

The Theory of Nature: From Romantic Idealism to Contemporary Ecologies in the Works of Juliana Spahr and Alice Oswald

Assist. Lect. Hanan Jamal Ali.

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research / Al-Qadisiyah University

Abstract. *This paper focuses on how Juliana Spahr and Alice Oswald's work modernizes the Romantic ideals of 'Nature' about ecopoetics. For Romantic writers such as Wordsworth and Emerson, 'Nature' promised transcendence, the ethereal, and the virtuous. In the twenty-first century, poets see 'Nature' as delicate, tangled, and chaotic due to the ecological crisis and human touch. Juliana Spahr's *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs* imagines the atmosphere as a lyrical commons of breath where intimacy and global violence, ecological intimacy, and domination coexist. Alice Oswald's *Dart* creates a polyphonic ecology where a river, workers, and other-than-humans speak to one another, dramatizing the interpenetrating and collaborative world we share. This study claims, based on ecocriticism, new materialism, and posthumanism, that both poets extend the lyric to move 'beyond' representation in order to think nature as interdependence, agency, and shared responsibility. Oswald and Spahr are positioned within the longer line of Romantic idealism and Anthropocene ecologies to show how contemporary lyric poetry serves as a type of ecological theory.*

Key words: *romanticism; ecopoetics; relationships Juliana Spahr and Alice Oswald; theory of nature; anthropocene.*

1. Introduction

From philosophy, literature, and culture, the issue of the theory of nature has always received attention, criticism especially. Nature evolved as a powerful construct of the sublime Romanticism of the long eighteenth century. Restoring the moral imagination and offering transcendence was nature's gift (Bate, 2000; Buell, 2005). Disturbing as it was, this vision also was based on a lyric subject within her solitude and a disproportionate seeing self and seen. Romanticism needs a new peering since, with the dawn of industrial modernity, the speeds of extractive economies, and especially over the last few decades, the global crises of climate change and mass extinction. As with all periods and movements, Romanticism also is subjected to reconsideration, and so do modern poets and theorists. They aim to render nature as more than a passive setting, as a place of plurality, agency and ethics (S. Garrard, 2011; Morton, 2013; Haraway, 2016). This inquiry explores how contemporary lyric poetry is centuries reassessed in its participation through two of its foremost ecopoetic practitioners: Juliana Spahr and Alice Oswald. Spahr's *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs* (2005) offers the atmosphere as a tender, yet permeable, vessel of life where intimacy and violence coagulate in the split of a breath. Oswald's *Dart* (2002) offers, in stark contrast, the river as a phonetic, multi-voiced mat, weaving together strands of human, animal, and mythic speech. In their own ways, both poets engage with the long Romantic legacy of lyrical nature, reanimating it with contemporary ecopoetic concerns.

This study posits in Spahr and Oswald the lineaments of a trajectory from Romantic idealism to twenty-first-century ecologies, taking up the case that ecopoetics serves a contemporary theory of nature. Through close reading, theoretical framing, and comparative synthesis, the study illustrates

how lyric poetry formulates a theory of ecological entanglement and articulates ethical modes of response to the Anthropocene.

The goal of this research is to investigate the ways in which both Juliana Spahr's and Alice Oswald's poetry recasts the Romantic understanding of 'Nature' through contemporary ecopoetics. Through both poets' pioneering applications of the lyric genre, our research will illustrate how they are able to take this traditional concept of literature and push it into an ecological realm that prioritizes inter-being, nonhuman agency, and mutual ethical obligation. By working across ecocriticism, new materialism, and posthumanist philosophy, we argue that contemporary lyric poetry is a mode of ecological theory that critically responds to the conditions of the Anthropocene while still maintaining a critical conversation with Romantic idealism.

Using an examination of current lyric poetry as a basis for this study, we will analyze the ways in which contemporary works (in particular those of Juliana Spahr and Alice Oswald) challenge the Romantic ideals of nature in light of present day issues related to environmental crisis. We will evaluate the way these two poets see themselves, others, and their world; each poet constructs an understanding of nature from their own perspective with the intent to create an awareness of connectedness with other beings, including both people and the environment. By examining their works through this lens, we may come to a greater understanding of how poetry can effectively communicate with society and assist in resolving the ecological crises faced by humanity.

2. Theoretical Framework

The focus of this study relies on the intersection of ecocriticism, ecopoetics, posthumanist theory, and studies of the Anthropocene. The ecocritical approach to literature, particularly the work of Lawrence Buell (2005)—along with Greg Garrard's (2011) identification of the major tropes of pollution, apocalypse, and dwelling central to ecological reading—forms the basis for interpreting literary works as ecological discourses. Building on this, the discipline of ecopoetics provides the framework within which poetry is regarded as a mode of theorizing nature, rather than a representation of nature. Bate (2000) illustrates this with the argument that poetry is itself ecological thought, and Clark (2015) develops this position on the lyric form as a means to articulate the Anthropocene.

