

Apology to the ecosystem: A Stylistic Analysis of Linda Hogan's "Song for the Turtles in the Gulf"

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ABSTRACT

This paper conducts a stylistic analysis of Linda Hogan's eco-friendly poem "Song for the Turtles in the Gulf," examining its ecological concerns through the exploration of tone, symbols, images, personification, and intertextuality. Against the background of the 2010 BP oil spill, this poem issues a reflection on the disastrous impact of human endeavoring and development on the environment and, more specifically, sea turtles. This paper provides an analysis of how Hogan uses literary elements to appeal to the emotions and raise awareness about the environment to show that the poem challenges contemplation and rightful action in view of the raging environmental degradation. The analysis emphasizes the turtle as a symbol of vulnerability and environmental degradation. Moreover, the paper also analyzes some selected techniques of Hogan, such as personification and intertextuality, which make the reader think more about the ecological context and humanity's critical position on it. In conclusion, this research benefits the field of ecocriticism by showing that close reading of literature enriches the moral and affective calls of environmental literature.

1. Introduction

Linda Hogan's *Song for the Turtles in the Gulf* is a powerful poetic piece that is about the death of sea turtles and how the human has brought death to them and their eggs. Alakhdar (2019) says that the poem draws inspiration from the 2010 BP oil spill and explores the stance people adopt in response to recent ecological disasters. Hogan employs this iconic representation of a turtle whose lifeless body symbolizes the loss not of an individual species but of a total ecosystem we largely depend on for our sustenance on earth. Hogan writes in this gloomy style so that the reader can think about the turtle, its shell, its breath, and its brain, as well as the harsh reality that people's carelessness could kill it off. It is a poem telling the conscience of man about the consequences of actions affecting other species, regardless of how strange, ugly, or unnatural they may look (DesMonD, 2023).

In the regard of Hogan's concern, the paper seeks to analyze various interactions between metaphoric diction and literary devices in raising ecological awareness. This study is therefore rooted in the emerging issue of ecological disasters, especially the consequent impacts of the disaster, such as the oil spill by BP, which have had adverse and enduring impacts on the environment and on creatures. In this connection, the poem by Hogan serves as the language for mourning, guilt, and the appeal to "green" repentance.

The goal of this analysis is to (i) look at the tone of the poem; (ii) look at how symbolism and imagery are used as stylistic devices; and (iv) look at personification in the poem and how it relates to (v) intertextuality in the way it makes us think and feel about environmental issues. Through these elements, the study aims to reveal how Hogan goes beyond producing an aesthetic effect; she aims to multiply the ecological themes within the text. Furthermore, this analysis helps us better understand how literature can reflect on and evaluate environmental practices. However, the present paper pays particular focus on personification and intertextual references used in the poem and, thus, emphasizes that the environment should not be regarded as an object to use but as a living being that is worth sparing, respecting, and loving.

The research by Alakhdar (2019) and DesMonD (2023) examines thematic elements of Linda Hogan's *Song for the Turtles in the Gulf* relative to environmental disasters such as the BP oil spill. Research on Linda Hogan's *Song for the Turtles in the Gulf* misses the vital contributions of stylistic devices to the work. The absence of research regarding Hogan's stylistic techniques to create environmental personification led this study into analysing her implementation of three literary devices. Through her work, Hogan develops an empathetic "green repentance" by treating environmental elements as living beings. This analysis reveals the poem's dual purpose: Through environmental grief and educational means, the text seeks to urge ecological stewardship.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Stylistic Analysis: A conceptual review

According to Carter (2010), the study of stylistic features in poetry typically focuses on language use, images, and appeals. Leech & Short (2007) identified that tone or standard choice can be employed for the purpose of reporting the emotional condition of the speaker and the ethical position of the writer. Hogan's poem is mournful and lamenting as the speaker, after having considered the death of the turtle and the destruction of the natural environment by human recklessness, reflects on the loss.

Symbolism greatly contributes toward the development of the ecological themes of the poem. Volume symbols in environmental poetry indicated that there are hidden meanings that show the interconnectivity of living organisms proposed, (Gebauer, 1987); (Devrim & Bektas, 2016). Hogan's work associates the turtle with the tenderness of nature and endangered species threatened by human activities. Logo of death: the turtle, lifeless and covered in oil, signifies the death brought on by industrialization, especially for the Gulf of Mexico oil disaster.

