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Nature and Women in Harmony: An Ecofeminist Reading of Charlotte- Mew's Poetry

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الطبيعة والمرأة في تناغم قرائه بينية نسوية
لشعر شارلوت ميو

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Abstract

This study examines the poetry of Charlotte Mew from an ecofeminist perspective. According to this study, Mew uses her poetry to highlight the harmonious relationship between women and nature, including how this relation functions as a dynamic force against patriarchal society's oppression of women and nature. Women are isolated and marginalized so they attempt to find a space where they can find themselves as self-determining agents. Throughout Mew's poetry nature goes beyond a place; rather it becomes a refuge to women who demand identity and liberty. Mew's

poetic works call for environmental maintenance and social justice. She emphasizes the important roles of both women and nature in sustainable life.

Key words: ecofeminism, nature, Charlotte Mew, women, oppression, patriarchal society, identity, social justice, ecology

المستخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة شعر شارلوت ميو من منظور النسوية البيئية. ووفقاً لهذه الدراسة، تستخدم ميو شعرها لتسليط الضوء على العلاقة المتناغمة بين المرأة والطبيعة، وكيف تُشكّل هذه العلاقة قوة دافعة في مواجهة قمع المجتمع الأبوي للمرأة والطبيعة. فالنساء، نظراً لعزلتهن وتهميشهن، يسعين لإيجاد مساحة يشعرن فيها بالاستقلالية والقدرة على تقرير مصيرهن. وفي شعر ميو، تتجاوز الطبيعة كونها مجرد مكان، لتصبح ملاذاً للنساء اللواتي يطالبن بالهوية والحرية. وتدعو ميو في أعمالها الشعرية إلى الحفاظ على البيئة وتحقيق العدالة الاجتماعية، مؤكدةً على الدور المحوري لكل من المرأة والطبيعة في تحقيق الاستدامة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النسوية البيئية، الطبيعة، شارلوت ميو، النساء، الاضطهاد، المجتمع الابوي، الهوية، العدالة الاجتماعية، البيئة

Introduction

Ecofeminism is a movement that concentrates on the relationship between the exploitation of women and the destruction of the environment. Since the late 1980s, the word

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ecofeminism has been used to describe a rising political, cultural, and intellectual movement that includes both activists and academics. Ynestra King refers to it as 'the third wave of the women's movement'. Its main argument is that environmental damage and historical oppression of women are inextricably intertwined (Clark, 2011, p. 111).

Ecofeminism emphasizes the importance of connecting care, accountability, and justice in both social and environmental domains due to their shared oppressive structures (Philips & Rumens, 2016, p. 2). Furthermore, Ecofeminism advocates for the end of oppressive practices, recognizing that achieving liberation for women and other oppressed groups requires a parallel effort to liberate nature (Graad, 1993, p. 1).

This paper traces the ecofeminist aspects in the poetry of Charlotte Mew and how she attempts to shed light on the suffering of women and nature, also portraying their anguish in the patriarchal society. At the same time, she endeavors to emphasize the concept that the relationship between women and nature functions as a distinguished and dynamic instrument against the operation deep-rooted in patriarchal society.

Theoretical Background

The appearance of a new aspect of literature has been traced through the last decade, this aspect condensed mainly on the link between the ascendancy of women and the ascendancy of nature by patriarchal society. This has been labelled 'ecofeminism'. This term was first coined by the French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 (Vakoch, 2022, p. 17). The conceptual convergence of feminism and ecology in that theory includes more attention to women and the natural world (Vakoch & Mickey, 2018, p. 18).

Ecology can be defined as the study of the link between the organisms and the environmental conditions, while feminism concentrates on rectifying the subjugation of women in sexuality as well as in gendered relationships. The fusion of ecological and feminist standpoints creates opportunities for numerous ways of comprehension and responding to the complicated relationship and distinguishes the contrast between relations of domination and partnership. So ecofeminism's aim is not to center nature and women in a separation from everything else. Rather ecofeminism aims to focus on the interdependence and synergy, thus all categories like

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race, age, religion, class, ability, nationality, and others like gender, sexuality, and species would be under the cover of ecofeminism(2018,p.18). Ecofeminism is based not only on the realization of the correlation between the operation of nature and the domination of women across patriarchal societies. Further, it is based on the recognition that these two types of dominance are associated with class exploitation, racism, colonialism, and neo-colonialism (Gaard& Murphy, 1998,p.3).

