



Research Article

Subverting Anthropocentric Mythic Elements: Animal Representations in the Select Poems of Louise Glück and Mary Oliver

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Abstract

The representation of animals in literature has long been dominated by anthropocentric perspectives that prioritize human experiences and values. Animals were relegated to metaphors and narrative accessories, neglecting their inherent rights and treating them primarily as reflections of human qualities. This paper examines the works of contemporary American poets Louise Glück and Mary Oliver, focusing on how their selected poems reconsider conventional anthropocentric patterns of animal representations in poetry. The analysis centers on the poets' strategies to blur rigid boundaries between the human-animal divide by challenging conventional depictions where animals are frequently assigned peripheral roles. The study explores how these poems cultivate powerful connections with the natural world, fostering a sense of communion and interconnectedness with nature. Additionally, the research highlights the deliberate efforts by the poets to reconfigure hierarchies, challenge value dualisms, and question anthropocentric narratives that sanction oppression. Lastly, the paper contributes to the broader discourse on ecocritical thought, enriching discussions on literature and environmental activism.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Entangled Empathy, Poetry, Domination, Unjustified hierarchy.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

Funding: No funding received.

Article History: Received: 29 February 2024. Revised: 20 June 2024. Accepted: 21 June 2024. First published: 23 June 2024.

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Published by: [Aesthetix Media Services, India](#)

Citation: Sunny, S. & Narayana, S. (2024). Constituting a 'Moral' Public: Society, Law and Literature in Colonial India. *Rupkatha Journal* 16:2. <https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v16n2.29g>



1. Introduction

Anthropocentric perspectives, characterized by a focus on human experiences and values, have significantly influenced the portrayal of animals in literature. For instance, in literary studies, animals emerged as metaphors (McHugh, 2009, p. 488) and were mere products of the human imagination. Their inherent rights were neglected, reducing them to representations of different facets of the human condition (Robinson, 2015, p. 28). Animals were employed as accessories to enhance and embellish the narrative framework. In literary works such as John Keats's *Ode to the Nightingale* and Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, animals serve as instruments to enhance the poetic effect rather than being valued for their intrinsic significance. Similarly, poets Edgar Allan Poe and Ted Hughes employ animals to reflect the darkness of human nature or symbolize human constructs like power and freedom. However, these representations typically render animals passive and devoid of agency, reinforcing an anthropocentric worldview that diminishes their individual significance.

The widespread depiction of animals as subordinate beings can be traced back to the dominant influence of anthropocentric and androcentric mythic narratives. These narratives placed humans at the center, relegating animals to subservient roles. This marginalization extended to both women and animals, viewing them as inferior beings characterized by muteness and servitude to the male gender. In contemporary post-industrial societies, androcentric structures continue to reinforce these hierarchical dynamics, positioning women, nature, and animals on the margins of mainstream culture and perpetuating their interconnection as a mechanism of oppression (Plumwood, 2002, p.338). This systemic subordination denied them agency and voice, contributing to the establishment of a cultural hegemony that silenced their experiences and perspectives. Hence, female authors and poets faced significant challenges asserting their subjectivity and cultivating a sense of self through nature writing.

Janet McNew (1989) states that literature reveals notable discrepancies between men's and women's writings, particularly concerning their mythic engagements with nature (p.60). As a result, women faced considerable challenges in establishing an authentic place in the romantic tradition of nature writing where the masculine self-dominated and internalized otherness and the other was frequently identified as female (Homans, 1980, p.13). McNew's argument about the challenges women poets face in asserting their subjectivity within the male-dominated tradition of nature writing aligns with Louise Glück's and Mary Oliver's animal poems that attempt to give voice to marginalized entities, such as animals. Their poems converge on the importance of challenging the dominant images and symbols in writings on nature to pave the way for more inclusive and responsible engagements with the natural world.

