

# THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

## Eudaimonia and Monomyth in Mary Oliver's "The Journey" and Charles Finn's "Please Hear What I'm Not Saying"

Sylvia Sobhy Fam

Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Literature,  
Faculty of Arts, Ain Shams University, Egypt

### Abstract:

The beginning of the present century witnessed what has been called the "eudaimonic turn" in the humanities and social sciences. Advocates of this trend call for promoting "well-being" rather than dwelling on "ill-being." They rely heavily on Aristotle's *Ethics* and new humanistic-existential psychology. A central conviction of this school of thought is that every human being is born with a "true self" with great potentials that need to be actualized. The two founding tenets of new eudaimonism are self-realization and self-determination. This also involves the belief that the self is a process rather than a product, which is in agreement with Joseph Campbell's theory of "monomyth." Mary Oliver's poem "The Journey" and Charles Finn's poem "Please Hear What I'm Not Saying" provide evidence for the personal journey of the two poets towards self-realization. Oliver refers to the true self in terms of an inner voice that she finally manages to identify as her own despite other voices that attempt to consume it. Finn uses the image of an inner child that is imprisoned behind numerous false masks. Seen within the context of the works of the two poets at large, the two poems represent turning points in their life-journeys.

**Keywords:** True self, inner voice, inner child, self-realization. social masks, personal myth

Both the general run of men and people of superior refinement say that it [the highest goal of human existence] is happiness... *but with regard to what happiness is they differ.* (Aristotle & Ross, 1925, p. 5)

According to *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, the Greek term "eudaimon" is composed of two parts: "eu" means "well" and "daimon" means "divinity" or "spirit" (Kraut, 2018). As Vittersø remarks, in his introduction to the *Handbook of Eudaimonic Well-Being*, eudaimonia has generally been translated into English as "happiness" (2018, p. 7). Marangos, Astroulakis, & Triarchi state that the word has also been translated as "flourishing," "good living" and "well-being" (2019, p. 525). Vittersø argues that the translation of the term "eudaimonia" as "well-being" makes more sense than the term "happiness" which is often associated with a state of mind or a pleasurable state of feeling good. Eudaimonic scholars generally prefer adopting the term "well-being" since it involves not only "being" but also "doing" good (2018, p. 7). Despite the fact that what is now referred to as "eudaimonic theory" is quite new, the term goes back to Aristotle (Waterman, 2008, p. 234). As Waterman points out, "Eudaimonia is a construct that can be traced back at least as far as classical Hellenic philosophy where it received its most notable treatment in the works of Aristotle" (2008, p. 235). Contemporary eudaimonic scholarly researchers unanimously acknowledge Aristotle as their philosophical source (See Ryff & Singer, 2006; Deci & Ryan, 2008). In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle identifies happiness with virtue. It is not just a state of mind, but rather an "activity." He claims "that happiness is pretty much a kind of living well and acting well." According to Aristotle, goodness is classified into three types: "those called external goods, goods of the soul, and goods of the body." Among these three goods, those "of the soul are the ones we call most strictly and most especially good, and the actions and activities of the soul we may attribute to the soul" (Aristotle & Crisp, 2000, p. 13). This distinction between pleasure and well-being, or "hedonia" and "eudaimonia," is one of the basic tenets of contemporary eudaimonic theory. In their defining article "Know Thyself and Become What You Are," Ryff and Singer challenge those who confuse these two concepts (2006, pp. 13-15). Relying on an earlier and more favoured translation of *Ethics*, they clarify that Aristotle disagrees with those who identify happiness with pleasure or power. The former, according to Aristotle, is more suitable for beasts, and the latter is a form of slavery to one's own tastes (Aristotle & Ross, 1925, pp. 5-6). Happiness, on the other hand, is the "activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, and if there be more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete" (Aristotle & Ross, 1925, p. 11, emphasis in original). Therefore, the translation of "eudaimonia" as a pleasurable state or a sense of feeling good is not consistent with the basic doctrines of the eudaimonic theory.

