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## **Contemplation: A Divine Command; An Environmental Demand: A Poetic Islamecocritical Study**

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**الملخص:** إن التأمل مفهوم قديم ظهر من خلال الدين و الفلسفة و الأدب في معظم الثقافات و الحقب الزمنية. من وجهة نظر النظرية الإسلامية النقدية لأدب البيئة كما طرحتها أبو الفتوح في ورقة بحثية بعنوان " النظرية الإسلامية النقدية لأدب البيئة: تقديم الإسلام الأخضر إلي نظريه نقد الأدب البيئي " ، يُعد التأمل أمراً إلهياً و مطلباً بيئياً. و تُعد هذه النظرية اتجاهاً ناشئاً منبثقاً عن نظريه نقد الأدب البيئي حيث تستهدف تقديم الفكر الإسلامي للنظرية ذات الأصول الغربية. تحاول الباحثة إثبات أن التأمل هو المفهوم الغائب الحاضر في العديد من دوائر الجدل الناقد لأدب البيئة. فعلى الرغم من التصنيف الضيق للتأمل كممارسة روحانية دينية، إلا أنه ينساح في كل مناحي الحياة. فعلى سبيل المثال تأمل تدهور الطبيعة كان الشرارة الفعلية التي أدت الى ظهور نظرية نقد الأدب البيئي، كما أن كافة الكتابات الشعرية تستند إلي التأمل في المقام الأول. و رغم ذلك لم يعتد به حتى الآن كمصطلح رئيس في هذه النظرية النقدية. لذا تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلي تقديم التأمل بوصفه مفهوماً أساسياً لحماية البيئة من منظور إسلامي نقدي للأدب البيئي. يحفز التأمل الحواس كي تسمع، و تلمس، و تشم، و ترى بصدق، و بالتالي يفتح المجال للذهن كي يفكر، و يكتشف، و يتغير. سيُلقي الضوء على هذه النقاط البحثية من خلال ثلاث قصائد كندية. سيثبت من خلالها التأمل كونه قوة حافزة ذات قيمة نحو الأفعال المؤثرة، كما سيتم حث المعاصرين علي الانشغال به ليستكشفوا آثاره.

**الكلمات الدالة:** التأمل، النظرية الإسلامية النقدية لأدب البيئة، نظريه نقد الأدب البيئي، حماية البيئة، الشعر الكندي

**Abstract:** Contemplation is an ancient concept that appears in religion, philosophy, and literature throughout almost all cultures and epochs. From the point of view of Islamecocriticism, it is a divine command and an environmental demand. Islamecocriticism has been acknowledged as a new approach to Ecocriticism with the publication of Abolfotoh's "Islamecocriticism: Green Islam Introduced to Ecocriticism" in the *ISLE*. The new approach is oriented toward introducing Islamic thought to the Western ecocritical project. Contemplation is believed to be the absent concept present in various ecocritical debates. Although contemplation is narrowly classified as a spiritual religious practice, it intervenes in all aspects of life. Contemplating the degradation of nature, for instance, was the actual spark that gave rise to Ecocriticism, and all poetic writings are primarily contemplative. Nevertheless, it has not yet been accredited as an ecocritical term. The present paper aims at introducing contemplation as a key concept in environmentalism from an Islamecocritical standpoint. The word has Latin origins and means to view or observe with continued attention. Therefore, contemplation activates the senses to genuinely hear, touch, smell, and see. Accordingly, it opens a legible space for the mind to think, discover, and

change. These points of discussion and more are illustrated in light of three Canadian poems. Contemplation proves to be a valuable motive toward action. Moreover, contemporaries are encouraged to be engaged in it and to explore its effects.

**Keywords:** contemplation, Islamecocriticism, Ecocriticism, environmentalism, Canadian poetry

## **Introduction:**

“The Cow,” “The Cattle,” “The Elephant,” “The Bees,” “The Ants,” “The Spider,” “The Fig,” “The Thunder,” “The Light,” “Adh-Dhâriyât” (“The Scattering Winds”), “The Dawn,” “The Night,” “The Forenoon,” “The Earthquake,” “The Daybreak,” “The Star,” “The Moon,” “The Iron,” “The Cave,” “Al-Ahqâf” (“The Sand Dunes”), “At-Tûr” (“The Mountain”), and “An-Nâs” (“Mankind”) are titles of some surahs in the Noble Qur’an. A tour amongst them reveals instances from the entire universe: animals, insects, plants, natural phenomena, celestial bodies, minerals, landforms, and humans. Nature is obviously an integral part of the open cosmic gallery of the Noble Qur’an. Moving from the titles of surahs to verses, human beings are invited to inspect multiple natural scenes. Implied in each of them is a divine command to contemplate meticulously the Almighty God’s creation. Verse 164 in the second surah of the Noble Qur’an is a fine example in which Earth is depicted in incessant motion; intellectual minds are instructed to contemplate and study its symmetry. The Maker summons humans to contemplate this flawless universe: “[Y]ou can see no fault in the creation of the Most Gracious. Then look again: ‘Can you see any rifts?’ / Then look again and yet again: your sight will return to you in a state of humiliation and worn out” (*The Qur’an* 67:3-4).

Although contemplation is an imperative priority in Islamic thought for being as ancient as the creation of humans, few studies are dedicated to scrutinizing and highlighting its value at the present time. “The field of contemplative studies” is even depicted by Komjathy as “an emerging interdisciplinary field” “in an embryonic or formative phase” (9). She associates it with other fields of inquiry in a diagram with one big circle for

contemplation intersected with smaller circles for hard sciences, clinical sciences, humanities, religious communities, education, peace studies, and creative arts (12). Linking contemplation to almost all branches of knowledge is unarguably correct, but the use of an overlapping relationship is not quite accurate. Contemplation is the *origin* of knowledge, spiritual and material, for being the most refined mental activity. A tree diagram rather than intersected circles is more appropriate to show that fields of knowledge spring out of it.

