

**Ecocritical Analysis of Ecological Presence, Anthropocentrism, and
Interconnectedness in Aimee Nezhukumatathil's Oceanic**

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this research study is to examine the bond between man and nature, reflected in the poetry of contemporary American poet Aimee Nezhukumatathil. The nature poetry of the poet strengthens man's relation with nature and fosters ecological awareness. Her poetry has been explored earlier from different perspectives, but little work has been carried out from an ecocritical perspective. This research seeks to examine selected poems from her collection Oceanic(2018) using textual and thematic analysis of three poems ('Invitation', 'Sea Church', and 'Love in the Time of Swine Flu') in order to highlight her concept of nature alongside the artistic and imaginative qualities of her poetry. The study analyzes Nezhukumatathil's ecological consciousness through three main aspects: ecological presence and care, challenge to anthropocentrism, and symbiotic interconnectedness. It further examines the imagery and literary style in the selected poems to show how natural imagery of sea, salt, grapefruit, and marine creatures reinforces the themes, using ecocritical notions of ecological awareness, interrelatedness, and environmental responsibility. This study addresses a gap in ecocritical scholarship and aims to promote environmental sensibility and awareness.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Anthropocentrism, Ecological Presence, Symbiotic Interconnectedness, Aimee Nezhukumatathil, Oceanic, Environmental Awareness

INTRODUCTION

Authors have consistently turned to nature for inspiration and to convey their emotions. From ancient verses to contemporary dramas, rivers, trees, skies, and seasons have been utilized to tell narratives. Various authors depict nature in their distinct styles. Each writer brings a distinct perspective, shaped by cultural heritage and personal outlook. Consequently, although universal, nature appears in literature through diverse shades of feeling and understanding. Realizing the connection between literature and the environment is the most basic way to comprehend ecological awareness. This shows that literature reflects the natural world and also belongs to its own time. It also suggests that people and their actions

are closely linked with the environment. In essence, what people do to nature also comes back to affect them. Ecocriticism, therefore, offers a shared way of reading literature that highlights its relation to the natural world. Lawrence Buell argued that ecocentric works demonstrate the connection between human and environmental history by presenting “the non-human environment not merely as a framing device but as a presence” (Buell, 1995, as cited in Waugh, 2006, p. 537). Ecocriticism is fundamentally a cultural and ethical approach that looks at the connections between text, nature, society, and the individual. Richard Kerridge stated that “Nature is what the earth is and continues to be without human involvement” (Kerridge, as cited in Waugh, 2006, p. 538), and he cites Bill McKibben’s theory in *The End of Nature* (McKibben, 1990, as cited in Waugh, 2006, p. 538), that the possibility of this pristine condition of nature has vanished due to global warming. Such debatable problems are the subject matter of Aimee Nezhukumatathil’s poetry.

Aimee Nezhukumatathil is an American poet and essayist, and also the writer of four poetry books, the newest of which is *Oceanic*, which won the Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters Award for poetry. She gained grants and fellowships from the Mississippi Arts Commission, MacDowell, and the National Endowment for the Arts. *World of Wonders* (2020) was rated as a New York Times best-seller. *Miracle Fruit*, *At the Drive-In Volcano*, *Lucky Fish*, and *Oceanic* are her poetry collections. In *World of Wonders*, she shares short notes about plants, animals, and places, stressing how closely human life is tied to nature. This study is going to investigate the selected poems from the collection of Nezhukumatathil’s poetry *Oceanic* (2018), paying close attention to three poems: “Invitation,” “Sea Church,” and “Love in the Time of Swine Flu.” Each one of these poems draws attention to contemporary ecological issues as they reveal the deeper connection between nature and human life. In the selected poem “Invitation”, Nezhukumatathil dissolves the boundaries between humans and the ocean by welcoming the reader into its domain, thus challenging anthropocentric thinking. In *Sea Church*, she presents a vision of a church shaped by salt and sunlight, which highlights the sanctity and frailty of nature and reveals how humans and their behaviour have an unbreakable connection to the natural world. In *Love in the Time of Swine Flu*, metaphor and natural imagery indicate how ecological issues are reflected in human emotions and human weakness. As a result, nature offers more than a backdrop in this exchange of thoughts; it becomes a voice of resistance, awareness, and connection.