The selected poems by Glück and Oliver, namely *Earthworm (2009)*, *Bats (2009)*, *Winter Sleep (1972)* and *The Fish (1972)*, challenge and subvert anthropocentric representations of animals within poetry. Through their poetic lens, the poets decenter the human subject, highlighting the unseen perspective of the animals. This deliberate shift challenges conventional depictions where animals are frequently relegated to symbolic or peripheral roles, devoid of individuality and inherent worth. The verses examine the intricate challenges that arise when confronting the boundaries between humanity and the animal kingdom. They also reveal the shortcomings of hierarchical thinking, dualistic values, and oppositional binaries that have historically shaped

human interactions with the natural world. It is crucial to challenge and transcend this restrictive conceptual framework to embrace the knowledge and responsibilities necessary for living in modern times.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study utilizes Karen J. Warren's (2000) Oppressive conceptual framework as a foundational tool to examine the 'othering' of animals within anthropocentric contexts. Central to this analysis are three interconnected elements: value hierarchical up-down thinking, oppositional value dualism, and notions of power and privilege. Value-hierarchical thinking delineates the entrenched tendency in anthropocentric societies to establish hierarchical structures assigning value based on perceived superiority or inferiority. Oppositional value dualisms reinforce these hierarchies through binary constructs, such as male/female, human/animal, and culture /nature perpetuating and justifying domination. Simultaneously, notions of power and privilege concentrate authority among certain privileged groups, enabling the maintenance of dominance over marginalized individuals or groups. Together, they contribute to the logic of domination that subjugates individuals occupying peripheral positions. The logic of domination serves as a moral justification for keeping those who are subordinate in their place, as its acceptance provides approval for perpetuating their oppression (Warren, 2000, p.46)

Expanding upon this framework, the analysis delves into the selected poems of Glück and Oliver, identifying instances where a transformative vision challenges the dominant patriarchal script of the human-nature relationship. Through the poets' works, a renewed sense of connection with nature emerges, a departure from the anthropocentric principles that treat nature as radically separate from humanity. This departure resonates with Lori Gruen's (2015) concept of entangled empathy (p.12) and Margaret Homan's (1980) notion of feminist transcendence, emphasizing kinship with animals without romanticizing separation (p.192). Glück's and Oliver's poetry illustrates how fostering deep connections with nature and animals can facilitate transformative experiences, challenging established hierarchies and promoting a more egalitarian human-nature relationship.

In parallel, the study critiques the anthropocentric principles that underpin the separation between humanity and nature, highlighting a continuous reassessment of qualities that differentiate humans from the natural world while consciously excluding shared attributes. This process of 'othering' nature contributes to the formulation of value dualisms, further alienating humanity from the environment. Thus, by employing Warren's framework alongside concepts from Gruen and Homans, the study attempts to deconstruct dominant anthropocentric patterns and illuminates alternative modes of thought and resistance against oppressive systems.

3. Women and Animals in Ecocritical Discourses

Ecofeminism, also known as feminist environmentalism, focuses on revealing gender biases in how people interact with nature and other living beings (Gard, 2017). It examines how societal attitudes and behaviors toward both nature and women are intertwined, often reflecting similar

patterns of exploitation and domination. Lori Gruen (1993), in her essay "Dismantling Oppression: An Analysis of the Connection between Women and Animals", identifies a few myths and narratives that justified the subordinate status imposed on both women and animals in an anthropocentric, patriarchal society (p.62). First is the 'myth of man the hunter. Gruen argues that this narrative revolves around the notion that the act of hunting bestows upon humanity a perceived superiority over animals. Hunting is depicted as a showcase of human prowess, intellect, and dominion over the natural environment, thereby reinforcing hierarchical distinctions between humans and animals. Consequently, this myth not only asserts an inherent disparity between humans and animals but also exalts the latter due to their capacity to systematically destroy (Gruen, 1993, p.62).

Women, due to their comparatively smaller size and physical strength, were historically excluded from participating in hunting activities. Therefore, exerting violence over nature becomes a masculine trait, eventually contributing to the logic of domination. Violence, or aggression, among men, became routinely regarded as innate and inevitable (Hunnicut, 2019, p.26). This intensified man's desire to control and tame nature. Representations of women and animals in religious and cultural mythologies, women also depicted them as uncontrollable and harmful, leading to their sacrificial offerings to appease the gods and cleanse communities (Gruen, 1993, p.63).

In addition to the above concerns, the transition from nomadic to agricultural societies marked a shift towards increased labor demands and the domestication of animals. This led to a deeper understanding of reproduction mechanics and animal mating behaviors, potentially influencing perceptions of gender roles. Women were primarily seen as child-bearers contributing to the workforce, their value tied to reproduction. The domestication of animals and the need for labor likely reinforced societal views oppressing both women and animals, reducing them to reproductive and labor roles. Additionally, the scientific revolution introduced a mechanistic worldview, viewing nature as an objective system to be studied through detached reason. This perspective furthered the separation between humans, who actively seek knowledge, and nature, women, and animals, viewed as passive subjects of investigation, reinforcing notions of division and domination. In Merchant's work (1980), she highlights how the scientific revolution separated culture from nature, thereby creating oppositional binaries. The above historical narratives underscore how belief systems and societal changes have reinforced the objectification and domination of nature, women, and animals.

