eco-poet's mind that is accompanied by the transformation of the reader and the speaker-poet as they live all the sensuous moments of the eco-poem and become a part of the more-than-human world. This mode of transformation is the product of Oliver's literary style which Zona describes as "writing-as-mindfulness" (2011, p. 123), revealing her acute observation of Nature that leads to the suspension of the motif of egocentrism and progression towards an integrative being with Nature.

However, going beyond one's self and being part of Nature requires the eco-poet to marry the human mind with the world of the non-human. Indeed, Oliver was aware of this fact when she gave voice to the insufficiency of her human capabilities in "Spring Azures" as such:

Sometimes the great bones of my life feel so heavy,

and all the tricks my body knows—

don't seem enough to carry me through this world.

("Spring Azures", Oliver, 1992, n. p.)

In order to reach that goal, she aspires "to have wings—, blue ones—, ribbons of flame," as the butterfly, so that she can "rise / from the black rain water" ("Spring Azures", Oliver 1992, n. p.) and become that butterfly for a moment and experience that incident in her mind. Describing such event as "the discipline of *momento mori*," Burton-Christie believes, it paves the way for Oliver to obtain some insight on life and confirms her position as a notable seeker, experiencing affinity, closeness, and concordance in the world of the non-human (1996). Alford, likewise, argues Oliver's extraordinary characteristics mark her difference from her contemporary poets. One such endeavor is engrossing "the reader in a fully sensual union with nature" (1988, p. 283). This goes in line with Burton-Christie's statement that highlights Oliver's awareness of the ongoing vivacity and beauty of life that comes into notice in her ecopoetry (1996), which is echoed in the following lines:

When it's over, I want to say: all my life

I was a bride married to amazement.

I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.

When it's over, I don't want to wonder

if I have made of my life something particular, and real.

I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened,

or full of argument.

I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.

("When Death Comes", Oliver, 1992, n. p.)

Thus, what soothes her soul is living life to the full, urging the speaker-poet and the reader to "recognize the universal joys, pains, beauties, and terrors experienced in such connectedness" (1988, p. 283). For this reason, the mere visiting of the world is not enough for her; rather, she gives voice to the transformative power of the spiritual that arises from the speaker-poet's encounter with the ordinary and exerts its influence on the speaker-poet and the reader through the help of poetic imagination (Burton-Christie, 1996). Likewise, she does away with the existing rift between man and Nature and the alienating attitude that accompanies the rift and "searches memory and present experiences" (Alford, 1988, p. 283) like when in "Picking Blueberries" the speaker-poet awakens up to the deer's stumbling against her. In such atmosphere all elements of Nature work in sync. The wind blows with its "glossy voice" so as to give the deer instructions. It seems as if the only incongruity seen within this natural environment is the human presence that is indicative of the deer's running away, "floating off toward the trees" (Oliver, 1992, n. p.). The ecopoet's choice of such verbs and adjectives as "wandering, floating, listening, glossy, wide, deep, etc. shows the serenity and peace surrounding the field and the sense of calm and tranquility it gives the speaker-poet once she thinks back on it. This short encounter with the deer is "so memorable and so deep" that is as fresh as thirty years ago, showing the lasting effect Nature has had on the speaker-poet's mind for many years. The fresh

sense of Nature after a long time makes it evident that the most viable treatment for enclosing the current ruptures is retreating to Nature that brings the notion of connectivity, lying in the heart of Ecocriticism, to the mind. (W. Berry, 1999).