Similarly, Posthumanist and new materialist thinkers reconceptualize nature by putting human subjectivity on the periphery. Rosi Braidotti (2013) and Haraway (2016) both advocate for multispecies relationality and shared vulnerability as vital to an ecological imagination, and Jane Bennett (2010) with her concept of 'vibrant matter' stresses the agency of nonhuman elements. These theoretical strands elucidate how Alice Oswald's *Dart* articulates a river as a polyphonic subject, while Juliana Spahr's *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs* transforms the atmosphere into an engaged commons of interconnection. Moreover, the Anthropocene resonates with the urgency of their scholarship. Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009) rethinks history as constructively tied to planetary systems, while Timothy Morton (2013) offers the term 'hyperobjects' for ecological realities that are distributed, omnipresent, and inescapable, such as climate change or pollution. Ursula Heise's "sense of planet" (2008) touches upon the same issue of how ecological thinking needs to integrate global structures with local attachments. These perspectives cumulatively justify the article's approach to Spahr and Oswald not as "nature poets" in the traditional sense, but instead as ecologists who seek to communicate a new theory of nature using lyricism.

3. Methodology

The methodology of this study employs close reading, comparative reading, and integration of theoretical work within the environmental humanities. An analysis begins with an examination of the formal features of Spahr's *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs* and Oswald's *Dart*, focusing on how the refrain, repetition, polyphony, and the imagery of air and water operate as theoretical devices and not as ornamental structures. These close readings are then treated in comparative relation in order Spahr's consideration of air corresponds well to Jane Bennett's (2010) "vibrant matter." In her poems, air is not a mere backdrop but an active component of experience. Air holds pollen, poisons, viruses, and chemical byproducts; it is communicative and illuminating; it is a precondition to life. By air's connection as a mode of communion, Spahr, via acts of silences, bestows agency to

nonhuman worlds. The intersubjective atmosphere is not just an environment we access; it is an environment that accesses us, affecting our state of health, emotion, and even our social polity. The attribution of agency to atmosphere positions Spahr within posthumanist ecopoetics. Her poetry reveals the microparticle and flow dynamics that sustain, and threaten life. From this perspective, theory might suggest that in her lyrics, poetry is the medium that reveals the active multiplicity of agency within collapsed ecologies. To show the different but balancing approaches each poet utilizes: Spahr conceives of the global atmosphere as commons, fragile, continuously at risk, and every breathing person is an implicating self. In contrast, Oswald imagines the river as a polyphonic speaking community in resistance against anthropocentric and controlling hierarchies. Contextualization as a method is also vital. For both poets, the context of Romantic idealism, particularly Wordsworth and Emerson's views of nature as a moral and spiritual guide and how their works subsequently revise and transform this lineage.

Locating Spahr and Oswald within this trajectory, as with the other poets studied here, reveals how lyric poetry partakes in the Romantic yearning for transcendence and, more recently, an infatuation with entangled ecologies. Throughout, the integration of theory is such that, while the interpretation of the texts engages with other works of Buell, Garrard, Bate, Clark, Bennett, Haraway, Morton, and others, the lyric allows this boundary to be registered and for the poetry to be viewed not simply as an illustration of the discourse. Finally, for Spahr, the scope of the study is, by design, confined to this Connection of Everyone with Lungs and Oswald's Dart, as the two works strategically emphasize and position the ecology of the media of air and water as sites of the most profound integration of lyric form with ecological theory.

4. Juliana Spahr: Atmosphere and the Lyrical Commons

Juliana Spahr's *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs* (2005) has become one of the defining texts of What Juliana Spahr has done in her *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs* (2005) is has become one of the defining texts of ecopoetics. The book's intimate and planetary spaciousness has become one of the defining characteristics of Spahr's work. Published by the University of California Press in the New California Poetry series, the book's melding of lyricism and politics is unparalleled. Spahr's long, sinuous sequences conflate the most personal registers of address—"beloveds"—with acts of warfare, environmental and ecosystem violence, and the degradation of the biosphere. The volume's spine is organized around the metaphor and the reality of breath: to breathe is to exist with others, human and otherwise, in relation. It is to share the atmosphere, which is at once a commons, and an equally fragile and inescapable reality.