The narratives outlined by Lori Gruen reveal how historical developments, such as the myth of man the hunter, the transition to agricultural societies, the influence of religious beliefs, and the scientific revolution, have collectively contributed to the establishment and perpetuation of unjustified hierarchies and value dualisms. These narratives reinforce the inferior status assigned to animals by portraying humans as superior beings entitled to control and exploit them for their own purposes. Through glorification of human dominance, objectification of non-human beings, and relegation of women and animals to subordinate roles, these narratives underscore the interconnectedness of systems of oppression that marginalize and exploit various groups. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for challenging and dismantling unjust hierarchies and fostering more equitable and compassionate relationships among all beings. Glück's and Oliver's select poems are a demonstration of this challenge.

4. Glück's and Oliver's Ecological Vision

The first step for the female poet engaging in the rich tradition of Nature poetry is to conduct a cultural renovation, revising images, symbols, and patterns attributed to nature. The objective is not to eliminate women's association with nature but to foster a positive connection, and poetry is an effective tool to bring about this change. According to Oerlemans (1994),

Poetry is a means of encountering, investigating, and representing animals that are especially capable of mediating and altering the way we think about them. Poems about animals do many things: they bring animals to our attention; they give various kinds of meanings to animals; they bring animals into the realm of human culture, even high culture; they transform non-human animals into human symbols; and they allow us to imagine modes of animal being, to attempt to cross, blur and reimagine the problematic human-animal divide (p.12).

Reimagining the problematic human-animal divide has been a major endeavor for the poets, and this vision is persistent throughout their poetic works. Several of Glück's writings reflect themes on nature, pastoral life, animals, and plants. The poet relies on nature and its elements to comfort and stabilize the internal and external conflicts her narrators face. The narrators' conflicts are reflected in their natural environment and vice versa. In Glück's poems, there is an extension of the poetic self to her environment to form an eco-self that relies on interdependence, harmony, and co-existence with nature. Her poetry collections *The Wild Iris (1992)* and *The Village Life (2009)* are filled with articulate flowers and animals that interrogate, provide advice, and suggest survival strategies to human listeners. In her poetry, both animals and natural elements are portrayed with strong emotive voices that denote autonomy. Through this representation, the poet transforms nature into a space for resistance and opposition for her animal narrators. The poet's depiction of non-human beings confronts and challenges longstanding beliefs and myths that dictate human dominance over nature.

Similarly, Mary Oliver's poetry also deviates from the dominant anthropocentric and mythic assumptions that view nature from human-centric lenses. Janet McNew (1982) argues that Oliver's poetry contains a "world of mythic assumptions very different from those of her famous romantic precursors" (p. 62). The difference is in terms of the idea of transcendence that dominates romantic nature poetry. McNew claims that Oliver's transformation through her interactions with nature is the opposite of a romantic transcendence. Instead of achieving a higher spiritual or sublime state, the poet's interaction brings her closer to the earth and its beings. There is a dissolution of the poet's identity with that of nature. Estella Lauter (1984) traces a similar pattern among women writing about nature. Lauter notes that many women demonstrate a notable degree of connection to nature, characterized by a lack of fear and a heightened sense of consciousness, as evidenced in a significant body of their works (p.177). Oliver's poems reflect this identification and a deep connection to nature. Her poems also foreground Susan Griffin's (1978) vision that "we are nature seeing nature, we are nature with a concept of nature" (p. 226). This level of interconnection calls for an extension of the poetic self to accommodate her natural environment. It erases the rigid distinctions between humans and nature, fostering a sense of communion and interconnectedness where the once-clear boundaries separating the animal and

human realms gradually dissolve. This results in an emotional and psychological communion with the natural world.