Once this healing comes by and the gap between human being and Nature is enclosed it is the power of love and dedication that strengthens such tie. As Celati has pointed out, imagination “puts us in a state of love for something out there” (Lynch et al., 2012, p. 111). In such situation the deeper the sense of love and dedication, the more lasting the bond between the agents, i. e. human and non-human. This is where such eco-poets as Oliver show up to give rise to the necessity of restoring balance to the human-Nature correlation, adhering to the basic premise of Ecocriticism and its rejection of the one-sided, discriminatory tendencies of the contemporary age (Kalmbach, 2012). The restoration of this broken bond is, therefore, as vital as it continues even when one part of the human-Nature equation is not present physically as in Oliver’s “Her Grave” which takes us to the speaker-poet’s recalling the memories she shared with her beloved dog before the dog’s death. Taking the dog as her sample, Oliver reminds us that Nature proceeds independent of the human individuals given that integrity is its major component element (Burton-Christie, 1996). Hence, the speaker-poet states, “A dog comes to you and lives with you in your own house, but you / do not therefore own her, as you do not own the rain, or the / trees, or the laws which pertain to them”. Indeed, not only do the human beings not own Nature, they also do not have the absolute power over the non-human individuals. Accordingly, Oliver chooses to “pray for nothing but modesty, and / not be angry” (“Her Grave”, 1992, n. p.), which can be viewed as an effort to “acknowledge the self’s mutability and multiplicity, not to lose subjectivity” (Graham, 1994, p. 253). Not only is the speaker-poet’s subjectivity not lost, but she is also able to turn her sense of self-centeredness, egocentrism, to some sort of direct engagement with Nature, i. e. ecocentrism, via the help of poetic imagination. In other words, Oliver engages herself with Nature through experiencing moments of first-hand, sensuous communion with the non-human. To do so she gets close to the waterfall to see it for herself and testifies,

For all they said,
 I could not see the waterfall
 until I came and saw the water falling,
 its lace legs and its womanly arms
 sheeting down...
 (“The Waterfall”, Oliver, 1992, n. p.)

The way Oliver attributes feminine qualities to the waterfall and how she sheds light on its howling “like thunder” add much to the delicate majesty of it, turning it into a scene of wonder and awe for the speaker-poet. The grandeur of the waterfall is so deep that it goes beyond the speaker-poet’s imagination and proves that “the natural world is indubitably real and beautiful and significant” (Love, 1996, p. 237). However, the still water at the base of the waterfall shows “some slack and perfectly balanced / blind and rough peace, finally, / in the deep and green and utterly motionless pools” (“The Waterfall”, Oliver 1992, n. p). Despite the power inherent in the water falling on rocks,

Oliver's picturing the womanly tenderness of the waterfall invites the reader to realize that it is the feminine gentleness and godly grandeur of the waterfall that work in harmony. This procedure accounts for Oliver's restoring imagination to place that reanimates the world (Iovino, as cited in Lynch et al., 2021, p. 106) and involves her readers in the process of "cultivating ecological consciousness" (Devall & Sessions, 1985, p. 8) within themselves and becoming "more aware of the actuality of rocks, wolves, trees, and rivers—the cultivation of the insight that everything is connected" (p. 8). It is this sense of connectivity, thus, that empowers the speaker-poet to inaugurate a green dialog with "true real" (Graham, 1994, p. 355) and rise to ecological wholeness.

The desire to form a tie with the real, however, requires the speaker-poet "to look, to touch, to taste, to see, and to smell" everything which opens the speaker-poet's eyes to how the goldenrods "rise in a stiff sweetness, / in the pure peace of giving / one's gold away". Though known as "sneeze-bringers and seed-bearers," these goldenrods "bend as though it was natural and godly to bend" ("The Goldenrod", Oliver, 1992, n. p.). Nonetheless, the insight they grant the speaker-poet, as she mentions, "And what has consciousness come to anyway, so far, / that is better than these light-filled bodies?" ("The Goldenrod"), is the ability to draw the veils of superficial examination to get into the core of their presence and feel joy after such close encounter. Were it not for the wind flaring and the blossoms rustling, the speaker-poet would not reach the recognition that it is necessary that we set aside the boundaries that have long separated us from Nature, let go of ourselves in the arms of Nature, and take up different identities and intermingle with other species (Graham, 1994).

One major step in this regard is to take into consideration the "significance of environmentality," which according to Buell is "defined by the self-conscious sense of an inevitable but uncertain and shifting relation between being and physical context" (2005, p. 62). The conscious alteration of ways of relating to Nature is the message that is conveyed in Oliver's "Peonies". By absorbing the readers' attention to the amount of emotion that peonies can evoke, the speaker-poet draws an informing analogy between their seeming beauty and worth and that of life. To that end, Oliver states:

the flowers bend their bright bodies,
and tip their fragrance to the air,
and rise,
their red stems holding

all that dampness and recklessness
gladly and lightly,
and there it is again—
beauty the brave, the exemplary,

blazing open. ("Peonies", Oliver, 1992, n. p.)