The element of eudaimonic theory that is most relevant to this paper is the way contemporary eudaimonic scholars interpret the term "daimon" (sometimes spelled as "daemon," but the paper adopts the spelling that is generally used by eudaimonic scholars) as the "true self." Waterman defines it as "an ideal in the sense of being an excellence, a perfection toward which one strives and, hence, it can give meaning and direction to one's life" (1990, p. 40). Ryff and Singer describe eudaimonism "as an ethical doctrine wherein each person is obliged to know and live in truth to his daimon (a kind of spirit given to all persons at birth), thereby progressively actualizing an excellence" (2006, p.17).

Waterman, Ryff and Singer acknowledge that they owe this interpretation to David Norton. In his book *Personal Destinies: A Philosophy of Ethical Individualism*, Norton says that "Every person is a bust of Silenus... containing a golden figurine, his daimon" (1977, p. 6). This daimon is "an ideal of perfection—unique, individual, and self-identical... affording to the actual person his supreme aim and establishing the principle by which the actual person can grow in identity, worth, and being" (p. 14). Accordingly, Norton translates "eudaimonia" as "meaningful living conditioned upon self-truth and self-responsibility" (p. xi). This is built on "the two great Greek imperatives: first, to 'know thyself' (a phrase inscribed on the temple of Apollo at Delphi), and second, to 'choose yourself' or 'become what you are' (p. 16). Drawing on these two principles, Ryff, Waterman and Ryan, the "three bigs of psychological eudaimonics," as Vittersø calls them (2018, p. 16), set the two pillars of the eudaimonic theory: first, knowing one's own true self, or self-realization, and second, self-responsibility, which is also referred to as "autonomy" or "self-determination"

In their article "Hedonia, Eudaimonia and Well-Being: An introduction," Deci and Ryan inform the readers that the eudaimonic theory was inspired not only by Aristotle's view of the highest human good involving virtue and the realization of one's potential, but also from the work of "psychodynamically and humanistically oriented psychologists" (2008, pp. 3-4). Among these, they mention Carl Rogers (1902-1987). In his book *On Becoming a Person*, Rogers calls for a discovery of one's "real self" as opposed to a false "ideal self" that society and other factors dictate; the "I am" as opposed to the "I should be." He argues that during the process of self-discovery, the individual starts to realize "how much of his life is guided by what he thinks he should be, not by what he is. Often he discovers that he exists only in response to the demands of others, that he seems to have no self of his own, that he is only trying to think, and feel, and behave in the way that others believe he ought to think, and feel and behave" (1961, p. 110). The process of becoming oneself, he explains, starts when one is willing to take charge of one's own life; to claim the right to be what one truly is. He becomes the judge of his own self-worth: "The individual increasingly comes to feel that this locus of evaluation lies within himself, less and less does he look to others for approval or disapproval; for standards to live by; for decisions and choices." The person gradually discovers "that his own organism is trustworthy, that it is a suitable instrument for discovering the most satisfying behavior in each immediate situation" (pp. 118-119). In short, the person fulfils his own "daimon," the "golden figurine" in every human Silenus, that is, the positive potentials of one's own soul.

It was this positive attitude towards the good in Man that aroused the interest of literary scholars in the eudaimonic theory. In the spring of 2010, a meeting at the University of Pennsylvania between James O. Pawelski, Professor of Positive Psychology, and D. J. Moores, Professor of English, sparked a series of conversations on the common grounds between psychology and literature. This inspired them to carry their work on eudaimonia forward into the domain of literary studies. The fruit of this collaboration was the book entitled *The Eudaimonic Turn: Well-being in Literary Studies* (2014). In the introduction to this book, James Pawelski states that the twenty-first century has witnessed a general shift of focus towards well-being in the social sciences and humanities. Rather than investigating what is wrong with the human condition, these eudaimonic scholars have chosen to have a more positive standpoint. Pawelski calls this "recent development in the conversation about well-being, with its focus on the interdisciplinary investigation of the best things in life, the 'eudaimonic turn'" (p. 3). He adds that serious academic work has been conducted by these scholars in accordance with the standards of their respective fields, "rendering work in the eudaimonic turn interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and cross cultural" (p. 26). In the introduction to the *Handbook of Well-Being*, the editors report that research on the topic has pervaded the fields of psychology, economics, political science, sociology, genetics and neuroscience, as well as cultural, historical and geographical studies ((Diener, Oishi, & Tay, 2018, p. 5).

