

Confederation of Ecology and Literature in the Selected Poems of Mary Oliver

¹S. V. Karthiga, ²V. Mainar

¹Assistant Professor of English, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur, Email: svkarthiga5@gmail.com

²A Research Scholar (Part-Time), SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur and Assistant Professor of English, Dwaraka Doss Goverdhan Doss Vaishnav College, Arumbakkam, Chennai-106, Email: mv1400@srmist.edu.in

Abstract

Eco-criticism has evolved into a system of interlinking literature and environment by the postmodern writers of Twenty First century. It made the contemporary writers to expose the possibilities of creating awareness through their writings. Environmental issues become the highly discussed in global arena where literature also has come forward in support of bringing cohesive and sustainable development through literary pieces. Eco-criticism allowed the readers to identify and question the contemporary misgivings against natural wrongdoings. Mary Oliver is one of the environmentalist and poet who penetrated the idea of providing equal space for every species through his writings. He, as a poet brought out the problems and sufferings of multiple issues faced by the natural livings and its repercussions on human lives. The articles deals with the eco-critical issues dealt in his selected poems and how does he expose to the world through his works.

Keywords: Eco-criticism, Literature, environment, ecology, human lives.

INTRODUCTION

“The earth is what we all have in common”

-Wendell Berry

The world has seen tremendous changes in various fields. But, one common notion on literature still remains the same. It has a power to reproduce the hidden energy it has in it. Sometimes, the literary pieces produced by well-known writers use it as a medium to transform the modernistic society through their pen and paper. This is the base for the emergence of criticism. According to Wikipedia, literary criticism can be defined as the study of evaluation, interpretation of literature and it's often influenced by literary theory to achieve its goals and methods (Wikipedia contributors, 2022). The belief in the literary works which can bring out the influence of various changes have achieved what it intended by the writers. A critical piece can be a tool to improvise the

upcoming generation's ideas and it can also substitute the treasures of knowledge the text has it. The literary criticism has seen various theories and theorists, right from the structuralism to post-modernism etc. But, the contemporary learners started to induce multiple new theories into literature and started to use it in modern literary pieces. One of the important theory which evolved into this category of new dimensions to literary pieces is Eco-criticism.

The modern innovations which were created by human for the past two to three decades made the people to go against the nature. Sometimes, it has no other choices than accepting what it gives back by the nature. This is how, the eco-criticism in the context of ecology emerged in the modern period. Nature in the twentieth century has represented as the representation of symbolic or ideological properties of the world, not as an image which it has dealt (Kern.R, 2000). In research from Clemens on the glossary

of literary theories insists that the world teaches us and studies the literature which is made connects the same dots where humans and many more species and beings live in it. It has impact on everything as it does not stop with one aspect. It has both the cultural and intellectual impacts based on the activities it affects. As the problems arises from the other side, there will be a spring which emerges the process of evolution in the living things. Like literature, it has continuous impact on everything (Clemens, 2021).

Ecocriticism emerged as a concept in the late 1970s. It took the influence of American writers of nineteenth century like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Margaret Fuller. Ecocritics reject the fact that not everything is connected socially or linguistically in the world (Barry.P, 2022). With the rapid innovations and industrial expansion in the world, many countries experienced the environmental losses rigorously. None could identify the reason for the failure of mass environmental loss which occurred globally. This is where the ecocriticism insisted on the preserving of nature through literature. Often, it was questioned by many. But, its influence expanded continuously with the various contributions from the different authors.

According to Wikipedia, Mary Oliver was born September 10, 1935 in America. Being an American poet, he has won the National Book Award and he won the important prize in literature i.e., Pulitzer Prize. She focused her writings based on her inspiration by nature as she preferred to human world. She has great passion for the solitary walks in the deep thoughts in the wild. Her writings have been characterized as a true wonderment at the repercussion of natural ideas which has been conveyed in plain language. She was recognized as the best country poet in 2007 (Wikipedia contributors, 2022b).

Mary Oliver was a person who was accustomed with the beauty of nature and she enjoyed the natural imagery in front of her. From her childhood, she spent her time outside of her house during her leisure walks and reading. During her interview in 1992 with Christian Science Monitor, she expressed her concern and love for being part of Ohio as the days were pastoral and nice. She felt that as if extended family where she does not know the reason for her affinity with the world of nature. But she was

feeling content for what she was available. She found the first connection with the natural world made her experiences more important than the social world she has been part (Ratiner, 1992).

Mary Oliver's affinity towards nature

Oliver as a poet from America followed the descendants of Emerson and other writers of twentieth century. The writer who loved nature expressed her desire for the natural world than social world. According to J.D. Michael, Oliver was also one of the contemporary and modern poets who has been admired by Blake and one would call her as an heir. He pointed out that Oliver has invocation on nature and physical transformation of the body. Her poems were steeped into the language of art with many poems of hers. Blake and Oliver makes the human mind the border between the material and the spiritual world. The poet's has to awake the imagination of the readers for some purpose. The purpose should not be an experience which is an ordinary for many thinkers (Michael, 2011).

Being the winner of both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer's Prize, her poetry looks accessible for everyone for those believe in readings of Oliver. George Voros pointed out that no critics share the popular enthusiasm: every individual points out that she has a "peculiar lack of genuine engagement would be in the natural world (George Voros, 2021d) Oliver represented her thematic observations in her poems and through her writings, she tried to imbibe the value being connected with nature and creatures. She tried to emulate the language of nature in her writings with the powerful observations of scenic beauty of her world. McNew calls her a visionary poet of nature which resembles the love she has for the nature through her writings (McNew, 1989).