Research Objectives

- To investigate how Nezhukumatathil uses natural imagery in her poetry to conflate the natural and human worlds.
- To examine how her portrayal of nature as sacred, delicate, and intricately linked to human life subverts anthropocentric thinking.
- To examine how ecological concerns are expressed in human emotions and frailties through the use of metaphors and symbols.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecocriticism began small but it has developed into a thriving field. Initially, the objective was to simply consider literature and nature together, rather than using nature as a background (Glottfelty & Fromm, 1996). Building on that, Buell (1995) highlighted how literature becomes ecological when the natural world appears as a real presence that links us to environmental histories and responsibilities, rather than merely existing on the periphery.

From there, critics broadened the field in two key ways that matter to this study. First, Cronon (1995) challenged the idea of “wilderness,” showing that it is not a neutral place, but a cultural concept shaped by politics and power. Second, thinkers like Heise (2008) and Morton (2007) introduced the importance of scale and entanglement. Heise argued that even a local image in a poem can reflect planetary processes. Morton extended the argument further by suggesting that we move beyond idealized notions of nature and instead think in terms of complex ecological systems.

Recent scholarship connects ecocriticism closely with the lyric voice in poetry, stressing that language itself shapes ecological awareness. Based on Zapf (2016), literature is a type of “cultural ecology,” with poetry both reflecting and “regenerating cultural energies” in response to recent ecological crises (p. 141). Poets like Aimee Nezhukumatathil show this through metaphors that join human life with the natural world and turn feelings into care and awareness for nature.

Scholars have also studied eco-poetry as a broader movement. Bryson (2002) describes eco-poetry as a mode that resists anthropocentrism and asks readers to rethink their relationship with nonhuman life. Numerous studies have examined the use of the personal imagery of breathing as a metaphor for the interconnectedness of the planets, such as Juliana Spahr’s *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs* (Estok, 2005). Camille Dungy’s editorial work in *Black Nature* situates African American poets within ecocritical traditions, connecting ecology with cultural identity and justice (Dungy, 2009). These studies show that contemporary poetry is already being read ecocritically, but not all poets have received equal attention within this framework.

These ecocritical ideas give us useful ways of reading, but they take on a different weight when we look at Aimee Nezhukumatathil’s poetry. Her book *World of Wonders* (2020) has often been described as a work where memory and the natural world meet. Instead of only celebrating plants and animals, she writes about how they have shaped her own sense of belonging. One reviewer points out that the creatures she describes “expand our imagination and empathy” and also leave “lessons big and small” about wonder and connection (Bastian, 2021). In interviews, Nezhukumatathil recounts seeking out hand guides for identifying field insects and discovering in them a life-long source of joy and metaphor (Bastian, 2021). This shows that her writing is not merely appreciative, it cultivates ecological awareness through everyday observation and emotional resonance.

Despite her popularity scholars have not discussed her poetry from ecological point of view. Most scholarship centers on themes of “identity, migration, and cultural belonging” while her environmental ethics receive little sustained analysis (Chettri, 2021, p. 57). In contrast, eco-poets such as Juliana Spahr and Camille Dungy are celebrated for weaving ecological themes with social justice. As Tuck and Ree (2013) note, Spahr’s work demonstrates how “the personal lyric becomes a collective environmental witness” (p. 647). Dungy, too, uses “nature as a site of cultural memory and political struggle” (Rankine, 2017, p. 214). Compared to this critical attention, Nezhukumatathil’s work calls for deeper ecocritical engagement to recognize how her poetry extends ecological thought into new cultural terrains.

Some recent work gestures toward such readings. For example, Estes (2021) places Nezhukumatathil’s essays in the context of modern American eco-writing, noticing how her major attention on animals “creates moments of empathy which spread into ecological awareness” (p. 94). Nixon’s (2011) idea of “slow violence” is a helpful way to understand Nezhukumatathil’s work, because her portrayals of fragility and resilience often reveal the hidden costs of environmental decline.

Yet, as Nixon notes, “the environmentalism of the poor is frequently disregarded in dominant narratives” (p. 6), this serves as a reminder that her ecological vision is both politically charged and aesthetically pleasing. A more thorough ecocritical analysis of her poetry that incorporates ecological theory with issues of ethics, identity, and environmental care is necessary in light of these sporadic revelations.

Building on these theoretical models, the poems of Nezhukumatathil, particularly “Invitation,” “Sea Church,” and “Love in the Time of Swine Flu,” offer fertile ground for applying concepts such as Heise’s focus on scale, Cronon’s cultural framing of wilderness, Buell’s environmental presence, and Morton’s entanglement. These frameworks highlight how her poetry listens to nonhuman realms, presents the sacred fragility of nature, and turns human vulnerability into ecological metaphor.

