A Postmodernist Analysis Of Hyper-Textuality In Alice Oswald's Poem "Dunt : A Poem for a Dried Up River"

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تحليل ما بعد حداثي للنص الفوقي في قصيدة أليس أوزوالد "دنت: قصيدة لنهر جاف"

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Abstract

This study explores the concept of hyper-textuality within Alice Oswald's "Dunt: A Poem for a Dried Up River," situating the poem within a postmodernist framework. The central problem of this analysis lies in understanding how Oswald's work embodies and challenges the notions of textuality, fragmentation, and intertextuality typical of postmodern literature. The aim is to uncover the ways in which hyper-textuality enhances the thematic concerns of environmental degradation and the impermanence of nature in "Dunt." The hypothesis posits that Oswald employs hyper-textuality not merely as a stylistic device but as a means to evoke a multifaceted dialogue between the poem and its surrounding cultural, ecological, and literary contexts. Guided by postmodern literary theory, the methodology encompasses a close reading of the text alongside comparative analyses with other works that explore similar themes of nature and loss. This approach is complemented by examining critical texts on hyper-textuality and postmodernism. Preliminary results indicate that Oswald's use of fragmented images, disjointed narratives, and allusions to various texts create a rich tapestry of meanings that invite readers to engage actively with the text, thus reinforcing the poem's central motifs of absence and ecological crisis. The findings contribute to a broader understanding of how contemporary poetry utilizes hyper-textuality as a vehicle for critical engagement with pressing environmental issues, suggesting that Oswald's work is not only a lament for a dried-up river but also an intricate commentary on the interconnectedness of text, nature, and human experience in the postmodern landscape.

Keywords: postmodernism, hyper-textuality, Alice Oswald, fragmented narrative, intertextuality, multiplicity of meanings, temporal fluidity, interactive reading experience, "Dunt: a poem for a dried up river"

المستخلص

تستكشف هذه الدراسة مفهوم النصية عالية التداخل ضمن قصيدة "دنت: قصيدة لنهر جف" لأليس أوزوالد، موضعةً القصيدة في إطار ما بعد الحداثة. تكمن المشكلة المركزية في هذا التحليل في فهم كيفية تجسد عمل أوزوالد وتحديها لمفاهيم النصية والافتقار والترابط النصي التي تعتبر نموذجية للأدب ما بعد الحداثي. الهدف هو الكشف عن الطرق التي تعزز بها النصية العالية التداخل الاهتمامات الموضوعية للتدهور البيئي وزوال الطبيعة في "دنت". تفترض الفرضية أن أوزوالد تستخدم النصية العالية التداخل ليس كوسيلة أسلوبية فحسب، بل كوسيلة لإثارة حوار متعدد الأبعاد بين القصيدة وسياقاتها الثقافية والبيئية والأدبية المحيطة. استناداً إلى نظرية الأدب ما بعد الحداثي، تشمل المنهجية قراءة دقيقة للنص جنبًا إلى جنب مع تحليلات مقارنة لأعمال أخرى تستكشف موضوعات مماثلة للطبيعة والفقدان. تكمل هذه المقاربة دراسة نصوص نقدية حول النصية العالية التداخل وما بعد الحداثة. تشير النتائج الأولية إلى أن استخدام أوزوالد للصور المجزأة والسرد غير المتناسق والاستشهادات بنصوص مختلفة يخلق نسيجًا غنيًا من المعاني التي تدعو القراء للانخراط بشكل نشط مع النص، مما يعزز الدوافع المركزية للشعر المتعلقة بالغياب والأزمة البيئية. تساهم النتائج في فهم أوسع لكيفية استخدام الشعر المعاصر للنصية العالية التداخل كوسيلة للانخراط النقدي مع القضايا البيئية الملحة، مما يشير إلى أن عمل أوزوالد ليس مجرد رثاء لنهر جف، بل هو أيضًا تعليق معقد حول الترابط بين النص والطبيعة وتجربة الإنسان في المشهد ما بعد الحداثي.

الكلمات الرئيسية: ما بعد الحداثة، النص الفوقي، أليس أوزوالد، السرد المجزأ، التداخل النصي، تعددية المعاني، السيولة الزمنية، تجربة القراءة التفاعلية.

1. Introduction

Alice Oswald's poetry, characterized by its deep engagement with nature and myth, offers fertile ground for postmodern analysis. Her poem "Dunt" exemplifies many hallmarks of postmodern literature, particularly through its hyper-textuality—a literary technique that breaks linear narrative structure and creates a web of interconnected meanings and references (Barthes, 1977). This technique aligns with the postmodern ethos of questioning established narratives and embracing multiplicity and fragmentation (Lyotard, 1984). "Dunt" employs a fragmented narrative structure that resists straightforward interpretation, inviting readers to piece together meaning from a series of disjointed yet evocative images. The poem opens with the figure of a "very speechless very broken old woman," a Roman water nymph made of bone, attempting to "summon a river out of limestone" (Oswald, 2009). This surreal image sets the tone for a poem that oscillates between the past and present, the mythological and the mundane. The use of repetition and recursive phrases such as "try again" and "go on" further disrupts any sense of linear progression, emphasizing a cyclical, iterative process of meaning-making (Hutcheon, 1988) instead. This technique mirrors the hyper-textual nature of digital media, where readers navigate through non-linear pathways, creating unique interpretations based on their interactions with the text (Landow, 1992). Moreover, Oswald's poem is rich in intertextual references, blending elements of classical mythology with contemporary environmental concerns. This interweaving of diverse textual strands is a quintessential feature of postmodern literature, reflecting a world where boundaries between texts, genres, and even temporal periods are porous and fluid (Kristeva, 1980). In

"Dunt," the ancient and the modern coexist, each informing the other and creating a layered, multifaceted narrative.