Karren J. Warren claims that ecofeminism has its roots in the wide variety of feminisms like (Marxist feminism, black feminism, and liberal feminism). What makes ecofeminism special is its emphasis on nonhuman nature. Naturalism and the unjustified exploitation of nature are feminist issues. From the perspective of cultural ecofeminism, there is a strong innate relationship between women and nature(1997,p.59). Through concentrating on the inherent propensity of women to care for nature and define themselves with it, to realize their interrelationship with it. Cultural ecofeminists recognize the significance of actions and characteristics specially devalued by dominant culture(patriarchal society). So ecofeminism can be seen as the

most effective way to oppose the operation of patriarchal society, which controls both women and nature through maintaining various theories and practices(Adams,2012,p.4).

Ecofeminism has been defined as a practical movement with its path for social change emerging from the struggles and suffering of women to preserve themselves, their families as well as their communities. This movement intends to rise against the male development and environmental degradation caused mainly by patriarchal societies, multinational corporations, and global capitalism. They are pursued for environmental balance, matrifocal and hierarchical societies, the preservation of indigenous cultures alongside economic systems and initiatives grounded in subsistence practices and principles of sustainability. Ecofeminism is grounded in both impedance and vision. It consists of both deleterious systems together with motif for enormous changes(Gaard& Murphy, 1998,p.2).

Ecofeminism also comes to challenge the use of dualism, Val Plumwood has dug in deep in western thoughts of binary opposition such as male/female, rational/emotional, nature/ culture, and human/ animal.

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Nature has been seen in opposition to culture and represents the female along with nonhuman characteristics, on the other hand, culture includes male and human representations. Ecofeminists claim that this kind of dualism is used mainly to justify the exploitation of women and nature by defining them with the inferior side of the dichotomy (Campbell,2022,p.1). Therefore, ecofeminism defies all the hierarchical structures set in patriarchal society and advocates for harmony between all members of the ecosystem.

Ecofeminism has a strong framework to understand the connection between environmental and social issues. Through addressing the deep root which causes of ecological decline as well as gender inequality, ecofeminism advocates for a more just and sustainable world. In spite of having a lot of criticisms, ecofeminism is determined to evolve, integrate various perspectives, and facing contemporaneous challenges.

Charlotte Mew; life and career

Charlotte Mew was born in (1869-1928) She published short tales, essays, and poems from 1894 until her death. In 1916, she released a small collection of poems, some of which established her as a prominent English poet. Both Thomas Hardy and Virginia

Woolf regarded her as one of the greatest living female poets(Joiner,1989,p.1). Prior to releasing the lyric poetry that established her renown, Mew wrote short stories and essays in many publications. Her first collection of poetry, *The Farmer's Bride* (1916, extended 1921; U.S. title, *Saturday Market*), was appreciated for her straightforward style, which included Wessex county dialect. The title poem and "Madeleine in Church" (in which a prostitute greets the Virgin Mary) are notable for their avant-garde conversational rhythms at the time. *The Rambling Sailor* (1929), a posthumous collection of 32 previously uncollected poems, increases Mew's total number of published poems to sixty (Britannica, 2020).

Mew's poetry is deeply interlinked with nature. *In The Nature of Modernism*, Elizabeth Black argues that women are depicted in Mew's poetry as isolated and marginalized in society, where they are deprived of full expression of identity. Consequently, women shelters to nature as a safe refuge, offering psychological relief from social oppression. Nature is presented in her poems as a symbolic and dynamic force. Besides, it parallels women's emotions of suffering,

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alienation, and oppression. In her poetry, she highlights the violence against both of woman and nature. Her poems echo feminists' perspective that the relationship between women and nature could resist exploitation toward them(2017, p.169).

Discussion

If we represent knowledge as a tree, we know that things that are divided are yet connected. We know that to observe the divisions and ignore the connections is to destroy the tree.