This study addresses that gap by applying ecocritical tools, including Buell’s concept of environmental presence, Cronon’s critique of cultural framing, Heise’s idea of scale, and Morton’s notion of entanglement, to three of Nezhukumatathil’s poems. Close readings will focus on how each text:

- Invites the reader into listening to nonhuman realms (“Invitation”),
- Presents the sacred fragility of nature (“Sea Church”), and
- Transforms human vulnerability into ecological metaphor (“Love in the Time of Swine Flu”).

This paper demonstrates that these poems do more than describe nature; they present an ethics of care and inspire environmental awareness through lyric imagery, invitation, and emotional intimacy.

Even though Nezhukumatathil’s work provides strong frameworks and obvious literary value, there is still a lack of communication between the ecocritical field and her despite in-depth analysis from several angles. This research will advance eco-poetics and Nezhukumatathil studies by applying ecocritical theory to her major poems, demonstrating how her lyrical voice challenges us to reconsider humanity’s role in the living world.

Theoretical framework

Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism is a concept which focuses on how literature reflects nature and the environment, and what are the human attitudes towards nature. It began to develop in the late twentieth century alongside environmental movements, emphasizing the values, care, or neglect of nature that texts communicate. British eco-critic Jonathan Bate believed that Romantic poets and their followers treated nature in their poetry so personally that it seemed they were living within it. He contends that since man is estranged from nature, it is the responsibility of writers to express the connection between humans and their environment. According to eco-critics, nature not only depicts the harmonious human and non-human environment, but also “a competitor, singular, abstracted, and personified religious being: the monotheistic God” (William, 1980, p.69). According to ecologist Timothy Morton, “if human practise the datum that we are rooted in the world,” we would do everything in our power to prevent further degradation of the environment (Alvi, Vengadasamy, and Majid, 2019, p.331). This is a theoretical model for bridging the gap between subject and object, nature, and human/culture.

According to Lawrence Buell (1995), texts take on an ecological quality when they depict “the non-human environment not merely as a framing device but as a presence” (p. 7). This study applies ecocriticism to Aimee Nezhukumatathil’s poems to show how the natural world is not background but an active participant in shaping human thought and feeling.

Anthropocentrism

The core feature of human nature that prioritises people is called anthropocentrism. Man believes that he is superior to all other organisms because he is the only literary being on Earth (Mishra, 2016, p. 169). By paying attention on providing equal care of all animals and the natural elements of the environment, ecocentrism challenges anthropocentrism. It’s an approach to the cosmos that honours the real worth of habitats and the biological and physical elements that shape them, while appreciating the connections between species, natural cycles, and the interactions between biological organisms and the natural world.

Ecologist Stan Rowe (1994) argues that while the human role is undoubtedly important, the Ecosphere as a whole holds greater significance. It stretches beyond human life in scale and depth, carrying more complexity, harmony, creativity, beauty, and mystery, and existing long before humanity itself (pp. 106–107). From this perspective, eco-centrists stress the inherent worth of all beings in the world, acknowledging their collective role in sustaining life.

According to Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), the standard by which intrinsic value is determined is rationality. According to his theory, all other entities devoid of reason are relegated to the status of means, having only instrumental value, whereas rational beings, humans, are ends in themselves (Kant, 2017). The rationalist perspective of early modernity, which Dictoro emphasizes, saw nature as an inert, mechanical system that was only moved by outside forces. This perspective is reflected in Kant’s anthropocentric position (Dictoro et al., 2019).

On the other hand, modern philosopher Peter Singer (1946–) suggests sentience, the ability to experience pleasure or pain, as the standard for intrinsic value, adhering to the utilitarian tradition of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832). By extending ethical consideration to nonhuman animals, Singer’s approach greatly expands the moral community (Singer, 2011). The basis for contemporary environmental law was laid by Christopher Stone (1937–2021), who argued that even trees and other natural objects should be recognized as legal subjects (Stone, 2010).

Debates on anthropocentrism and ecocentrism set the ground for reading Aimee Nezhukumatathil’s poems. Her work moves beyond human-centered views by giving attention to plants, animals, and landscapes as meaningful in themselves. In this way, theory becomes more concrete, showing how poetry can shape care for the natural world.