In his section of the introduction to *The Eudaimonic Turn* (2014), Moores announces the initiation of the new eudaimonic outlook in the domain of literary studies. He argues that a great deal of literary criticism, such as feminist, Marxist and postcolonial studies are concerned with well-being. The problem is, however, that the concern with well-being manifests, at least in much literary discourses, as a preoccupation with its absence; in other words, it is really a concern with ill-being.... So often in such discussion, the focus is whether on the discernment of a social problem the text illuminates or a demystification of a given author. (p. 27)

In his recent article "The Disaster Artist of the Long Eighteenth Century" (2019), Moores explains that this has not always been the case with literary criticism. He points to the enormous body of eighteenth-century writings which are concerned with human flourishing. Drawing on the example of Jeremy Bentham's idea of '*felicific calculus*,' he illustrates how happiness was a preoccupation during the Enlightenment. He goes on to explain how two World Wars, with all the disasters, genocides and famines that ensued, "left scholars thoroughly disenchanted with the concept of progress and thus suspicious of all notions of happiness." During most of the twentieth century, Moores explains, many academics were disenchanted with the idea of happiness, dismissing it as a "shallow neurosis of denial" (pp. 103-104). With the advent of the new millennium, some theorists "have become disenchanted with disenchantment, now challenging the assumptions of the hermeneutic of suspicion," bringing the eudaimonic turn into effect (p. 104). Moores mentions Potkay's *Story of Joy* (2007) and Felski's *The Limits of Critique* (2015) as pioneering works in the field. In an attempt to spread this eudaimonic view, Moores and Pawelski contributed with other scholars in editing a selection of lyrical poems from various ages under the title *On Human Flourishing: A Poetry Anthology* in 2015. It is worth noting that in the introduction to this book, Moores mentions Mary Oliver as one of the contemporary poets who devoted a great deal of their work to the promotion of the conception of good life (p. 2)

Finding one's true self or daimon, as Rogers explains, is a progressive procedure. The person gradually finds out that the real self is "a process rather than a product." It is not a "fixed identity," but rather "a process of becoming" (1961, p. 122). This process is sometimes referred to in terms of a story or narrative. In a study entitled "Narrative Identity and Eudaimonic Well-Being," Bauer, McAdams and Pals illustrate how people make sense of their lives through constructing a

story of personal growth where painful experiences gain value by counting them as transformative events (2008, p. 81). One of the patterns of identity narratives that they name is the "intrinsic pattern." To elucidate their point, they refer to Deci and Ryan's "Self-determination theory":

Themes of intrinsic growth in life stories involve an emphasis on intrinsically rather than extrinsically motivated concerns. Self-determination theory frames intrinsic versus extrinsic motives in terms of... humanistic, eudaimonic, growth-oriented concerns... Intrinsic motivation is inherently growth-oriented, in keeping with an organismic perspective on human development. (p. 87)

It is at this point of regarding the self as a construct or a process that eudaimonic theory converges with existential-humanistic psychology and theories of personal mythology. Hoffman calls this personal narrative a "Sustainable Myth of Self." By myth, Hoffman does not mean a false fiction. He adopts Rollo May's definition of the term as a story that provides meaning and direction to life (Hoffman, Stewart, Warren, & Meek, 2015, p. 3). According to May: A myth is a way of making sense in a senseless world. Myths are narrative patterns that give significance to our existence. Whether the meaning of existence is only what we put into life by our own individual fortitude, as Sartre would hold, or whether there is a meaning we need to discover, as Kierkegaard would state, the result is the same: myths are our way of finding this meaning and significance. (p. 15)

In his article, Hoffman outlines the three foundational conceptualizations of the self in existential-humanistic psychology. The first is that the integration of the self is "necessarily an ongoing process." The second is that the self is not just a cognitive construct. There is a real self that is recognized through experience. The third concept is that this self is an agent that has the ability to act. Existential-humanistic psychology emphasizes personal responsibility (p. 13). It is noteworthy that Hoffman shows how positive existential psychology reclaims the sense of an integral self as opposed to the negative postmodern views of the self as "empty," "multiple" or "saturated" (p. 7).