Wendell Berry(Bressler,2011,p.230)

Charlotte Mew in her poem *The Trees are Down* (Mew, 1923) supplies us with an appropriate example for ecofeminism to be applied. In this poem, Mew gives us an image about group of men who cut the trees at Euston Square Garden and her reaction toward this harsh scene. This poem is a mixture of Mew's personal emotion as well as societal critique which offers a rich commentary on the relationship between men and the natural world. Mew begins the poem with an epigraph from the book *Revelation*, this quote works as an ethical framework to the poem, it exhibits that cutting the trees is not only environmentally painful but spiritually wrong(Jackson,2019). Furthermore,

this quotation aligns with ecofeminists' moral values, ecofeminists like Vandana Shiva and Carolyn claim that patriarchal society infringes this ethic through consider both nature and women as commodities. Mew's decision to open her poem with a warning not to harm nature parallels the feminist perspective. She refuses nature distraction and exploitation of economic gains for personal men's sake.

Mew begins her lines with violent language "They are cutting down the great plane-trees at the end of the gardens(1)" to reflect their violent attitudes toward the trees. Trees here symbolize women who are under the control of patriarchal society. Men spread their power by cutting down the trees because they think that God created both women and nature for their comfort. The trees in this poem are shown as passive, pretty, and destroyed just like women's bodies who are subjected to men's desire. There is a juxtaposition between the loud sound of men and the silent sound of falling trees and the speaker "With the 'Whoops' and the 'Whoas,' the loud common talk, the loud/common laughs of the men, above it all". This reflects the unlimited hegemony of men above nature and women, they see themselves as more paramount than

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trees. Besides, they present the cultural aspect so they spread their power and sacrifice the natural world for their development.

The loud laughing of men while they are cutting the trees also represents their toughness as well as their cold hearts, they kill the trees in the bloom season "spring" just like how they spread their domination on women and destroy them physically and mentally through their youth, preventing them from blooming.

I remember one evening of a long past Spring

Turning in at a gate, getting out of a cart, and finding a large

dead rat in the mud of the drive.

I remember thinking: alive or dead, a rat was a god-forsaken thing,

But at least, in May, that even a rat should be alive(Mew,1923,6-9).

Mew tries to hold out against the normalization of humankind's destruction of nature, she reveals that even the "dead rat" should be alive in May. Lisa Kemmerer argues that "the same patriarchy that oppresses women oppresses nonhuman animals"(2011, p.122). Mew feels pity about how these living being is getting harmed by

patriarchal society and how the nature cycle is getting ruined. Her sympathy detects an ecofeminist ethic, trees and animals are treated in this poem as kin. From Mew's point of view, all creatures must be saved to preserve the ecosystem.

It is going now, and my heart has been struck with the hearts of

the planes;

Half my life it has beat with these, in the sun, in the rains,

In the March wind, the May breeze,

In the great gales that came over to them across the roofs from

the great seas(21-25).

Mew in these lines identifies herself with the trees, feeling that these trees and she have one body as well as one soul. Her heart has been beaten along with the cutting down of these trees, this idea echoes ecofeminists' notions that women and nature are connected to some extent. There is such intimacy between them, something which cannot be absorbed by patriarchal society. Furthermore, this scene demonstrates that men have absolute domination over both women and nature, they are suffering all the time without any capable resistance

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and this is approved through cutting down the trees: "There was only a quiet rain when they were dying." Even the rain is described as quiet to reflect the weakness of nature, it is just a silent mourning for those losing trees.

Mew starts and ends the poem of biblical reference 'hurt not the trees', as if she wants to warn all humankind not to touch the earth due to its holiness. Nature must be respected, cherished, and given special care considering that humankind's godly duty. Mew uses adjectives like 'green' as a sign for health and fertility, nature is presented as a source of life to all human being and harming it could lead to environmental imbalance as well as severe consequences which impact life as a whole. Therefore, saving the ecosystem is fundamental to maintaining a stable and sustainable future.

The Changeling (Mew, 1923) is the second poem in Mew's poetry that has a significant impact in echoing ecofeminist ideologies. In this poem, Mew depicts a little girl who has an inner feeling of being odd from her human family and has the desire to escape to her mother nature. The title of this poem is prominent and it is regarded as a key to interpret the meaning. Changeling is a word derived

from European folklore, in old myths changeling is a child who has been taken by fairies, it has been believed that this child has physical characteristics that make her a stranger when she is surrounded by human children which leading her to be a supernatural being (Poem analysis,2023). The speaker through this poem identifies herself with this myth recognizing that she is regarded as other in patriarchal society and has a special attachment with nature seeing her right place in the lap of her mother nature, a kind of intimacy that she never felt in her human mother's lap.