Ecocriticism, as a field of knowledge initiated and developed by Western thinkers in the 1990s, springs out of contemplation. Contemplating the universe and humans' actions is its undeniable basis even if no direct reference to this fact is made by ecophilosophers. The classical pioneering ecocritical text of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), for example, was surely the outcome of contemplating a marred nature by humans' thoughtless conduct. However, a few decades after the inception of Ecocriticism, Oppermann remarks how it begins to show self-inflicted limits that arouse deep concern for the future of the field (309). She explains that strong partisanship has appeared among ecocritics with one camp favoring activism and engagement while the other insisting on theory, i.e. the analysis of the theme and content of texts which places Ecocriticism in a naive position (309, 315). This partisanship turns the ecocritical project "into more a symbolic fiction than a truly activist intellectual endeavor to make a change" (309).

Oppermann's worries are related to neglecting the fact that Ecocriticism is in the first place a practical theory that should combine theoretical knowledge with practical application. Favoring theory for activism or vice versa is against its true nature and aim. Thus, ecocritics have two complementary roles: they are textual analysts of nature writings, and they need to demonstrate a practical link between this role and environmental hazards. Denying one of the two roles limits the theory and may lead to its death. One of the evolving approaches to Ecocriticism that puts theory and activism on two equal scales is Islamecocriticism (Abolfotoh "Islamecocriticism" 1372). Islamecocriticism is based on a practical appreciation of environmentalism in literary works for giving definite

answers to environmental queries like hunting, deforestation, and others. It reinforces many established Western ecocritical notions and introduces vital Islamecocritical tenets such as stewardship, animism, moderation, prohibition of corruption, harm prevention, innateness, divine judgment, and contemplation (1374-83). Each of these concepts is part of the Islamecocritical theory; simultaneously, it initiates practical involvement. Contemplation, like other Islamecocritical concepts, enjoys a parallel potentiality to quench the dispute between theory and activism; it is a flowing spring for theory and a moving force for action.

The study is based on a qualitative research approach that entails the technique of documentation in collecting data. Moreover, the inductive approach of thematic analysis is employed in the literary criticism of the poems under consideration. The descriptive methodology is, likewise, used throughout the discussion. Islamecocriticism is chosen as an effective literary theory that can best answer the research problem. The central research problem is introducing contemplation as a key term of nature writings from an Islamecocritical perspective. Another target of studying contemplation is to change it from an instinctive unconscious activity that may be discarded in a busy life to a purposeful conscious one regularly practiced as a part of one's life routine. This alteration will have productive results that will positively affect environmentalism. Moreover, contemplation nowadays seems to be heading for extinction. In "The Lost Art of Contemplation," Abdul-Rahman calls "the modern age of rapidly advancing technology" the age of distraction that blurs reality (5). "Being preoccupied with gadgets, screens, and devices," he insists, "has distracted us from the powerful creativity, insight, and self-awareness that our minds were designed for" (7). The dwindling amount of time humans give contemplation is catastrophic and will lead to further ecological chaos. That is why returning contemplation to the spotlight is essential to revive its value and encourage its performance.

The coming discussion begins with an evaluation of the tradition of contemplation in the Islamic doctrine with all readings and views adhering to Sunni Islam. Rituals, steps, fields, and ends of contemplation are demonstrated. Then, the theoretical discussion is illuminated by a poetic illustration of Purdy's "Trees at the Arctic Circle (Salix Cordifolia–Ground

Willow),” Carman’s “Vestigia,” and Waddington’s “Dead Lakes.” It is worth noting that Islamecocriticism fits the discussion of these texts despite having no connection with the Islamic religious sphere because of Islamic Universalism. Kohfeldt and Grabe define universalism as the possibility of “apply[ing] generalized norms, values, or concepts to all people and cultures, regardless of the contexts in which they are located” (2036). Speaking of Islamic jurisprudence, it is divided into two major branches: acts of worship (فقه العبادات) and dealings (فقه المعاملات). The first branch is related to religious practices; the second is devoted to the goings-on of life arenas. Islamic Universalism is concerned with the jurisprudence of dealings with its ideas and ideals that have universal applications like trusteeship, balance, moderation, and others.

Islamic universalism should not be regarded as a form of cultural hegemony because it is founded on accepting differences among individuals and nations: "O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another" (*The Qur'an* 49:13). The verse illustrates what Abdelrahman calls cultural acquaintance and cultural integration (93). The former affirms the world nations' right to exist and be different along with admitting their ability to benefit from one another by cooperation for attaining perfect morality (93). The latter necessitates the integration of world cultures to complement one another to gain a comprehensive scope of the meaning of life and humanity and to form an ideal universal cultural discipline (93-4). Cultural acquaintance and cultural integration should be based on seeking goodness and forbidding evil: “Help you one another in *Al-Birr* and *At-Taqwâ* (virtue, righteousness and piety); but do not help one another in sin and transgression” (Abdelrahman 189; *The Qur'an* 5:2, italics original). Being rooted in the Islamic tradition, Islamecocriticism enjoys parallel universalism. Islamecocriticism is engaged with the way Islam organizes the relationship among humans and between them and their surroundings. This engagement is at the heart of ecocritical discourses that can benefit greatly from the ethical pillars of Islam.

## Discussion

### *An Islamecocritical Appreciation of the Concept of Contemplation:*

Contemplation can be defined as a deep intellectual activity triggered by all or some of the senses. Thus, it links metaphysical mental activities to the physical world. Contemplation is a fundamental aspect of Islam. “In over 750 places, the Qur’an directs the human being to think, ponder, reflect, listen, and observe” which are various techniques that provoke contemplation and link humans to their surroundings (qtd in Abdul-Rahman 5). The repeated command for contemplation in the Noble Qur’an signifies its importance and fuels the thought to consider its validity. Abderrahman, a Moroccan philosopher whose work centers on logic and the philosophy of morality, admits the significance of contemplation. Thus, he places it within the wisdom principle of Islamic thought along with thinking and co-contemplation (210). However, he believes that contemplation is marred by the present-time focus on material utilitarianism, commodification, and enslavement to the market (210).

