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What Connection Requires:
Turtle Poetics in Mary Oliver and Linda Hogan

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[Abstract]

This article compares turtle poems by Mary Oliver and Linda Hogan to ask what ecological connection can, and cannot, establish about ethical responsibility. Across five poems, both writers unsettle human authority to interpret nonhuman life, yet their encounters differ in the histories they carry and the injuries they represent. Oliver's "The Turtle" and "Turtle" question anthropomorphic projection, imagine ecological kinship, and distinguish restraint before predation from assistance to an apparently displaced animal. Hogan's "Turtle," "Turtle Watchers," and "Song for the Turtles in the Gulf" place interspecies relations within embodied memory, qualified reciprocity, and industrial environmental violence. Reading the poems together reveals that recognizing interdependence does not determine what humans owe other beings. Ethical responses depend on the limits of perception, the particular histories of belonging, and distinctions among vulnerability, causal culpability, and collective implication. The comparison contributes to multispecies ethics and environmental justice by showing why relations across species require historically situated judgments rather than a uniform ethic of connection.

Keywords: Mary Oliver, Linda Hogan, ecocriticism, animal studies, ecological responsibility

1. Introduction

Turtles bring ecological processes into contact with human practices of interpretation, memory, and care. Their habitats and life histories vary, however, so that a turtle inhabiting a freshwater pond cannot simply be equated with one returning to a marine nesting ground. That difference matters for the poems considered here: the animal's recurrence makes comparison possible without turning turtles into a biologically or culturally uniform symbol. In American environmental poetry, the turtle can invite an observer to reconsider animal agency, recall relationships carried across generations, or confront damage produced by human institutions. Alicia Ostriker's "Move," for example, turns a nesting turtle's journey into questions about memory, instinct, and the human desire to interpret animal movement (40). In such writing, the turtle becomes a particularly revealing point of encounter between nonhuman lives and the meanings humans attach to them.

Mary Oliver's "The Turtle" and "Turtle" and Linda Hogan's "Turtle," "Turtle Watchers," and "Song for the Turtles in the Gulf" present encounters with turtles through observation, reproduction, memory, predation, rescue, and industrial violence. Comparing these poems is especially revealing because the recurrence of an animal does not produce a single kind of relation. Both poets question the human observer's authority and reject an understanding of nonhuman life as merely external to human existence. The significance of those shared commitments nevertheless changes with the circumstances of encounter. What can the observer know about another creature? What ecological, familial, or cultural histories shape the relation? What kind of harm occurs, and whose actions or institutions produce it? Taken together, these questions distinguish three dimensions too easily collapsed under the term interconnectedness: the limits of perception, the histories of belonging, and the causes and scales of

injury. The comparison tests how each dimension affects the ethical demands of relation rather than assuming that recognition of connection already supplies a rule for action.[1)]

Oliver's position within American nature poetry makes the first question especially important. Janet McNew places her work within and against the Romantic tradition, tracing its effort to imagine a subjectivity not secured by separation from an objectified natural world (59–77). Oliver's attention to an animal's material life thus inherits a concern with the observing self while repeatedly exposing the limits of that self's interpretations. Loreto reads the creatures in Oliver's poetry as acting through ecological processes irreducible to autonomous human intention, a problem visible in "The Turtle" (341), while Chun locates the poem's movement away from human virtues toward a wider network of animal life (137–39). The scholarship thus clarifies the poem's movement away from an isolated human subject, while leaving a further question about the observer's interpretive authority. Even the claim that the turtle knows her belonging remains the speaker's account of what an animal knows. The poem therefore cannot simply deliver unmediated access to nonhuman experience. Its Romantic inheritance is transformed into an inquiry into how attention both enables and limits ecological knowledge. This tension, rather than a presumed transparency between human and animal, provides one point of contact with Hogan.