Then, by asking "Do you cherish your humble and silky life? / Do you adore the green grass, with its terror beneath?", the speaker-poet makes it clear that it is crucial is "to be wild and perfect for a moment" ("Peonies") before the opportunity is missed. As Burton-Christie discusses, "Here we are beckoned not

only to observe, to appreciate these “pools of lace,” dancing under a shifting wind, but to abandon our detached perspective and run to embrace them, filling our arms and whispering tender words of love before it is too late, before they are “nothing forever” (1996, p. 85). Discussed in terms of Hitt’s “ecological sublime,” Oliver’s main attempt is to provide her readers with the chance to consider the need for a more comprehensive framework to reflect on the human-Nature relationship more responsibly (Hitt, 1999, p. 605), the main result of which is the propagation of humane values one of which includes “humility before nature” (p. 606). Humility is at issue here in that it relates to “appreciative description” and “loving embrace” in order to enable us to think well about “what we will do” and “how we will live *now*” (Burton-Christie, 1996, p. 85). Simply put, the important issue that we must contemplate is “whether we are prepared to risk loving this world, knowing we cannot hold onto it — perhaps *because* we cannot hold onto it” (p. 85).

Contemplation on our deeds and how we respond to the natural environment stems from how we treat Nature. In other words,

How you act *should* be determined, and the consequences of your acts *are* determined, by where you are. To know where you are (and whether or not that is where you should be) is at least as important as to know what you are doing, because in the moral (the ecological) sense you cannot know *what* until you have learned *where*. Not knowing where you are, you can lose your soul or your soil, your life or your way home. (W. Berry, 1983, p. 103)

From an ecological perspective, knowing where one is goes in line with knowing what to do in close company of Nature and its non-human agents. That is to say, the green call to affirm the unfinished process of the continuation of the tie between human beings and Nature (Müller & Pusse, 2018) is the key notion that Oliver tries to touch in most of her ecopoems. For the speaker-poet being in tune with Nature is the ultimate goal even if she has to learn it the hard way. Such is when Oliver talks about how rain brings the sweet essence of life back to the dead swamp and lets the speaker-poet see the revival of “the withered acres of moss”. Upon witnessing the restorative power of Nature, i. e. the rain, the speaker-poet longs for her death on a rainy day and states, “When I have to die, I would like to die / on a day of rain— / long rain, slow rain, the kind you think will never end” and she expects the ones taking part in her funeral to “travel slowly and with thought, as around the / edges of the great swamp” (“Marengo”, Oliver, 1992, n. p.). Thoughtful vision and contemplation, taking root in the ecopoet’s imagination take us back to our senses, which “feels like magic” and renews “our abstract ideas and dusty agendas” in a “glistening, multiple world”. And the ecopoet is here to show us “the immediate reality of connectedness, of kinship” (Elder, 1996, p. 226), even when that connectedness is achieved through death.

The notion of connectedness serves as the major ecological factor in nature writings of such ecopoets as Oliver in the sense that her ecopoems herald “that human beings must perceive the natural world through human eyes, and by way of the prisms of human cultures” (Wimberley, 2009, p. 3). To make it more explicit, human senses are the gates to the perception of the

natural world around them, as they are the only medium through which human beings can relate to Nature. It is with the help of poetic imagination and senses that Oliver can grasp the existing harmony between the birds floating “in the distance” and the green grass underneath in the green field. Oliver’s likening the grass to the “green sea,” doing its job of feeding the birds until “their bellies swelled” sheds light on the grace of the green grass. The speaker-poet’s visiting the same field “A year later” and noticing that “the grass rises thick and clean,” shining “like the sea,” (“Field Near Linden, Alabama”, Oliver, 1992, n. p.) informs the reader that human beings and Nature are “nested within a complex interdependent hierarchy of ecosystems” (Wimberley, 2009, p. 4) in which sustainability serves the human-Nature continuum. Closely related to this idea is that within such firmly-established bond between human beings and Nature there is no room for such thing as imbalance and disharmony. Accordingly, when it comes to mortality and issues related to life and death, it becomes evident that death in Oliver’s ecopoems is the process of immersion into the body of Nature (Graham, 1994) regarding the fact that her poetry is an invitation to acknowledge our dwelling in the harmonious world of presences (Christensen, 2002). By writing about gannets and how they “blaze down into the water / with the power of blunt spears / and a stunning accuracy—,” despite the sea riling and boiling, thus, Oliver makes it clear that “life is real” and so is pain. However, the hunted fish, condemned to death, does not actually die as the speaker-poet mentions that death is nothing but “an imposter;” hence, the fish is able to “rise from the water inseparable / from the gannets’ wings” in the end (“Gannet”, Oliver, 1992, n. p.).