Contemplation leads to evaluations, conclusions, decisions, and actions. It has varied results depending on the contemplator’s personality, beliefs, and his/her will to change. The contemplative experience underlies different degrees, factors, and conditions. Badri, a Sudanese author and professor of psychology who was a pioneer of modern Islamic approaches to psychology, refers to nine variables that interrelate in the formation of the experience: depth of faith, depth and length of concentration, emotional and mental state of the contemplator, environmental factors, influence of culture, knowledge of the subjects of contemplation, influence of companionship, nature of the objects of contemplation, and familiarity of the objects of contemplation (78–87). Though unrestricted to certain individuals, the highest level of contemplation has been practiced by prophets, scientists, thinkers, and philosophers. Contemplation can be done anywhere because the entire universe is its field. It can be an arranged activity, or it can be accidental when the subject of contemplation is greater than one’s ability to ignore it. The contemplator can reflect on the positive or the negative: sublime scenes with matchless charm or cleared forests. In either case, it

leads to a thorough understanding of the contemplated matter and taking appropriate reactions. Therefore, contemplation is the unarguable gateway for turning thoughts into actions and combining ecocritical theory with activism.

Rituals of contemplation in Islam are simple: humankind just needs to activate its senses and concentrate its thinking on a definite matter in a serene place distant from crowds and noise. The Noble Qur'an traces the steps that the contemplator should go through as follows:

He causes to grow for you the crops, the olives, the date-palms, the grapes, and every kind of fruit. Verily! In this is indeed an evident proof and a manifest sign for people who **give thought**. / And He has subjected to you the night and the day, and the sun and the moon; and the stars are subjected by His Command. Surely, in this are proofs for people who **understand**. / And whatsoever He has created for you on the earth of varying colours [and qualities from vegetation and fruits (botanical life) and from animals (zoological life)]. Verily! In this is a sign for people who **remember**. / And He it is Who has subjected the sea (to you), that you eat thereof fresh tender meat (i.e. fish), and that you bring forth out of it ornaments to wear. And you see the ships ploughing through it, that you may seek (thus) of His Bounty (by transporting the goods from place to place) and that **you may be grateful**. (16: 11-14, bold mine)

The procedure begins with looking at the signs of the Almighty God in the physical world and a chain reaction takes place. Humans begin to **give thought** to what they **see** in the impeccable design of Earth and its prolificacy. Thinking leads to **understanding** the signs of the Almighty God that manifest His greatness and that of His creation. The cause-and-effect relationship between thinking and understanding is stressed in contemplation verses. The onlooker should continue practicing contemplation to **remember** what has been learned and to guard it against the distractions of life. Continuity leads to a sense of **gratitude** to the Almighty God. Gratitude is



seen in nurturing nature, caring for other species, and fixing the broken. More than others, contemplators can appreciate the gifts of the Almighty God and show gratitude. Nonetheless, this desired end of contemplation is not going to be the same for all humans because it depends on the person and the other variable factors stated earlier. That is why the sense of gratitude is given as a probable outcome in the verse. It should be remarked that the entire human race is invited to go through such an enlightening experience; the command is not restricted to Muslims. Those who neglect contemplation are incessantly reproached by the Creator: “And how many a sign in the heavens and the earth they pass by, while they are averse therefrom” (12:105).

Komjathi, an independent scholar-educator and author interested in contemplative and religious studies, remarks that contemplative studies “might parallel other subfields of religious studies,” but “this is not to reduce contemplative practice to religiously-committed forms” (12). The following discussion of the fields and ends of contemplation in Islam does not reduce contemplation but rather expands it to encompass the entire universe and to be involved in various life experiences. The Noble Qur’an points to two major fields of contemplation: the universe and humanity: “We will show them Our Signs in the universe, and in their own selves” (41:53). The signs of the universe are too numerous to be counted. Concerning humans, they are supposed to contemplate two aspects in themselves: their anatomy that dazzles physicians and their behavior with their surroundings. One interpretation of the second half of the verse argues that “what is meant here is man and his physical composition as detailed in the science of anatomy which indicates the wisdom of the Creator – may He be blessed and exalted – and the different inclinations and opposite natures that people have, good and bad” (ibn Kathīr). Though virtually scientific, the spectacular human anatomy has lured poets. Atwood, for instance, “celebrates the exceptional shape and function of the human brain” in “I Was Reading a Scientific Article” from *The Animals in that Country* (1968) (Abolfotoh, *The Essential* 124). She draws similarities between the human brain and the landscape, the seascape, and the skyscape (127). Such parallels between the brain and many elements in the universe refer to the oneness of the Creator, a notion that

brings forth sacredness to all beings and establishes an environmental humility.