Hogan's poems raise a related problem of animal encounter from a differently situated literary and cultural position. As a Chickasaw writer whose work draws on family memory and Indigenous histories, Hogan cannot be adequately represented by an undifferentiated category of Indigenous relationality; neither should an individual turtle image be treated as a transparent expression of Chickasaw tradition. Craig Womack's reading of "Turtle" connects its shell imagery with Southeastern women's ceremonial practices and the transmission of cultural memory (103–04). Hogan's own

recollection of being among “turtle people,” qualified by her insistence that this identification was “not from clan,” further cautions against reducing familial experience to a fixed tribal emblem (“To Take Care of Life”). Choi finds in Hogan’s *The Book of Medicines* (1993) a crossing of human and natural histories through coevolution (195–96, 211). Poks’s *Decolonial Animal Ethics in Linda Hogan’s Poetry and Prose* approaches Hogan’s animal writing through decolonial “re-minding” and the primacy of relationships (Lönngren 151–52). Lönngren also questions the risk of idealizing Indigenous relational worlds in a sweeping contrast with Western modernity (152–53). This debate helps specify our intervention: rather than assume that relation already secures an ethical response, the comparison asks how the poems make kinship imaginable while confronting uncertainty, vulnerability, and historically unequal powers to harm. Hogan’s turtles connect bodily memory with forms of injury that species interdependence alone cannot explain.

The shared vocabulary of connection consequently requires careful qualification. Oliver writes that “attention is the beginning of devotion” (*Upstream* 8), but devotion does not settle whether a person should interrupt predation or assist an animal displaced from a habitat. Hogan likewise calls for “wisdom . . . an old kind of knowing that respects a community of land, animals, plants, and other people as equal to ourselves” (*Dwellings* 133), yet respect for a shared world does not by itself identify the agents responsible for its destruction. The distinction is between recognizing a relation and determining what that relation demands in a particular situation. An encounter may call for restraint, an immediate response to vulnerability, or an account of institutional culpability and broader implication; these responses are neither interchangeable nor simply successive stages of moral awakening. Ecological interconnectedness establishes that lives are entangled, while ethical judgment must attend to what can be known, what histories bind the participants, and what produces

their vulnerability. This distinction also opens the poems onto animal ethics and debates over environmental responsibility without presuming that a single theoretical vocabulary can exhaust their differences.

The comparison also unsettles a familiar opposition between a supposedly universal Romantic nature poetry and a culturally grounded Indigenous ecological ethic. Oliver's work emerges from a tradition of attentive self-questioning, whereas Hogan's draws upon Chickasaw positionality, family remembrance, and histories of unequal power. Yet both poets imagine animal agency and kinship while acknowledging, sometimes uneasily, the human desire to interpret another creature's life. Their shared challenge to the observer's authority acquires different ethical force when the circumstances change: Oliver's displaced turtle calls forth a limited act of rescue, while Hogan's oil-covered turtle makes corporate violence and its wider implications impossible to overlook.

I argue that these differences reveal the ethical incompleteness of ecological interconnectedness. The question is not simply whether humans belong to a more-than-human world, as both poets suggest they do, but what such belonging demands when knowledge is uncertain, relationships carry distinct histories, and injuries arise from unequal forms of power. Oliver's poems bring the observer's projections into view and distinguish restraint before predation from assistance to a vulnerable animal; Hogan's place qualified reciprocity and embodied memory alongside an industrial catastrophe that cannot be remedied through individual care. In this sense, the poems illuminate one another without collapsing their cultural and poetic differences: the recognition of connection matters, but it cannot determine responsibility in advance.

2. Seeing the Turtle: Attention, Projection, and Animal Alterity

Both Oliver's "The Turtle" and Hogan's "Turtle Watchers" begin with acts of looking, yet neither allows looking to remain a simple encounter between an observing human and a passive animal. Oliver follows a turtle making her way from water to sand to lay her eggs, while Hogan recalls generations of humans watching turtles return from the sea before imagining a later encounter in which a turtle watches the swimmer beside it. Where Oliver asks the observer to revise meanings initially projected onto the turtle's behavior, Hogan gradually redistributes watching itself between human and turtle. In both poems, ecological attention begins when the animal exceeds the categories brought to the encounter.