Christensen, similarly, sheds light on the transformative effect generated through the intermingling of the elements of different beings into one another to blur the distinctions between mortality and immortality in Oliver’s poetry (2002). Therefore, we may infer that the fish’s death can be read as the process of “redemptive regeneration” through “physical mortality” (p. 137). In the same vein, Oliver likens the egret’s hunting the fish to the “dark death,” opening “like a white door” (“The Egret”, Oliver, 1992, n. p.), which echoes the same point, working as a transition from life to death (Kumin, 1993). Nevertheless, Oliver’s main struggle in employing the image of such predator as the egret is to make her readers “confront the violent death and the terror that she sees as fundamental to the natural world” (p. 19). Still, her admiration of the hunting skills of the predators echoes the sublimity witnessed in Nature which stimulates the human individual to move towards ecological integrity (Knott, 2002).

Obviously, in Oliver’s ecopoems ecocritical awakening is achieved through ecological poetic imagination, close observation of the natural world, and reflection on the relationship between humans and Nature. Likewise, Oliver’s “visionary goal” includes “constructing a subjectivity” that encourages the close affinity between human and non-human (McNew, 1989, p. 72). For Oliver, the goal of constructing subjectivity is a means to the renewal of her bond between Nature and her ego which is exemplary of the sense of love echoed through the goldfinches’ building nests, “silvery baskets,” and laying eggs in their nests every year. The same way thistles “rise out of the marshlands of spring with their newly-sprung buds waiting “for midsummer, /

for the long days," to benefit from "the brass heat, / for the seeds to begin to form in the hardening thistles," the goldfinches need to wait for the generous offering of the thistles to see the hatchings of their eggs "in the swaying branches" and "love the world". For the speaker-poet there is no more happiness than hearing these little birds "singing in the wind, above the final fields" ("Goldfinches", Oliver, 1992, n. p.), which testifies Oliver's belief in the interdependent nature of all beings (Davis, 2009) and educates the speaker-poet to oscillate between individual awareness and ecocritical association with Nature (Bonds, 1992). As it relates to Ecocriticism, identifying with Nature requires human beings to bridge the gaps in their relations with Nature and the non-human. As a result, they need to, first and foremost, shift their ego-centered mindsets to an eco-centered one through the generative power of poetic imagination that can lead to the formation of a symbiotic relationship between human mind and Nature. As an instance, Oliver encourages her readers to join the speaker-poet and see how the rice "grew in the black mud" with "stems thinner than candles," so that they can understand the mud is "like a blessing" ("Rice", Oliver, 1992, n. p.), providing human beings with the courtesy denied from them in the advanced, human-centered society, "dominated by the values of a supposed human exceptionalism" (Clark, 2019, p. 14). Accordingly, the speaker-poet summons the reader as such:

I want you to walk out into the fields
 where the water is shining, and the rice has risen.
 I want you to stand there, far from the white tablecloth.
 I want you to fill your hands with the mud, like a blessing.
 ("Rice", Oliver, 1992, n. p.)

By encouraging the readers to fill their hands with the fertile mud, Oliver paves the way for their growing conscious in terms of ecological concerns dominating "the real, vital world that Oliver opposes to the domesticated one represented by the white tablecloth" (Knott, 2002, p. 185). Likewise, it is an attempt suggesting that responding to Nature and its non-speaking agents unravels the messages and thoughts that human language fails to communicate to the humans (Bonds, 1992). As follows, the speaker-poet refers to nostalgia and summons the readers to take heed of and revitalize their lost tie with Nature which originates from the lost "human feelings" (Worster, 1993, p. 5). Within this ecopoem, in short, Oliver "takes the reader on a quest for origins" in order to ameliorate the human-Nature condition (Knott, 2002, p. 185).