Contemplation has two fields that result in two ends. It is understood from Quranic verses that the noblest end of contemplating the universe – and the human anatomy being part of it – is seeing the attributes of the Almighty God in His perfect creation and realizing His existence. This outcome of contemplation endows sacredness on nature by linking it to the Divine. The second end of contemplation is reflecting on humankind's conduct for fossilizing or modifying it. Therefore, the Noble Qur'an constantly presents commands and prohibitions for desired and undesired types of behavior. One of the most practical commands that can shape a reliable green human conduct on Earth is self-restraint, *jihad*. Jihad is an ancient Arabic word that refers to classical defensive warfare against Islam's enemies. Its broader meaning entails the everlasting inner struggle to suppress one's evil and follow goodness. Referring to this unique quality, the Noble Qur'an affirms that the one who "restrained himself from impure evil desires and lusts. / Verily, Paradise will be his abode" (79:40-41). Self-control, Prophet Muhammad affirms, is the most difficult type of jihad. On the way home from the Battle of Badr and directing his speech to Muslims, he "uttered an important and oft-quoted maxim: 'We are returning from the Lesser Jihad (the battle) and going to the Greater Jihad,'—the immeasurable more important and difficult struggle to reform their own society and their own hearts" (Armstrong 125). For the significance of self-restraint in nature conservation, some Muslim environmentalists label their effort to save nature an eco-jihad. Naeem's "Eco-Jihad: Planting Trees for Paradise" and Zbidi's "The Call to Eco-Jihad" are good examples. Eco-jihad can be placed within the broader principle of "ethical jihad"; however, the former expands the meaning of ethical jihad through the inclusion of non-humans (Abderrahman 174).

The two ends of contemplation tangle when the realization of the Almighty God through the universe's contemplation leads one to be watchful of his/her conduct and to fear His penalty in case of deviation. This way, humans' mission and vision on Earth become definite with no inner fighting forces. Omer, an award-winning author and associate professor of Islamic

history and civilization, believes that by following the tradition of contemplation, one experiences a sense of “amazement with regard to the awesome sights in the universe, as a result of Allah’s supreme artistry, followed by his in-depth study of what is viable thereof, [which] is meant to lead man to an unwavering spiritual awakening.” This awakening plays a vital role in behavioral reform as will be disclosed in the following poems.

### ***Contemplation Illustrated in Poetic Argumentations:***

In “Trees at the Arctic Circle (*Salix Cordifolia*–Ground Willow),” Purdy contemplates the behavior of ground willows: “the dwarf trees of Baffin Island” that manage to grow above the tree line (183). Purdy is a Canadian free verse poet who wrote thirty-nine books of poetry and was called the nation’s unofficial poet laureate (Brooke). The free verse poem under consideration consists of four stanzas: the first and the fourth are of the same length (sixteen lines), the second has nine lines, and the third has seventeen. There are no internal or end punctuation marks, so the lines run smoothly. Concerning new ideas, they are marked in capital letters. Pauses take place by line ends, among stanzas, and at the beginning of some lines which are tabbed off the body of the poem. Lines are concise in the first half of the poem. As the theme progresses, they get longer to give space for the poet’s argument and to express his conclusions. The rhythm is mostly fast except for some long words that slow it down for thinking. The use of concrete language focusing on flora helps the reader visualize the setting. In the first two stanzas, satirical; aggressive; and offensive words are used to attack ground willows, small flowering plants. In the final two stanzas, the attack is interrupted by the poet when he satirizes his own ignorance and praises the dwarf trees. Contemplation carries out its mission; eventually, the poet becomes enlightened.

The poem begins with botanic depictions of the trees: “They are 18 inches long / or even less / crawling under rocks” (Purdy 182). They are seen “grovelling among the lichens / bending and curling” (182). The use of the present continuous indicates the continuity of this behavior during their lifespan. Scientific data are given a metaphorical flavor (crawling –

grovelling – bending – curling) to indicate the plant's willful movement, i.e., its deliberate intention to carry out certain missions by its movement. This is one of the notable features which points to the animism of flora. Although this behavior is intended to preserve the trees' life, the speaker sounds to be ignorant of this fact. Therefore, s/he feels "angry" with this species calling it "Coward trees" "not proud of what they are" (182). The word *Coward* is capitalized in this and the next stanza to imply that it is the proper name of ground willows in the poem. The trees are likened to an outlaw "finding new ways to hide" and "escape" from a crime or a shameful deed (182). Their shameful deed, according to the poem, is "making themselves small" (182). Their cowardice is perceived in "bowing to weather" and being "careful of themselves / worried about the sky / afraid of exposing their limbs" (182). The use of cognitive verbs once again indicates their deliberate behavior. The speaker's predicament at this point is his/her inability to translate their conduct as an act of adaptation that conserves their kind rather than a sign of cowardice. The contemplative experience clearly begins with ignorance, then it sets his/her thoughts on fire.

In the second stanza, a lack of consideration and knowledge persists. The speaker finds the stunted weather-beaten trees of the North antithetical to the immense southern trees s/he is inspired to imagine (Merkley 5). Therefore, s/he draws a paradox between both: "I call to mind great Douglas firs / I see tall maples waving green / and oaks like gods in autumn gold" (Purdy 182). The speaker applauds their pride which shows up in their sense of greatness, in their waving green branches, and through standing in a god-like position as they tangle together in the "jungle dark" "horizon" (182). These depictions contrast the behavior of "Coward trees" (182). This is the second use of the word *Coward* to describe and name ground willows so as to emphasize his/her scorn. Scorn reaches a climax when the speaker refers to "the dwarf shrubs of Ontario" that "mock them," too (182).

With continuous contemplation, misunderstandings are amended. The speaker knows how s/he and the dwarf shrubs of Ontario were mistaken in their first judgments. Therefore, the third stanza begins with: "And yet—and yet—" to imply the ideological changes the speaker goes through (182). S/he watches the trees' "seed pods glow / like delicate grey earrings" (182). The

speaker gets to know that these plants have a limited life cycle. They have to strive “to make sure the species does not die” (182). Their sole means is conserving themselves and their delicate precious seeds from the severe weather in the Arctic Circle. Technically, there is no brain in plants to organize these functions. However, the Almighty God creates these trees – and all other beings – and provides them with every needed means for survival and the continuance of their type: “Our Lord is He Who gave to each thing its form and nature, then guided it aright” (*The Qur’an* 20:50). The behavioral motion of plant species stimulates wonder and points to this divine wisdom. Margaret Atwood’s “Sundew” from *The Animals in That Country* (1968) is an unforgotten example in this context.