Oliver stages this recognition through an explicit correction of the observer's first response. The poem follows the turtle as she breaks the surface of the water, drags her "mossy" shell through shallows and rushes, crosses the mudflats, and digs into the sand with "ungainly feet" (Oliver, *Dream Work* 57). These physical details invite the reader to watch closely, although observation soon gives way to interpretation. Seeing the labor of nesting, the speaker says:

> her white eggs down
> into the darkness, and you think
> of her patience, her fortitude,
> her determination to complete
> what she was born to do. (57)

Indeed, the second-person address implicates speaker and reader alike. "Patience," "fortitude," and "determination" translate the turtle's bodily effort into a familiar

human narrative of perseverance, purposeful labor, and moral character. Almost immediately, the poem revokes what it has encouraged the reader to think:

> and then you realize a greater thing—
> she doesn't consider
> what she was born to do.
> She's only filled
> with an old blind wish. (57)

The movement from "you think" to "you realize" gives the poem a self-correcting structure. The turtle does not become admirable because she possesses an especially heroic will; what appears from outside as determination is described as an impulse older than deliberation, a "wish" that is paradoxically "blind." Oliver asks the reader to withdraw a specifically human explanation at the moment when it seems most natural to apply one.

The following lines complicate the correction. The "old blind wish" "isn't even hers but came to her / in the rain or the soft wind, / which is a gate through which her life keeps walking" (Oliver, *Dream Work* 57). The turtle's activity cannot be reduced either to conscious intention or to an isolated instinct sealed inside an individual body. Rain, wind, season, reproduction, and animal movement converge in what she does. The poem first locates recognizably human values in the turtle before questioning whether they adequately describe behavior grounded in an embodied ecological principle (Chun 137–39). Loreto similarly reads the "old blind wish" not as an absence of animal agency but as activity distributed through turtle, weather, reproductive cycle, and surrounding world (341). Here agency need not mean humanlike intention; it names the turtle's capacity to act within processes exceeding individual conscious will.

The poem's formal sequence adds a further difficulty. "You think" and "you realize" make ecological perception a process in which seeing exposes the inadequacy of its own first explanation. The turtle is initially made familiar through human virtues and becomes strange again when those virtues are withdrawn. Yet the correction cannot stand wholly outside the interpretive practice it questions: "doesn't consider" and "old blind wish" are also human descriptions of a consciousness the observer cannot verify. Even the later assurance that the turtle "knows" her place in the world risks assigning the animal a certainty unavailable to the speaker. This does not invalidate Oliver's ecological insight; it makes the insight formally precarious. The second-person address invites readers to revise their judgments while withholding any position from which they could know the turtle without interpretation. Attention becomes an ethical discipline of revisability, not a guarantee of transparent access to animal experience. Here the poem both inherits and tests the Romantic ambition to find a less divided relation between perceiver and world.

Hogan's "Turtle Watchers" also begins with looking, but watching is multiple from the outset. An "old mother at water's edge" "used to bow down" toward turtles arriving from the sea (Hogan, *Rounding* 51). The child speaker sees the old woman, turtles with "their many eggs," and "hungry watchers standing at the edge of trees / hoping for food when darkness gathers" (51). Observation therefore has no single meaning. The old mother's bow resembles prayer; the child witnesses the scene; the hungry watchers look toward the turtles as possible sustenance. Reverence, memory, hunger, and survival occupy the same shoreline. The turtles themselves are "called back to where they were born" (51), so watching is already connected with return. The speaker remembers an older woman witnessing returning turtles, the turtles move toward their place of birth, and the adult speaker will later encounter another turtle through the memory of these earlier scenes. Hogan does not idealize the human-

animal encounter as pure contemplation; the shoreline is already inhabited by need, respect, and memory, as the speaker narrates:

> Years later, swimming in murky waters
> a sea turtle swam beside me
> both of us watching as if clasped together
> in the lineage of the same world
> the sweep of the same current, (Hogan, *Rounding* 51)

"Both of us watching" changes the arrangement of perception. The human no longer possesses the gaze exclusively. The turtle becomes another watching presence while the two bodies move through the same current and even rise "for a breath of air at the same time" (51). Their shared movement does not establish sameness; human and turtle remain differently embodied creatures. What changes is the assumption that sight travels only from knowing human subject to observed animal.

The mutuality of this scene recalls the relational animal ethics that Poks explores across Hogan's writing, as suggested by Lönngren (151–52, 154). Yet the poem's claim is more tentative than a general affirmation of reciprocal knowledge: human and turtle are "as if clasped together / in the lineage of the same world" (Hogan, *Rounding* 51). The conditional "as if" makes their shared movement perceptible without certifying access to what the turtle sees or understands. "Lineage" also gives the encounter temporal depth, anticipating the inherited and remembered relationships that Hogan's earlier "Turtle" makes more explicit.