5. Challenging Anthropocentric Patterns

Warren's (2000) identification of oppressive conceptual frameworks, particularly value hierarchical thinking, up-down thinking, and value dualisms (p.1), sets the stage for understanding how Glück's poems, like *Earthworm* and *Bats*, challenge these constructs. The poems are situated within the anthology, *The Village Life* (2009), and the collection mediates on the everyday rustic life lived close to the earth and manifests a deep philosophical understanding of the natural world. The poem *Earthworm* uses the first-person narrative of a worm, which interrogates and challenges the human race. By assigning speech and voice to the worm, the poem stands as a daring subversion of the dominant mythic pattern of the human speaker and the mute nature. The mute nature is a passive, silent backdrop against which humans assert their dominance and control. It represents a silent canvas upon which human actions and narratives unfold. However, in Glück's poems, nature is not mute or passive. Animals and the various elements of nature are assigned subject positions and are in control of the narrative. The earthworm, for instance, thinks, speaks, and interrogates the human listeners. Language and speech, being human inventions, inherently reflect a bias towards masculinity, making it challenging for women to express themselves within this framework authentically. By giving agency and voice to the earthworm, the poet challenges this inherent bias in language. This act disrupts conventional linguistic norms and aligns with the larger goal of dismantling phallogocentric structures, which traditionally prioritize male-centered language in shaping cultural narratives

In Glück's poem, the reader is shocked by a non-human entity examining human psychology and challenging the understanding of the complexities inherent in human subjectivity (Greulich, 2013, p.254). Through exploring human behavior and emotions through the lens of an animal, the poet invites us to reflect on the constructed nature of our identities and how we perceive ourselves and the world around us. Glück writes

Mortal standing on top of the earth, refusing
To enter the earth, you tell yourself
You are able to see deeply
The conflicts of which you are made, but facing death,
You will not dig deeply (Glück, 2009, p. 576)

The speaker of the above lines posits death as the ultimate equalizing force that dismantles the hierarchical distinctions separating humans from other living beings. The earthworm states that man's position on the top of the earth symbolizes his superior position in the hierarchical order. This hierarchy is a cultural construct that justifies and sanctions the dominion of one over the other. The poem attempts to destabilize this hegemony by questioning this hierarchical value dualism. Glück invites the readers to consider the fragility and impermanence of human life in relation to the cycles of nature. As a symbol of decay and renewal, the earthworm disrupts the notion of human exceptionalism and confronts the reader with the inevitability of death as a

universal experience. Consequently, the act of attributing abstract thought, reasoning, and agency to the earthworm, as undertaken by the poet, signifies an initial step towards subverting the established hierarchical order.

If you sense
That pity engulfs you, you are not
Delusional: not all pity
Descends from higher to lesser, some
Arises out of the earth itself, persistent
Yet devoid of coercion (Glück, 2009, p. 576)

Man gaining mastery and control over animals ran parallel to their devaluation. Animals became mere instruments of use and, therefore, lacked intrinsic value. This instrumentalism created a lower and upper side where the lower side is objectified, excluded, and never treated as their moral kin. Hence, within this relational framework wherein one entity is considered superior to the other, subordinates naturally function as instrumental means for fulfilling the superior entity's requisites (Plumwood, 2002, p.5). Glück, through these verses, acknowledges this value dualism by using the terms 'higher' and 'lesser.' but dismantles the idea that one is inferior to the other. Glück uses the terms higher and lesser to position the earthworm as an entity residing inside the earth and the human as someone standing on top. The earthworm also cautions the readers that the feeling of pity can also ascend from the lesser to the higher. The speaker pities the human race for their inability to merge and be whole with the earth. However, this pity that arises from nature towards man is "devoid of coercion". It is not oppressive.

Being devoid of coercion refers to circumstances or environments that lack the use of force, threats, or any form of control or influence regarding someone's choices and actions. It denotes a situation where individuals can act or express themselves without being manipulated by external forces. In such contexts, decisions or actions are made willingly without any form of compulsion or undue influence. This concept is often associated with respect for individual autonomy and the absence of imposed constraints on personal choices. From the above lines, the poet suggests to the readers that humanity's approach to nature is forceful, indicating a clear absence of respect for the autonomy of non-human entities. Glück writes:

Perhaps
You will find in these travels
A wholeness that eluded you- as men and women
You were never free
To register in your body whatever left
A mark on your spirit (Glück, 2009, p.576)

Ecocriticism often critiques patriarchal societies for fragmenting our relationship with nature and ourselves. The poem may imply that this wholeness has been elusive due to societal structures that restrict our connection to the natural world. The confinement within urban spaces and the

modern materialistic worldview have distanced humankind from nature. The line "To register in your body whatever left / A mark on your Spirit (Gluck, 2009, p.576) indicates a profound link between the body and mind that ecocritical principles have been trying to reunite. The body and the mind are often viewed as oppositional dualities. This view has been deeply ingrained in various philosophical and scientific traditions, shaping our understanding of human experience and identity.