4.1. Breathing as Poetic and Ecological Method

Breathing functions in Spahr's poetry both literally and metaphorically. The opening poem of *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs* begins by naming the simple fact of shared breath:

"There are these things: cells, the movement of cells and the division of cells, and then the general swelling of cells... and they are connected." (Spahr, 2005, p. 3)

The poem expands this cellular image outward into the act of respiration, affirming that the air we inhale and exhale connects us to everyone else on the planet. This ecological fact becomes the foundation of Spahr's lyric voice. The refrain-like structure, repeating "there are these things," mirrors the rhythm of breathing itself, rendering poetic form into an ecological metaphor (Chisholm, 2014). The refrain is not merely decorative; it is constitutive of the poem's meaning. As Chisholm (2014) argues, Spahr creates what she calls an "eco-frame," in which repetition and accumulation emphasize the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman bodies. Breathing here is both necessity and vulnerability: what we breathe sustains us, but it also exposes us to toxins, pollutants, and war debris. In this sense, Spahr demonstrates how lyric can function as a theoretical medium for ecological entanglement.

4.2. The Atmosphere as Commons

Spahr maintains the stance that the air is a publicly available resource which cannot be owned or restricted. In this case, her poetry echoes most vividly Timothy Morton's (2013) notion of '

hyperobjects', which includes climate change or global warming and other phenomena that stretch across spatio-temporal matrices. Air is exactly such a medium: cloaked, plentiful and unavoidable. It resists delineation and renders every individual participant in planetary networks of exchange. The political consequences of this are enormous. Spahr composed the book during the early 2000's while the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were ongoing. The poems contain references to bombs, oil, and military action which are woven into the poems' most intimate and delicate seams.

In one sequence, Spahr juxtaposes the act of lying in bed with a lover with reports of American airstrikes

"The war was on, it was everywhere, and we breathed it in." (Spahr, 2005, p. 14)

The atmosphere is no longer just a natural commons, but a political one as well: a repository of violence and vandalism. The notion of "slow violence"—the diffused, attritional damage from war, removal, and contamination—captures distinct aspects of Spahr's work. Her poetry demands that violence, as a direct thing, might be absent, but its residues are still inhaled. The commons of air, then, becomes both close and global at the same time. It connects, for instance, lovers in the bedroom through the soft rhythm of shared breath. It also connects remote bodies through the circulation of pollutants, toxins, and militarized airspace. Spahr's work exemplifies Ursula Heise's (2008) idea of "the sense of place and sense of planet." Heise argues, Spahr integrates the local and global into one ecological system.

4.3. Lyric, Collectivity, and Responsibility

In contrast to Romantic poetry which usually focused on a lonely lyric subject close to nature, Spahr's poems disrupt the unitary voice. Her pronominal addresses to 'beloveds' are not limited to a single recipient but instead proliferate across bodies, nations, and species. This engenders what Thom Donovan (2006) calls 'collective lyricism', where the poem is a chorus of breathing beings instead of a monologue of an alienated self. This form of collectivity is ethically charged. Spahr addresses everyone as 'beloveds' as a means of enacting an empathy that is inclusive, but she also implicates us in systems of violence and complicity. Welch (2014) claims that her poetry offers an 'inclusive posthumanist ecopoetics', where human beings are porous and entangled with infrastructures, technologies, and nonhuman agents. We bear the burden of responsibility; to breathe is to be accountable, whether one decides to or not.

4.4. Posthuman Agency and Vibrant Matter

Spahr's consideration of air corresponds well to Jane Bennett's (2010) "vibrant matter." In her poems, air is not a mere backdrop but an active component of experience. Air holds pollen, poisons, viruses, and chemical byproducts; it is communicative and illuminating; it is a precondition to life. By air's connection as a mode of communion, Spahr, via acts of silences, bestows agency to nonhuman worlds. The intersubjective atmosphere is not just an environment we access; it is an environment that accesses us, affecting our state of health, emotion, and even our social polity. The attribution of agency to atmosphere positions Spahr within posthumanist ecopoetics. Her poetry reveals the microparticle and flow dynamics that sustain, and threaten life. From this perspective, theory might suggest that in her lyrics, poetry is the medium that reveals the active multiplicity of agency within collapsed ecologies.

4.5. Romantic Legacies and Revisions

Spahr replaced Romantic idealism with different 'impulses' like the ones which believe in the ethical and poetic concern with the natural world. Breath emphasizes on without and spells out Wordsworth's *Reverie* 1820 and Emerson's *Nature* 1836. But Spahr does updates these transfigurations by abandon all forms of transcendences which instead of consolation and sublimity, her the poetry emphasize on fragility, vulnerability and complicity. This is renewal on Romanticism in terms of its relevance to the Anthropocene. Wordsworth's tranquil restoration becomes Spahr's nature in its contaminated and precarious state which is nevertheless the ground of connection and responsibility. So, this is what Spahr's poetry does. It replaces the Romanticism legacy by a set of relations which enables to deal with the current ecological crisis.