When the wisdom behind the cowardly behavior of ground willows becomes clear, the speaker regrets his/her former attack. S/he begins to reflect on their animism which is not of a coward criminal but of a brave worrier striving in the bitter weather by all possible means to save himself and his army/seeds. Thus, with much more appreciation, the speaker in the remaining part of the third stanza contemplates their life. The trees

spend their time

unbothered by any human opinion

just digging in here and now

sending their roots down down down. (Purdy 183)

They are independent creatures unmindful of any human opinion; the essential elements for their survival are secured to them by their Creator. They have the sun, the air, and extending roots of “about 2 feet” to reach the “permafrost / ice that remains ice forever / and they use it for their nourishment” (183). They are not created and left on their own, but there is a caring Hand that directs every motion to fulfill a certain purpose. Nothing is haphazard, and the trees find their way to nutrients in ice to “use death to remain alive” (183). This death/life paradox comes at the juncture of the stanza. It encapsulates endless life cycles in nature where life finds its way in death, and death is the doom of life forms. This very cycle is the reason for

the trees' so-called cowardly behavior to conserve their life (seeds) before death.

The speaker's earlier "scorn of the dwarf trees" indicates an unawareness of their innate animate existence that is measured by a heavenly balance (183). Therefore, the fourth stanza is an apology to them. The speaker scorns his/her own ignorance and decides to document it in the poem. S/he accuses him/herself of being "most foolish in my judgments / To take away the dignity / of any living thing" (183). Contemplating ground willows teaches him/her the most valuable lesson: "life" of *any* creature is never "trivial" (183). When humans employ their senses and reason, they understand this reality. The speaker acknowledges that s/he has "been stupid in a poem," but s/he "will not alter the poem" (183). Instead, s/he will "let the stupidity remain permanent / as the trees are / in a poem" (183). The poem becomes a moral lesson that should not be forgotten: The universe is alive and enjoys an intrinsic value. It is sustained by its Creator with His unlimited wisdom and knowledge. The role of humans is to look and learn. The most remarkable outcome of this contemplative experience is that it causes the speaker's attitude to be altered. This is one of the most desirable results of nature's contemplation to environmentalism.

Many surahs in the Noble Qur'an begin with oaths by several natural creatures and phenomena like the sun, the Earth, the dawn, and others. The Almighty God draws attention to the fact that human beings should recognize their value. In surah ninety-five, for example, the Maker takes an oath "By the fig, and the olive" (*The Qur'an* 95:1). "The two trees have been specified because they possess abundant blessings and advantages" (Shafi). In addition, this oath by plant life implies the value and sacredness of the entire species. The Almighty God takes an oath by small figs and tiny olives though there are other more complicated and bigger types of plants. Hence, it is not a matter of size; these are mostly human miscalculations. Dwarf trees are not dwarf in value. Fortunately, contemplation has been the key to unveiling their significance by the end of the poem.

The implicit result of contemplation in Purdy's poem has been seeing the Creator's attributes and greatness in nature which leads to re-evaluating

one's judgments. This implicit outcome is explicitly expressed in Carman's "Vestigia." The poem inspects the Maker's vestigia, i.e., traces, through contemplating His creation. Carman, "the unofficial poet laureate of Canada in 1921," was the "most lyrical and Bohemian of Canada's Confederation poets" and was famous for the fineness of his sensibilities ("Bliss"). The poem consists of five five-lined stanzas. The melodious verses have a regular rhyme scheme (aabba) and rhythm (iambic tetrameter). The resultant music reflects harmony in nature, mimics its beautiful sounds, and provides a calm atmosphere for contemplation. The use of caesuras and line-ends creates many pauses for reflection. Similarly, the regular use of punctuation marks, neat phrasing, and the orderly use of grammar help the reader concentrate on the subjects of contemplation. The general use of language in the poem motivates the senses, and the figures of speech are suggestive and visually imagistic. The colors and sounds of nature provoke eyesight and the ears. Moreover, word choice fits the general mode of the poem and provides a satisfying contemplative experience.

The speaker could not find the Almighty God in the busy civilized world. Therefore, s/he decides to take "a day to search for God" (Carman 82). The speaker heads toward the wilderness as a convenient place for contemplation. At first, s/he "found Him not" (82). "But as I trod / By rocky ledge, through woods untamed, / Just where one scarlet lily flamed," the speaker remarks, "I saw His footprint in the sod" (82). The metaphorical depiction of the scarlet lily as a flaming fire implies its burning vibrant color and mellowness. The image generally points to the place's wild fertility. Through these lines, the poet draws some criteria for a successful contemplation. *Solitude* is important; the speaker is by him/herself. *Activating the senses* is a vital impetus. *The wilderness* is preferred to urban spots because it provides direct contact with virgin nature. Virgin nature reveals the greatness of the Almighty God's creation which manifests for His presence. *Calmness* is, equally, crucial to create a mental space for contemplation. *Concentration* is an indisputable requirement: the speaker takes a day off to search for God; s/he empties the mind from everything to focus on his/her quest. When these steps are done, s/he finds nature a clear

sign of its Maker. The speaker's finding is the utmost goal of contemplating the universe.

The first stanza pinpoints eyesight as the first urge for contemplation. In the second and the third, hearing is introduced. The speaker goes “[f]ar off in the deep shadows, where / A solitary hermit thrush / Sang through the holy twilight hush” (82). The thrush is likened to a solitary hermit contemplating the Almighty God's creation. This personification of the thrush initiates another metaphor of its surroundings being equal to a sacred place. The magnificent symphony played by the song of the thrush, the “stir of wind,” and the rustle of “poplar leaves” helps the speaker hear “His voice upon the air” (82). Then, the contemplative experience expands to include heaven; the speaker “marveled how / God gives us Heaven here and now” (82). The reader expects to hear *there* after *here*. Nevertheless, the speaker is not interested in what lies there. S/he concentrates on the present experience and becomes absorbed in its exact borders: its place – “here” – and time – “now.” At this point, nature epitomizes one harmonious display of the perfect powers of the Maker. Ignorance is replaced by certainty via contemplation and sense of awe. Metaphysical belief becomes a concrete experience that leaves no space for doubt: “His hand was light upon my brow” (82).