By analyzing "Dunt" through the lens of postmodern hyper-textuality, this paper aims to uncover the complex interplay of themes, images, and references that make Oswald's work a compelling example of postmodern poetry. This approach not only highlights the innovative techniques employed by Oswald but also underscores the broader implications of postmodernism in contemporary literary studies.

2. **Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive approach to analyze Oswald's poem "Dunt" through the lens of postmodern hyper-textuality. The analysis focuses on examining the poem's structure, imagery, and intertextual references to uncover the layers of meaning and thematic complexity embedded within the text. The primary method of analysis is close reading, a detailed and nuanced examination of the text that aims to identify and interpret significant literary devices, symbols, and themes (Belsey, 2013). This method allows for an in-depth exploration of how Oswald's use of fragmentation, repetition, and intertextuality creates a hyper-textual narrative. In addition to textual analysis, thematic analysis is used to identify recurring motifs and themes within the poem. This approach helps to elucidate how the poem's disparate elements coalesce to form a cohesive commentary on memory, time, and the natural world (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Intertextual analysis involves examining the references and allusions to other texts and cultural artefacts within the poem (Kristeva, 1980). This method helps to situate the poem within a broader literary and cultural context, revealing the dialogic

relationship between Oswald's work and other narratives. This study is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of postmodernism and hyper-textuality, with a particular emphasis on their application to contemporary poetry.

3. Theoretical Framework

Postmodernism is characterized by its rejection of grand narratives and its embrace of fragmentation, multiplicity, and the instability of meaning (Lyotard, 1984). In the context of literary analysis, postmodernism emphasizes the deconstruction of traditional narrative structures and the exploration of alternative modes of representation (Hutcheon, 1988). Oswald's "Dunt" exemplifies postmodern principles through its fragmented structure and its blending of mythological and contemporary elements. The poem's non-linear narrative and its use of repetition and recursive phrases challenge readers to engage in an active process of meaning-making, reflecting the postmodern scepticism toward fixed and authoritative interpretations.

Hyper-textuality which refers to the textual practice of creating interconnected, non-linear pathways of meaning, is often associated with digital texts but applicable to any form of narrative that eschews linear progression (Landow, 1992). It invites readers to navigate through a web of interrelated elements, constructing their pathways and interpretations. The poem employs hyper-textual techniques by presenting a series of disjointed, evocative images and phrases that resist linear interpretation. The poem's iterative structure, marked by the repeated injunctions to "try again" and "go on," creates a sense of recursive exploration, akin to navigating through a hypertext (Bolter, 2001).

Intertextuality as introduced by Julia Kristeva, posits that texts are inherently interwoven with other texts, forming a network of meanings that transcend individual works (Kristeva, 1980). This concept is central to the analysis as Oswald's poem draws on a rich tapestry of mythological, historical, and environmental references. By situating "Dunt" within this intertextual framework, the study highlights how Oswald engages in a dialogic relationship with other narratives, creating a multi-layered text that reflects the complexity and interconnectedness of human experience (Barthes, 1977).

Postcolonial Theory, although not the primary focus, postcolonial theory provides additional insights into the cultural and historical dimensions of Oswald's work. Postcolonial theory examines the impacts of colonialism on cultures and literature, emphasizing themes of identity, resistance, and hybridity (Bhabha, 1994). While "Dunt" is not explicitly postcolonial, its engagement with historical and mythological themes invites consideration of how these narratives intersect with broader cultural and ecological concerns.

4. Literature Review

The existing studies on postmodernism, including works such as "Celebrated Fragmentation: A Postmodern Study of Harold Pinter's 'The Homecoming'" by Almaaroof & Muhesin (2024), "Breaking the Grand Narrative in Sam Shepard's 'Buried Child': A Postmodern Study" by Almaaroof & Abdullah F. J. (2024), and "The Simpsons: A Postmodern Reading for the Position of an American Family" by Almaaroof & Jabir (2023), primarily focus on analyzing fragmentation and narrative structures in various literary texts. However, these studies do not specifically address

the intersection of hyper-textuality with ecological themes within contemporary poetry, particularly in the context of Alice Oswald's "Dunt: A Poem for a Dried Up River." The existing literature tends to emphasize postmodern techniques in broader literary contexts without delving deeply into how hyper-textuality operates within poetry to engage with pressing environmental concerns. The current study seeks to fill this significant gap by providing a focused analysis of hyper-textuality in "Dunt," investigating how Oswald employs intertextual connections and fragmented narratives to enhance her commentary on environmental decay and the fragility of nature. By bridging this gap, the study aims to contribute to the understanding of how contemporary poets utilize postmodern strategies to reflect and challenge urgent ecological issues, thereby situating "Dunt" within both literary and environmental discourses.