Symbiotic Interconnectedness

The third approach is symbiotic interconnectedness, which emphasizes the bonds of dependence between humans and nonhumans. Ecologists explain that all organisms live in connection with one another, whether through mutual support or forms of competition (Capra, 1996). Haraway (2016) describes this as “making kin,” recognizing survival as a shared process across species (p. 102). Latour (2005) also views humans and nonhumans as part of networks that create life together. Nezhukumatathil often presents animals and plants as companions rather than mere symbols. In *Invitation*, the ocean is portrayed as a

partner that dissolves boundaries, while in Sea Church, salt and water are given sacred value. These images suggest that humans and nonhumans form a web of shared existence in which no life is separate.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Ecocriticism: Textual and Thematic Analysis

This qualitative research study has been conducted using textual and thematic analysis focusing on the ecocritical themes in the poetry of Aimee Nezhukumatathil. The research applies ecocriticism as the central lens, while also drawing on the related concepts of anthropocentrism and symbiotic interconnectedness to interpret her work. The primary texts under study are three poems from the collection *Oceanic* (2018): “Invitation,” “Sea Church,” and “Love in the Time of Swine Flu.”

The method of textual analysis allows close reading of imagery, metaphor, and symbolism to trace ecological concerns. Thematic analysis helps in organizing the findings into three broad areas:

Ecological Presence and Care: This theme highlights how nonhuman elements are presented as active agents that demand ethical attention from the selected poems.

Challenge to Anthropocentrism: This theme analyzes how the poems’ appreciation of plants, animals, and landscapes as having intrinsic value challenges human-centered viewpoints from the selected poems.

Symbiotic Interconnectedness: This theme examines the way that Nezhukumatathil depicts humans and nonhumans as being interconnected in a shared existence and dependence on one another from the selected poems.

This approach is suitable because poetry requires interpretive methods that go beyond surface description. Textual analysis captures the depth of her metaphors, while thematic grouping makes the ecological concerns clear and structured. This method also connects theory with practice by applying multiple ecocritical concepts such as, Buell’s environmental presence, Morton’s entanglement, Heise’s scale, and Rowe’s ecosphere) directly to the selected poems.

The study avoids a narrow focus by combining textual and thematic approaches, focussing on the complex ways in which Nezhukumatathil connects ethical awareness, ecological fragility, and human emotions. This approach addresses broader ecological discussions while guaranteeing that the analysis stays true to the literary form.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Ecological Presence and Care.

Aimee Nezhukumatathil’s poetry reflects her strong belief that nature is alive with meaning and worthy of care. She never treats the natural world as quiet or secondary to human life. Her poems remind us that nature has its own voice and presence, where things like salt, birds, fish, insects, and flowers appear as central and important. Each one is given its own value and dignity. This approach suggests a form of ecological care in which nonhuman life is recognized not as decorative or symbolic but as an active force that participates in shaping human experiences. A close examination of *Sea Church* (2018), *Invitation*

(2020), and *Love in the Time of Swine Flu* (2018) reveals how Nezhukumatathil's imagery and metaphors elevate simple elements of nature into carriers of sacred and relational meaning.

In *Sea Church*, the opening prayer-like lines establish a vision where holiness is discovered not in man-made structures but in the material of the sea itself:

“Give me a church
Made entirely of salt.
Let the walls hiss
And smoke when
I return to shore.”
(Nezhukumatathil, 2018, p. 7)

In the very beginning of the poem Nezhukumatathil desire for a church built from salt which shifts the sense of holiness from human-made structures to the natural elements of the earth.

Salt, a simple and familiar substance of daily life, becomes the base of a sacred space. The brief and flowing lines read like a quiet prayer, carrying the tone of worship. By treating salt as something holy, the poet shows that true ecological care begins when people learn to see nature as sacred rather than as material to be used up. Lawrence Buell's idea of “environmental presence” (1995) resonates here, since the salt is not passive background but a participant in meaning-making. The ocean, through its salt, becomes a living agent that invites reverence and reflection.

The same quality of presence appears in *Invitation*, where the poet turns the sea into a space of welcome rather than estrangement:

“Come in, come in. The water's fine! You can't get lost
Here. Even if you want to hide behind a clutch
Of spiny oysters I'll find you.”
(Nezhukumatathil, 2018, p. 29)

The use of phrase “come in” sounds like someone is welcoming us to home but here the home is the sea. Entering the water is shown as gentle and safe, reducing the fear that usually comes with the unknown. Even the idea of hiding behind oysters and still being found suggests that the sea does not keep us away but gathers and protects us. The ocean is pictured as a host, and its creatures appear as companions rather than strangers. Through this picture, ecological care takes on a wider meaning. It is not only about knowing nature as a system but also about forming closeness, trust, and companionship with the living world.