Contemplation, according to the poet, is not a shallow limited experience. Indeed, it develops and grows after its actual practice. The speaker states that s/he will think about “what I had learned / And all that there was still to probe” (82). Contemplation is a deep psychological state that cannot be eroded. Once you set forth on the journey, there is no coming back. Feelings get changed permanently because the acquainted knowledge has been a fusion of sensory and mental faculties. The senses are activated to focus on the subject(s) of contemplation. This process is accompanied by mental operations that eventually lead to gaining knowledge.

It is “evening” time; the speaker decides to “[turn] / [h]omeward” (Carman 82). However, s/he is still in His realm, so s/he “caught the glory of His robe / Where the last fires of sunset burned” (82). The orange color of the sky at sunset is energetically equated to that of fire to denote its appealing splendor. The poet insists that as long as one is in the wilderness, the



Creator's presence will be overwhelming. Once one gets the first thread of His existence, it becomes unavoidable. Though the speaker decides to stop his/her contemplative experience, the place does not allow ending. Being in the wilderness makes contemplation inescapable. The experience may end when one returns to the routine of civil life. Nonetheless, memories continue to instigate the contemplator for more contemplative journeys. The poem suggests that city dwellers are much more remote from contemplation than those who live in rustic or wild spots. While these spots lack urban places' conveniences, many of their dwellers will not trade their serene contemplative life for city life.

Contemplation is crucial for a refreshing start. When the soul gets rusty with a busy loaded material life, contemplation turns out to be the inevitable therapy. The speaker returns "[b]ack to the world with quickening start" (82). S/he "longed for" what s/he has learned; s/he missed Him (82). Yet, contemplation gives him/her a "kindling ecstasy" (82). Fire imagery is used here for the third time as an indicator of the vigor of the experience and its ends. This ecstasy will never go away and will continue to gush from within because s/he "knew God dwelt within my heart" (82). The speaker goes through one of the highest degrees of certainty when s/he feels His presence in his/her heart all the time. This is a Qur'anic fact: "And He is with you... wheresoever you may be" (*The Qur'an* 57:4). The poem begins with a decision to find the Maker's traces by contemplating His creation. Indeed, it is a recurrent demand to humans in various verses: "And on the earth are signs for those who have Faith with certainty" (51:20). Thus, the poem ends with utter belief. The Creator is no longer noticed by a footprint, a voice, or a touch upon the brow. His holy presence fills the contemplator's heart. Therefore, the poem is an invitation to humans, townspeople, in particular, to have a break to search for Him. The experience is cathartic and therapeutic, and they will be addicted to the beauty that points to the "Beauty" (Carman 82).

Realizing the Almighty God's vestigia in nature has remarkable environmental benefits. When humans believe that nature is an emblem of the Creator's supremacy and that it has no independent existence from Him, they innately concede its sanctity. Subsequently, they realize their role as

stewards entrusted with Earth to enjoy its resources without corrupting them. As a result, they show gratitude to the Creator by keeping its well-being. Furthermore, seeing the Creator's vestigia in nature provokes His attributes which encompass Mercy – for granting humans such a magnificent ecosphere – besides Anger and Revenge in case of abuse. Hence, humankind expects a divine reward or penalty for its deeds. These are strong incentives for responsible conduct in which over-consumption and extravagance are dismissed in favor of moderation, harm prevention, and keeping the divine balance of nature.

The force of contemplation to enhance environmental activism is, further, investigated in Waddington's "Dead Lakes." The poet was a Life Member of the League of Canadian Poets, an essayist, and a social worker ("Miriam"). She was awarded Borestone Mountain Awards for best poetry in 1963, 1966, and 1974 ("Miriam"). Through the poem, she contemplates the Anthropocene epoch in which humankind's behavior has become the main agent of negative change to many ecosystems. The poem is written in free verse and comprises four stanzas. The introductory and concluding ones have eight lines. The body stanzas consist of ten and twelve lines, respectively. The cumulative arrangement of stanzas' length mimics the progress of events which reaches a climax by the third stanza. Each stanza is one complete sentence dissected into concise lines. Each complete idea/stanza ends with a period to leave a space for contemplating the actions of humans. Enjambments within stanzas are technically suitable for a breathless compilation of events. A combination of short and long words creates a disorderly rhythm that mimics nature's abuse. Concerning language, grim words prevail; the word *dead*, for example, is repeated four times. Positive words like *living* are fewer, and in their context, they negatively represent nostalgia for life. The present simple is used throughout the poem to indicate a factual representation of events.

As its name implies, "Dead Lakes" tackles the catastrophic repercussions of mining in Greater Sudbury. "Over 7,000 lakes around Sudbury, Ontario, Canada were acidified by S [Sulphur] deposition associated with emissions from the Sudbury metal smelters" (Keller et al.

317). The history of the lakes' contamination shows how before the turn of the twentieth century, "the area grew into one of the largest metal-producing complexes in the world. Smelter emissions peaked during the 1960s... Thousands of tons of metal particulates have also been emitted from the Sudbury smelters over the years. Lakes in a large area of northeastern Ontario were severely affected by the atmospheric deposition of contaminants... [to] the point at which significant biological damage is expected" (317). Although mining in the region dates to 10,000 years ago, 1883 is treated as the starting date of its recent history (Jewiss). Mining activities were at first carried out by primitive miners, but later, local giants and multinational companies mined the lakes for copper, nickel, gold, platinum, silver, tin, and other minerals (Jewiss). Tragic consequences of mining became notable with the technological and industrial advances of the mining industry. Therefore, the lakes fell prey to material utilitarianism and the transgressive rules of the market that prioritize profit and consumption over goodness and morality (Abderrahman 201).