Ecologically speaking, the revival of human bond with Nature is possible when human beings accept the transience nature of life despite all the power it bestows upon them. Thinking that human beings are able to disturb such order is out of the question as the world is a self-regulating whole in which all the major parts work for the same cause, i. e. the stable coexistence of all individuals (Worster, 1993) and death is the inseparable part of such order. However, death is not the end of life and its inevitability is the indicator of the fact that "loss is the great lesson" ("Poppies", Oliver, 1992, n. p.). As the ecopoet casts light on the noticeable beauty of the poppies which,

... send up their
 orange flares; swaying

in the wind, their congregations
are a levitation

of bright dust, of thin
and lacy leaves. ("Poppies")

She also avers that everything will "sooner or later drown / in the indigos of darkness," from which there is no escape. Despite this, Oliver believes that death is not the end of man's story as it is a means to survival for both human and non-human, implying the fact that human survival goes hand in hand with the survival of Nature (Bate, 1991). For the speaker-poet, as well as her readers, the "roughage" of the world "shines like a miracle". The result of this miracle is the light that the speaker-poet sees as "an invitation / to happiness," resulting in "a kind of holiness" that is "palpable and redemptive". For this reason, the sense of the "earthly delight" ("Poppies", Oliver, 1992, n. p.) the speaker-poet finds in the fields "serves as a stay against darkness" and the "renewal of happiness among the poppies becomes an answer to the consciousness of mortality that haunts" the speaker-poet (Knott, 2002, p. 85). As Burton-Christie has explained further, "Oliver is honest enough not to skirt this struggle or to suggest that the "indigos of darkness" have nothing to teach her. But neither is she prepared to admit that the swathe cut by the "black, curved blade" is final, irrevocable, incapable of yielding — somehow — to light" (1996, p. 84).

Oliver's awareness of mortality is, in reality, a call to the human observer to accept the fact that joy and agony accompany each other to the effect "that even the purest light, lacking the robe of darkness, / would be without expression—". With that in mind, the speaker-poet recalls "thinking of the old, wild life of the fields, when, as I remember it, / I was shaggy, and beautiful, / like the rose". Though aging has affected her youth vivacity and the odor of the skunk haunts her "as the brushing of thorns," ("A Certain Sharpness in the Morning Air", Oliver, 1992, n. p.), she finds the old fields as a source of spiritual healing, where the speaker-poet's attempt to regenerate the sense of attending to the wild life grants her the chance to move towards salvation (Knott, 2002). That is why, she believes even a little of the odor of the skunk is "another story" ("A Certain Sharpness in the Morning Air", Oliver, 1992, n. p.), showing that the gloom of physical decay gives birth to "optimism" and "her [Oliver's] capacity to find joy in the natural world that underlies her injunctions to her readers" (Knott, 2002, p. 188). Time and again, Oliver absorbs the readers' attention to how simple trifles of life can fill one's heart with delight. By employing simple imageries and words she brings her message of watchfulness home to her readers. All she intends to communicate to the reader is to invite them to celebrate the reception of the unexpected in the natural world around them attentively so that they can unveil what has gone unnoticed (p. 12). As an example, in "Morning" ecopoem Oliver pictures the owner of a cat talking about some ordinary stuff in their house, "Salt shining behind its glass cylinder. / Milk in a blue bowl. The yellow linoleum. / The cat stretching her black body from the pillow" (Oliver, 1992, n. p.). It seems that the cat is living a life of pleasure and enjoyment, making "her curvaceous response to the small, kind gesture". Upon watching the cat's jumping, playing, and

comforting in the grass, the speaker-poet realizes the value of these simple things that make their life wonderful. The wonder she finds in simple things around her convinces the speaker-poet that she is blessed “with everything wonderful around” her (Oliver, 1992, n. p.), which is the key message rendered to the reader in this eco-poem and ends in the celebration of the ultimate bliss on the part of the human beings, stressing the importance of the notion of humility before Nature (Moore, 2008).