In the first stanza, the young girl sees off her parents justifying her leaving that she cannot belong to their "paradise", because she is different from them. She describes herself as "wild", this adjective is used often to describe nature not human beings. But, this makes sense that she has a unique connection with nature. From an ecofeminist lens, the father figure represents patriarchal society, and her departure from his realm to nature expresses her desire to rebel and search for her real identity in an authentic space. Nature can be seen as a metaphorical space of impedance, it's emerging as a place for tackling freedom and self-connection away from the boundaries of a dominated

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society. Nature is not just a setting but a companionate partner in the dispute for autonomy.

In the garden at play, all day, last summer,

Far and away I heard

The sweet "tweet-tweet" of a strange new-comer,

The dearest, clearest call of a bird.

It lived down there in the deep green hollow,

My own old home, and the fairies say

The word of a bird is a thing to follow,

So I was away a night and a day (Mew, 1923,9-16).

The tone has been changed in the second stanza. At first, the young girl speaks sadly about her family and her home. But, when she hears the sound of this bird, she feels relieved, such a sound can make her feel safe. It is a calling for freedom, the bird encourages her to follow him to find her real identity in the lap of her mother nature. A place where she can find herself a way to escape any feeling of disgrace. These lines reflect how

women and nature are connected, at a time when everyone refuses her, nature opens her hand and welcomes her. There is a deep connection between the two, Susan Griffin in her book *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* mentions this subject, she claims:

He says that the woman speaks with nature. That she hears voices from under the earth. That wind blows in her ears and trees whisper to her. That the dead sing through her mouth and the cries of infants are clear to her. But for him, this dialogue is over. He says he is not part of this world, that he was set in this world as a stranger. He sets himself apart from women and nature. We are the birds eggs. Birds eggs, flowers, butterflies, rabbits, cows, sheep; we are caterpillars; we are leaves of ivy and sprigs of wallflower. We are women. We rise from the wave. We are gazelle and doe, elephant and whale, lilies and roses and peach, we are air, we are flame, we are oyster and pearl, we are girls. We are woman and nature. And he says he cannot hear us speak. But we hear (1978, P.3).

Ecofeminists highlight the deep connection between women and the natural world. Together, they are acting as a potential power working to;

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put an end to the ecological collapse and attempt to achieve social equality. This connection also provides women with enough power to resist the exaltation upon them; also, nature functions as a space where women can express themselves freely away from masculine judgment.

You can hear the whole world whispering;

The shy green grasses making love,

The feathers grow on the dear grey dove,

The tiny heart of the redstart beat,

The patter of the squirrel's feet,

The pebbles pushing in the silver streams,

The rushes talking in their dreams,

The swish-swish of the bat's black wings,

The wild-wood bluebell's sweet ting-tings,

Humming and hammering at your ear,

Everything there is to hear

In the heart of hidden things(37-48).

In these lines Mew personifies every tiny creature, she portrays an image that is full of life and happiness, it is like a separate world celebrates its beauty away from the environmental vandals. Nature is not passive but active as well as a liberating force. These vivid images inspire the young girl to look forward to a new life. From an ecofeminist point of view, the girl is not separate from the environment; rather, she exists in a state of harmony with natural worlds, and her identity is intertwined with the rhythms of nature reflecting the interconnectedness between female identity and the ecological system.

In this poem, there is a contrast between the girl's house and nature. From ecofeminists lens, the house presents oppression, alienation, and displacement. The young girl does not feel convenient or loved. From the beginning, she distances herself from her family because she feels that the domestic house is unwelcoming to her existence, and her identity is not accepted. Besides, this house presents a patriarchal society that oppresses women and rejects their existence because of their gender and sex. This society which always has a feeling of disgrace toward women, is just like the girl's parents who feel shamed from her in their house.

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In contrast, nature deals with kinship and identity. The young girl feels the warmth of nature's warmth, she has been welcomed by nature, and she has been regarded as part of nature. The bird's call is not just an ordinary sound, but it is a call to pull her away from the strict atmosphere of home into a place where she could feel alive and seen. Nature gives her the chance to know herself as it is not like the patriarchal society that intends to shape her, she finds her authentic identity in a place that is to her a source of truth.