The poem continues by describing how marine creatures, from squid to narwhals, teach lessons about richness, play, and direction. The sea becomes a teacher, guiding and nourishing those who enter. The poet rejects the idea that humans and the environment are distinct by placing the human figure within this community of nonhuman life. The ocean and its inhabitants are independent entities that demand respect and cooperation; they are not symbols for human problems.

In a similar way, in the poem “*Love in the Time of Swine Flu*,” Nezhukumatathil portrays the ecological connection between human life and the natural world by comparing an unborn baby to a grapefruit:

“Especially now that I carry
A small grapefruit, a second son inside me.”
(Nezhukumatathil, 2018, p. 33)

In these lines Nezhukumatathil shows human and natural connection between the mother and her child. She compares the unborn baby to a small grapefruit. By using this metaphor she reminds us that human life is part of the natural world. Just like a fruit grows and depends on its surroundings, same as the case the baby inside the mother is growing because of care, protection, and the natural process of life. It shows us that taking care of human life is mutually connected to taking care of nature itself.

It also shows fragility. A small grapefruit is delicate, and this makes the reader feel how careful the mother must be. This is where the idea of ecological care comes in. Just like we protect fragile plants or animals in nature, the mother must protect the child. Every action she takes matters, which reminds us that humans are not separate from the world around them. We are connected, and care is needed to keep life safe and growing.

The stanza also shows that everything is connected. The mother, the child, the home, and even illness are all part of the same natural system. Human life is not apart from the natural processes, even the small lives depend on the care we give and the environment we live in. By the use of the metaphor grapefruit to an unborn baby, Nezhukumatathil makes it clear for the readers to see that life is fragile, precious, and deeply linked to the rhythms of the natural world.

When we view these three poems collectively, it clearly shows that Nezhukumatathil places ecological presence at the centre of her poetic vision. In *Sea Church*, salt becomes sacred matter; in *Invitation*, the sea extends an embrace; in *Love in the Time of Swine Flu*, a baby needs care and protection as grapefruit from surroundings. Each poem affirms that nonhuman life is not marginal but essential to the unfolding of meaning and experience. The precision of her images and the patient unfolding of her lines ensure that salt, oysters, squid, and even grapefruit are not decorative but constitutive.

This reading also benefits from critical ecological theory. Buell’s concept of environmental presence provides a lens for understanding how salt and marine life emerge as forces within the poems. Timothy Morton’s notion of entanglement (2010) is illustrated in the blending of human life with nature as comparing a baby to natural grapefruit in *Love in the Time of Swine Flu*. Humans and marine life coexist in the same large home in *Invitation*, revealing Donald Rowe’s ecosphere. These frameworks highlight that ecological care entails a shift in perspective, where each component of the natural world is viewed as dynamic, valuable, and relational, rather than just protecting the environment externally.

Nezhukumatathil’s poetry therefore offers more than lyrical beauty. It models a way of living where humans approach the earth with reverence, intimacy, and attentiveness. The rhythms of grapefruit, salt, and even fish serve as reminders that the world is sacred and alive. She encourages readers to understand that true concern for the environment starts with the daily act of acknowledging and respecting nonhuman life as a partner in meaning and survival by placing nature at the centre.

Challenge to Anthropocentrism.

Human-centered view is one of the most striking aspects of Aimee Nezhukumatathil’s poetry. Anthropocentrism, which frequently reduces nonhuman life to background elements or objects that exist only for human benefit. But Nezhukumatathil rejects this idea through her writing, which treats natural life

as subjects rather than objects and places humans and nonhumans on equal footing. Her poems tell the readers that holiness, meaning, and direction can be found in the earth's elements, animals, and plants in addition to human behaviour and thought. The idea that humans are the centre of the universe is challenged by this poetic choice. By doing so, Nezhukumatathil teaches her readers that life must be understood in terms of relationships across species and elements, not in terms of human domination.

