

Healing and Liberation Through Poetry: A Comparative Study of Rumi's The Guest House and Mary Oliver's Wild Geese

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OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 12

Special Issue: 4

Month: May

Year: 2025

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

Citation:

R, Sahana. "Healing and Liberation Through Poetry: A Comparative Study of Rumi's The Guest House and Mary Oliver's Wild Geese." *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, vol. 12, no. S4, 2025, pp. 144–48.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v12iS4.May-9172>

Introduction: The Emotional Alchemy of Poetry

Poetry functions as an ancient artistic practice which has bound itself to human emotions since ancient times to offer comfort and comprehension while releasing transformative healing power. Through its verses poetry reaches the fundamental human feelings which help people explore themselves while they face suffering and strive to free themselves from personal and environmental challenges. The 13th-century Persian mystic Rumi and the 20th-century American poet Mary Oliver both express healing and liberation through their poetic works. Through their poems *The Guest House* and *Wild Geese* the authors present their themes by using distinct yet harmonious perspectives.

The Guest House by Rumi shows readers how to accept change by teaching them to receive every feeling that enters their life, including the difficult ones. The text embodies Sufi spiritual principles which view suffering as a path to wisdom and understanding. The poem *Wild Geese* by Mary Oliver presents a soft yet forceful message about freedom, which leads readers toward a natural world belonging without guilt. *The Guest House* helps people heal through emotional acceptance yet *Wild Geese* leads to freedom through self-compassion. The paper examines the dual role of these poems as instruments for achieving emotional and psychological wellness. The research demonstrates that poetry serves as a healing instrument which also leads people toward personal liberation through its literary and psychological analysis.

Poetry as a Medium of Healing and Liberation

Poetry, in its most basic form, is emotion's truth on a piece of paper. It describes feelings and experiences that often go unsaid. It takes shape of the felt things that are otherwise formless. "When we write poetry, we give voice to our souls in ways that can be both revealing and healing," says the poet and therapist John Fox. And there, too, as poets show us, we see that same alchemy — poetry becomes a task of recognition, a release.

Poetry's place in healing is increasingly recognized by modern therapeutic practices. An area of writing known as poetry therapy turns its attention to verse as a portal to emotional processing and self-exploration, using language to help people navigate grief, trauma, and self-doubt. Instead of fleeing from pain, poetry guides us through it with a sense of clarity and greater compassion.

In this sense, healing does not mean numbing ourselves to pain. It is recognizing the pain, why it's there, and allowing yourself the grace to grow through it. Liberation, as well, is not about escaping reality—it's about releasing ourselves from what no longer serves us: shame, guilt, perfectionism or the illusion that we are not enough. This is where Rumi and Mary Oliver come in. Though separated by centuries, continents, and belief systems, both poets offer readers a transformative path through pain and toward peace.

Rumi's The Guest House: Welcoming Every Emotion

"This being human is a guest house.

Every morning, a new arrival."

With these first lines, Rumi already puts us into a deeply human and spiritual metaphor. He says life is like a guest house. Each morning emotions ring our doorbell. Some we're pleased to have: joy, laughter, excitement. Others, not so much — grief, jealousy, anxiety or sorrow.

Yet Rumi does not urge us to repel the painful visitors. Quite the opposite. He invites us to welcome each one with gratitude:

*"Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honourably."*

Here in these lines, sorrow is not a thief instead, it is a teacher. It may tear through our hearts, leaving us raw and trembling, but it comes with a vital purpose that is to cleanse us and to make space for something new. Rumi's Sufi worldview embraces suffering not as punishment, but as a sacred messenger.

Psychologically speaking, this is very similar to the principles of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), which teaches people to sit with their emotions instead of run from them. ACT is built on the premise that we often make our suffering worse by resisting or denying our emotions. Which means, when we let them in, as Rumi goes on to describe, we start to turn them into something else.

Imperfect Rumi on the impermanence of emotion No feeling, no matter how searing, is everlasting. Pain ebbs. Joy returns. If we allow emotions to come through us, they leave gifts if we are open to receiving them.

