



## Blending of the Human and the Non-Human in the Poems of Seamus Heaney and Alice Oswald: An Ecological Perspective

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### Abstract

*This paper examines the complex interplay between the human and non-human world in the poetry of Seamus Heaney and Alice Oswald through an ecological lens. A close reading of Oswald's inventive approach to nature poetry and Heaney's close ties to the Irish landscape, shows how both writers transcend conventional lines between the human and non-human realms. Heaney's works frequently depicts a symbiotic relationship with nature, in which the natural world has a significant influence on how humans define their earthly existence. Oswald's poetry, on the other hand, emphasizes the agency and autonomy of the natural world while negating human-centric viewpoints. This paper examines how the poets employ themes, and poetic techniques, to communicate ecological interdependence and the ethical implications of this interconnection through close readings of a few select poems. The study emphasizes the significance of literary viewpoints in tackling environmental concerns and advances our understanding of ecological consciousness in contemporary poetry by the two prominent poets of the British Isles. Analyzing the poems as samples of Eco poetry would provide an insight into how poetry becomes an agent of creating ecoconsciousness.*

**Keywords:** Human Centric viewpoints, Ecological interdependence, symbiotic relationship, ecological Consciousness, Ecopoetry.

### 1. Introduction

The World today is grappling with the ever-multiplying environmental issues that keep demanding sustainable solutions. The intensity of escalating environmental crises can only be solved by a multidimensional approach seeking inputs from various scientific and non-scientific fields of study. Ecocriticism emerged out of this emergency offering to come up with complementary research that would contribute to the emergency state the earth had been pushed into. Ecocriticism is the interdisciplinary study of literature and the environment, bringing together several scientific disciplines to examine the environment and generate ideas for improving the current state of the environment. And Ecocriticism developed into a literary theory as the world powers were seeking a reliable solution to tackle the crisis which was questioning the possibility of the very existence of the earth. Environmental criticism,

literary ecology, literary environmentalism, deep ecology etc. are among the few names of the varied branches of ecocriticism that have come to occupy the academic minds. Ecocriticism is recognized as a wing of literary criticism. And ecoliterature has become a part of the curriculum of many universities. Seminars, conferences and workshops are being organized round the year on ecology and literature. Research papers are published in large numbers, especially on seminal works. Ecological perspective in literature has gained significant traction, emphasizing the intricate relationships between humans and the natural world. This paper explores the complex interplay between the human and non-human realms in the poetry of Seamus Heaney and Alice Oswald. By closely examining Oswald's innovative approach to nature poetry and Heaney's deep connection to the Irish landscape, we see how

both poets transcend conventional boundaries between the human and non-human. Heaney's poetry often depicts a symbiotic relationship with nature, where the natural world profoundly shapes human existence. Conversely, Oswald's poetry emphasizes the agency and autonomy of the natural world, challenging anthropocentric viewpoints. Through close readings of select poems, this paper investigates how both poets employ themes and poetic techniques to communicate ecological interdependence and the ethical implications of this interconnectedness. This study underscores the importance of literary perspectives in addressing environmental concerns and enhances our understanding of ecological consciousness in contemporary poetry by these two prominent poets of the British Isles. [1]

## **2. Seamus Heaney's Symbiotic Relationship with Nature**

Seamus Heaney's poetry frequently explores the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature, revealing a deep-rooted interconnectedness that shapes human identity and experience. Heaney's works are infused with a profound sense of place, drawing on his rural upbringing in Northern Ireland.

### **3. Close Reading of "Digging"**

In "Digging," Heaney parallels his own work as a poet with the physical labor of his father and grandfather. The poem opens with the lines:

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*Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.*

Here, the pen is metaphorically compared to a gun, suggesting the power and precision of writing. As the poem progresses, Heaney reflects on the digging done by his forebears:

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*By God, the old man could handle a spade.  
Just like his old man.*

The repetitive digging, a physical act, becomes a symbol of tradition and continuity, bridging the human and non-human realms. The natural world, represented by the earth being dug, is an integral part of this familial and cultural legacy.

## **4. Close Reading of "The Tollund Man"**

In "The Tollund Man," Heaney meditates on the preserved body of an Iron Age man found in a Danish bog. The poem reflects on the human body's integration into the natural landscape:

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*His last gruel of winter seeds  
Caked in his stomach.*

The Tollund Man, a human artifact, is preserved by the bog, a natural element, symbolizing the inextricable link between human history and the natural world. The poem underscores the idea that human existence and identity are deeply rooted in the natural environment. [2,3]

## **5. Alice Oswald's Emphasis on Natural Agency**

Alice Oswald's poetry often emphasizes the agency and autonomy of the natural world, challenging human-centered perspectives and highlighting the independent existence of nature. [4,5]

### **6. Close Reading of "Dart"**

In "Dart," Oswald traces the journey of the River Dart, intertwining the voices of people and nature. The poem's polyphonic structure reflects the river's dynamic presence and its influence on the surrounding environment. One passage illustrates this interplay:

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*A stream is a dart  
A glider*

*Under leaves, between the trees*

Here, the river is personified, possessing its own identity and agency. The river's voice and the human voices are interwoven, emphasizing the interconnectedness and mutual influence of the human and non-human worlds.

## **7. Close Reading of "Memorial"**

In "Memorial," Oswald reimagines Homer's "Iliad," focusing on the ecological and human devastation of war. By stripping away the heroic elements, Oswald highlights the natural world's resilience and continuity amidst human conflict:

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*...leaning on the air,*

*with its black wings spread out behind,  
it moves closer, eye to eye  
to see which one of us will look away.*

The natural world is portrayed as a powerful, enduring presence that stands in stark contrast to human transience and destruction. This perspective challenges traditional heroic narratives, emphasizing nature's autonomy and endurance.

### 8. Comparative Analysis

Heaney and Oswald, despite their differing approaches, both transcend the conventional boundaries between the human and non-human realms. Heaney's poetry, deeply rooted in the physical and cultural landscape of Ireland, depicts a symbiotic relationship where the natural world is integral to human identity. Oswald's work, with its mythological and historical contexts, emphasizes the agency of the natural world, challenging human-centered viewpoints. Both poets use imagery, form, and structure to convey their ecological perspectives. Heaney's use of earthy, tactile imagery grounds his poetry in the physical world, while Oswald's fluid, dynamic structures reflect the ever-changing nature of the environment. Their work collectively advocates for a more integrated and holistic understanding of nature, highlighting the ethical implications of ecological interdependence.

### 9. The Role of Ecopoetry

Analyzing Heaney's and Oswald's poems as examples of ecopoetry provides valuable insights into how poetry can foster ecological consciousness. Ecopoetry, as a genre, emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life forms and the ethical imperative to respect and protect the natural world. By blending human and non-human elements, Heaney and Oswald's poetry serves as a powerful medium for promoting ecological awareness and inspiring a deeper appreciation for the environment.

### Conclusion

Seamus Heaney and Alice Oswald, through their unique poetic approaches, offer profound insights into the complex interplay between the human and non-human realms. Heaney's depiction of a symbiotic relationship with nature and Oswald's emphasis on natural agency challenge conventional boundaries and promote a holistic view of ecological

interdependence. Their work underscores the importance of literary perspectives in addressing environmental concerns and advancing our understanding of ecological consciousness in contemporary poetry. Through their innovative use of themes and techniques, Heaney and Oswald's poetry not only reflects the natural world but also actively contributes to the creation of an ecoconscious society.

### References

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