In the following lines taken from the selected poem *Sea Church*, Nezhukumatathil challenges the Anthropocentric view as;

“I ask for the grace
Of a new freckle
On my cheek, the lift
Of blue and my mother’s
Soapy skin to greet me.”
(Nezhukumatathil, 2018, p. 7)

Nezhukumatathil does not ask for grand human achievements or monumental blessings. Instead, the request is for something as small as a freckle on the cheek, a trace of the sun and ocean's work on the body. By grounding grace in a freckle rather than in human accomplishments, the poem undermines the human tendency to seek greatness in terms of mastery. A freckle is not created by human will; it is given by sunlight, by the sea, by nature's subtle influence. She tells the readers clearly through these lines that human identity is shaped not only by culture and personal choice but also by ecological forces that inscribe themselves on the body. We are impacted by the world, and those impacts have sacred significance.

The depiction of “the lift of blue” pushes this idea further. Blue, often associated with the sky and ocean, is not something that humans can control. It is a presence larger than human scale, shaping mood and memory. By invoking blue as a form of grace, the poet points away from human-centered religion and toward a spirituality embedded in natural elements. This replaces the hierarchy where humans stand above nature with an awareness that we are held within it.

The stanza closes by asking for the greeting of the mother's “soapy skin.” This intimate, domestic detail connects the elemental with the familial. The sea, the sun, and the skin of the mother become part of the same texture of grace. Human life is not imagined as separate or superior; it is intertwined with nonhuman matter. Anthropocentrism is challenged here because meaning does not originate solely in human thought or institutions but emerges from an ongoing dialogue between body, family, and nature.

The selected poem *Invitation* further challenges anthropocentric perspectives, as Nezhukumatathil illustrates:

“while their singular tooth needles you
Like a compass pointed towards home. If you dive
Deep enough where imperial volutes and hatchetfish
Swim, you will find all the colors humans have not yet
Named, and wide caves of black coral and clamshell.”
(Nezhukumatathil, 2018, p. 29)

Nezhukumatathil uses an animal the narwhal and their long, spiralling teeth serve as a compass which provides direction to the people to their homes. An image like this undermines anthropocentrism since an animal, rather than human maps or tools, provides direction and orientation. Instead, the animal gives direction, and the human receives it. This shift grants authority to nonhuman life and shows that wisdom flows from creatures of the sea to people.

According to the lines that follow, there are colours that humans have not yet named in the hidden world of deep-sea creatures. It is suggested that despite ecological abundance, human perception is limited and human language is incomplete. Beyond human classifications, there are realities on Earth that exist independently of human recognition. The poem questions the human-centered notion that existence is measured by language by highlighting what has not been named. Nonhuman worlds remind us of our limited viewpoint by containing truths and beauty beyond human control.

The stanza ends with the image of “wide caves of black coral and clamshell.” These are habitats and lives that flourish without human observation, independent of human purpose. Their existence demonstrates that the earth is not organized around human needs or attention. Nezhukumatathil challenges her readers to acknowledge that humans are not the planet’s primary inhabitants by portraying these nonhuman spaces as teeming with mystery. The seas are brimming with colour and life that are theirs, not ours.

Similarly, in the poem *Love in the Time of Swine Flu*, Nezhukumatathil interrogates anthropocentric assumptions through her poetic vision, as evident in the lines:

“I wish
My name meant wing. The child still forming
Inside me fevers for quiet, the silence of the after,
The silence of cell-bloom within our blood.”
(Nezhukumatathil, 2018, p. 33)

In these lines, Nezhukumatathil wishes her name carried the meaning of a wing. A wing immediately connects the human body to the animal world, to birds and flight, to the freedom of nonhuman life. Names are usually tied to culture and human history, but here the poet imagines identity shaped by natural imagery instead of human categories. This simple wish loosens the hold of anthropocentrism, because it values meaning that comes from outside the human-centered world. The wing is not an invention of people but a gift of evolution, and by desiring this connection, the speaker aligns herself with the wider natural order.

The next part of the stanza speaks of the unborn child “fevering for quiet,” a longing that is expressed not in human words but in silence. Silence here carries weight because it reflects processes of growth that are biological, invisible, and beyond human control. The “silence of the after” and “cell-bloom within our blood” point to the fact that human life develops through cellular rhythms that echo patterns found throughout the natural world. Similar to how plants and other organisms thrive in silence, cells also grow, divide, and bloom. By reminding us that human reproduction is merely one thread within the same biological fabric that governs all living things, rather than something distinct or superior, this comparison challenges anthropocentrism.