4.6. Critical Reception and Influence

In ecopoetics and cultural studies, Spahr's *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs* has been dealt with extensively. Chisholm (2014) notes how her poetic frame works to expand the boundaries of personal lyric and political discourse. Welch (2014) speaks of her posthumanist inclusivity, where the lyric voice is porous and entangled. Nixon (2011) describes her writing in the context of the emerging field of environmental justice, focusing on how her attention to "slow violence" intersects with global issues of extraction and war. Furthermore, critics remark about the performative dimension of Spahr's poetry. The persistent cadence of her lines has such rhythmic proximity that it becomes, in places, quasi musical, and in so doing drags the reader into the very act of breathing with the words. As Donovan (2006) argues, her poetry is not only descriptive but also performative: it, literally, participates in the ecological connectivity of which it speaks. This frictive quality of her work is what propels the central argument in this article—the lyric is, indeed, a form of ecological discourse.

Spahr uses lyrical strategies – refrain, address, and accumulation – to make breathing both a metaphor for interdependence and an ethical obligation. She shows how lyric poetry can theorize nature as a commons, one which pulls bodies into tenuous, inescapable relation. To reconceptualize nature in the form of air and breathing provides a refreshing contrast to Alice Oswald's work with water and riverine voices which we will examine next.

5. Alice Oswald: River Polyphony and the Speaking Nonhuman

Alice Oswald's *Dart* (2002) stands out in modern-day ecopoetics. Juliana Spahr zeros in on the air and the atmosphere, while Oswald focuses on water, more specifically, the Dart River in Devon, as a sentient, speaking entity. The poem has been crafted over several years of walking, listening and talking to diverse people connected with the river, including, but not limited to, fishermen, swimmers, poachers, ferrymen and other riverine industrial workers. Oswald weaves these separate narratives into a single long poem that articulates the river's course from head to end. The outcome is neither conventional landscape poetry nor some romantic outpouring, but rather a polyphonic ecology, in which human and non-human voices entwine, overshadow, and resonate with each other. The river is not the backdrop in *Dart*, but rather the subject, with its own distinct mutterings, rhythms, and stories. (Oswald 2002; Goursaud 2019).

5.1. Form and the Poetics of Polyphony

Oswald moves away from the standard conventions of lyric poem structure in *Dart*. Inscribed in the poem's cover, Helen translates the poem from the Dart River to the sea as a songline, the latter a borrowed word and concept from Australian Aboriginal culture wherein the landscape is described and mapped using song. Illustrating this songline clearly outlines Oswald's emphasis on the writing's performative and vocal aspects. Instead of framing the river as an object of contemplation, Oswald constructs a soundscape wherein the river "speaks" through an entire ecology of human and nonhuman bodies. The entire poem has a polyphonic structure. Each "voice" is labeled in the margins: "poacher", "eel-watcher", "ferryman". These voices blend and often surrender to the river's self-voice. In a 2019 essay, Goursaud labels this 'lyrical discretion.' The use of a fragmented chorus is the result of replacing the singular 'I'. Posthuman authors focus on the nonhuman, and in this case, the fragmented chorus shifts focus from the human (Bennett 2010; Braidotti 2013). There is an emphasis on sound in this particular poetics. To illustrate, Oswald engages in onomatopoeia and uses broken syntax and disrupted rhythm in order to 'swim' across the 'poem' while the cadence simulates the movement of water. Howarth (2013) calls this an 'acoustic ecology' because the text is soundscape and the readers feel the energy of the river. Similarly, Oswald does not merely speak about the river; he makes it audible.

5.2. The River as Agentic Subject

One of Oswald's most radical moves is to attribute voice to the river itself. At moments, the *Dart* speaks in first person:

"Who's this moving alive over the moor?"

An old man seeking and finding a difficulty.

Has he remembered his compass, his spare socks?

He's missing his schoolboy son.

This is me, anonymous, water's soliloquy." (Oswald, 2002.)

The river's claim as "me" collapses the border of human and nonhuman speech. The human figures—a schoolboy and an old man—disintegrate into the river's utterance and are engulfed by its flow. This is an example of Bennett's (2010) "vibrant matter:" the river is not a passive backdrop, but an animated, agentive being that remembers, speaks, and shapes lives. This kind of voicing is not mere personification; it is a type of performance of relationality. Making kin, as Haraway (2016) puts it, is, among other things, entering into a conversation with nonhuman-thinking. Such a kin-making entity is Oswald's Dart. It contains human stories, labors and myths, but it also stretches beyond them, forcing readers to remember that the river has her own rhythms, mutterings and trajectories.