Mew in this poem displays the great role of nature in women's lives. It is not just a passive animated place, it is full of activity and a source of strength. Vandana Shiva in her book *Staying Alive Women, Ecology and Survival in India* claims that "Nature is inherently active, a powerful, productive force in the dialectic of the creation, renewal and sustenance of all life" (1988, p.38).

The journey of the young girl is recognized as a metaphorical one for demanding autonomy in a society that is always willing to take control of both the feminine and nature. This harmonious relationship which could not be understood by men, has its benefits on both women and nature Together, they stand against all

subjection and rise to establish a society standing on an equitable social system and ecological protection.

In the third poem *The Farmer's Bride* (Mew,1923), Mew gives a realistic tale of marriage in rural England. She portrays how wives can be seen through men's lens. The poem speaks about a farmer and his young wife. Nevertheless, their relationship is miserable because of the lack of communication between the two. The title of the poems gives a gesture about the nature of this marriage, the wife is referred to in reference to her husband and she is presented as his possession. Furthermore, the poem is told through the voice of the farmer sharing his thoughts and feelings; neglecting his wife's existence. The poem uncovers deep insights into gender roles, domination, and the alienation of both women and nature in patriarchal societies.

Three summers since I chose a maid,
Too young maybe—but more's to do
At harvest-time than bide and woo.
When us was wed she turned afraid
Of love and me and all things
human;
Like the shut of a winter's day

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Her smile went out, and 'twadn't a woman—

More like a little frightened fay.

One night, in the Fall, she runned away(Mew,1923,1-9).

The poem begins with the farmer's speech, telling the story of his marriage. He has been married for three years to a young woman. He says that he chooses a maid, this line reduces his wife's identity indicating the domination of men over women. He chooses his wife by himself chooses the wife neglecting her approval of this marriage. Besides, these lines indicate that she is treated like an object as he was shopping or choosing furniture not a partner to live with. He reveals that he is too busy to care about her, reflecting the belief of patriarchal society that men's work is more significant than women's needs as well as the main role of women to fulfil the desires of men.

In spite of being married for three years, the young girl still feels terrified of her husband. This implies that her interaction with him is only through their sexual relationship and it is obvious that she is unhappy during their sexual encounter. Because, she is too young and immature to go through such an experience. She is regarded as

a child and has been pushed to adult life, that's why "she turned afraid of love and me and all things human"(4-5) and that's led her to escape. It is clear from the start that the farmer sees his wife as inferior to him and while there is no voice to this girl throughout the poem, she decides to escape

Out 'mong the sheep, her be," they said,

'Should properly have been abed;

But sure enough she wadn't there

Lying awake with her wide brown stare.

So over seven-acre field and up-along across the down

We chased her, flying like a hare

Before out lanterns. To Church-Town

All in a shiver and a scare

We caught her, fetched her home at last

And turned the key upon her, fast(10-19).

After her escape, the farmer realizes her absence. He starts looking for her to bring her back to his prison, and he succeeds in this matter.

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However, he never discusses this action with her or tries to figure out her motive for fleeing. Even he does not ask himself if she does that out of agony or melancholy. Rather, he concentrates on his feeling "All in a shiver and a scare" when he is unable to find her. He is extremely egocentric, driven by his pleasures and his own desires. She intends to give him a sign through her running away and to make him feel for her and regard her as a true wife not only an object. Then he says "We caught her, fetched her home at last", the way he uses to describe how he finds her and takes her back to his home gives an impact that as he speaks about pieces of property. He does not speak about her with tenderness and intimacy or treat her in a way that could feel safe or loved. Rather, he "fetched her" and locked her up as she is an animal that wants to run away.

These lines expose how women are abused and mistreated by men. The girl is too weak to defend herself and her needs. Women are treated like animals and both of them must be under the service of men. Women and nature are seen as the same in men's lens, they are subjects of pleasure to men and the focus must be only on men's well-being.

She does the work around the house

As well as most, but like a mouse:

Happy enough to chat and play

With birds and rabbits and such as they,

So long as men-folk keep away.