The closing images tie the human body to the most elemental processes of life. By describing the unborn child through metaphors of bloom and blood, the poem connects human development to the universal cycles of growth across species. What makes this powerful is the absence of human control: no person

can will cells to bloom, just as no one can command the silence of growth. The human mother is shown as a component of a much broader ecological network in which natural laws govern creation, growth, and survival. Nezhukumatathil subtly challenges the human-centered perspective on life and maintains that the only reason our lives are meaningful is because they are connected with the same living processes that support the rest of the world.

Symbiotic Interconnectedness.

Aimee Nezhukumatathil's poems show a world where humans cannot be cut off from the life around them. Every being, from people and animals to plants and even grains of salt, belongs to one shared network. Nature appears here as an active force that gives shape, care, and guidance, not as a silent decoration behind human life. The endless ties with oceans, skies, and even the smallest creatures of the earth are presented as the ground from which human choices, emotions, and survival itself arise.

Nezhukumatathil's vision makes us think differently about the idea that humans are the center of everything. She does not portray nature as something that is under our control. Rather, she portrays it as something that supports, mentors, and occasionally even corrects us. Nezhukumatathil's vision makes us think differently about the idea that humans are the center of everything. She does not portray nature as something that is under our control. Rather, she portrays it as something that supports, mentors, and occasionally even corrects us. Nezhukumatathil writes in a way through which the human heart beats in time with the sky, the sea, and the surrounding life. Her writing inspires readers to appreciate the relationship between people and nature and to take care of it with a sense of duty and beauty.

Nezhukumatathil links natural elements with human experience in a continuous chain in the poem *Sea Church*.

“for this water-prayer
Rising like a host
Of sky lanterns into
The inky evening.
Let them hang”
(Nezhukumatathil, 2018, p. 7)

These lines show a water prayer rising like lanterns, connecting human hope with the movement of nature. A prayer travels through light and water rather than floating upward on its own. Human longing cannot arise without relying on the forces of the earth and the sky, just as a lantern cannot shine without a flame. As a result, prayer becomes a communal act where natural energy and human hope come together rather than a private one.

The movement of transformation is also important. Water becomes prayer, prayer turns into lanterns, lanterns rise into the sky. Each form depends on another, and none exists alone. This chain of change is the very picture of interconnectedness, where one thing gives itself to another in order for meaning to continue.

The act of prayer in this stanza no longer belongs to a single voice. It is carried and reshaped by water, sky, and light until it becomes part of a greater order. Something that began inside the human heart is absorbed into the vastness of the world, showing that even our most personal moments exist within a wider network of life.

In the same way in the next poem “Invitation” of Nezhukumatathil, she also consider sea elements as guidance of our lives;

“into the sea. So many lessons bubble up if you know
Where to look. Clouds of plankton churning
In open whale mouths might send you east
And chewy urchins will slide you west.”
(Nezhukumatathil, 2018, p. 29)

These lines turn the sea into a teacher, full of lessons that rise from its creatures. Instead of humans deciding their own direction, guidance is pictured as coming from plankton, whales, and sea urchins. The smallest organisms and the largest mammals both take part in shaping the course of movement. This image removes the idea that humans are in control, reminding us that even the paths we follow depend on forces beyond our own will.

The equal importance given to plankton and whales shows that size or power does not measure value. She gives whales and plankton equal weight, showing that value cannot be measured by size or strength. Because she want to demonstrate that the movements of life are shaped by the combined influence of a tiny organism like plankton and a giant sea creature like a whale. Human beings are a part of this balance, not above it.

Calling these movements “lessons” also changes our idea of wisdom. It is not only written in books or passed down through human culture but is carried in the rhythms of the ocean itself. The sea becomes a source of knowledge, teaching that survival and direction come from attention to interdependence.

Same as the case in “Life in the time of swine flu”, Nezhukumatathil describes an unborn baby metaphorically through a grapefruit;

“Especially now that I carry a small grapefruit, a second son inside me.”
(Nezhukumatathil, 2018, p. 33)

In these lines Nezhukumatathil reflects a larger vision that life is never separated but always connected with one another either through bodies, species or natural elements as shown in the image of carrying “a small grapefruit and a second son inside me”. The unborn child is described not through a medical term but through a fruit, which ties the growth of human life to the organic rhythms of the earth. A grapefruit becomes a measure of life forming within the mother, reminding the reader that even the most intimate human processes are inseparable from natural metaphors and cycles. Nezhukumatathil tells the readers that understanding human identity and survival requires acknowledging nature as an active partner, which is reflected in this choice of imagery. Here in the lines the child’s life is not only reliant on the parents but is also metaphorically supported by the produce of the land, which forming a symbiotic relationship that layers ecological presence and familial ties.

