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**Strategic Openness in Contemporary Poetry: Ecological Entanglements in Gander,
Graham, and Limón**

Bakhtawar

Department of English, University of Wah

bakhtawarhereat@outlook.com

Abstract

Literature plays a critical role in reimagining the symbiotic relationship between people and non-human life during this time of global climate emergency and ecological insecurity. Scott Slovic re-evaluates the term "*strategic openness*," which extends ecocriticism to include all texts, even if they are not obvious nature works. This accommodating and receptive direction emphasizes how ecological impotence easily infiltrates cultural expression. This provides a more nuanced understanding of grief, human mortality, survival, and the planetary crisis. Based on Slovic's framework, this paper analyses poems by Forrest Gander ("Son" and "Epitaph"), Jorie Graham (*Sea Change* and *Runaway*), and Ada Limón (*Almost Forty* and *the End of Poetry*). Applying a qualitative approach and close textual analysis, the study examines the ethical implications of these works. It observes their way of blurring the line between human and nonhuman. The results identify three major strands. To begin with, Gander redefines death and mourning as ecological predicaments and illustrates the body as persistent microbes and processes of the environment. Second, Graham resonates with the dramatic note of language disruption, syntactic and visual discontinuity, and locates the human degradation in the framework of the social and political urgency. Another third ecological thinking is intimacy, resilience, survival and longing, which is a communal act of resistance to despair. Their combined works are paradigms of strategic openness in that they exhibit the natural imagination in texts that are unnatural to poems. The ecocriticism is able to eliminate the narrow taxonomies by applying the strategic openness. This gives one an understanding of the mutuality of literature. The analysis reveals that Gander, Graham and Limón represent ecological entanglement in the imagery of grief, crisis, and survival. This demonstrates that with the help of poetry, it is possible to create environmental awareness and expand the opportunities of environmental literary criticism.

Key words: *Strategic Openness, Ecocriticism, Interconnectedness, Ecological Imagination, Ecological Grief, Climate Crisis, Human–Nonhuman Relations*

1. Introduction

The twenty-first century can be characterized by the crisis of the climate that has never been observed before, and it prompts the literary scholars and artists to reconsider the complex relation between human beings and the nonhuman world. Poetry is an effective tool of communication regarding the interdependence of all living things to one another, and the anthropocentric hierarchies within the contemporary society. With the growth of the ecological consciousness, the poets begin to make the nature a topic of their work not as a passive observer of the human action, but as the active participant. The resultant effect has been the emergence of new critical frames of ecocriticism where one of them is strategic openness as proposed by Scott Slovic. Strategic openness is a hypothesis to be more accommodative in the interpretation of literary texts. It means that there is not only the traditional nature poems but any genre and subject, such as elegies, love poems, or even the political poetry, where the intention of environmental awareness is evident. This method acknowledges that ecological thinking may not be visible in finer, complicated expression, implicit in language, feeling or even silence. It focuses more on receptivity which is the element of staying open to ecological implications, even where it is not possible to see such implications directly. This is quite applicable to this concept particularly in relation to modern poetry. Hundreds of poets today are reading and writing about climate change, extinction, grief and resilience in ways and images that are challenging the tradition of environmental writing. These are such voices as Forrest Gander, Jorie Graham and Ada Limon. Their writings demonstrate the vision of strategic transparency with ecological entanglements in the analysis of human experiences of loss, love, and survival associated with the functioning of the planet as a whole. This comes as prolonged mourning that goes beyond the continuity of the flesh in the elegiac poems of Gander himself who suffered a loss. The loosely written syntax and the rich language employed by Graham make the world unstable, which is in the verge of ecological and a political collapse. The domestic, intimate cogitations of Limon demonstrate the fact that the global climate crisis can be discovered in every sphere of life, that even ordinary activities become a source of strength.

This essay uses an ecocritical approach by Slovic to interpret selected works: "Son" and "Epitaph" by Forrest Gander, "Sea Change" and "Runaway" by Jorie Graham, and "Almost Forty" and "The End of Poetry" by Ada Limon. It explores how these poets redefine the relationships between the environment and humanity, as well as reveal the mutual dependence between the human soul and the surrounding world, through close reading and qualitative analysis.