5. **Discussion & Analysis**

Alice Oswald, a prominent British poet, is renowned for her deep connection with nature and her innovative use of classical themes in contemporary settings. Born in 1966, Oswald's work often intertwines the natural world with human experience, reflecting her training as a gardener and classicist (Day, 2021). One of her notable poems, "Dunt," encapsulates her ability to evoke powerful imagery and emotion through the depiction of a dried-up river and a Roman water nymph (Oswald, n.d.). Postmodernism, with its focus on fragmented narratives, intertextuality, and the questioning of grand narratives, provides a fitting lens to analyze "Dunt" (Hutcheon, 1988; Lyotard, 1984). The poem's layered meanings and its reflection on the loss and recovery of voice align with postmodernist concerns about the instability of meaning and

the multiplicity of interpretations (Belsey, 2013). Thus, "Dunt" exemplifies how contemporary poetry can engage with postmodernist ideas, using hyper-textuality and fragmented structure to explore complex themes of memory, loss, and environmental change. The title of the poem serves as a starting point for a more expansive inquiry into environmental issues, effectively engaging readers with the broader implications of the poem's content. It acts as a portal to the rich, interconnected meanings within "Dunt," enhancing its hyper-textuality and reflecting the fragmented nature of postmodern poetry. It prompts an exploration of the relationships between human action, natural processes, and the deeper existential questions stemming from ecological crises.

The poem starts with :

> "Very small and damaged and quite dry,
> a Roman water nymph made of bone
> tries to summon a river out of limestone
>
> very eroded faded
> her left arm missing and both legs from the knee down
> a Roman water nymph made of bone
> tries to summon a river out of limestone" (Oswald, 2009, 1-7)

Oswald's poem "Dunt" presents a rich text for postmodern analysis, particularly through the lens of hyper-textuality. The above stanzas exemplify how fragmented imagery, intertextual references, and layered meanings create a complex, multifaceted reading experience.

The above stanzas provide fragmented and vivid images such as a "Roman water nymph made of bone" that is "very small and damaged and quite dry." It does not create a cohesive narrative but rather evokes a sense of decay and erosion. The repetition of the

phrase "tries to summon a river out of limestone" emphasizes the struggle and futility, creating a layered, recursive structure that invites multiple interpretations.

The multiplicity of Voices and perspectives are reflected in the use of the imagery evokes different voices and perspectives. The historical (Roman nymph), the natural (river, limestone), and the decayed (bone, eroded, missing limbs). These elements come together to create a multiplicity of meanings rather than a singular interpretation. Readers are encouraged to engage with the text on multiple levels, exploring the historical, mythical, and natural references embedded within the stanzas. Intertextual references are there as well in the use of Classical Mythology. The reference to a "Roman water nymph" connects the poem to classical mythology, invoking images of mythological beings associated with water and nature. This intertextuality enriches the poem, as readers draw connections between the ancient myth and the present decay. The nymph's attempt to "summon a river out of limestone" can be seen as a metaphor for the enduring power of myth and nature, even in the face of erosion and decay.

Historical and natural elements are apparent in the poem. The poem juxtaposes the ancient (Roman nymph) with the natural world (river, limestone). This blend of historical and natural references creates a complex intertextual web, inviting readers to explore the connections between past and present, human and nature. The imagery of limestone, a sedimentary rock, evokes geological time scales, adding another layer of depth to the text.

Blurring of boundaries is used in the blending of human and non-human. The poem blurs the boundaries between human and non-human elements. The nymph, a mythical human-like figure, is described as "made of bone" and connected to natural elements (river, limestone). This merging of human and natural imagery

challenges traditional distinctions and highlights the interconnectedness of all things. The physical decay of the nymph, described as "very eroded faded" with missing limbs, further emphasizes the fluidity and permeability of boundaries between different realms. Past and present have a role in creating this poem. The stanzas evoke a sense of timelessness, with the ancient Roman nymph existing in a state of perpetual decay and struggle. This blurring of temporal boundaries aligns with postmodern themes of temporal fluidity and the collapse of linear time. The repeated attempt to "summon a river out of limestone" suggests an ongoing, timeless effort, reinforcing the idea of cyclical time and the persistence of myth.