The stanza further demonstrates how pregnancy itself is a type of interconnection, with one life’s body supporting and shielding another’s growth. The mother transforms into a person and a living space, carrying a world that is dependent on her blood, breath, and nurturing.

By presenting this delicate bond in terms of fruit and growth, Nezhukumatathil places motherhood within the wider ecology of nature. Human reproduction is not pictured as separate from natural processes but as another example of how all forms of life carry and depend on one another.

DISCUSSION

The foregoing findings of this research show that Aimee Nezhukumatathil's poetry does much more than describe nature. She creates a space where humans and the natural world stand side by side, and where ordinary things such as salt, sea creatures, and even fruit carry their own meaning and dignity. In the analysis of the selected poems, we see how Nezhukumatathil treats the natural world as active and alive, not as background to human life. When these poems are read together they do not only talk about the beauty of nature but also show how humans understand their own lives through it. Nezhukumatathil portrays nature as immediate and meaningful rather than separate. The idea of care is shown as respect and relation, not only saving trees or water.

She challenges the human-centered perspective of the world, which is one of the poems' strongest points. In *Sea Church*, she places grace in something as small as a freckle shaped by the sea and sunlight. The narwhal's long tooth or the plankton's movements provide direction in *Invitation* rather than human maps. Human life is closely linked to natural processes, as demonstrated by Nezhukumatathil's comparison of an unborn child to a grapefruit. It is evident that survival is dependent on the same cycles that support plants when the development of fruits in nature is juxtaposed with growth inside the body. The idea that people are superior to nature is contested by this style of writing, which situates humans within Earth's life cycles.

Another clear theme is interconnectedness. Her poems keep stressing that nothing lives in isolation. In *Sea Church*, a simple prayer rises through water and light and turns into lanterns that float into the sky, showing how even personal longing is carried by natural forces. In *Invitation*, the sea is full of lessons where both whales and plankton guide the way, suggesting that wisdom is shared across the largest and smallest creatures. In *Love in the Time of Swine Flu*, the unborn child is pictured as fruit, which ties human growth to the same cycles that shape the earth. These examples together create an image of life as a web, where every strand depends on another.

The research also shows that her poetry speaks to ideas discussed in ecological theory. Buell's idea of environmental presence is reflected when natural objects like salt or fish act as forces with meaning in the poems. Morton's idea of entanglement is clear when she shows human birth as part of the same rhythms that drive the natural world. The way Nezhukumatathil writes shows that people are not always the center of everything. Her poetry makes it clear that humans are not placed at the center of life. Instead, she gives equal value to the presence of nature. This approach connects with ideas in ecocriticism where human beings are decentered from being the main focus.

This study also makes it clear that Nezhukumatathil's poetry is more than just a picture of beauty. She writes in a way that makes readers feel nature as part of their own life. Reading her poems, we can see that even very ordinary things like salt, a whale, or a grapefruit are given meaning. This type of writing reflects that caring for nature is not only about big issues like saving forests and rivers. It also begins from the small details that are usually ignored. Her poems make us think that human life always stays connected with nature, and that real awareness grows when we start respecting even the simplest parts of the natural world.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This ecocritical study illustrates the intricate relationship between humans and the natural world, through studying the selected poetry of Aimee Nezhukumatathil: using the themes of ecological presence and care, the challenge to anthropocentrism, and the idea of symbiotic interconnectedness. This research uncovered a strong connection between human beings and the nonhuman environment, through the use of natural imagery such as ocean, salt, grapefruit, and marine life, which support the theme of presenting nature as an active presence and a source of guidance and reflection. The essence of Nezhukumatathil's ecological vision advocates a view of existence in which the human figure is not placed at the centre of creation but is seen as part of a wider web of relations, which allows one to reconsider their position, to acknowledge the vitality of nonhuman life, and to understand that human survival is bound with ecological balance. The natural world offers a wealth of images and meanings to nourish human imagination, to awaken emotional responses, and to inspire a sense of reverence and care for the earth. This research study has applied textual ecocriticism to unite poetry and ecological concepts for broadening our perspectives and sensibilities about the human–nature relationship. This methodology, if applied to other contemporary writers, could provide further ecological insights into the interdependence of human and nonhuman life, which may be approached from diverse critical angles.

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