The poem is stereotypical of the Canadian settlement sin: the self-reproaching burden for the loss of biodiversity in Canada. It starts with a dreary contemplation of the "dead lakes / of Sudbury" which become in 1972, the poem's publication date,

unstirring waters

without splash

without fish

without waterbugs

without breath. (Waddington 177)

The repetition of the word *without* emphasizes the death of innumerable life forms due to mining emissions. As a matter of fact, marine life "act[s] as a biological indicator of water pollution level" (Al-Attar 77). A bitter example is detected in Clearwater Lake, "one of the most highly affected Sudbury lakes in the 1970s" (Keller 320). It has been monitored by scientists since the 1970s, and it has been noticed that "acid and metals released by nickel

smelting operations in Sudbury left the water body all but void of life” (“Sudbury”).

The second stanza explains the reason behind the disappearance of marine life in the lakes:

The slag fires  
of Sudbury  
spill molten metal  
on summer midnight[.] (Waddington 177)

The miners are depicted doing illegal activity at midnight. Mining has drastic effects on several species, so the poet portrays it as a crime against the ecological life of Sudbury. Biological studies affirm that “[i]f heavy metals enter and accumulate in body tissue faster than the body’s detoxification pathways can dispose of them, a gradual buildup of these toxins will occur” (Al-Attar 77). Fish “intoxicated with nickel,” for instance, suffer “pathological changes in the gills and blood [glucose]” along with “a broad suite of biochemical and physiological alterations” (82).

The poet laments “the low lakes / of Sudbury” that were dramatically intoxicated. They

press deep into earth  
under the towers  
of shivering  
mines. (Waddington 177)

The lakes seek refuge into the earth from the towers of mines; nevertheless, there is no hope. The use of the word *towers* and the employment of its and the word *mines* plural forms imply enormity, sturdiness, and multiplicity. In contrast to this bleak image, the poet seeks hope by describing the mines as being shivering to indicate their weakness and probable imminent collapse.

All in all, the lines represent a rich paradox between reality versus wished-for reality.

The poet's anguish grows deeper while she "look[s] down / in the dead waters / of Sudbury" (177). Her thoughts drive her to "Flaubert" Gustave, the French novelist who was famous for his pure clear precise perfectionist style of writing achieved by an obsession to find the right word (177). The poet draws an original simile in which she likens Flaubert's "passion for clarity"

with his crystal  
Frenchness with  
his one sentence  
a day[.]

to "the passion / of fish for a / living element" (177). The superficial meaning of the simile is obviously pessimistic. However, reading this image after about eight decades of writing the poem has optimistic associations. Flaubert's passion for clarity has been achieved through slow painstaking effort, and he successfully engraved his name among reputable literary figures. The fish's passion for freshwater has also been achieved gradually with persistent efforts by caring stewards. A case in point is once again traced in Clearwater Lake that "was intentionally left untouched after damage from mining emissions [and currently] has managed to make a recovery" ("Sudbury"). Experts affirm that the "presence of multiple fish species means the lake can now be considered recovered" due to "investments in clean technology at the smelter" and large changes in the lake's chemistry "[a]s emissions of SO<sub>2</sub> and metals were dramatically reduced during the 1970s" ("Sudbury"; Keller 318).

The present and future of Sudbury are quite promising if compared to its past. Therefore, its dilemma was not solved by the fourth stanza. The poem ends pessimistically considering the bleak vision of the region at that time. The poet grimly

..... search[es]

for the living water  
in the dead lakes  
of Sudbury[.] (Waddington 177-78)

However, she finds none. The word *Sudbury* by this stanza has been repeated five times to stress the locality of the theme. However, the thematic circle gets wider and expands to include the other dead places in Canada:

and I search  
for a living element  
in the dead places  
of my country. (178)

The lines expand the circle of contemplation to include other violations against biodiversity in Canada. Moreover, the word *search* is repeated twice in the stanza to affirm the absence of marine and wild life as well as the poet's concern to search for them. Despite the Canadianness of the theme, global environmental chaos is, likewise, implied and visualized by non-Canadian readers.

The poem strongly encourages self-reproach for global ecological deterioration. Contemplating humans' actions and confessing sins are healthy phenomena prior to self and communal reform. This was clear in the case of Sudbury lakes. The change was never to be manageable without contemplating the conduct of miners and the state of the region by concerned onlookers on varied levels: social, scientific, literary, and governmental. "Dead Lakes" is an exemplary piece of Canadian literature that reveals the role and ability of literature to raise awareness and cause changes by contemplating reality. Such poetic documentations of environmental history provide a practical historical record of a specific area for tracing the effects of nature abuse and the validity of containing it by modifying faulty behavior. This way, humans learn that it is their inexorable role to interfere before it is too late. The Almighty God states that "[e]vil... has appeared on land and sea because of what the hands of men have earned" (*The Qur'an* 30:41). The

verse is very precise; the Almighty God uses the word *appeared* not *spread*. Humans should react as soon as evil appears. Waiting till its spread makes the cure inaccessible. This parameter of *evil appearance* is vital; humans should be constantly attentive to the results of their activities. They may even need to change the entire course of their civilization to cease environmental damage.