Cuddon (2013) argues that characterizing an object in poetry enhances the depth of feeling that a reader gets with that object. Both compassionate and sophisticated, Hogan anthropomorphically baptizes the turtle as “the beautiful swimmer,” at other times “old wonderful mother.” This personification therefore brings out the dignity of the turtle and its place in the natural world; hence, it brings out the mournful side of things. As Hogan gives voice and character to the turtle, he underscores the feeling tones of ecological loss, and by so doing, he asks readers to grieve for this creature like a lost loved one.

Kristeva (1980) postulated that intertextuality refers to a work's ability to quote or parodically rewrite other literary or cultural texts. *Sophisticated Overtones: Native American Influence and a Brief Discussion of Ecological Postcoloniality* Hogan incorporates Native American mythology and ecological theory as intertextual elements of *Song for the Turtles in the Gulf* to comment satirically on the methods in industrialized countries and the resulting damage to the environment (Hogan, *Native American poetry: A Voice for the Earth*, 2000). This intertextual aspect enriches the poem's ecological theme and makes the connection with a broader denotative and normative system of thought and action.

2.2 Ecocriticism: A critical review

Critical studies representing the relationship between nature and literature form the core of ecocritical disciplines. This field investigates how literature depicts natural interactions and environmental critique, including efforts to transform human behaviour in the face of ecological challenges. According to scholar Cheryll Glotfelty (1996), ecocriticism involves studying how literature interacts with physical environments, but Lawrence Buell (1995) centres the field's ethical responsibility to environmental practice. According to Greg Garrard (2012), ecocritical analysis evaluates literary works based on their cultural meaning within ecological contexts and their responsiveness to environmental emergencies. According to Jonathan Bate (1991), literary works either maintain existing perspectives of nature or serve to reshape them. Ecocritical scholarship unites literary interpretation with ecology to develop ecosystem awareness, which sustainability gains through cultural products such as art.

The new multidisciplinary field of ecocriticism aims to analyze and make sense of literary works in terms of the natural world, as well as to think about how literature and environmental issues are connected (Moulton & Salo, 2022). Ecocriticism has evolved from its beginnings in the early 1990s and now includes such things as an analysis of literary representations of the environment and the way that narrative structures inform discussions of ecological disasters (Garrard, 2014). Reading Hogan's poem in the context of ecocriticism, it becomes possible to decipher the meaning of the *Song for the Turtles in the Gulf* as an opposition to the destructive forces with an appeal for the recognition of the ecological self.

During the past decade, however, ecocriticism has also focused on a paradigm that makes narrative central to the formation of public opinion on environmental concerns. Literature both represents ecological facts and shapes environmental perceptions through cultural discourses. Heise (2016). Gaard (1993) points out that works of fiction contain an implicit call to care for nature—a culture that is represented as frail and as requiring consideration. Nevertheless, a blooming field in ecocriticism studies is the way literature reflects the

particular environmental event. The BP oil spill that occurred in the Gulf of Mexico became one of the most massive ecological calamities of the recent period and has been explored in many ecological texts (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015). That is why Hogan's poem fills the gap and provides a reader with a passionate and heartfelt reaction to the event, including the turtle as an allegorical figure to the whole problem. Due to this, the poem highlights the real effects of the disaster on species and the primary, personal, and corporal sensations, though it reminds us of the detrimental effects of industrialization.

3. Research Methodology

The present study aims to conduct a detailed stylistic analysis of Linda Hogan's *Song for the Turtles in the Gulf*, with a particular focus on the following key literary devices: As for the compositional techniques analyzed, the analytical part will identify tone, symbolism, imagery, personification, intertextuality, as well as ecological connotations. The study methodology will use qualitative, close reading techniques that will put emphasis on the features of the poetic text. This will help for a better analysis of how language, organization, and these aspects of features of the poem add to the themes of concern focused on environmental apology and awareness. Moreover, the eco-criticism theory, which links literature to ecological issues, will underpin this analysis. This will provide the ability to approach the poem with enough distance and disinterest so as to analyze the more symbolic and ecological aspects associated with the work. The poem itself, specifically its text, will serve as the primary source of data. The full verses will not be analyzed due to the fact that the function of the above-mentioned stylistic devices will be studied with reference to special lines.

A wide range of ecocritical and literary theories will serve as foundations for the research as supporting evidence to analyse the poem's ecological elements. The understanding of how literary tools together with language function to display environmental awareness developed by these scholars establishes vital context while analysis proceeds. According to Buell (2001), literature that weaves human elements with non-human components promotes an enhanced ecological awareness—a concept matching Hogan's portrayal of nature's delicate state.