5.3. Work, Labor, and Ecological Community

In contrast with 'Romantic' nature poetry that usually focuses on the act of solitary pondering, 'Dart' pivots to the themes of work and togetherness. The testimonies come from a polyphonic chorus of river workers and users: anglers, dredgers, canoeists, and ferrymen. Their testimonies anchor the river in a network of value, social and economic, but Oswald is not willing to let that be the final assessment of the river. Rather, she treats work as part of the river's polyphonic community.

For example, the voice of a ferryman merges with the river's movement:

"Who's this moving alive over the moor?

Invisible, yet audible

like a poem, a rumor." (Oswald, 2002.)

Human activities, in this case, are directly related to nature's work. The river doesn't have a separate existence from the ferryman. He becomes one with its movement. This unity in work is in opposition to capitalist approaches that consider nature a mere resource to be utilized and instead sees work as ecological involvement. As articulated by Jung (2021), Dart offers a teaching framework for 'environmental education' where, instead of being alienated from nature, people realize that they are co-habitants of integrated ecological frameworks.

5.4. Myth, Memory, and River Time

Oswald weaves into the poem the voice of the mythological as well as the folkloric. The Dart, a river of flesh and blood, is also a river of culture, teeming with the tales of spirits, the drowned, and the distant past. Such a tangle of myth and memory is not oriented to a linear sense of time. The river, like any river, moves from source to sea and is, at the same time, part of a broader cycle of evaporation and rain. In the poem, the past and present, myth and modern work are sluiced together. According to Clark (2015), part of the challenge of Anthropocene poetics is to find a way to weave together multiple times within a single text—geological, ecological, and human. In this respect, Oswald's Dart is a good example of this challenge because it encompasses more than a single time frame. The river, for example, is steeped in deep time, local history, and present experience all at once. Such a convergence of time is what Morton (2013) refers to as hyperobjects—ecological realities that span periods of time and are, in turn, out of the realm of human understanding, although easily observable in the routine of daily life.

5.5. Posthumanist Lyric and the Disappearance of the "I"

A possible counterpoint could concern itself with a specific aspect of Dart: the absence of any authorial ellipsis. Still, it has to be remembered that her position is, comparatively speaking, rather weak, if best sidetracked. All that matters is that in the excerpt of the "Swim" section that follows, the swimmer's voice disappears and starts to be merged with the river's voice:

"I don't exist. I'm only the sound

of running water, the speech of the river itself.” (Oswald, 2002, p. 60)

The human subject's erasure here, reflects a posthumanist ethic that does not center human perception as the arbiter of meaning. Rather, lyric becomes a place of being listened to, where the human voice is one of the many. Goursaud (2019) reads this as a radical gesture of “lyrical discretion,” letting the nonhuman penetrate the poem’s soundscape. Such a gesture is reminiscent of Haraway’s (2016) exhortation to “stay with the trouble”: to acknowledge the limits of human mastery and to respond to the agency of nonhuman others. Oswald’s portrayal of disappearing into the river’s voice, dramatizes this ethical shift. The lyric subject is porous, decentered and resonant to the surrounding ecologies.

5.6. Romantic Legacies and Transformations

Unlike much of her Romantic predecessors, Oswald does not consider the landscape of riversides as a place of deep contemplation. In contrast with Wordsworth, whose solitary walks with a river came to provide him so much of contemplation as to reach to transcendence, Oswald favors immersion, participation, and engagement. The poet’s emotions do not force the river to serve as a reflection. Oswald self-identifying as a poet makes a distinction that clarifies her shift from the idealism of Romanticism to its contemporary ecologies. Wordsworth’s Romantic quad favors imaginal, nature is harmonizing, whereas Oswald imagines it to be messy, multiple, and agentic. In contrast to Romanticism, her lyric dissonance, multiplicity, and entanglement favor unity as the primary aim. In her recent works, Oswald makes a pronounced shift toward favoring contemplating nature. In contrast to the other poets of her time, her revisioning aligns with how poetry needs to be viewed with the ecologies of the xx century.