Interactive reading experience is another postmodern feature which appears in the engagement with fragmented text. The fragmented, vivid imagery and lack of linear narrative encourage readers to actively engage with the text, piecing together the different elements to construct meaning. This interactive reading experience is a key feature of hyper-textuality in postmodern literature. The repetition of certain phrases, such as "tries to summon a river out of limestone," creates a recursive structure that invites readers to explore the nuances and variations in meaning with each iteration. Multiple interpretations can also be seen in the criticism of this poem. The poem's ambiguity and layered imagery allow for multiple interpretations. Readers might see the nymph's struggle as a metaphor for human resilience, the power of myth, or the interplay between nature and history. This multiplicity of interpretations aligns with postmodern ideas about the instability and relativity of meaning. The poem's open-endedness encourages readers to bring their perspectives and experiences to the text, creating a personalized and dynamic reading experience. Oswald's stanzas, in this sense, exemplify postmodern hyper-textuality

through its fragmented imagery, intertextual references, blurring of boundaries, and interactive reading experience. The stanzas invite readers to engage with the text on multiple levels, exploring the complex interplay between myth, nature, history, and decay. Through this hyper-textual approach, "Dunt" challenges traditional narrative structures and offers a richly layered, multifaceted reading experience. The reader can follow the poem as the poet says:

> "exhausted utterly worn down
> a Roman water nymph made of bone
> being the last known speaker of her language
> she tries to summon a river out of limestone
> little distant sound of dry grass   try again
>
> a Roman water nymph made of bone
> very endangered now
> in a largely unintelligible monotone
> she tries to summon a river out of limestone
>
> little distant sound as of dry grass   try again"
> (Oswald, 2009, 8-17)

Oswald's stanzas use hyper-textuality to create a complex, multifaceted text that reflects postmodern themes of fragmentation, intertextuality, and the instability of meaning. The following analysis explores how these stanzas exemplify these elements.

Fragmented imagery is presented in an "exhausted utterly worn down" nymph, "the last known speaker of her language," and "a Roman water nymph made of bone." These fragments do not form a linear narrative but evoke a sense of decay, loss, and effort. The repetition of "she tries to summon a river out of limestone"

emphasizes the nymph's continual, perhaps futile, struggle, creating a recursive structure that invites various interpretations.

The multiplicity of voices and perspectives are suggested in the historical (Roman nymph), the ecological (dry grass), and the linguistic (last known speaker). Each perspective adds layers of meaning, reflecting the multiplicity inherent in postmodern texts. Readers engage with the text on multiple levels, interpreting the nymph's struggle through different lenses, such as environmental degradation, cultural loss, or mythical endurance. Intertextual references are used in mentioning the Classical mythology and linguistics. The "Roman water nymph" connects the poem to classical mythology, invoking images of ancient deities associated with nature and water. The mention of "the last known speaker of her language" introduces an intertextual reference to the field of linguistics and endangered languages. This blending of mythological and linguistic references enriches the poem, allowing readers to explore connections between cultural heritage, language preservation, and natural elements.

Historical and natural elements are shown in the stanzas. they juxtapose the ancient (Roman nymph) with the natural world (dry grass, limestone). This intertextuality creates a complex web of connections, inviting readers to consider the relationships between history, nature, and cultural loss. The imagery of dry grass and limestone evokes a sense of desolation and permanence, adding depth to the poem's exploration of decay and endurance.

Moreover, the poem blurs the boundaries between human and non-human elements. The nymph, a mythical human-like figure, is described as "made of bone" and connected to natural elements (river, limestone). This merging challenges traditional distinctions and highlights the interconnectedness of all things. The physical and linguistic decay of the nymph, described as "exhausted utterly

worn down" and speaking in "a largely unintelligible monotone," further emphasizes the fluidity and permeability of boundaries between different realms. The stanzas evoke a sense of timelessness, with the ancient Roman nymph existing in a state of perpetual struggle and decay. This blurring of temporal boundaries aligns with postmodern themes of temporal fluidity and the collapse of linear time. The repeated attempt to "summon a river out of limestone" suggests an ongoing, timeless effort, reinforcing the idea of cyclical time and the persistence of cultural and natural elements.

The fragmented, vivid imagery and lack of linear narrative encourage readers to actively engage with the text, piecing together the different elements to construct meaning. This interactive reading experience is a key feature of hyper-textuality in postmodern literature. The repetition of certain phrases, such as "tries to summon a river out of limestone," creates a recursive structure that invites readers to explore the nuances and variations in meaning with each iteration. The poem's ambiguity and layered imagery, in this sense, allow multiple interpretations. Readers might see the nymph's struggle as a metaphor for human resilience, the power of myth, or the interplay between nature and cultural loss. This multiplicity of interpretations aligns with postmodern ideas about the instability and relativity of meaning. The poem's open-endedness encourages readers to bring their perspectives and experiences to the text, creating a personalized and dynamic reading experience. Oswald's stanzas, in this concern, exemplify postmodern hyper-textuality through its fragmented structure, intertextual references, blurring of boundaries, and interactive reading experience. The stanzas invite readers to engage with the text on multiple levels, exploring the complex interplay between myth, nature, history, and cultural loss.