Gluck's next poem, titled 'Bats', challenges this value dualism by portraying the bat as an insightful creature capable of interrogating and mocking the existence of the human condition. This portrayal disrupts the idea that only humans possess rationality, consciousness, and reason. Glück is also able to destabilize the binary opposition between culture and nature. This dichotomy has historically served to emphasize human exceptionalism and justify the exploitation or marginalization of non-human beings. Gluck's portrayal of the bat challenges this binary by suggesting that animals, too, possess forms of intelligence and emotional richness that merit recognition and respect. The bat is also the speaking agent of the poem, and it is capable of reflecting on human dilemmas and complexities. It is assigned a certain kind of vision that stands for enlightenment and understanding. Glück writes:

There are two kinds of vision:
 The seeing of things which belongs
 To the science of optics versus
 The seeing beyond things, which
 Results from deprivation. (Gluck, 2009, p.590)

The absence of sight in the bat species serves as a reminder of their unique sensory experience and the challenges they face navigating their environment. This deprivation of a fundamental sense often evokes empathy and compassion from humans as they imagine what it must be like to exist without the ability to see. Consequently, this lack of sight becomes a focal point where feelings of pity towards the animal originate. The poet's primary agenda is to replace this pity with a sense of admiration for the animal. The speaker of the poem posits the existence of a kind of vision that is independent of the science of optics, suggesting an alternate way of seeing that transcends the materialistic objective world within our immediate perception and cognitive grasp. Glück equates the bat's ability to see beyond the materialistic and objectively observable realm to that of a philosopher. The poet is successful in reversing this pity when the bat pities the man for his inability to see beyond his immediate sight. In addition, she blurs the non-permeable boundaries between the bat and the human world. There is a direct conversation, unlike in reality, in which the readers shift their focus from the species to the individual animal. Focusing on the individual animal induces one to wonder about the sentience of that animal and its singular perception of its world. By delving into the reality of the individual being, readers are encouraged to empathize with its subjective experience, transcending the generalized understanding typically associated with the entire species.

This approach fosters a deeper appreciation for the nuanced complexities of individual existence within the natural world. (Oerlemans, 1994, p.138) . The following lines resist the anthropocentric

notion of human sovereignty- man the Supreme Being. The repetition of the word 'dark' denotes man's ignorance of a world outside his own immediate perception. Glück writes:

Man mocking the dark, rejecting

Worlds you do not know: though the dark

Is full of obstacles, it is possible to have

Intense awareness when the field is narrow

And the signals few. Night has bred in us

Thought more focused than yours,

If rudimentary;

Man the ego, man imprisoned in the eye,

There is a path you cannot see, beyond the eye's reach. (Glück, 2009, p.590)

The poet addresses humans as egocentric beings. The term denotes a sense of self-centeredness or importance that can further inflict harm on the current environmental crisis. According to Micheal J. Stark (1988), egocentrism arises from man's insecurities and his constant need for validation (p.178). Individuals who are driven by egocentric tendencies strive to relentlessly establish a sense of superiority at the expense of others and the world around them (p.179). This preoccupation with self-importance manifests in various ways, such as seeking recognition, status, and material possessions to bolster one's sense of value. Egocentricity fosters a mindset characterized by continual judgment and evaluation of the self concerning others and the world. This ongoing scrutiny fuels feelings of insecurity and inadequacy, prompting individuals to assert their worth through assertive or even aggressive means.