5.7. Critical Reception

Dart has received praise for its innovativeness and ecological sensitivity. While critics like Howarth (2013) note the sonic value of the work, Goursaud (2019) speaks about its posthumanist ethics of silence. Jung (2021) furthers its value for environmental teaching, showing how it shapes the discourse around rivers and ecological communities. Bristow (2006) identifies it in a genealogy of post-Romantic poetics concerned with sound, place, and ecology. This collection of writings illustrates that Dart is more than a poem about a river; it is a radical reimagining of the possibilities of poetry in the face of an ecological crisis. In the case of Oswald's Dart, the river is a chorus in action, a polyphonic churn that disrupts the human-centered order and enlarges the lyric form. Her poetry accomplishes what posthuman and eco-poetic theorists call for: recognition of nonhuman agency and the artistic responsibility that lies within multispecies, entangled ecologies. While Spahr theorizes air as the fragile commons of breath, Oswald theorizes water as the polyphonic medium of an ecological community. Together, Oswald and Spahr, illustrate the capacity of contemporary lyric poetry to shift the singular focus of the poetry in the romantic era to the contested ecologies of the anthropocene.

6. Comparative Discussion: Air and Water, Chant and Chorus

Juliana Spahr’s *This Connection of Everyone With Lungs* (2005) and Alice Oswald’s *Dart* (2002) provide a thoughtful conjunction for reconsidering the eco-poetic nature of the theory of nature. They have roots in the Romantic tradition but thoroughly reinterpret it in the context of an ecological emergency. Spahr extends her ecological focus to the air, atmosphere, and breathing, while Oswald moved to the water, river, and flow. Spahr’s lyric voice emerges through collective address and chant-like repetition, while Oswald’s voice scatters into polyphony, composing a choral ecology of human and nonhuman speakers. So, their work illustrates how lyric form can theorize interdependence and rethink the theory of nature in the context of the Anthropocene.

7. Air and Water as Ecological Media

Here, the element performs additional functions beyond the environment; it functions as an agent too. In Spahr, the atmosphere is filled with particulates, toxins and shared breaths. Oswald’s river mutters, remembers and speaks. Air and water are illustrative of different scales of an ecosystem as well. For instance, Spahr’s work tends toward the planetary. She grounds the reader within expansive atmospheric networks that span continents and wars. Her lyric can dissolve local intimacy and replace it with global circulation, so it forces the grim recognition that, within one’s lifetime, one’s breath

has been shared with strangers and enemies. Unsurprisingly, Oswald's river is very local: from its source to its mouth, it is anchored in the Devon geography and its people. But that local river, in turn, has global resonance as it embodies the planetary hydrological cycle, and carries myth, memory and an ecological community. In this sense, Spahr's atmosphere and Oswald's river illustrate different scales of geopolitical ecologies: the planetary and the situated, the distributed and the specific.

8. Chant and Chorus: Poetic Form as Theory

The authors exemplify differing lyric approaches on Spahr's poetry centered on chants which are repetitive, refrain driven and cumulative, and are said to reflect the rhythm of breathing and the circulatory nature of the atmosphere. A chant captivates the reader by the use of incantation magic and serves to remind them of the rhythm and multidisciplinary attribute of breathing. Lyric as breath of ecology is theorized and the verses become a linkage model. Spahr calls Oswald's poetry a chorus. Her structures is polyphonic distributing voice to ferrymen, swimmers, poachers, seals and the river as well. The chorus is more multiplicity and dissonance as opposed to unity, which is what Haraway calls "making kin." "Cospake," coinhabit and "coshape" are moments of recognition of shared ecologies between humans and nonhumans. Theory is polyphony here. The Many-voiced river demonstrates entangled ecosystem agency and challenges the dominance of a single human lyric voice. Chant and chorus are diverging yet complementary approaches to ecopoetry. Chant imagines and theorizes nature as repetitive, circulatory, and inescapable. Chorus imagines and theorizes nature as plural, dialogic, and polyphonic. Both extend lyrics beyond representation to perform ecological thinking.

9. Romantic Legacies and Revisions

While both poets undertake a dialogue with the Romantic tradition, the engagement is markedly different. Spahr takes over the Romantic sense that poetry mediates ethical and spiritual connections with nature, but she outright rejects the consolatory sublime. Rather, she stresses fragility and complicity, demonstrating that to breathe is to be part of war, pollution, and global violence. In doing so, poetry transforms Romantic transcendence positively to Anthropocene entanglement. Oswald's engagement with Romanticism is more nuanced. Like Spahr, she also takes over the Romantic practice of walking along rivers and "poeticizing" the surrounding nature. But unlike Spahr, she does not place herself as the lonely visionary poet. Rather, she subsumes herself into the river's choir and differentially allocates the voice from the river to various human and nonhuman bodies. In the same way, while Wordsworth was seeking to transcend time through memory and imagination, Oswald immerses herself into what is termed 'ecological time' and weaves together myth, history, and labor into the 'voice' of the river.