Eco critical aspects of Oliver's poems

Oliver has identified herself as the woman who loves her surroundings. She never denied expressing this through her effective writings. She often describes that she is descended from the legacy of Walt Whitman, Shelley, Keats and Byron as a way to seek the unabashed knowledge from nature (Davis, 2009). She clearly stated in her poem *Why I Wake Early* (2011) about the pleasant start of the day one should have especially when the human

started live with more of industrial noises in the twenty first century as,

“Hello, you who made the morning

And spread it over the field

And the faces of the tulips

And the nodding morning glories” (lines 3-6).

Oliver as a person who has been motivated by the beauty of natural happenings has substantiated the lines for the pandemic situations too. Though her poem *Why I Wake Early* (2011) talks about her happiness in getting to see the nature with kindness, it can be taken as a poem Corona pandemic where most of us stayed indoors and never come out of our homes to see the day-to-day life. For many, it was a period of self-imprisonment. As she points out in the lines,

“Best preacher that ever was,

Dear star, that just happens

To be where you are in the universe

To keep us from ever-darkness,

To ease us with warm touching,

To hold us in the great hands of light” (lines 9-14).

The dual face of human beings always questionable as it does not allow the nature to be in the safe hands. It often leads to the destruction of human wishes through its actions. Oliver as a poet significantly described in her work *Beside the Waterfall* which is a small poem on the experiences of a dog which is called Winston. It goes into the bushes and attacks a fawn and brings back the dead body of it. The cruelty which has shown in the poem can be resembled with the contemporary killings and other destructions. It is a mammoth idea to project the duality of human desire to acquire the whole world through biological issues as Corona has spread into the community of each nation. She explains in the following lines, “and with kind eyes, / He, too, if you’re willing, / had a face, / Like a flower: and then red sun” (Poetry Foundation, 2018).

The world is growing fast in such a way that what one give, she or he gets back. The relationship between the nature and human

should be treated as a family. The ecosystem which safeguards the human beings and animals should protect it with utmost care and sincerity. The importance of protecting the nature focused after the scientists found out the hole in the ozone. It paved the way for the people to give attention to plant more saplings in however possible ways. They become conscious of what they are surrounded and they started to protect their nature on their own (V. Shoba & Dr. P. Nagaraj, 2011). Oliver insisted rigorously through her works to do the same and for her, treating the nature as part of family considered important than any other work *Wild Geese*. This poem teaches the importance of moving forward in one’s life with the positive attitude by taking nature a friend in one’s life. As she puts it in the poem *Wild Geese* (2004),

“Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,

The world offers itself to your imagination,

Calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting-

Over and over announcing your place

In the family of things” (lines 14-18).

The above lines may explicit her desire to treat everyone as her kith and kin in this world and also the hardships would always hinder our progress in our life. One should know how to deal the issue no after how hard the problem might be. She takes the example of wild geese to show us the way to get inspired by the ecosystem and its functions which lies in front of human beings. The love one should possess for the world of nature is unconditional and it should not be embodied with what we don’t have it.

In the poem *Spring*, she defines the word ‘love’ in a way that a perfect human who loves nature should adopt to the world with proper affection. She talks about the wild bear which gets up from its sleep and started to live with love for the place it lives in it. As a reader, one would be able to connect with the contemporary situation of how this Corona pandemic made us to stay inside house, leaving out the external beauty it has. Often, the influence of technology made the people to forget what is called ‘true nature’. Oliver presents her form of love for the nature in the poem *Spring* (2018) as,

“There is one question:

How to live this world.

I think of her

Rising

Like a black and leafy ledge

To sharpen her claws against

The silence

of the trees” (lines 16-23).

A lover of nature will always see a beauty in everything. Oliver looked at the ecological aspect as one needs to take it to their mind to conserve what the next generation needs from us. Oliver calls the love for the nature as a perfect love through her poem Spring. She mentions as ‘all day I think of her-/ her white teeth/ her wordlessness/ her perfect love’ (Poetry Foundation, 2018b). The person should be able to preserve the beauty and adorn the love with affection and care in the world. Oliver kept insisting this idea as she wants to see the real affection of nature and human with connectedness through the perfect love.

Conclusion

There are two group of people where one focuses on creating awareness on the idea of ecosystem by producing literary works and the other does conferences to enhance the discussion on the ecology and the need to preserve the beauty of nature (V. Shoba & Dr. P. Nagaraj, 2011). Mary Oliver can be put into the first category of people who enlighten the people to bring out the love for the nature. She implies about ‘the sense of going towards the source’ (Foer, 2019). None can deny that the society has come out in a way where the technologies imbibed into our lives. Even the person who talked about nature was in a position to hold a flip phone. But she does not critique the world only for the purpose of technological inventions. Her only motive is to going back to our source where we have come from and every aspect of nature has to be loved and admired as she puts it as perfect love and she calls it the collection of essays Upstream ‘attention is the beginning of devotion’ (Excerpt from Upstream, 2021). The mutuality of nature and human beings has to be correlated with the contemporary viability and feasibility of the living and non-living things.

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