The relentless pursuit of validation and superiority becomes a driving force in their interactions and decision-making processes. In the context of the current ecological crisis, egocentrism poses a significant obstacle to achieving sustainable and harmonious coexistence with the natural world. The relentless pursuit of individual desires and interests often comes at the expense of environmental degradation, resource depletion, and biodiversity loss. Moreover, the egocentric mindset perpetuates a worldview that prioritizes short-term gains and personal gratification over long-term sustainability and collective well-being. To address the ecological crisis effectively, there is a pressing need for a shift from egocentrism to ecocentrism—a worldview that values the interconnectedness of all living beings and prioritizes the health and integrity of the environment. This shift entails recognizing the inherent worth and intrinsic value of the natural world beyond its utility to human beings. It involves embracing a mindset of stewardship, cooperation, and humility, wherein human actions are guided by a deep respect for the Earth and its diverse ecosystems. Ultimately, overcoming egocentrism is essential for fostering a more sustainable and equitable relationship between humanity and the planet we inhabit.

In the above poems on the earthworm and the bat, both creatures play a pivotal role in subverting the dominant mythic pattern of mute nature. They are assigned a sense of autonomy using which they challenge the anthropocentric perspective of human centeredness. The poet successfully brings in the animal perspective to render a fresh and distinct lens through which to explore

animal portrayals within the literary canon. This approach not only questions conventional narratives where animals are accessories to enhance the poetic effect but also adds depth and individuality to the animal. This technique elevates animals from being mere symbols to fully realized beings within literary and cultural contexts.

6. A Quest for Wholeness

Mary Oliver's poems, unlike Glück's, do not employ an animal speaker. Glück's concept of dismantling boundaries involves a significant shift in perspective from a human-centered to a more inclusive approach that incorporates the non-human world. By ascribing voice and agency to her animal speakers, the poet successfully reconfigures hierarchies and challenges the anthropocentric elements that permeate animal representations. For Oliver, a mystical and emotional communion is essential to be one with nature. Her narrators are on a psychological quest to attain wholeness, and the poet believes that nature is what completes humankind. This forms a sense of interconnectedness with nature, where rigid boundaries gradually dissolve. Oliver's poems reflect a profound observation of the different species co-existing with her. Their animality, habitat, and minute details are foregrounded to enhance the readers' comprehension of the respective animal. When trying to empathize and understand a species different from our own, we must understand the best we can about what the world seems, feels, and smells like from their position (Gruen, 2015, p. 47).

This concept of entangled empathy put forward by Lori Gruen permeates most of Oliver's poetic verses. Entangled empathy encompasses both emotional resonance and cognitive understanding. The individual empathizing not only feels a connection with the other being but also actively considers both the similarities and differences between their own experiences and those of the creature they are empathizing with. This process involves shifting between their own perspective and that of the other, allowing them to appreciate the situation from multiple angles. Similarly, observing, interacting, and being one with animals is a source of renewal for the poet and this is most reflected in her poem titled *Winter Sleep*. The poem explores themes of sisterhood and how nature becomes an ally and a source of comfort for the female poet. Oliver writes:

If I could I would
 Go down to winter with the drowsy she-bear,
 Crawl with her under the hillside
 And lie with her, cradled. Like two souls
 In a patchwork bed -
 Two old sisters familiar to each other
 As cups in a cupboard (Oliver, 1979)

The poet imagines crawling under the hillside with a drowsy bear. She and the bear are "two old sisters familiar to each other /As cups in a cupboard" (Oliver 6-7). The comparison of the poet herself and the bear to two old sisters suggests a bond that transcends mere acquaintance. It implies a shared history and mutual understanding that has developed over time. This image of

sisterhood evokes a sense of kinship and solidarity, highlighting the inherent interconnectedness between humans and the natural world. The poet's use of the word 'cradled' also invokes the association of the earth with that of the mother. The poet yearns for a return to the maternal nature. The desire to unify with the mother is visible throughout Oliver's Pulitzer-winning collection, *American Primitive*. To her, Nature is the mother, and the bear her sister. The poet attempts to regain an attachment to her feminine self and recover lost maternal origins. Oliver's dreams of a reunion with female creatures and with maternal nature receive validation in feminist terms that male developmental theories and literary criticism build on them would deny (McNew, 1989, p. 65). Here, nature becomes a source of solace and companionship to the female protagonist. The verses echo women's intricate and deep connection with nature that is not necessarily degrading.