2. Materials and Methods

This paper uses a qualitative research design; it is a textual-thematic study of the chosen poems. It is based on the theory of strategic openness introduced by Scott Slovic as the main

interpretative tool and the associated ecocritical theories, such as the slow violence proposed by Rob Nixon, the ecological entanglement and the dark ecology of Timothy Morton, and the concept of psychic numbing. Collectively, these ideas enable one to read more deeply how poets participate emotionally, ethically, and formally in ecological crisis.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Strategic Openness (Scott Slovic): According to Slovic (2010), this is an inclusive form of ecocritical reading that tries to find an ecological resonance in texts that are not necessarily about nature. It extends ecocriticism beyond apparent environmental writing to emotional, cultural and political aspects of ecological thinking.

Slow Violence (Rob Nixon): According to Nixon, the destruction of the environment is often quiet and slow across geographical space and across generations (Nixon 2011). This slow violence can be visible in poetry with its focus on detail and emotion.

Ecological Entanglement (Timothy Morton): Morton (2007) tackles the view that all beings exist in a complex interdependence. Both human and nonhuman life are mixed in mutual vulnerability and being.

Psychic Numbing (Robert Jay Lifton): A psychological reaction to devastating crises, in which humans become emotionally numb in order to survive periodic calamities. This detachment can be overcome in poetry by re-opening the senses of empathy and attention.

2.2. Methodology

It is the technique of close reading that analyzes language, imagery, tone, rhythm, and syntax to find ecological meaning behind it. The poems are discussed in terms of environmental awareness, lamentation, or survival, expressed in the structure and content of the poem. It begins with the personal interpretation of Gander, Graham, and Limon to a comparative synthesis, which shows similar ecological ethics of the three.

The texts have been chosen according to their thematic variety and their representative nature: the intimate elegies of Gander, the political-environmental narratives of Graham, and the domestic but planetary lyricism of Limon. The paper aims to demonstrate how all these poets model ecological thought through their stylistic and emotional decisions.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. *Forrest Gander: Ecological Grief and Biological Continuity*

The poems of Forrest Gander turn individual lamentation into the consciousness of biology. His Pulitzer-winning poetry book *Be With* (2018) is a reaction to the loss of his wife.

In "Son," Gander writes:

“You lug a bacterial swarm in the crook of your knee,

And through my guts writhe helminth parasites.

Who was ever only themselves?”

These lines not only redefine grief as an independent feeling but also as a biological fact that is shared by living systems. The body of the speaker is full of the bacteria and parasites which indicate that there is no such thing as individuality. Even during personal loss life goes on in infinitely occurring microscopic forms. The tone of Gander is very personal and scientific at the same time, the combination of emotional and biological imagery is the representation of strategic openness because ecological meaning is formed in a very human context. On the same note, in "Epitaph", he notes:

"while cyanide drifts
from clouds to
the rivers."

In this case, the elegant landscape is exposed to environmental pollution. The sudden breaks in the poem imitate the disruption, fragmentation- emotional and ecological. The personal mourning becomes a social issue on the contaminated planet. This fusion of interior and exterior worlds encourages the readers to view ecological loss as a continuation of personal loss. The work of Gander represents what Slovic describes as the ecological attention, which is a feeling of connectedness and mortality that does not allow people to isolate emotional life and ecological process. His poems make us remember that the grieving of the deceased is also a grieving of the ruined earth. The microbial sensibilities that Gander insinuates transform mourning into ecology and demonstrate that in the world of species, there is always a manner of survival.

3.2. Jorie Graham: *Disruption, Urgency, and Slow Violence*

Jorie Graham is a poet whose poetry is at the crossing point between the consciousness of the environment and the political urgency. Her works *Sea Change* (2008) and *Runaway* (2020) address the disorder of the Anthropocene with the help of complicated, broken language.

In "Sea Change," she opens with:

"One day: stronger wind than anyone expected...
Un-natural says the news."

The poem is a commentary of how the weather is erratic. The waving lines are long like the current or wind and they do not wish to be closed. Graham mixes weather and the mood and proves the intrusion of the forces of nature into the world of domestic and linguistic. Enjambment and disrupted syntax with which she indulges herself is the expression of the absence of stability in the moving world. In the later section of the poem, she states that the planktons were driven northwards and the life of the cod larvae could not survive. It is a form of slow violence portrayed by Rob Nixon the destruction that takes place whether we notice it or not as the time goes by. The language employed by Graham makes the slow death of ecosystems a palpable experience, and the urgency can be felt by the readers.

In *Runaway*, she distinguishes environmental degradation and human displacement:

"Melted chromium.

Ash. Refugees denied papers.”

The similarity of weakness of ecological and political systems is manifested by the comparison between the industrial contamination and the human suffering. Climate change is not a scientific issue but it is a human issue. The fragmentation of the poem reflects this destruction and the reader is thrown out of his comfort.