She restyles Romantic idealism into polyphonic realism, wherein nature is chaotic, multilayered, and sentient. In either case, the legacy of Romanticism is not discarded but rather reshaped. They retain the Romantic belief that poetry is important for our relation to nature, but they frame it in the context of the current ecological crisis. This shows the continuity and the change of the theory of nature: from idealist sublime to ecological entanglement, from individual contemplation to multiplicity and polyphonic lyricism.

10. Responsibility, Community, and Ethics

At the ethical level, both poets compel recognition of responsibility. Spahr notes that breath itself implicates one in systems of war, violence, and environmental destruction. Her "beloveds" do not constitute a protected enclave, but an inclusive, contaminated whole. Responsibility arises from the fundamental fact of co-breathing. Oswald stresses the participatory aspect of living. To dwell by the river is to be attuned to its rhythms, to its shaping, and to its narratives. Her river community is not a community of pure relations, but an entangled matrix of work, story, and ecology. Responsibility in such a context arises from a certain kind of listening and recognition of the work of others. Both align with posthumanist ethics. It is an attempt to de-center the human and instead, draw attention to the porous boundaries of interdependence and multispecies entanglement. In Alice Spahr, responsibility comes from acknowledging shared vulnerability; in Oswald, from acknowledging the multiplicity of

voices that make up an ecological community. These both provide an example of how lyric can explore ethical relations in ecological terms.

11. Theory of Nature in the Anthropocene

The way Spahr and Oswald contrast one another shows how contemporary lyric poetry reconfigures the understanding of 'nature'. Nature shifted from being an idealized abstraction 'outside' a cage to something we 'entwine', to the air and water that connects and holds bodies across scales. Both of them focus on the agency of nonhuman forces which aligns, to an extent, with new materialist theories of vibrant matter. Addressing the spatiotemporal challenges of the Anthropocene, Spahr embeds intimacy within planetary circulation while Oswald employs geography in a layering of mythical, historical, and ecological time. The push the lyric form into theoretical praxis which makes poetry an act of ecological reasoning. Spahr and Oswald, in this respect, demonstrate the strength of ecopoetics as a contemporary lens. They boldly assert that poetry 'thinks': theorizing breath and river, community and intimacy, and also responsibility and vulnerability. The theory of 'nature', prismatically refracted in the works of both authors, is not an abstraction, but lived, embodied, and pressing.

Spahr and Oswald together generate a vigorous reworking of the theory of nature. They demonstrate, for example, the elements of air and water are neither passive nor indifferent mediums, but active commons that solicit response. Relative to these elements, both poets recalibrate luminous form as a kind of ecological theory, Spahr through the breath of rhythm that embraces all bodies in planetary circulation and Oswald in the many-voiced song of the countering river to her dominion. These moves give a striking re-interpretation of the Romantics inheritance of solitary, private contemplation as repositioned to ecological entanglement in relational, collective, and ethical terms, and profoundly contemplation of the theory of nature in terms of vulnerability, community, responsibility, and for the first time, relational, collective, and ethical. This is what contemporary lyric does, describing not the ecological crisis, but creatively formulating new and diverse ways of living within that crisis.

12. Conclusion:

The journey from romantic idealism to present day ecologies describes the progress that the concept of nature has gone through due to differing sociohistorical and environmental factors. For some romantic poets like Wordsworth and Emerson, nature was transcendental, an ethical mooring, and a source of emotional and imaginative restoration. Their idealist vision spatialized nature outside of human society, placing it on the periphery to be accessed by the lonely lyric subject—a fragmented individual, seeking consolation and spiritual sustenance. However, this imagined vision is no longer the case in the twenty-first century. Taking the ecological crisis, the changes to the climate, and the globalized, interconnected world we live in, nature and politics entangled with vulnerability and responsibility, ensure that socioecological issues will always be a matter of direct concern. The theory of nature must also contend with the nonhuman world, its beauty, fragility, agency and complex entanglements with human histories. This Shift is demonstrated by Juliana Spahr and Alice Oswald. Spahr reframes the atmosphere as a delicate commons of breath interweaving loves, strangers and even enemies.