Cultural ecofeminist and writer Carolyn Merchant (1980) identifies specific patriarchal narratives that conflate women with nature in a pejorative light—for instance, the identification of Earth with Mother Nature (p. 2). This is extensively problematized in "Loving Your Mother: On the Women Nature Relationship" by Catherine Roach (1991), where she argues that the term motherhood is problematic in a patriarchal culture. According to Roach, both "men and women alike have trouble perceiving mothers as autonomous subjects" (p.49) but view them as objects "who provides all of our sustenance and who makes disappear all of our waste products, she who satisfies all of our wants and needs endlessly and without any cost to us" (p.49). This led to an ecological breakdown in which nature is treated as a storehouse with inexhaustible resources and unconditional supply. In patriarchal cultures, Nature is either the nurturing mother or the wild, uncontrollable entity that can render violence. "Both were identified with the female sex and were projections of human (male) perceptions of the external world" (p. 2).

Ecofeminist principles aim to restructure this relationship to transform nature into an empowered feminine space. From celebrating goddess-based spirituality to acknowledging women's deep-seated connection to nature, the cultural ecofeminist strand of feminism strives to foster a closer, more harmonious human-nature bond. According to Carlessance (2000)

Cultural feminists resist patriarchal language, religion, myth and culture for the sake of planetary survival and the empowerment of women. Whether they recreate goddess-based spiritualities, invent new myths, or new linguistic or discursive styles, they do so in an effort to bring about an ecological and egalitarian transformation of cultural and human consciousness (p. 92).

Oliver's poem *Winter Sleep* adopts this transformative vision, in which the dominant patriarchal script of human nature relationship is revised. There is a return to the earth and a renewed sense of identification with nature. Beauvoir also talks about this attachment of the female protagonist to Nature in her trailblazing work, *The Second Sex* (1953). Simone de Beauvoir explores the intricate connection between a young girl and her natural environment. The author states that a young girl's transition from childhood to adolescence requires a process of socialization during which they are instructed to conform and adhere to societal norms and expectations set by the patriarchal system. Her emancipation from this male-centric culture / paternal house is finding solace in the natural world free of such laws, customs, and routines. The author states that a girl devotes a special love to nature compared to an adolescent boy (p. 386). The untamed, inhuman

nature is a source of worship and reverence for the girl child. She develops a special devotion and love towards the wild, untamed, and inhuman nature. For Beauvoir,

In the midst of plants and animals, she is a human being, a subject of freedom. She is freed both from her family and from males. She finds an image of the solitude of her soul in the secrecy of forests and the tangible figure of transcendence in the vast horizons of the plains; she is herself the limitless land, this summit jutting towards the sky. (p. 386)

Reconnecting with nature liberates women from the ties of patriarchal society and the dominance of males. This suggests a rejection of traditional societal expectations and a pursuit of self-determinism. She seeks independence and meaning in nature, finding solitude in forests and a sense of transcendence in the expansive plains. Oliver's poem suggests a deep connection between a woman and the natural world built on interconnectedness, unity, and communion. This act of communion is also evident in her next poem titled *The Fish*

In the poem, the communion between the narrator and the fish is portrayed through the act of eating the fish, which also turns into an exploration of their connection and shared experience. Eating is the central theme of Oliver's poetry collection, *The American Primitive*. Almost sixteen poems in this volume use eating as a central Eucharistic symbol for mystical communion with nature (McNew, 1989, p. 34). Eating for Oliver is a metaphor that signifies an amalgamation of the poet's self with that of the fish. The poem begins with the narrator's experience of catching her first fish. She describes its slow death, the steps to dissect and eat the fish, and the poet devours it. Oliver believes in the immanence of divinity, where the sacred is not distant but in the everyday ordinary life around us.

Therefore, by consuming the fish, the poet experiences a transformation opposite to the concept of transcendence in romanticism. Though Oliver is popularly termed a neo-romantic, her poetry is "not a flight into the transcendent" (Burton, 1996, p.84). In Romanticism, transcendence often refers to the idea of rising above the ordinary, mundane world to connect with something greater, whether it's nature, the divine, or the sublime. Whereas, through consuming the fish, the poet undergoes a transformation that grounds them in the here and now, rather than lifting them into realms beyond. Oliver writes:

Now the sea
is in me: I am the fish, the fish
glitters in me; we are
risen, tangled together, certain to fall
back to the sea. (Oliver, 1983, p.56)