Graham employs language as a form of resistance to psychic numbing, through interruption of both syntax and imagery. She does not allow the comfort of a smooth narrative and demands that the readers meet crisis face to face. Her disorientation poetics is a reflection of the disorientation of the contemporary world but it is the disorientation of the modern world that contains ethical awakening.

In this way, Graham brings the strategic openness into the form. It is the ecology of her language, broken, fluid, unstable, which is mirrored in the lack of environmental stability. As in her poems we can see that the way we talk about the world influences the way we see the world and take care of it.

3.3. *Ada Limón: Intimacy, Survival, and Ecological Imagination*

The poetry written by Ada Limon transcends both space and time. She frequently starts her work with domestic settings but opens towards cosmic consciousness. In her works *The Carrying* (2018) and *The Hurting Kind* (2022), she does not depict the environment as something distant but as an emotional component of everyday life.

In "Almost Forty," she observes:

“The birds were being so bizarre today...

Maybe it is a warning.”

The poem starts with a mere description of weird bird behavior, but this behavior quickly takes the form of an indicator of the imbalance in the environment. Yet, Limon rapidly switches to personal issues, such as health, old age, and relatives. The ecological prophecy and the inner soul become one emotional space. This dialogue shows the trans-scalar imaginary, the possibility to shift between the global and domestic levels.

Limon states in “The End of Poetry”:

“Enough of osseous and chickadee and sunflower...

I am asking you to touch me.”

The speaker refuses to use ornamental representations of nature and finds human contact instead. But this request to be touched is also ecological- it is a demand to re-establish physical and emotional contact with the world. Limon deprives poetry of decoration and turns intimacy itself into one of environmental resistance. Her plainness of language covers profound ecological morality. The poems by Limon demonstrate that the concern to other people, sincerity, and emotional receptiveness do not exist independently of the environmental

awareness. Her poetics of tenderness is in opposition to despair as she demonstrates that the smallest of gestures of connection are the start of resilience.

In Limon, we encounter the third ecological thinking found in this study, which is intimacy, resilience, and survival. Her work demonstrates the fact that ecological awareness does not have to be supported by grand landscapes or apocalyptic visions; it can flourish in the most mundane instances of taking care about and loving.

3.4. Comparative Discussion: Patterns of Strategic Openness

The three interrelated patterns of strategic openness can be read when Gander, Graham, and Limon are read together.

Ecological Continuity Elegy (Gander):

Gander transforms the one who is grieved into a recognition of the shared biological life. In his elegies, he demonstrates how death imparts life and sorrow has a manner of connecting human beings with any form of living.

Forms of the Environment of Language (Graham):

Graham disfigures syntax and visual alienation to linguistic expression. The argument in her poems is that of an emotional numbness and leave the readers lost as part of environmental truth.

Intimacy as Resistance (Limon):

Limon grounds ecological awareness on the everyday life and thus tenderness is a survival tactic. The gap between personal feeling and world crisis is occupied with her inner thoughts.

Their combined works attest to the fact that emotion is even ecological. Grief, fear and tenderness are not only individual but also indicative of what is happening to the planet. The ecology of the poems, whose emotionality helps the readers in this situation open their eyes to the anthropocentric empathy, and the planetary compassion in the larger sense of this word.

4. Conclusion

Gander, Graham, and Limon are reviewed in the perspective of strategic openness, which helps observe that the role of modern poetry in developing the ecological awareness is significant. Their writings disconnect the association that environmental writing ought to be of wilderness or landscape. Instead, they demonstrate that the ecological awareness can be manifested through elegy, experiments with language, or self-examination. Gander redefines grief in the context of ecological continuity in his *Be With* that shows how life persists by means of interdependence. *Runaway* and *Sea Change* by Graham dramatize language of crisis and transform the environmental break down into the poetic language. “Almost Forty” and *The End of poetry* by Limon bring the climate crisis closer to the reader and caring and touch are transformed into ecological practices. Taken together, these poetic illustrations are a means to prove how strategic openness can help ecocriticism to grow beyond established frontiers. They show how literature can become the space of moral engagement, how literature can help us keep in mind that human beings and nonhumans are in an unstable and yet a permanent

relationship. Altogether, one understands that poetry is not only a product of ecological crisis; it is a matter of our understanding and response to environmental crisis. Strategic openness helps us to learn that every poem, no matter the subject of the poem can not only strengthen our ecological imagination but also remind us that we are part of the web of life.

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