3.1 Data Analysis Procedures

The analytical part incorporates close reading to select the appropriate words, phrases or lines in the poem that are associated to the main focus of this paper.

4. Findings

This study finds that through its stylistic techniques of tone, symbolism, imagery, and personification, as well as intertextuality, Linda Hogan's *Song for the Turtles in the Gulf* provides an insight into environmental issues. The five literary techniques focus on exercising the sentiments and reason of the reader by provoking concern about the environmental degradation caused by human activities, with a focus on the BP oil leak. Furthermore, the poem effectively raises the reader's awareness about potential environmental issues through the use of stylistic figures and an exceptional approach to depicting ecological themes. Through the use of tone, symbolism, imagery, personification, and intertextuality, Hogan

draws attention to the damage that people do to the environment and the ways that we see and understand the natural world differently. The precise representation of Findings is presented below:

Table 1: Findings of the study

Analytical Concepts	Findings
Tone	The tone of the poem is gloomy and guilt; the phrases like "the plastic bin of death", "only destroyed", and "Forgive us for being thrown off true" reveal sadness.
Symbolism	Regarding symbolism, "the beautiful swimmer," "old great mother," "the mosaic growth of shell", "burned and covered with red-black oil" serve various symbolic intricate in the poem
Imagery	Vivid imagery, such as "ocean of splendor and light," "the very air you exhaled when you rose" and the repetition of "destroyed" ecological loss.
Personification	Personification infuses "You are willing to swim with me", "old great mother," "beaten heart", "eyes of another intelligence" and many more.
Intertextuality and Ecological References	The "BP oil" ties the poem to references which promote respect for nature.

5. Discussion and Analysis

5.1. Tone

The tone in the "Song for the Turtles in the Gulf" shows regret, guilt, and sorrow. The speaker laments the destruction of the turtle, its past liveliness with the violent death shown in phrases like "the plastic bin of death" and "torched and pained". Thus, the speaker's use of phrases such as "I loved your life" and "only destroyed" conveys grief and places the blame on humanity's ignorance. This is made even more explicit in the remorse of the speaker, seen in "Forgive us for being thrown off true" and "our trespasses;" coupled with the lamentation of a lost life, it speaks of sadness but also humanity's sin.

5.2. Symbolism

Symbolism plays a pivotal role in deepening the poem's emotional impact and conveying its themes of environmental devastation and human culpability. The turtle, emblematic of nature's delicate beauty and resilience, serves as a potent symbol of life itself, "the beautiful swimmer," "old great mother", who represents the earth's intricate ecosystems. The phrase "the mosaic growth of shell" further enhances the turtle's symbolic connection to the interconnectedness and uniqueness of natural life, suggesting that nature's complexity cannot be replicated by human hands, only destroyed. The imagery of the turtle "burned and covered with red-black oil" evokes a tragic symbol of ecological destruction, directly referencing the 2010 BP oil spill and illustrating the ravaging effects of industrial pollution on the environment. This tragic image of death contrasts sharply with the earlier vision of the turtle's life in the "ocean of splendor and light," reinforcing the symbolism of loss. The speaker's invocation of the turtle's "eyes of another intelligence" underscores a belief in the inherent value and wisdom of the non-human world, positioning the turtle as a symbol of a greater intelligence than that of humankind. Finally, and lastly, through the turtle, Hogan

tries to encourage people to think about how humans treat the soil and all the living things in it, to recognize the sin of destroying habitats that are priceless in the world today.

5.3. Imagery

The use of vivid imagery creates a powerful emotional and sensory experience, depicting the poem's themes of ecological loss and human guilt. The phrase "ocean of splendor and light" conjures an image of a pristine, radiant natural world, a sharp contrast to the darker imagery that follows. The "reflections and distortions of us" suggest the complicated relationship between humans and nature, where our actions both shape and distort the world around us. The image of the turtle "burned and covered with red-black oil" is stark and visceral, evoking a sense of violence and irreversible harm. The "bin of death" further amplifies the brutal, dehumanizing impact of environmental disaster, turning the sea into a graveyard. The description of the turtle's shell as "mosaic growth" emphasizes its intricacy and beauty, evoking a sense of natural artistry, while the repetition of "destroyed" highlights the permanence of the damage. Imagery like "the very air you exhaled when you rose" imbues the turtle with a life force, emphasizing its importance within the ecosystem. Additionally, the portrayal of the turtle's "eyes of another intelligence" invokes a sense of mystery and depth, suggesting the turtle's wisdom and perspective are beyond human comprehension. In combination with each other, these images produce a rather multisensory understanding of the poem and its emotional charge, as well as the message for the readers that they failed to respect the environment as humans should have done.