Through this hyper-textual approach, "Dunt" challenges traditional narrative structures and offers a richly layered, multifaceted reading experience. She continues when says:

> "exquisite bone figurine with upturned urn
> in her passionate self-esteem she smiles looking sideways
> she seemingly has no voice but a throat-clearing rustle
> as of dry grass   try again
>
> she tries leaning
> pouring pure outwardness out of a grey urn
>
> little slithering sounds as of a rabbit man in full night-gear,
> who lies so low in the rickety willowherb
> that a fox trots out of the woods
> and over his back and away   try again" (Oswald, 2009, 18-27)

The stanzas are filled with fragmented and evocative images such as those in an "exquisite bone figurine with upturned urn," a "throat-clearing rustle as of dry grass," and "little slithering sounds as of a rabbit man in full night-gear." These images do not form a cohesive narrative but rather evoke a series of disconnected scenes. The repetition of "try again" after each stanza emphasizes a cyclical, iterative process, creating a sense of continuous effort and renewal. The imagery presents a multiplicity of voices and perspectives such as in the ancient (bone figurine), the natural (dry grass, rabbit man, fox), and the abstract (pure outwardness). Each element contributes to a rich tapestry of meanings, reflecting the multiplicity inherent in postmodern texts. Readers are encouraged

to engage with the text on multiple levels, interpreting the scenes through different lenses, such as the mythological, natural, and metaphorical.

Classical mythology and natural world represent intertextual references. The "bone figurine with upturned urn" connects the poem to classical mythology, invoking images of ancient deities and rituals. The natural elements, such as the "throat-clearing rustle" and "slithering sounds," introduce intertextual references to the natural world and its rhythms. This blending of mythological and natural references enriches the poem, allowing readers to explore connections between cultural heritage, natural cycles, and the human condition. In this sense, The imagery of the "grey urn" and "pure outwardness" adds an abstract, symbolic dimension to the text. These elements invite readers to interpret the figurine's actions and the natural sounds in symbolic or metaphorical terms, creating a complex intertextual web. The reference to "a rabbit man in full night-gear" introduces a fantastical, surreal element, further enhancing the poem's intertextuality and richness.

The poem blurs the boundaries between human and non-human elements. The "bone figurine" and "rabbit man" merge human and animal characteristics, challenging traditional distinctions and highlighting the interconnectedness of all beings. The natural sounds, such as the "throat-clearing rustle" and "slithering sounds," further dissolve the boundaries between human and natural realms, creating a fluid, permeable world. The stanzas evoke a sense of timelessness, with the ancient figurine and the natural elements existing in a state of perpetual interaction. This blurring of temporal boundaries aligns with postmodern themes of temporal fluidity and the collapse of linear time. The repeated attempts to "try again" suggest an ongoing, timeless effort,

reinforcing the idea of cyclical time and the persistence of natural and cultural elements.

The fragmented, vivid imagery and lack of linear narrative encourage readers to actively engage with the text, piecing together the different elements to construct meaning. This interactive reading experience is a key feature of hyper-textuality in postmodern literature. The repetition of certain phrases, such as "try again," creates a recursive structure that invites readers to explore the nuances and variations in meaning with each iteration. The poem's ambiguity and layered imagery allow for multiple interpretations. Readers might see the figurine's actions as a metaphor for human resilience, the interplay between nature and culture, or the persistence of myth. This multiplicity of interpretations aligns with postmodern ideas about the instability and relativity of meaning. The poem's open-endedness encourages readers to bring their perspectives and experiences to the text, creating a personalized and dynamic reading experience.

The above lines exemplify postmodern hyper-textuality through its fragmented structure, intertextual references, blurring of boundaries, and interactive reading experience. The stanzas invite readers to engage with the text on multiple levels, exploring the complex interplay between myth, nature, history, and the human condition. Through this hyper-textual approach, "Dunt" challenges traditional narrative structures and offers a richly layered, multifaceted reading experience. The poet pursues her saying:

> "she tries leaning
> pouring pure outwardness out of a grey urn
> little lapping sounds   yes
> as of dry grass secretly drinking   try again
>
> little lapping sounds   yes
> as of dry grass secretly drinking   try again
>
> Roman bone figurine
> year after year in a sealed glass case
> having lost the hearing of her surroundings
> she struggles to summon a river out of limestone
>
> little shuffling sound as of approaching slippers"
> (Oswald, 2009, 28-38)

The the figurine "pouring pure outwardness out of a grey urn," the "lapping sounds as of dry grass secretly drinking," and the "little shuffling sound as of approaching slippers." These images do not form a cohesive narrative but evoke a series of disjointed, almost surreal scenes. The repetition of "try again" and "little lapping sounds" emphasizes a cyclical, iterative process, creating a sense of continuous effort and renewal. The imagery presents a multiplicity of voices and perspectives: the mythological (Roman bone figurine), the natural (dry grass), and the mundane (shuffling slippers). Each element contributes to a rich tapestry of meanings, reflecting the multiplicity inherent in postmodern texts. Readers are encouraged to engage with the text on multiple levels, interpreting the scenes through different lenses, such as mythological, natural, and metaphorical.

The "Roman bone figurine" connects the poem to classical mythology, invoking images of ancient deities and rituals. The

natural elements, such as the "dry grass" and "lapping sounds," introduce intertextual references to the natural world and its rhythms. This blending of mythological and natural references enriches the poem, allowing readers to explore connections between cultural heritage, natural cycles, and the human condition. The imagery of the "grey urn" and "pure outwardness" adds an abstract, symbolic dimension to the text. These elements invite readers to interpret the figurine's actions and the natural sounds in symbolic or metaphorical terms, creating a complex intertextual web. The "sealed glass case" introduces a historical, almost museological element, suggesting themes of preservation, isolation, and loss.