The poem also qualifies its strongest claims through repeated "as if." Human and turtle watch "as if clasped together," and water later moves "back to birth and before / as if there is a path where beings truly meet, / as if I am rounding the human corners" (51). Hogan imagines the possibility of meeting without claiming that

interspecies understanding can ever be complete. “Rounding the human corners” does not require the speaker to cease being human or the turtle to become transparent to human knowledge. The encounter alters the shape of human self-understanding without erasing difference. This qualification brings Hogan closer to Oliver than a simple opposition would suggest. Oliver dramatizes the limits of knowing through the correction from “you think” to “you realize”; Hogan marks them through “as if.” Neither poet claims possession of animal consciousness. Their poems organize the difficulty differently. Oliver asks the observer to withdraw meanings projected onto the animal. Hogan imagines the gaze itself becoming mutual, so that the human is not only the one who sees but one whose place in the encounter is changed by another perceiving being.

Oliver’s correction of the observer’s first impression and Hogan’s qualified image of mutual watching thus approach the limits of human knowledge from different directions. In Oliver, the second-person address exposes the observer’s own interpretive habits; in Hogan, the recurring “as if” keeps the possibility of reciprocal perception open without turning it into certainty. Both poems make attention responsive to an animal whose experience cannot be fully possessed. That uncertainty becomes especially consequential when the turtle is imagined as kin, for the language of belonging may deepen care even as it risks speaking on the animal’s behalf.

3. Forms of Belonging: Turtle Bodies, Kinship, and Home

Oliver’s “The Turtle” answers the question of belonging through ecological nonseparation. The turtle does not reason herself into connection with her

surroundings; she lives through pond, weather, season, reproduction, trees, and birds. Hogan's earlier "Turtle," by contrast, makes the turtle a being through whom women imagine the past, bear animal forms upon their bodies, and recover continuities extending beyond an individual life. Both poets challenge the autonomous self, but belonging becomes perceptible in different ways: Oliver discovers it in ecological embeddedness, while Hogan makes it something remembered, embodied, and carried. The closing movement of Oliver's poem states this nonseparation directly:

> She can't see
> herself apart from the rest of the world
> or the world from what she must do
> every spring. (Oliver, *Dream Work* 57)

The language of being "apart" is crucial. The poem does not present two independent entities—animal and environment—that subsequently form a connection. The turtle's yearly movement belongs to a cycle in which rain, wind, reproductive impulse, pond, and body are already inseparable. The poem extends this condition through explicitly familial language: "she is a part of the pond she lives in, / the tall trees are her children," while the birds above her are "tied to her by an unbreakable string" (58). Oliver thus reaches toward kinship as well as ecological interdependence, but "children" expands nonseparation among coexisting forms of life rather than developing into genealogy or inherited cultural memory. Kinship is therefore not absent from Oliver; it is organized differently from the more explicitly intergenerational and culturally situated continuities that Hogan's turtle poems will make central.

Yoon contrasts the turtle's participation in an interconnected natural world with the human observer's attempt to recover connection through observation and

imagination (64–66). He also recognizes the anthropocentric limits of personification in Oliver's ecological project (62, 71). Extending that concern to this passage, we can ask what authority the speaker has to describe the turtle's own knowledge. The opposition between "she doesn't dream" and "she knows" (Oliver, *Dream Work* 58) still attributes a form of knowing to the turtle, even after the speaker has questioned human projections of animal intention. The poem's ecological nonseparation is persuasive as a description of material dependence; its assertion of what the turtle knows remains an imaginative human inference. Moreover, the turtle's nesting and seasonal return give this belonging reproductive and temporal dimensions, even if the poem does not develop them as inherited cultural memory. Oliver's achievement lies partly in making ecological participation visible through an observer whose knowledge remains limited.