This communion results in a spiritual awakening for the poet. Nature for Oliver is filled with this divine spirit. Oliver passionately urges us to recognize and reconsider the inherent spirituality of the natural world, emphasizing its vitality and essence. However, she avoids romanticizing nature or abandoning it in pursuit of deeper spiritual understanding. Instead, she describes a specific and tangible process of spiritual growth that arises within everyday experiences, enriched by poetic imagination. (Habich, 2009, p.79). The poet suggests that we can cultivate a deeper sense of connection with the world around us and foster a more profound understanding of our place

within it. Thus, the act of consuming a fish, when viewed through Oliver's lens, becomes a sacred ritual that honors the interconnectedness of all life forms and celebrates the divine presence within the ordinary. The poet sees the divine in nature and critiques the harmful effects of dualism, which attempts to separate the soul from earthly matters and the earth from the incomprehensible mystery of God (Davis, 2009, p.607)

The poet's use of the word 'risen' symbolizes the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the redemption of humankind. Being one with nature redeems man. The fish symbolizes nature, and the narrator represents humanity. The narrator is whole and made complete by consuming the fish. However, the identification is not a return to the primitive, no-consciousness state of nature created by masculine traditions. In her book *Women Writers and Poetic Identity*, Margaret Homans argues that the male-constructed image of nature has "no consciousness, only materiality and elusive presence, no center, only diffusiveness" (p. 17). It is purely physical and lacks a distinct center or focal point. By identifying themselves with this male-constructed image of nature, women writers often find themselves relegated to the peripheries, deprived of self-representation. Their identification with a nature lacking consciousness or agency reinforces societal structures that marginalize women and their voices. While communion with nature can lead to spiritual awakening and redemption, the traditional portrayal of nature in literature often reinforces gendered hierarchies and marginalizes female voices. Therefore, Oliver has attempted to revise this.

Reaching this state of wholeness is also reflected in Oliver's *Winter Sleep*. McNew (1989) argues that several of Oliver's Poems present the embrace of animals as a dreamlike regaining of original wholeness (p. 64). For Oliver, embracing animals symbolizes a return to a stage of primal completeness. Her verses depict the women narrators experiencing a transcendent state of mind that leads to an innate sense of wholeness. This transcendence visible in women's writing is very different from the concept of transcendence in romanticism. The poems critique the concept of romantic egotism, as articulated by Homans (1980, p. 236), wherein transcendence is achieved by distancing oneself from earthly concerns to embrace the divine in its highest form. In contrast, Oliver's perspective on transcendence involves a closer connection to the Earth and its primal essence.

7. Conclusion

This article effectively illustrates that Glück's and Oliver's poems put forward a significant challenge to the prevailing anthropocentric representations of animals in poetry. The poems *Earthworm* and *Bat* successfully question the anthropocentric principle of placing humans at the top of the hierarchical order. The animals are granted agency and voice to challenge human claims of superiority, which justified their oppression as creatures deemed lacking intrinsic value. Additionally, they challenge the traditional human-animal dichotomy by directly conversing with animals, gradually erasing the boundaries that separate these two worlds. Through exploring complex themes like death and human psychology from an animal perspective, the poems erase the anthropocentric belief that humans are the only rational beings. This perspective erases the notion that rationality and introspection are exclusively human traits, broadening our understanding of intelligence and consciousness across species boundaries.

At the same time, Oliver's poetry attempts to revalue our relationship with animals and nature. The verses display a profound interconnectedness with nature, making nature a safe and empowered space for the poet to inhabit. Oliver's poems also merge the narrator's identity with that of the animals', considering the similarities and differences that define each species. The paper utilized the idea of entangled empathy to understand the poet's technique of immersing herself in the experience of the animals she interacts with, thereby gaining a profound insight into their lives. Through empathetic engagement, Oliver gains profound insights into their lives, emotions, and perspectives. This approach challenges anthropocentric views by highlighting the richness and complexity of animal experiences, fostering a deeper appreciation and respect for non-human beings

Through their bold and transformative poetry, Glück and Oliver invite readers to reconsider their place within the ecological tapestry, advocating for a more harmonious and equitable relationship between humanity and the natural world. One way to achieve this was to revise the dominant mythic patterns, images, and symbols that contributed to the subjugation of women and nature. To conclude, the poems express the poets' ecological perspectives and provide myriad paths for influencing and changing our cultural/ historical, and political understanding of our place in this world. In conclusion, the poems convey the poets' ecological perspectives and offer myriad avenues to reshape our cultural/ historical, and philosophical perceptions of humanity's role in this world. They promote a reevaluation of how to understand and interact with our environment, fostering a more sustainable approach.

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