Besides the concept of humility before Nature, which is mostly favored by the eminent scholars of Ecocriticism, being part of Nature and blending into the natural world is another important factor that can be achieved only when human individual is not seen as an Other. It must not, however, be forgotten that Oliver has always been open to the fact that Nature is both harsh and comforting, nurturing yet challenging. Nevertheless, harmony is an inseparable part of it, due to which Oliver pictures the scene of imagining her own death when she falls asleep “as if in a vast and sloping room” filled with white flowers “that open all summer, / sticky and untidy, / in the warm fields”. Upon waking up, she finds herself covered “with blossoms,” wondering whether her body “went diving down / under the sugary vines / in some sleep-sharpened affinity” or she was embraced by the “green energy” that “rose like a wave / and curled over” her. Whatever the case, it is such a delighting experience for the speaker-poet due to which she is not willing to rise, as she says:

Never in my life had I felt so plush,
 or so slippery,
 or so resplendently empty.
 Never in my life
 had I felt myself so near
 that porous line
 where my own body was done with
 and the roots and the stems and the flowers began.
 (“White Flower”, Oliver, 1992, n. p.)

Through this imaginary death, the speaker-poet relishes her company with Nature and donates her earthly flesh to the earth, without any feeling of dissatisfaction, to help the germination of the flowers. The growth of the stems and flowers is the symbol of the speaker-poet’s undergoing the process of self-renewal, which removes the veil of self-centeredness before her eyes and marries the speaker-poet’s mind with the all-embracing Nature, engenders “a sense of self—that is, of being-in-relation” (Zona, 2011, p. 131), and reinforces the utility and importance of all Nature (Evernden, 1996).

For an eco-poet whose ability to write stems from the astounding poetic imagination, that relies on direct observation and sensual experience in Nature and the influence of place on its stimulation, communion with the natural is a rise to poetic inspiration; as she writes, “I walk in the world to love it” (“Wasteland: An Elegy”, Oliver, 2004, p. 40). For her, writing poetry is tantamount to keeping a watchful eye on plants and animals, and then turning this sensual encounter into eco-poems in such a way that readers can join the speaker-poet, not feeling any sort of detachment. To make it more vivid, she proclaims, “The poem in which the reader does not feel himself or herself a participant is a lecture...The point is not what the poet would make of the

moment but what the reader would make of it" ("The Swan", Oliver, 2000b, n. p.). After all, "Plain as a needle a poem may be, or opulent as the shell of the channeled whelk, or the face of the lily, it matters not; it is a ceremony of words, a story, a prayer, an invitation, a flow of words that reaches out and, hopefully, without being real in the way that the least incident is real, is able to stir in the reader a real response" (Oliver, 2004, p. 82). Such is the case when the speaker-poet indulges the reader in a deep contemplation about the value of the world. So, the speaker-poet asks,

What does the world
mean to you if you can't trust it
to go on shining when you're

not there?... ("October", Oliver, 1992, n. p.)

By trusting the world here, the speaker-poet intends to show "the need to resituate — even evacuate — the human in order to let the natural world stand forth" (Burton-Christie, 1996, p. 81). In that regard, the speaker-poet needs to be cautious of this opportunity "as though it's the last chance" she is "ever going to get / to be alive / and know" the world ("October", Oliver, 1992, n. p.). For the same reason, she states,

Sometimes in late summer I won't touch anything, not
the flowers, not the blackberries
brimming in the thickets; I won't drink
from the pond; I won't name the birds or the trees;
I won't whisper my own name. ("October")

However, the paradox that stands out here requires the reader and observer to spot the fox "glittering and confident" and to reflect on the possibility of the fox's existing apart from the human" (Burton-Christie, 1996, p. 81). Probably, however, Nature seems more intact when no trace of human being is seen there, which is why the speaker-poet concludes in the end, "so this is the world. / I'm not in it. / It's beautiful" ("October", Oliver, 1992, n. p.). Beautiful not in an "aesthetic" sense but in an "ethical" one, calling us forth to "relinquish our habit of determining the value and purpose of nature" (Burton-Christie, 1996, p. 81).