Defining the self as a myth calls to mind Joseph Campbell's concept of "monomyth" as described in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. According to Campbell, each human life is a personal myth. He explains that it has been "the prime function of mythology to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward" (2004, p. 10). In an age when "an effective general mythology" is missing, each person has to construct his own dream or "personalized myth" (pp. 4, 18). The hero of this myth is "the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms." In other words, the hero starts to discard the dictations and limitations of modern society and reaches a more natural and authentic version of the self. Campbell describes this process as the death of modern man and the rebirth of a more natural human being (p. 18). He compares this process of discovery to the uncovering of the treasures in Aladdin's caves. Beneath the fabric of our consciousness, there lies a reservoir of "psychological powers that we have not thought or dared to integrate into our lives." These powers within are both fascinating and dangerous. Their danger lies in the "destruction of the world that we have built and in which we live." The fascination is in the "wonderful reconstruction, of the bolder, cleaner, more spacious, and fully human life" (pp. 7-8). In her introduction to the 2004 edition of Campbell's book, Estes notes that these inner powers of the psyche are the workings of that "invisible" but "palpably felt," "radiant center" that we call "soul." "When in relationship with the soul," she adds, "we sense our highest aspirations, our most uncanny knowing, our mystical understandings, and our spontaneous inspirations and unleasings of creative ideas." She calls this part of the psyche "the daemon," and defines it as "the angel that each person on earth is believed to be born with, the one who guides the life and destiny of that child on earth" (pp. xxx-xxxii).

The common grounds in eudaimonic theory, existential-humanistic psychology and personal mythology are evident. The three founding doctrines of existential-humanistic psychology that Hoffman points out coincide with the major eudaimonic tenets of self-knowledge and self-determination. Personal mythology foregrounds the process of personal growth which Campbell calls the "monomyth" or "the hero's journey." Combined together, these three approaches throw light on the possibility of growth and enhancement of the human condition through the discovery of the best in man. The three together emphasize personal responsibility for one's own life and the choice of advancement through the exploration of the positive potentialities of the authentic self. This paper studies the two poems, "The Journey" (1986) by Mary Oliver (1935-2019) and "Please Hear What I'm Not Saying" (2011) by Charles Finn (b. 1941) in the light of eudaimonic theory and contemporary existential psychology. The two poems themselves are examples of Campbell's monomyth, since they depict a journey of self-knowledge and self-advancement. Besides, when seen within the context of the lifework of the two poets, they represent turning points in their development throughout their career as a whole.

Mary Oliver's poem "The Journey" (1986) is a celebration of the discovery of the one and only life that she can truly sustain; the recognition of the one voice that is truly her own. "One day," she explains, she finally realizes what she has to do with her life. She describes this process in the following words:

there was a new voice  
which you slowly  
recognized as your own,  
that kept you company  
as you strode deeper and deeper  
into the world,  
determined to do  
the only thing you could do--  
determined to save

the only life you could save. (1986, pp.38-39)

The speaker refuses to yield to the others who wish to take hold of her life, dictating to her what she should do, driven by their own desires for her to meet their needs and mend their lives. Leaving their bad advice behind, she decides to cherish her newfound uniqueness.

"The Journey" is one of the very few autobiographical poems by Oliver. Although it describes a very personal experience, the poet uses the impersonal pronoun. This can be explained by the poet's unwillingness to make her private life material for the public eye. However, this makes the poem more universal since the readers can identify themselves with the "you" in the poem. Commenting on this poem in one of her rare interviews, the poet says:

Well, looking back, I'm shocked to see that I wrote that. Because I was always very private about my life, and yet the poems in *Dream Work* (1986) are not so private as I thought. I'm glad I wrote them, and I'm doing a little more of that now—using personal material. I want to be braver and more honest about my life. When you're sexually abused, there's a lot of damage—that's the first time I've ever said that out loud. (Shriver, "Behind the Scenes")

In these lines, Oliver is referring to her childhood memory of sexual abuse by her own father, which, as she mentions in the same interview, was one of the main reasons why she left home the day after she graduated from high school, choosing to take her life in her own hands. This incident of abuse is described in another poem in the same collection, under the title "Rage" (1986, p.12). She describes how her father was "the red song / in the night," violating the "damp rose of her body," and leaving his "bitter taste" that the years could not wipe away. Though the poem recounts the deep suffering of the helpless child, Oliver chooses not to dwell for long on trauma. Referring to this devastating experience, she says:

I don't usually mess around with what makes me unhappy when I'm writing. I want to write poems that will comfort, maybe amuse, enliven other people. I don't mean that the world is all great and wonderful. But I'm careful to—I try to keep the emphasis on the good and the hopeful. (Shriver, "Behind the Scenes")

This statement is evidently in line with the positive attitude of the new eudaimonic criticism. It is a choice to lay emphasis on what promotes well-being rather than dwell on ill-being. In her recent article, "Trauma, Mary Oliver and Me: How Poetry Saved My life" (2019), Professor Nadia Colburn narrates how Oliver's positive attitude impacted her life. She narrates how the suicide of two poet friends and graduates of the same Ph. D. program as herself shook her faith in the healing power of poetry. It was Mary Oliver who gave her back her confidence, teaching her that she had the choice of how to respond to pain. She adds:

In a world so full of destruction and trauma, Oliver is a wake-up call to continue to pay attention to and care for the beautiful, and not be subsumed, as so much media seems to subsume us, in more of the same toxic energy. Because of Oliver, I started not just writing poetry again, but living more joyfully again.

Referring to the poem, "The Journey," Colburn says that Oliver has taught many people how to listen to one's own voice and to save the only life that one could save. In her book *Blue Pastures* (1995), Oliver explains that it was not easy for her to choose love over anger and bitterness:

I don't mean it's easy or assured; there are the stubborn stumps of shame, grief that remain unsolvable after all the years, a bag of stones that goes with one wherever one goes and however the hour may call for dancing and for light feet. But there is, also, the summoning world, the admirable energies of the world, *better than anger, better than bitterness* and, because more interesting, more alleviating... that is to say, *having chosen to claim my life, I have made for myself, out of work and love, a handsome life*. And can do what I want to with it. Live it. (p. 69, emphasis added)

Oliver refused to let grief, anger and bitterness take hold of her life. With the help of work and love, she managed to "Live."

Similar to Oliver's "The Journey," Charles Finn's poem "Please Hear What I'm Not Saying" also tells of an inner voice that calls for attention. The conception of the poem goes back to 1966. Since then, it has taken on a long journey until its most recent publication in a book entitled *Please Hear What I'm Not Saying: A Poem's Reach around the World* (2011). The book is entirely devoted to describing this long journey. The poet explains that when he first wrote the poem, he had no intention to publish it. He had not yet acknowledged its authorship, until he learned that the poem was used anonymously in publications, conferences and albums across the country. In 1973, he was thrilled to know that one of the conferences arranged by the Association of Humanistic Psychology was entitled "Please Hear What I'm Not Saying." Intrigued to attend, the unknown poet, among an audience of a thousand attendees, was amazed to hear his poem recited in the opening speech. The book carrying the title of the poem includes testimonials by divergent people from different nationalities, age groups, genders and affiliations. Like Oliver, Finn confesses that the reason for his hesitation to acknowledge authorship of the poem was the vulnerability that is exposed in it; but this very reason made it easier for the words to touch a cord in so many lives (2011, pp. 1-3).

The poem begins with a cry for recognition from a deeper self that is thwarted by a multitude of false manifestations. This is followed by a series of juxtapositions of "without" and "within," "surface" and "deep-down," "front" and "behind," "exposed" and "hiding," "genuine" and "phony." Outside is a "glittering but empty parade of masks," a "nonchalant sophisticated façade;" and inside is a "trembling child" begging for release. The numerous masks of security, confidence, calmness and self-sufficiency are only attempts to hide "confusion, and fear, and aloneness." These masks turn eventually into "self-built prison walls." The imprisoned child cries out:

I don't like hiding. I don't like playing superficial phony games.  
I want to stop playing them.

I want to be genuine and spontaneous and me. but you've got to help me.  
Only you can wipe away from my eyes the blank stare of the breathing dead.  
Only you can call me into aliveness.(p. 6)

The narrator goes on persuading the listener to be creator of what he calls "the person that is me." The reader might wonder about the identity of the listener. The answer to this question is found in Finn's words: "I had empathy into others; it may be because I have listened well to myself" (p. 99). The art of listening, therefore, starts only when one acquires the skill of listening to the inner voice of the authentic self. The "you" in the poem, therefore, as in Oliver's poem, could stand for the narrator himself where the addresser and the addressee are two voices within the same person.