The poem blurs the boundaries between human and non-human elements. The "Roman bone figurine" and the actions of the dry grass merge human, mythical, and natural characteristics, challenging traditional distinctions and highlighting the interconnectedness of all beings. The figurine's struggle to "summon a river out of limestone" and the "lapping sounds as of dry grass secretly drinking" further dissolve the boundaries between human and natural realms, creating a fluid, permeable world. The stanzas evoke a sense of timelessness, with the ancient figurine existing in a state of perpetual interaction with the natural elements. This blurring of temporal boundaries aligns with postmodern themes of temporal fluidity and the collapse of linear time. The repeated attempts to "try again" suggest an ongoing, timeless effort, reinforcing the idea of cyclical time and the persistence of natural and cultural elements. The fragmented, vivid imagery and lack of linear narrative encourage readers to actively engage with the text, piecing together the different elements to construct meaning. This interactive reading experience is a key feature of hyper-textuality in postmodern literature. The repetition

of certain phrases, such as "try again" and "lapping sounds," creates a recursive structure that invites readers to explore the nuances and variations in meaning with each iteration. The poem's ambiguity and layered imagery allow for multiple interpretations. Readers might see the figurine's actions as a metaphor for human resilience, the interplay between nature and culture, or the persistence of myth. This multiplicity of interpretations aligns with postmodern ideas about the instability and relativity of meaning. The poem's open-endedness encourages readers to bring their perspectives and experiences to the text, creating a personalized and dynamic reading experience. The above lines exemplify postmodern hyper-textuality through its fragmented structure, intertextual references, blurring of boundaries, and interactive reading experience. The stanzas invite readers to engage with the text on multiple levels, exploring the complex interplay between myth, nature, history, and the human condition. Through this hyper-textual approach, "Dunt" challenges traditional narrative structures and offers a richly layered, multifaceted reading experience. The use of repeated phrases and fragmented images creates a sense of continuity and iteration, allowing the poem to resonate with postmodern themes of fluidity, intertextuality, and the multiplicity of meanings.

> "year after year in a sealed glass case
> a Roman water nymph made of bone
> she struggles to summon a river out of limestone
>
> little shuffling sound as of a nearly dried-up woman
> not really moving through the fields
> having had the gleam taken out of her
> to the point where she resembles twilight   try
> again" (Oswald, 2009, 39-45)

The stanzas present fragmented and evocative images: a "Roman water nymph made of bone" encased in a "sealed glass case," and a "nearly dried-up woman" who "resembles twilight." These images do not form a cohesive narrative but evoke a series of disjointed, surreal scenes. The repetition of "try again" at the end of the second stanza emphasises a cyclical, iterative process, creating a sense of continuous effort and renewal. The imagery presents a multiplicity of voices and perspectives: the mythological (Roman water nymph), the natural (fields), and the temporal (twilight). Each element contributes to a rich tapestry of meanings, reflecting the multiplicity inherent in postmodern texts. Readers are encouraged to engage with the text on multiple levels, interpreting the scenes through different lenses, such as mythological, natural, and metaphorical.

The "Roman water nymph made of bone" connects the poem to classical mythology, invoking images of ancient deities and rituals. The natural elements, such as the "nearly dried-up woman" and "fields," introduce intertextual references to the natural world and its rhythms. This blending of mythological and natural references enriches the poem, allowing readers to explore connections between cultural heritage, natural cycles, and the human condition. The imagery of the "sealed glass case" and "twilight" adds an abstract, symbolic dimension to the text. These elements invite readers to interpret the figurine's actions and the natural sounds in symbolic or metaphorical terms, creating a complex intertextual web. The "struggle to summon a river out of limestone" introduces a mythic quest or impossible task, adding depth to the poem's intertextuality. The poem blurs the boundaries between human and non-human elements. The "Roman water nymph" and the "nearly dried-up woman" merge human, mythical, and natural characteristics, challenging traditional distinctions and

highlighting the interconnectedness of all beings. The nymph's struggle and the woman's resemblance to twilight further dissolve the boundaries between human and natural realms, creating a fluid, permeable world.

The stanzas evoke a sense of timelessness, with the ancient figurine and the natural elements existing in a state of perpetual interaction. This blurring of temporal boundaries aligns with postmodern themes of temporal fluidity and the collapse of linear time. The repeated attempts to "try again" suggest an ongoing, timeless effort, reinforcing the idea The fragmented, vivid imagery and lack of linear narrative encourage readers to actively engage with the text, piecing together the different elements to construct meaning. This interactive reading experience is a key feature of hyper-textuality in postmodern literature. The repetition of certain phrases, such as "try again," creates a recursive structure that invites readers to explore the nuances and variations in meaning with each iteration.