*"Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond."*

These lines echo like a quiet bell—it invites us to trust in the path and experience the journey, even when the destination is beyond our sight. In a world that often urges us to "stay positive" or "move on," Rumi encourages something far more radical: acceptance without resistance. Pain, when welcomed, becomes a guide, not a jailer.

Mary Oliver's Wild Geese: Liberation in Simplicity

Rumi and Mary Oliver have entirely different approaches, while Rumi is the mystic, Mary Oliver is the ground seer—the one who walks along quietly, showing the reader beauty in simple things like the fluttering of wings when the birds take flight, the bend of wildflowers, the hush

between the raindrops. With this simplistic approach her writing delivers the exact things your soul needed. Her poem *Wild Geese* begins with a gentle but powerful invitation:

“You do not have to be good.

*You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.”*

This feels like a deep breath. A balm. In a culture overwhelming with perfectionism, moralism and performative worthiness, Oliver’s voice is radical in its gentleness. She reminds us that we don’t have to earn our worth — we simply are.

Self-Compassion and Belonging

The core message of *Wild Geese* is simple yet transformative: You belong just as you are.

*“Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.”*

It is an emotional and existential form of liberation. Oliver dismantles the notion that suffering is a prerequisite to acceptance or love. Rather, she guides us to some other form of deliverance — not one that requires punishment, but one that asks or allows you to be real.

Oliver connects the two in these final lines where she states that the geese are calling us home, to ourselves, to one another, to life, to purpose, to be. We are not averse to life and meaning. We are a part of the “family of things.” We do not have to feel guilty and we do not have to work to justify our being.

Such a philosophy correlates with *self-compassion* as measured by psychologist Kristin Neff. Neff posits that self-compassion is our acknowledgment of our flaws and failures with kindness and understanding as opposed to being excessively harsh on ourselves. The works of Oliver breathe this sentiment as she tells all the tired, seeking souls who are trying so hard to be good enough that there is a better way.

Poetry as a Personal Companion: Deeper Reflections

One of the most powerful elements that Rumi and Mary Oliver share is their call for introspection. Their poems have stood the test of time as they simply don’t demand academic interpretations or philosophical deconstruction to be meaningful, they make sense beyond the literary means, they appeal to the spirits of the soul.

When reading *The Guest House*, it is not just the clever metaphor that intrigues you-it truly resonates, especially in those tranquil moments when emotions start to swell. When you are visited by grief, anxiety or loneliness, Rumi’s words offer a comforting whisper: “Treat each guest honourably.” Instead of telling us to shove our sadness aside or just snap out of it, he invites us to welcome it in. He asks us to make it feel comfortable, share a cup of tea and take the time to learn from it. This perspective shifts the way we approach suffering. Instead of looking at it as a form of punishment, treat it as something that deserves our attention and acknowledgement.

And that’s where the brilliance of the poem lies. In a world where happiness is oversold, people are always expected to be happy and emotionally composed, Rumi permits us to be raw and vulnerable. Acknowledging these feelings and honouring them is an essential part of humanity.

On the flip side, Mary Oliver touches on the other kind of suffering- this is not born out of external chaos, but due to our own internal struggles. “*You do not have to be good,*” she says, stripping away centuries of moral guilt in just a few words. It is the kind of line that brings tears

to your eyes—not because it’s over-the-top, but because it feels like finally being told what you needed to hear your whole life.

Her sense of liberation stems not from embracing the suffering but by letting them go. Letting go of shame. Letting go of the idea that you’re too broken, too flawed, or too strange to belong. In *Wild Geese*, Oliver essentially hands the reader a mirror and says, “*Look—you are already part of everything. You’re already home.*”

The Cross-Cultural Universality of Healing

It is remarkable how these poems—one old, one new—from far-apart places, Persia and America, meet at the same human truths. Rumi’s mystical quiet shouts, while Oliver’s nature whispers wisdom, both saying the same things about our hearts and minds. This shows how poetry jumps over time, space, and words. A flickering light in old Konya or a still cabin in Vermont today – the poems feel the same. Sadness is sadness then and now. Missing someone is missing someone always. Wanting peace inside – that never changes. These poems say you don’t need a special religion, culture, or time to get them. Just being alive is enough.