"Not near, not near!" her eyes beseech

When one of us comes within reach.

The women say that beasts in stall

Look round like children at her call.

I've hardly heard her speak at all.(20-29)

These lines describe her disappointment, she gives up to the reality that she is treated just like the furniture in the house. She is unheard by her husband as well as her needs are not important. She spends her time in domestic life, doing the chores, cooking, and responding to her husband's appetites in silence. The farmer again looks like to his wife as an animal "mouse" not as a human being or his partner. His feeling of superiority covers the whole poem, he is the controlling figure in this house and his wife must obey him blindly without any objection. These ideologies are spread by the patriarchal

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society into men's minds to be the controller upon women.

However, she is active in the natural world, chatting and playing happily with "birds and rabbits". Women instinctively are in need to be loved and secured. But, she is marginalized and undervalued by her husband all the time. Consequently, her sense of identity could be destabilized, encouraging her to deem nature as an alternative source of safety, love, and healing refuge. There is a juxtaposition between the relationship with her husband and nature, she never communicates with him rather she treats him like a stranger. While she has a deep communication with nature, she gets empowerment through this connection, enabling her to draw her authentic identity. Mew centralizes on the concept that nature is a refuge to women who are isolated and marginalized. Furthermore, nature in ecofeminists' lens does not treat just as a setting but a metaphorical scope of defiance, presenting potentials for independence and self-definition beyond patriarchal society.

Shy as a leveret, swift as he,

Straight and slight as a young larch tree,

Sweet as the first wild violets, she,

To her wild self. But what to me?(30-33)

He repeatedly describes his wife as inferior creature as "leveret", "tree", and "violets", he denies her existence as a human being who is equal to him. Moreover, the patriarchal mindset looks at women as a source of sins and impurity. So, all these ideologies are set as a tool in men's hands to justify their domination over women. Again, the same thoughts of how to satisfy his desire cover the whole stanza. He does not consider his wife a virtuous wife due to her abstention from letting him be near from her. Ironically, he never attempts to be a good husband who cares about his wife's feelings.

What's Christmas-time without there be/ Some other in the house than we! (40-41). These lines summarize how women are treated in patriarchal societies, the farmer wants to be a father. Women and nature are seen as machines to give birth only. Both of them are humiliated by male-hegemonic society, the concept that connects men/ culture with superiority and women/nature with inferiority has been inherited throughout the years. This logic of dualism is adopted as a common conceptual framework that covers different categories of oppression. The farmer in this poem

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represents the privileged figure who spreads his authority over both his land and his wife. Treating them as instruments of production, dominating his land for harvest and the latter for reproduction. Therefore, Val Plumwood in her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* argues that :

A major point of the critical ecological feminist position I shall develop is to argue that we should reject the master model and conceive human identity in less dualistic and oppositional ways; such a critical ecofeminism would conclude that both women and men are part of both nature and culture. This form of ecological feminism, in reconceiving human identity, is not placing women, or in fact men either, back in undifferentiated nature(1993,p.35).

Women should be considered as completely human and a part of human civilization alongside men. However, both men and women must fight the dualized understanding of human identity and establish an alternative culture that truly acknowledges human identity as continuous with, rather than foreign to, nature(1993,p.36).

Mew's poetry Campaigns for women's and nature's rights, she rejects the subjugation of women and nature

in male-dominated society. Although, Mew seeks to show how the relationship between women and nature is significant. The bond between nature and a woman is empowering. Because the environment provides life, women are responsible for giving birth to future generations. Both are necessary for life's sustainability and should be cherished and handled appropriately. The masculine society should understand the holy position of women and nature, both of which are sacred and a source of life for all living beings. So, they are not supposed to be controlled and exploited by men

Conclusion

To sum up, Mew's poems; The Trees Are Down, The Changeling, and The Farmer's Bride depicts how women and nature are subjugated and marginalized by men. However, she sheds light on the harmonious relationship between nature and women, nature is deemed as a source of strength and self-identification to women; Together they are seen as a motivating force and agent of change against the wrong ideologies, that show men as superior. This relation for Mew is presented as a solution to stop the domination and oppression of men. Consequently, Mew advocates for not

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hurting nature to maintain ecological balance and respecting women to some extent to be equal to men.

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