“The merciful are shown mercy by Ar-Rahman. Be merciful on the earth, and you will be shown mercy from Who is above the heavens” (*Jami` at-Tirmidhi*, b. 27, h. 1924).<sup>1</sup> The Hadith calls for mercy to be adopted as a manner of living while co-existing with others, humans or non-humans. The human behavior in Sudbury was void of mercy; no consideration was given to the lakes or marine life. According to Islamic philosophy, the entire universe is animate including inert beings like lakes. Animism has become an accepted fact among eco-philosophers, and it shapes the core of Material Ecocriticism. Muslims, similarly, believe that all creatures glorify the Almighty God in their own ways: “See you not that whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth, and the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the mountains, and the trees, and *Ad-Dawâbb* [moving (living) creatures, beasts], and many of mankind prostrate themselves to Allah...” (*The Qur’an* 22:18, italics original). The verse reveals that “[e]verything prostrates to His might, willingly or unwillingly... in a manner that befits its nature” (ibn Kathîr). According to the Qur’an and the Sunnah,<sup>2</sup> all these worshipping beings are at peace when used for the purpose of their creation. If abused or misused, they will testify against abusive humans on the Day of Judgment. When the Hell’s dwellers blame their skins for testifying against

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<sup>1</sup> The Sunnah translation is retrieved from <https://sunnah.com/>. For in-text citation, each Hadith is followed by the collection title, the book number, and the Hadith number.

<sup>2</sup> The Sunnah refers to the sayings, traditions, and actions of Prophet Muhammad which emphasize and explain the verses of *The Qur’an*. It is written in separate numbered units; each of them is called Hadith (plural: Ahadith). The Sunnah is collected in *al-Kutub as-Sitta* (*The Six Books*) by six Muslim scholars. Each of *The Six Books* is considered one big collection which consists of a number of books.

them, their skins respond by saying: “Allâh has caused us to speak – He causes all things to speak” (*The Qur’an* 41:21). It is understood from the verse that all things will speak and complain about all sorts of cruelty against them. Mercy mixed with responsibility for an animate universe is at the heart of humans’ stewardship on Earth. This should have been the ideal attitude in Sudbury.

The valuable metals of Sudbury lakes have been used in many important industries and raised Canadian national income. They have been a divine gift to help humans improve their life. The mistake has not been in employing the mind to utilize these metals for humankind’s benefit. The mistake has been the absence of moderation, the hegemony of greed, denying stewardship, the spread of corruption, and disregarding ethical concerns for the surrounding ecosystem. Besides, harm prevention has not been considered. According to the Hadith, “[t]here should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm” (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, b.13, h. 2340). To illustrate, the ecology of Sudbury should not be harmed while employing its resources for mining. Similarly, humans should not be harmed by preventing them from mining for causing harm in the region. Balancing the interests of humans and nature (which already was present in primitive mining activities) is the answer. The current moderate use of resources along with employing clean industries turn out to be equally good solutions to reach this balance and accomplish harm prevention.

## **Conclusion:**

Environmental degradation results from a lack of respect for the greatness of Creation and abandoning humans’ role as stewards responsible for their actions in front of the Maker. Contemplation plays a key role in correcting both ideological fallacies. To illustrate, contemplating the universe restores respect to its great creation and provides it with the sacredness that stems from the holiness of the Creator. Contemplating human behavior, on the other hand, shapes responsible stewardship that balances the relationship between humans and their surroundings. Both outcomes lead to humanity’s



humility which is extremely needed to counterbalance the arrogance of scientific and technological advancements.

Contemplation can be a complementary medicine to humans' psychic and physical disorders. However, for nature's disorders, it is a primary medicine and stimulant for a cure. Therefore, the study starts with an Islamecocritical appreciation of the concept of contemplation in Islam. Its rituals, steps, fields, and ends are discussed. Then three selected Canadian poems are analytically appreciated to demonstrate its significance. The argument exposes that contemporaries should start their contemplative journey to recognize their purpose in life, re-evaluate their actions, establish new targets, and have a fresh beginning. The whole universe including humans is an open field for this journey. Contemplating plants, for instance, reveals a willful movement that can never be haphazard. Their existence is linked to a sacred Creator Who gives them a primordial innateness to organize their life. Purdy's poem narrates a story of ignorance enlightened by contemplation. Readers learn to respect all creatures regardless of their size or incomprehensible behavior. Due care and appreciation are given to their undeniable animism. Carman's "Vestigia" enforces Purdy's findings. The poem elucidates how the Almighty God has created a symmetrical universe that points to His greatness and the inviolability of His creation. Henceforth, The Maker's attributes are clearly found in nature, and nature becomes a definite sign of Him. This understanding gives birth to a compulsory sense of unity and connectedness among all creatures with the supreme holy God controlling His universe and watching how humans conduct their earthly life.

Contemplating the anatomy of the human body points to the greatness of the Creator. Regarding human behavior, it is contemplated to be monitored and modified. The universe has a planned fixed course, and humanity is the major variable in it. Therefore, their deeds (advantageous or ruinous) have a decisive word in determining the path of their surroundings: "And that man can have nothing but what he does (good or bad)" (53:39). If humanity strives for destruction, it will have destruction; if it strives for goodness, it will have goodness. This is a broad conception that shapes humankind's environmental ethics, and it is strongly emphasized in Waddington's "Dead Lakes." The poem represents vigorous fieldwork for contemplating one of the hot issues

in the 1970s: the appalling mining industry and its ecological impact on Sudbury lakes. The damaging human behavior lead to nature's devastation. When humans altered their harmful conduct, they managed to reinstate relative equilibrium in the region. The fruits of the poem show up a few decades later with contamination containment and the gradual recovery of marine life. Therefore, nature writers are strongly invited to document their present, no matter how bleak it looks, to raise their contemporaries' awareness and to be a lesson for coming generations. For judging environmental degradation, humans should continuously contemplate their past, assess their present, and plan for the future. Re-investigating the poem in the wake of the twenty-first century necessitates a look at the many Sudburys scattered on the map like Wheal Jane Mines (United Kingdom), Terrafame Talvivaara polymetal mine (central Finland), tui mine (New Zealand), Ok Tedi Mine (Papua New Guinea), and so forth. The list is long because humans like to walk blindfolded on their way up toward development to make the utmost economic benefit from natural resources. With continuing insistence on this route, they will finally fall off.

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