Hogan's "Turtle" also begins with recovery, but its opening changes the meaning of return: "I'm dreaming the old turtle back" (Hogan, *Calling Myself Home* 3). "Back" gives the act of dreaming a temporal direction. The old turtle comes toward the present from a past the poem seeks to reopen, and "dreaming" makes the return imaginative rather than an objective reconstruction. Where Oliver's speaker learns to perceive belonging continuously present in the turtle's ecological life, Hogan calls something back into consciousness. The poem develops this return through an arresting transformation of animal and human bodies:

> We should open his soft parts,
> pull his shells apart
> and wear them on our backs
> like old women who can see the years
> back through his eyes. (Hogan, *Calling Myself Home* 3)

The passage resists an easy language of harmony. Its proposed actions are startlingly invasive: “open,” “pull,” and “wear” make the nonhuman body available to human hands and imagination. The turtle’s “soft parts” cannot be absorbed without remainder into an emblem of kinship. Yet the imagined wearing also unsettles possession, since the women, bearing shells “on our backs,” come to see the years “back through his eyes.” I read this double movement as central to the poem’s difficulty: an image of cultural and interspecies continuity emerges through gestures that might also threaten the creature whose vision is sought. The repeated “back” binds anatomy to memory without resolving the ethical cost of that imaginative crossing.

Embodiment matters because memory is imagined through shell, skin, back, age, and eyes rather than as information privately stored in the mind. The women imagine seeing “through his eyes,” but that possibility is staged through the disassembly of the very body that enables it. This tension matters to our comparison: where Oliver questions the authority of knowing an animal from outside, Hogan makes the desire to know through another body at once transformative and troubling. Womack provides cultural specificity without dissolving the tension. Discussing *Red Clay*, he identifies turtles as recurrent in Hogan’s early poetry, connects shells worn by women with Southeastern ceremonial practices involving turtle-shell shakers, and associates turtle vision with women’s transmission of cultural memory (103–04). The poem’s bodily crossing can therefore invoke situated practices of remembrance without becoming a universal symbol of seamless human–animal unity.

Cultural specificity need not make the turtle a fixed ethnographic symbol. Hogan herself describes its recurrence in *Calling Myself Home* through family and childhood memory. In her interview with Bruchac, she recalls a turtle caught in a pond near her grandfather’s house and stories that made the animal loom large in childhood

memory. She then states, “But we are turtle people,” immediately qualifying the phrase: “I don’t know why that is, not from clan or anything I can put a finger on.” She also remembers her grandmother speaking to a land turtle that seemed to respond to her language (“To Take Care of Life”). The qualification situates the poems within Hogan’s family experience without making her representative of a single, uniform Indigenous view of animals. The same interview links *Calling Myself Home* to the pond and Oklahoma landscape Hogan continued to carry as a formative center. “Home,” therefore, matters without requiring the turtle to become a symbol simply meaning *home*. The collection’s title joins self-naming with return, while “Turtle” makes return occur through an animal body remembered across time. The shell intensifies the association because shelter and body are materially inseparable in the turtle itself. When women imagine wearing shells “on our backs,” body, dwelling, and memory are drawn together without becoming interchangeable.

The comparison with Oliver becomes particularly revealing through two small words: Oliver’s turtle cannot see herself “apart” from the world, whereas Hogan’s women see the years “back” through turtle eyes. In Oliver, “apart” challenges an imagined separation between creature and environment; in Hogan, “back” gives belonging a past and a bodily cost. The distinction is not absolute. Oliver’s nesting turtle returns each spring, making reproduction and duration central to her ecological life, while Hogan’s imagined transformation also depends on a present act of perception. What differs is the pressure each poem places on these elements: Oliver foregrounds the limits of an observer’s claim to ecological knowledge, whereas Hogan’s shell makes historical continuity inseparable from the ambiguous handling of an animal body. “Lineage” in “Turtle Watchers” names a continuity that can be remembered and threatened, rather than simply assumed from shared existence.

Hogan’s essay “We Call It Tradition” gives this vocabulary further precision by

describing relationships and kinship with the living world as part of what is called "tradition" (20). The term situates relationship within practices of transmission and continuance: such ties have to be lived and carried rather than merely acknowledged as an ecological proposition. The women wearing turtle shells accordingly do more than demonstrate porous species boundaries. Their transformed bodies imagine how a tie with another creature can become a vehicle of cultural memory.