The poem's ambiguity and layered imagery allow for multiple interpretations. Readers might see the nymph's actions as a metaphor for human resilience, the interplay between nature and culture, or the persistence of myth. This multiplicity of interpretations aligns with postmodern ideas about the instability and relativity of meaning. The poem's open-endedness encourages readers to bring their perspectives and experiences to the text, creating a personalised and dynamic reading experience. Oswald's stanzas exemplify postmodern hyper-textuality through its fragmented structure, intertextual references, blurring of boundaries, and interactive reading experience. The stanzas invite readers to engage with the text on multiple levels, exploring the complex interplay between myth, nature, history, and the human condition. Through this hyper-textual approach, the stanzas

challenge traditional narrative structures and offer a richly layered, multifaceted reading experience. The use of repeated phrases and fragmented images creates a sense of continuity and iteration, allowing the poem to resonate with postmodern themes of fluidity, intertextuality, and the multiplicity of meanings. Oswal continues, saying:

> "little shuffling clicking
> she opens the door of the church
> little distant sounds of shut-away singing   try again
>
> little whispering fidgeting of a shut-away congregation
> wondering who to pray to
> little patter of eyes closing   try again
>
> very small and damaged and quite dry
> a Roman water nymph made of bone
> she pleads she pleads a river out of limestone
>
> little hobbling tripping of a nearly dried-up river
> not really moving through the fields,
> having had the gleam taken out of it
> to the point where it resembles twilight.
> little grumbling shivering last-ditch attempt at a river
> more nettles than water   try again" (Oswald, 2009, 46-60)

These stanzas present fragmented and evocative images. The opening of a church door, the "shut-away singing," and the "Roman water nymph made of bone" pleading for a river. These images create a disjointed narrative that evokes a series of surreal, almost dream-like scenes. The repetition of "try again" reinforces

a sense of ongoing struggle and cyclical effort, emphasizing the non-linear, iterative nature of the poem's narrative. The imagery introduces a multiplicity of voices and perspectives: the church setting, the congregation, and the mythological figure of the nymph. Each element contributes to a layered narrative that reflects the multiplicity inherent in postmodern texts. Readers are invited to interpret these scenes through different lenses, including the religious, mythological, and natural, creating a rich tapestry of meanings.

The "Roman water nymph made of bone" connects the poem to classical mythology, while the setting of the church and the congregation introduce intertextual references to religious rituals and traditions. This blending of mythological and religious references enriches the poem, allowing readers to explore connections between cultural heritage, spiritual practices, and the human experience. The imagery of "shut-away singing" and "eyes closing" adds an abstract, symbolic dimension to the text, inviting readers to interpret these elements in metaphorical terms. The nymph's plea for a river and the "last-ditch attempt at a river" introduce symbolic struggles and quests. The "nearly dried-up river" and its resemblance to "twilight" further enhance the poem's intertextuality by evoking themes of decay, transformation, and the passage of time. The poem blurs the boundaries between human and non-human elements. The actions of the congregation and the mythological nymph merge human, spiritual, and natural characteristics, challenging traditional distinctions and highlighting interconnectedness. The nymph's struggle to summon a river and the river's anthropomorphic qualities ("hobbling tripping," "grumbling shivering") dissolve the boundaries between human and natural realms, creating a fluid, permeable world. The stanzas evoke a timelessness, with ancient

mythological and religious elements existing in perpetual interaction. This blurring of temporal boundaries aligns with postmodern themes of temporal fluidity and the collapse of linear time. The iterative attempts to "try again" suggest an ongoing, timeless effort, reinforcing the idea of cyclical time and the persistence of cultural and natural elements.

The fragmented, vivid imagery and lack of a linear narrative encourage readers to actively engage with the text, piecing together different elements to construct meaning. This interactive reading experience is a key feature of hyper-textuality in postmodern literature. The repetition of certain phrases, such as "try again," creates a recursive structure that invites readers to explore nuances and variations in meaning with each iteration.

The poem's ambiguity and layered imagery allow for multiple interpretations. Readers might see the nymph's actions as a metaphor for human resilience, spiritual seeking, or the persistence of myth. This multiplicity of interpretations aligns with postmodern ideas about the instability and relativity of meaning. The open-ended nature of the poem encourages readers to bring their perspectives and experiences to the text, creating a personalised and dynamic reading experience. Oswald's stanzas exemplify postmodern hyper-textuality through its fragmented structure, intertextual references, blurring of boundaries, and interactive reading experience. The stanzas invite readers to engage with the text on multiple levels, exploring the complex interplay between myth, religion, nature, and the human condition. Through this hyper-textual approach, the above stanzas challenge traditional narrative structures and offer a richly layered, multifaceted reading experience. The use of repeated phrases and fragmented images creates a sense of continuity and iteration, allowing the poem to resonate with postmodern themes of fluidity,

intertextuality, and the multiplicity of meanings. The poem continues and ends with:

"very speechless very broken old woman
her left arm missing and both legs from the knee down
she tries to summon a river out of limestone

little stoved-in sucked thin
low-burning glint of stones
rough-sleeping and trembling and clinging to its rights
victim of Swindon
puddle midden
slum of over-greened foot-churn and pats
whose crayfish are cheap tool-kits
made of the mud stirred up when a stone's lifted

it's a pitiable likeness of clear running
struggling to keep up with what's already gone
the boat the wheel the sluice gate
the two otters larricking along   go on

and they say oh they say
in the days of better rainfall
it would flood through five valleys
there'd be cows and milking stools
washed over the garden walls
and when it froze you could skate for five miles   yes
go on

little loose end shorthand unrepresented

> beautiful disused route to the sea
> fish path with nearly no fish in" (Oswald, 2009, 61-80)