Using 'forced' in the context of 'rhythm of breathing' allows viewers to connect with the air's pollutants, toxins, and violence on a very personal level. It makes the air and even all poetry seem tangible. She captures the inextricable intertwining of human existence with planetary wars, industrial exploitation, and the deliberate destruction of the natural world. In contrast to the Romantic ideal of transcendence, she uses the ethos of exposed vulnerability, equating breathing with the ethical act of acknowledging and feeling the fragile interconnections of existence. In contrast, Oswald engages with the river as a complex voice. In *Dart*, a choral ecology is constructed with the overlapping voices of the river, ferrymen, poachers, and swimmers. The poem performs what is described in posthumanist theory as a decentering of the human subject: the river starts talking and the poet disappears. With myth, memory, and sound, Oswald unites human and nonhuman voices into a living chorus, abolishing the idea that nature is a mute backdrop. Where Romanticism embraced the visionary, Oswald emphasizes the need for community, multiplicity, and listening. Together, Spahr

and Oswald prove that lyric poetry is an ecological theory in addition to being a means of representation.

As this article defines it, the works of these authors are exemplary of lyrical ecology: the ability of poetry to engage with the nature, articulate entanglement, and envision ethical engagements with nonhuman agents. The selection of air and water as primary mediums illustrates the commons that connect life from the intimacy of a bedroom to the scale of a planet, and a local river to the global ocean. Their poetry reveals the intricacies of the material and ethical problems of the Anthropocene, one in which the interaction of nature should not be romanticized but approached with tenderness, as fragile, unevenly distributed, and agentic. This thinking of the theory of nature should make the environmental humanities think more deeply. It shows what literature long suspected of itself: that it is not just a mirror, but a theorist of the ecology. Poetry is capable of capturing and articulating the barely perceivable: the circulation, slowness, and deep violence of a poised, multi-layered society, and the constructs of thought and care for the deep ecological wreckage. Spahr and Oswald's work is particularly important as they transform lyric poetry into a substantial instrument of ecological reasoning.

We need to appreciate works that teach us being alive includes breathing and drinking water with fellow humans, listening to other-than-human beings, and understanding shared entitlements to the entangled ecosystem. As a result of the overwhelming climate crisis, the unfolding mass extinction, and global uncertainties, the 'theory of nature' can no longer remain a victim of Romantic consolation. It must embrace vulnerability, multiplicity, and accountability. Poetry can address these challenges, as Spahr and Oswald demonstrate. In listening to the river and paying attention to the climate, they draw on the Romantic tradition in a new ecopoetics that recreates nature no longer as an ideal 'other' but as a fragile, multi-voiced web of life. With their work, the lyric still serves as a vital means of redefining ecological relations in the Anthropocene.

References

1. Bate, J. (2000). *The song of the earth*. Picador.
2. Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things*. Duke University Press.
3. Braidotti, R. (2013). *The posthuman*. Polity Press.
4. Bristow, T. (2006). Contracted to an eye-quiet world: Sonic census or poetics of place in Alice Oswald. *Symbiosis: A Journal of Anglo-American Literary Relations*, 10(2), 167–185.
5. Buell, L. (2005). *The future of environmental criticism: Environmental crisis and literary imagination*. Blackwell.
6. Chakrabarty, D. (2009). The climate of history: Four theses. *Critical Inquiry*, 35(2), 197–222. <https://doi.org/10.1086/596640>
7. Chisholm, D. (2014). On the house that ecopoetics builds: Juliana Spahr's "eco-frame." *Cultural Studies*, 28(4), 592–611. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2013.845600>
8. Clark, T. (2015). *Ecocriticism on the edge: The Anthropocene as a threshold concept*. Bloomsbury Academic.
9. Garrard, G. (2011). *Ecocriticism* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
10. Goursaud, B. (2019). "The river's mutterings": Lyrical discretion, communal utterances, and poetry beyond the human in Alice Oswald's *Dart*. *Études Britanniques Contemporaines*, 56. <https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.6919>
11. Haraway, D. J. (2016). *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press.
12. Heise, U. K. (2008). *Sense of place and sense of planet: The environmental imagination of the global*. Oxford University Press.

13. Howarth, P. (2013). "Water's soliloquy": Soundscape and environment in Alice Oswald's *Dart*. In N. Alexander & D. Cooper (Eds.), *Poetry & geography: Space and place in post-war poetry* (pp. 195–210). Liverpool University Press.
14. Jung, S. (2021). Teaching rivers: Environmental learning with Alice Oswald's *Dart*. *Ecozon@*, 12(1), 64–80. <https://doi.org/10.37536/ecozone.2021.12.1.3581>
15. Morton, T. (2013). *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and ecology after the end of the world*. University of Minnesota Press.
16. Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor*. Harvard University Press.
17. Oswald, A. (2002). *Dart*. London: Faber & Faber.
18. Spahr, J. (2005). *This connection of everyone with lungs*. University of California Press.
19. Welch, T. J. (2014). The inclusive posthumanist eco-poetics of Juliana Spahr. *Journal of Ecocriticism*, 6(1), 1–17.