It is in this sense that Oliver pursues the fox's searching for the snowshoe hare, moving "like a red rain" until he reaches his goal and nothing is left of the snowshoe hare except for,

the feathery
scuffs of fur
of the vanished
snowshoe hare
tangled
on the pale spires
of the broken flowers
of the lost summer—
fluttering a little
but only
like the lapping threads
of the wind itself—

(“The Snowshoe Hare”, Oliver, 1992, n. p.)

Yet, the only thing the speaker-poet can hear is the cold creek running “over the old pebbles / and across the field and into / another year” (“The Snowshoe Hare”). Despite the tragic scene of the eco-poem, nothing can prevent the creek from moving “into the rest of the world,” which is certainly a mark of the inevitability of Nature, justifying Christensen’s belief in Oliver’s reliance on sincere devotion as the stepping stone, turning the act of simple observation of Nature to the moments of inter-being with other presences (2002, p. 140). So, the readers can deduce that it is through the transition from “direct observation toward revelation” that the speaker-poet notices the fact that perfection is just a mere fantasy (p. 141). That pain and suffering “are a part of life on earth,” is beyond doubt, but “Oliver’s predators are never evil” in that both the “predator and the prey are driven by the same force” (p. 146). As Oliver demonstrates in “Hawk,” death and destruction are intertwined with “the white lily of resurrection,” (Oliver, 1992, n. p.) showing that the prey’s being hunted by the hunter symbolizes the fact that for the speaker-poet the world is “as emblematic as well as real” and at the same time “virtuous” (“Comfort”, Oliver, 2004, p. 87).

Virtue is the inseparable part of the world in which both the kill and the hunter live together. If pain is interwoven to the fabric of life, so is death. Yet, for Oliver pondering about the purpose of death leads her to view it as the opportunity to experience a rebirth which provokes “a sense of reverence and awe” (Howard, 1991, p. 343). The seeming violence of the above-discussed eco-poems can be paraphrased in terms of Oliver’s own attitude toward such events in her essay “Owl”, where she mentions, “The world where the owl is endlessly hungry and endlessly on the hunt is the world in which I live too. There is only one world” (Oliver, 1995, as cited in Bryson 2002, p. 146). Being part of this unified world helps Oliver to acknowledge that “even an owl is acting out of love” (Christensen, 2002, p. 146). As Elder clarifies further, Oliver’s describing the gloomy scenes of death in Nature is an effort to picture such scenes sincerely on the one hand and illuminate the pure determination observed in the predator’s intention and concentration (1996, p. 220) on the other, driving the speaker-poet to register the process of death and later rebirth through an ecosystem as a psychological and emotional fact, which results from her undergoing those disheartening moments of sudden dread (p. 221).

Conclusion

It can therefore be concluded that Oliver’s main contribution in the above-analyzed eco-poems has been an attempt to increase human beings’ eco-poetic-ecocentric awareness of the central function of the eco-poems, which act as a passage between the world of the eco-poet’s mind and that of the non-human. It is from the attitude of noticing and direct sensual experiences in close company of Nature and non-human agents that the eco-poet can unite the readers with herself in an effort to encourage them to get out and see the world in which the eco-poet’s imagination is the mediator between the readers’ minds and the ecological stimulation, blurring the boundaries of self to reach a harmonious attitude in the end. By examining the juxtaposition of the harsh

images of the kill and the predator and the soft and sweet essence of the lilies and other small creatures and the way they contribute to an ecological relief and revival in the end, the readers can see the influential power of the poetic imagination in bringing the life of the more-than-human world and its ecology to the fore and cultivate an ecological inclusiveness and devotion to Nature in themselves. After all, Oliver' ecocentric-ecopoetic informed poetic imagination ignites the flames of thought and change in the readers' minds, bearing the view out that she is truly a poet of Nature whose world is a world of hope and light, empowered by the Nature-dependent poetic imagination. Last but not least, the researchers tried to imply that, by relying on Ecocriticism's advocacy of the mutual interlinkage between human and non-human as the focal point of this study, the transformative power of poetic imagination, the inspiration it receives from Nature, and the revelation it brings forth can be traced more overtly.

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