A broader pattern in Hogan's poetry reinforces this crossing of human history and nonhuman life. Transformation in *The Book of Medicines* has been read as challenging strict divisions between human and natural worlds through histories of coevolution (Choi 195–96, 211). Poks's *Decolonial Animal Ethics* situates *Calling Myself Home* within a larger project of relational animal ethics and decolonial "re-minding" (Lönngren 151–52, 154). Lönngren also questions the risk of idealizing Indigenous relational worlds through an overly sweeping opposition to modern Western society (152–53). This reservation sharpens the present reading: Hogan's "Turtle" makes kinship imaginable through an unsettling image of opening and wearing another body, rather than through a seamless vision of interspecies harmony. Our comparison with Oliver consequently attends to the formal and ethical tensions within each poet's representations of belonging, not merely to contrasting cultural traditions.

Belonging remains both sustaining and unsettled in these poems. Oliver's turtle inhabits a world of seasonal return, trees, birds, and weather, although the speaker's language of knowledge and kinship cannot escape the limits of human interpretation. Hogan's turtle joins women's bodies to family memory and cultural practice, even as the imagined opening of its shell complicates the intimacy being sought. Such tensions matter when the poems confront injury. The question of how creatures belong to one another becomes inseparable from what has happened to them and

what humans can, or should, do in response.

4. What Relation Requires: Predation, Intervention, and Environmental Violence

Recognizing that human and nonhuman lives inhabit shared worlds does not by itself determine what humans should do. An animal's vulnerability may call for assistance without making the observer responsible for causing its predicament; identifying the cause of an injury, in turn, does not settle the obligations of others who participate in the conditions that sustain it. Oliver's "Turtle" and Hogan's "Song for the Turtles in the Gulf" make these distinctions visible through contrasting scenes of harm. Oliver juxtaposes anticipated predation by a snapping turtle with an encounter involving another snapping turtle apparently displaced from captivity. Hogan confronts the death of a sea turtle amid industrial oil pollution. Their juxtaposition tests the central comparative claim of this article: connection becomes ethically consequential through the character of the encounter, the source of injury, and the possibilities and limits of response, rather than through belonging alone.

Oliver's poem first presents violence that an ecological ethic cannot simply prevent. Watching a snapping turtle follow a mother teal and her chicks, the speaker anticipates "the certain victory / of that pink and gassy mouth," the hen's "frantic / circling," and the remaining chicks scattering into the reeds (Oliver, *House of Light* 22). Her "heart / will be most mournful" for the birds, yet the poem abruptly asks, "what's important?" and answers:

Nothing's important

except that the great and cruel mystery of the world,
of which this is a part,
not to be denied. (23)

Here "cruel" registers suffering without converting predation into a moral offense. The speaker's grief is genuine, but it does not by itself authorize intervention. The snapping turtle is a predator, and saving the ducklings would mean exercising human preference on behalf of one animal against another. At the same time, the poem's appeal to the "great and cruel mystery" is not an uncomplicated ethical solution: mystery might acknowledge the limits of human judgment, but it can also risk making particular suffering seem beyond question. Oliver's distinction must therefore be read as a situated judgment about this encounter, not as a general principle that humans should never intervene in animal suffering.

The poem then alters the circumstances of judgment. On a city street the speaker finds a "dusty, fouled turtle" apparently escaped from "some backyard cage" and declares, "I knew what I had to do—" (Oliver, *House of Light* 23). Looking the turtle "right in the eyes," she places it in a knapsack "like a small mountain range," carries it away from the city, and releases it into a pond, "to live" (23). Unlike the threatened ducklings, this turtle appears exposed to danger through human captivity or displacement, although the poem does not identify who confined it or establish the full circumstances of its appearance on the street. Crucially, because the speaker is never represented as having caused the harm, her intervention responds to an encountered vulnerability without implying personal liability. This distinction matters because recognizing a creature's need may justify assistance even when causal responsibility lies elsewhere or remains uncertain. Nor does the rescue confer lasting human authority over the animal. The turtle, itself a snapping predator, is returned to conditions in which its life may continue independently of the rescuer. Oliver's "I

knew what I had to do" thus names a judgment formed within a particular encounter, while the release marks the limit of intervention. The poem differentiates grief without rescue from assistance without possession; neither response follows automatically from ecological interconnection.