5.4. Personification

Personification is a key stylistic device that infuses the natural world with human-like qualities, deepening the emotional resonance of the poem. The turtle is portrayed as a conscious, sentient being capable of willing action, as seen in the phrase "You are willing to swim with me," which endows the turtle with intentionality and agency. Opposed to humans who harm the environment, their actions are portrayed as mechanical and destructive in the media. The media further personifies the turtle as "old great mother," an archetypal figure that evokes nurturing, wisdom, and the interconnectedness of life. The reference to the turtle's "beaten heart" gives the creature a palpable, human-like vulnerability, symbolizing both physical and metaphorical damage inflicted upon the ecosystem. Hogan describes the turtle's eyes as possessing "another intelligence / than ours," implying an awareness that surpasses human comprehension. In attributing these human characteristics to the turtle, Hogan bestows it with extraordinary qualities; human beings should acknowledge them as wise and valuable. This personification adds more emotions to this poem and makes people think about what it implies to lose not just a certain species but something much, much more.

5.5. Intertextuality and Ecological References

Linda Hogan's *Song for the Turtles in the Gulf*, interconnected and interwoven with intertexts, takes on the challenge of raising environmental consciousness and invoking cultural responsibility in response to the crisis threatening the natural world. One that is rather striking, and the first that comes to mind, is the reference to British Petroleum (BP)—the spill that refers to the disastrous 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil disaster that caused one of the worst ecological tragedies of recent decades. By mentioning BP directly in the poem, Hogan moves the poem into the present age of destructive productions on nature scenarios, making the

readers aware of the effects of human interference in the natural world. A naturalistic symbol, the turtle is associated with global environmental issues. Its "beaten heart" and "eyes of another intelligence" may also echo a broader environmental discourse that critiques human-centric views, suggesting that non-human creatures possess wisdom and value that humanity often overlooks or undermines. The phrase "bin of death," a stark image that evokes both literal and symbolic death, connects to the growing global conversation on pollution, especially plastic waste, further reinforcing the ecological theme. The turtle's "mosaic growth of shell" as a unique and complex design also relates to broader ecological ideas of biodiversity. It shows how each species is a part of a bigger, interconnected system that humans have damaged. Hogan's use of "old great mother" draws on spiritual and mythological references to nature, similar to the Earth Mother archetypes found in many indigenous cultures. This gives the poem even more of an intertextual foundation that stresses respect for nature. Thus, Herman's ecological and intertextual concern exposes human negligence while simultaneously advocating for a profound understanding of the value of the earth's ecosystems.

6. Conclusion

Song for the Turtles in the Gulf discusses the human effect on the environment and provides an enriched analysis through stylistic features. The poem has a sorrowful tone; the speaker mourns the death of a turtle and its life less privileged, and this mourning is shared to mean a shared guilty conscience. Using vivid imagery, Hogan turns the turtle into a symbol of natural art, appealing to the readers' reason and asking them the same question about the worth of life and the planet where it takes place. Vivid imagery, such as the contrast between the "ocean of splendor and light" and the turtle's tragic fate, evokes a visceral understanding of ecological destruction. Personification elevates the imagery by presenting a turtle not just as an animal, but as an individual with its own consciousness and free will, deserving of appreciation and protection. Through these cultural references, such as the BP oil disaster and mythological Earth Mother figures, the poem widens the discursive possibilities of ecology and brings the discussion of environmental concerns back to human values and spirituality. Thus, the poem of Hogan reveals humanity's sin against the environment and calls for serious reconsideration of its position in respect to the Earth and its inhabitants.

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Appendix: The poem's text

Song for the Turtles in the Gulf by Linda Hogan

We had been together so very long,
you willing to swim with me
just last month, myself merely small
in the ocean of splendor and light,
the reflections and distortions of us,
and now when I see the man from British Petroleum
lift you up dead from the plastic
bin of death,
he with a smile, you burned
and covered with red-black oil, torched
and pained, all I can think is that I loved your life,
the very air you exhaled when you rose,
old great mother, the beautiful swimmer,
the mosaic growth of shell
so detailed, no part of you
simple, meaningless,
or able to be created
by any human,
only destroyed.
How can they learn
the secret importance
of your beaten heart,
the eyes of another intelligence
than ours, maybe greater,
with claws, flippers, plastron.
Forgive us for being thrown off true,
for our trespasses,
in the eddies of the water
where we first walked.