Modern Relevance: Why These Poems Matter Now

Today’s world, though hyperconnected, is emotionally fragmented. Rumi and Oliver’s words are like a soft shout in the silence. Anxiety and depression are everywhere. People feel lonely even though they are digitally connected to the crowd, scrolling through fake perfect lives. Young people especially fall prey to this and feel bad they aren’t good enough.

Rumi whispers, “Feel it all, happy-sad. The dark-light. They’re secret lessons.” Oliver adds, “Stop saying sorry for being you. Your spot’s already saved.” These aren’t just pretty words; they’re lifesavers.

They tell a different story than the loud voices screaming, “Do more! Be happier! Get better! Always be better!” They remind you that just being is okay. For therapists, soul-searchers, and regular folks like you and I, these poems are easy tools to look inside and calm down. They’re used in therapy groups and for getting better, not just ‘cause they’re nice, but because they work.

Nature as a Mirror

Rumi uses a house, a solid emptiness, to look inside us. Oliver uses nature, a wild calm. Geese fly, free captives, the air is clean dirt, our bodies are soft rock. These things are real fake, part of the world we see. But they whisper of quiet shouts, a peace war you can’t make, only remember. Nature, in Oliver’s words, is a wise fool. It just is. In that loud silence, that mean kindness, we are free prisoners.

Comparative Reflection: Two Roads to Inner Peace

Element	Rumi – The Guest House	Mary Oliver – Wild Geese
Core Theme	Healing through acceptance	Liberation through self-compassion
Tone	Mystical, philosophical	Direct, nurturing
Imagery	Guest house as the self	Nature and instinctual belonging
Emotional Focus	Embrace all feelings—even pain	Release guilt and embrace who you are
Spiritual Context	Sufi mysticism and transformation	Humanism and natural spirituality
Psychological Parallel	Mindfulness, ACT, post-traumatic growth	Self-compassion therapy, belonging therapy

Though they approach the subject from different angles, both poems delve deeply into emotional health. Rumi encourages us to embrace the whole spectrum of human experience, including its unpleasant aspects. Oliver tells us that we don't need to be anything other than who we are or bear guilt.

When combined, they create a lyrical conversation about accepting life as it is and having faith that we are already at home.

Conclusion: The Quiet Revolution of Poetry to Reclaim Ourselves

Rumi and Mary Oliver are separated by centuries, but united by something timeless: the belief that poetry can heal. It can sit with you in your sorrow and whisper, "This too belongs." It can place a hand on your shoulder when you're tired of striving and say, "You are already enough."

The Guest House and Wild Geese aren't just beautiful poems—they're emotional lifelines. They teach us that pain is not a failure, and neither is softness. That liberation doesn't come from escaping emotions, but from understanding them. And that in our most vulnerable moments, we are often closest to grace.

So if you ever feel overwhelmed, unworthy, or alone—read these poems. Read them slowly. Let their words do what poetry does best: return you to yourself.

Ultimately, both *The Guest House* and *Wild Geese* are about reclamation—of our emotions, our identities, our right to be here fully and imperfectly. They aren't about fixing yourself. They are about remembering yourself.

They ask us to see emotion not as weakness, but as wisdom. They encourage us to meet ourselves with compassion, not critique. And in doing so, they quietly rewrite the story of what it means to be human.

So if life ever feels like too much—if grief knocks at your door, or guilt claws at your chest—go back to these poems. Let them sit beside you. Let them remind you:

You are not alone in your pain.

You are not unworthy because of your wounds.

You are not too broken to belong.

As Rumi would say, "Don't go back to sleep."

As Oliver might answer, "You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves."

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