Hogan's "Song for the Turtles in the Gulf" begins where restoration is no longer possible. The poem recalls a living encounter—"you willing to swim with me / just last month" (Hogan, *Dark. Sweet.* 348)—and replaces it with the spectacle of a dead body. The speaker sees "the man from British Petroleum / lift you up dead from the plastic / bin of death"; the turtle is "burned / and covered with red-black oil, torched / and pained" (348). The temporal proximity of "just last month" intensifies the loss: a creature recently encountered as a swimmer has become evidence of environmental catastrophe.

Hogan names British Petroleum, giving the injury a form of human agency absent from Oliver's anonymous "backyard cage." The contrast does not make Oliver's scene ethically trivial or Hogan's simply more advanced; it reveals what changes when a poem can identify an institution implicated in producing environmental harm. The dead turtle cannot be restored through a single act of rescue, and its condition directs attention toward oil extraction, industrial infrastructure, corporate decisions, and the unequal powers that organize them. The distinction between an immediate duty of assistance and accountability for producing harm becomes especially important here. Hogan's turtle has a "mosaic growth" in which no part is "simple" or "meaningless"; the poem contrasts human inability to create such life with the capacity to "destroy" it (348). The damaged body exposes the disproportion between technological power and the living complexity that power can extinguish.

The naming of British Petroleum also resonates with critiques of an undifferentiated Anthropocene, in which references to "humanity" can obscure

unequal agents and histories of ecological damage. Heather Davis and Zoe Todd caution that a generalized Anthropos may efface colonialism and petrocapitalism (763–65), while Kyle Powys Whyte emphasizes the unequal historical conditions through which environmental disruptions are experienced (153–54). Hogan's poem does not itself develop their theoretical accounts, but its naming of a corporation resists the flattening of responsibility into an abstract species-wide guilt. The distinction matters because acknowledging that humans share an endangered world is not the same as identifying who has the power to damage it.

Yet the poem does not end with an accusation directed exclusively toward a corporate "they." The speaker asks, "How can they learn / the secret importance / of your beaten heart," describes the turtle's "eyes of another intelligence / than ours, maybe greater," and then pleads, "Forgive us for being thrown off true, / for our trespasses" (Hogan, *Dark. Sweet.* 348). The change from "they" to "us" should not be treated as a shift between two equivalent scales of blame. The corporate agent named earlier remains distinguishable from the speaker, whose plural pronoun instead registers implication in a damaged world and the difficulty of claiming complete innocence within it. The language of "trespasses," with its echo of prayer and its suggestion of crossing a boundary one has no right to cross, makes this implication morally charged without specifying identical culpability for everyone included in "us."

The poem consequently differentiates identifiable agency from a more diffuse ethical implication. Naming British Petroleum keeps responsibility for industrial harm visible; "forgive us" asks what obligations remain for people who did not personally enact the injury but nevertheless inhabit the systems and relationships through which it occurs. These are related but nonidentical questions, and the poem does not offer a ready formula for distributing liability. Its ethical force lies partly in holding the

distinction open. The turtle's "another intelligence / than ours, maybe greater" further unsettles the human assumption that only what humans can fully understand merits protection. Hogan's prose likewise describes "an intelligence that is different from our own" (*Dwellings* 50). In the poem, the recognition of another intelligence intensifies the wrong of destruction while leaving the practical work of accountability unresolved.[2)]

The difference between these encounters clarifies the ethical problem at the heart of the comparison. Oliver's speaker refrains from interrupting predation but assists a turtle apparently exposed to danger through human interference; neither response requires her to claim mastery over the animal or responsibility for its original predicament. Hogan, facing a turtle already killed by oil pollution, names an industrial actor and then widens the poem's address to an implicated "us," without distributing blame equally. Where a living animal can be released, care takes the form of a bounded intervention; where the animal is dead, grief presses toward an account of the powers that made its death possible. The shared world these poems disclose is therefore no substitute for judgment about particular injuries.

5. Conclusion

The turtles in Oliver's and Hogan's poems resist being reduced to objects of human knowledge, although each poet approaches that resistance through a different poetic encounter. Oliver's second-person address exposes the observer's tendency to assign motives to a nesting animal; Hogan's "as if" allows the possibility of a shared gaze to remain open without certifying it. The resulting uncertainty is productive. It makes attention a practice of revising human claims, while reminding us that another

creature's life continues beyond what the observer can understand.