The poem's fragmented imagery creates a series of disjointed, surreal scenes. The "speechless, very broken old woman," the "low-burning glint of stones," and the "beautiful, disused route to the sea" evoke a sense of decay and loss without forming a cohesive narrative. The repetition of "go on" and "yes, go on" emphasises the iterative, cyclical nature of the poem, suggesting an ongoing struggle or journey. The poem features a multiplicity of voices and perspectives, from the "broken old woman" to the "victim of Swindon," and from historical reminiscence to ecological observation. This multiplicity reflects the layered, multifaceted nature of postmodern texts. Readers are invited to interpret these scenes through various lenses, including personal, historical, and environmental, creating a rich tapestry of meanings. The references to Swindon, historical flooding, and ecological degradation connect the poem to real-world places and events, introducing intertextual references that enrich its meaning. The imagery of "five valleys" and "skating for five miles" evokes a nostalgic, almost mythical past. These intertextual elements allow readers to explore connections between personal memory, historical events, and environmental changes.

The imagery of "low-burning glint of stones" and "beautiful disused route to the sea" introduces abstract, symbolic dimensions. These elements invite readers to interpret the scenes metaphorically, adding depth to the poem's intertextuality. The struggle to "summon a river out of limestone" and the "nearly no fish" in the "fish path" highlights the tension between natural processes and human impact, creating a complex intertextual web. The poem blurs the boundaries between human and non-human

elements. The actions of the old woman, the ecological observations, and the mythic references merge human, natural, and historical characteristics, challenging traditional distinctions. The nymph's struggle and the environmental degradation dissolve the boundaries between human and natural realms, creating a fluid, permeable world. The stanzas evoke a sense of timelessness, blending memories of "better rainfall" with present ecological decline. This blurring of temporal boundaries aligns with postmodern themes of temporal fluidity and the collapse of linear time. The iterative attempts to "go on" suggest an ongoing, timeless effort, reinforcing the idea of cyclical time and the persistence of cultural and natural elements.

The fragmented, vivid imagery and lack of a linear narrative encourage readers to actively engage with the text, piecing together different elements to construct meaning. This interactive reading experience is a key feature of hyper-textuality in postmodern literature. The repetition of phrases like "go on" and "yes, go on" creates a recursive structure that invites readers to explore nuances and variations in meaning with each iteration.

The poem's ambiguity and layered imagery allow for multiple interpretations. Readers might see the old woman's actions as a metaphor for resilience, ecological degradation, or historical memory. This multiplicity of interpretations aligns with postmodern ideas about the instability and relativity of meaning. The open-ended nature of the poem encourages readers to bring their perspectives and experiences to the text, creating a personalised and dynamic reading experience. Oswald's lies exemplify postmodern hyper-textuality through the fragmented structure, intertextual references, blurring of boundaries, and interactive reading experience. The stanzas invite readers to engage with the text on multiple levels, exploring the complex

interplay between personal memory, historical events, ecological change, and the human condition. Through this hyper-textual approach, they challenge traditional narrative structures and offer a richly layered, multifaceted reading experience. The use of repeated phrases and fragmented images creates a sense of continuity and iteration, allowing the poem to resonate with postmodern themes of fluidity, intertextuality, and the multiplicity of meanings.

6. Conclusion

A postmodernist analysis of hyper-textuality in Oswald's poem reveals the complexity and depth of her poetic craft. By employing fragmented narrative structures, recursive phrases, and rich intertextual references, Oswald creates a multifaceted text that challenges conventional modes of interpretation. "Dunt" exemplifies postmodern literature's rejection of linearity and singular meanings, instead embracing multiplicity, fluidity, and the active role of the reader in constructing meaning. Oswald's use of a Roman water nymph, a figure both ancient and enduring, serves as a poignant symbol of persistence and the struggle to reclaim lost voices and histories. The poem's recursive nature, marked by the repetitive commands to "try again" and "go on," mirrors the hyper-textual experience of navigating through a web of interconnected meanings. This technique not only disrupts traditional narrative flow but also engages readers in an iterative process of discovery and interpretation, akin to exploring a digital hypertext. Moreover, the interweaving of mythological, historical, and contemporary elements in the poem underscores the postmodern theme of intertextuality, where texts are seen as part of a larger, interconnected network of cultural and literary

references. By blurring the boundaries between different temporal and spatial contexts, Oswald's poem invites readers to consider the fluidity of time and the interconnectedness of human experience. The poem stands as a testament to the power of postmodern hyper-textuality in poetry. Oswald's innovative use of literary techniques not only enriches the reader's experience but also reflects broader postmodern concerns with language, identity, and the nature of reality. Through a detailed exploration of these elements, this analysis highlights the enduring relevance and transformative potential of postmodern approaches to literary studies.

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