The poets also complicate any easy division between ecological belonging and culturally remembered kinship. Oliver's nesting turtle participates in seasonal return and an extended family of trees and birds; Hogan's turtle shell joins animal embodiment to women's memory, while the imagined act of opening and wearing it makes intimacy ethically uneasy. Their poems thus offer overlapping yet differently situated ways of imagining a shared world, a contrast that sharpens when injury enters the scene. Oliver distinguishes predation, before which compassion need not justify intervention, from an apparently displaced turtle whose vulnerability prompts assistance. Hogan names British Petroleum in a scene where rescue is no longer possible, then shifts from identifiable agents of harm to the implicated "us" of her plea for forgiveness. Responding to an animal in need, causing its injury, and participating in wider damaging arrangements remain distinct ethical positions.

What emerges from these differences is an account of multispecies ethics attentive to the circumstances in which care and accountability become necessary. Oliver's rescue gives practical force to a response to vulnerability even when the cause of harm remains unknown; Hogan's naming of British Petroleum insists that environmental violence cannot be understood through an undifferentiated appeal to human responsibility. Indeed, the poems invite us to hold animal agency, cultural memory, and institutional power within the same ethical field without treating them as interchangeable. Their contribution lies in this demand for discrimination: connection makes another life matter to us, but the obligations it generates must still be judged in light of history, injury, and the unequal capacity to cause or remedy harm.

Notes

1) The five-poem corpus comprises Oliver's "The Turtle" from *Dream Work* (1986) and "Turtle" from *House of Light* (1990), alongside Hogan's "Turtle" from *Calling Myself Home* (1978), "Turtle Watchers" from *Rounding the Human Corners* (2008), and "Song for the Turtles in the Gulf," cited here from *Dark. Sweet.: New & Selected Poems* (2014). The selection brings similarly named poems into dialogue without assuming that freshwater and marine turtles have identical ecologies or that these poems exhaust either writer's animal poetry.

2) The poem's "us" marks a collective implication in damaged ecological relations; it does not establish that all people have equal power over, or responsibility for, the industrial practices named in the poem. The distinction between participation in a harmful system and direct culpability remains central to this reading.

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국문초록

연결이 요구하는 것:
메리 올리버와 린다 호건의 거북이 시학

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이 논문은 메리 올리버와 린다 호건의 거북이 시 다섯 편을 비교하여 생태적 연결이 인간의 윤리적 책임을 어디까지 설명할 수 있는지 살펴본다. 두 시인은 모두 인간이 비인간 생명을 해석하고 통제할 수 있다는 믿음에 의문을 제기하지만, 거북이와의 만남에 담긴 역사와 그 만남을 위협하는 위해의 양상은 서로 다르다. 올리버의 "The Turtle"과 "Turtle"은 동물에게 인간의 의도를 투사하는 시선을 되돌아보고 생태적 친연성을 드러내는 한편, 포식 앞에서의 절제와 인간의 개입으로 제자리를 잃은 듯한 동물에 대한 구조를 구분한다. 호건의 "Turtle," "Turtle Watchers," "Song for the Turtles in the Gulf"는 종을 가로지르는 관계를 몸에 새겨진 기억, 상호적인 듯하면서도 불확실한 지각, 산업 활동이 초래한 환경 폭력 속에서 탐색한다. 이러한 비교는 생태적 상호의존성을 인식하는 것만으로 다른 생명에 대한 의무가 정해지지는 않는다는 점을 보여준다. 윤리적 대응은 동물을 이해하는 방식의 한계, 관계가 품은 문화적·역사적 기억, 그리고 취약성에 대한 응답과 위해의 인과적 책임, 더 넓은 구조에 대한 연루 사이의 차이에 따라 달라진다. 따라서 본 논문은 다종 간 윤리와 환경정의의 논의에 기여하면서, 인간과 비인간의 관계를 하나의 보편적 연결 원리로 환원하기보다 개별적인 만남과 역사적 조건에 비추어 판단해야 함을 강조한다.

주제어: 메리 올리버, 린다 호건, 생태비평, 동물연구, 생태적 책임

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