Acknowledging one's own voice entails responsibility. Oliver emphatically says: "*You must not, ever, give anyone else the responsibility for your life*" (1995, p. 68, emphasis in original). She not only chooses the positive over the negative attitude in dealing with her trauma, but she also decides to choose her own route in life. As she says in the famous lines from her poem "Summer Day": "Tell me, what is it you plan to do / with your one wild precious life?" (1992, p. 60). The lines quoted above from the poem "The Journey" show that the poet was "determined" to do the only thing she had to do. The repetition of the word "determined" emphasizes volition. Despite the violent resistance, nothing could hold the poet back from choosing her own path:

One day you finally knew  
 what you had to do, and began,  
 though the voices around you  
 kept shouting  
 their bad advice--  
 though the whole house  
 began to tremble  
 and you felt the old tug  
 at your ankles.  
 "Mend my life!"  
 each voice cried.  
 But you didn't stop.

You knew what you had to do. (1986, p.38)

The difficulty of the choice is reflected in the image of the trembling house which represents the world that she was familiar with. Her old world was threatened to fall apart. The difficulty of carrying on the decision to leave this world behind is sensed in the "tug" at her ankles. The voices shouting at her to stop, reminding her of what she should be doing, subside as she unwaveringly proceeds. Finn, likewise, emphasizes volition and responsibility in the repetition of the word "choose": if you choose to. You alone can break down the wall behind which I tremble, you alone can remove my mask, you alone can release me from my shadow-world of panic, from my lonely prison, if you choose to. Please choose to. (2011, p. 6) According to both Oliver and Finn, therefore, acceptance and assurance start when one chooses to listen to the voice within.

Finding one's true self is not an easy task, especially when the false social self is mistaken for one's identity. The claims of the false self-become like prison walls that are hard to escape. In Oliver's "The Journey," social pressures take the form of voices that attempt to drown the true inner voice. The mild, inner voice as opposed to the shouting, regressing voices are the metaphors employed to represent the authentic self and the false social selves respectively. In *The Self under Siege: A Therapeutic Model for Differentiation*, Robert Firestone et al. explain how every individual is born with unique potential which is hard to retain due to the negative imprints and painful experiences that hold the authentic self-hostage to the internalized voices of parents or authority figures. The "self is under siege by social imprinting from the society at large" (Firestone, Firestone, & Catlett, 2013, p.1). Gradually, these social imprints take the form of a negative self-reflective voice (p. 28). Basing their therapy on what is called "separation theory," Firestone et al. employ the technique of "voice therapy" in which the person involved is helped to separate the authentic inner voice from the internalized voices of society (p. 44). The "Separation theory" proposed by Robert Firestone is very similar to Carl Roger's theory of true self and false selves, except that the therapeutic technique is based on what is called "Voice Therapy." In this practice, the client is asked to verbalize the inner thoughts using the second voice, using "you" instead of "I": The technique of verbalizing the voice in the second person format not only elicits strong affect, but also appears to access core negative beliefs or schema more quickly than other methods. In addition, we found that utilizing this format "facilitates the process of *separating* the client's own point of view from hostile thought patterns that make up an alien point of view toward self" (pp. 205)

This explains why Oliver chooses to address herself in the second person throughout the poem. Paradoxically, it is only then that she recognizes her inner voice as her own. As Firestone, Firestone, & Catlett explain, setting oneself free of the self-destructive limitations of internalized voices requires separation from "fantasy bonds" which enforce the illusion of fusion with the internalized parent or authority figure (p. 37).

In Finn's poem, the false selves which embody the demands of society are depicted as masks that are difficult to part with, hiding the true self that takes the figure of an inner child crying for recognition. The whole poem revolves around the image of the mask as a symbol of the false public self behind which the real, spontaneous self seeks refuge from the "glance that knows," not realizing that these were barriers that held the fragile, insecure child captive. The speaker declares that this façade was made up of "a thousand masks," entailing deeper involvement into the "desperate pretending game." The comparison of the social self to a mask is not uncommon. One of the most famous instances is Carl Jung who draws upon the ancient Greek theatre's use of masks and links this to the concept of the social *persona* which the individual makes use of to hide the true identity:

The persona is a complicated system of relations between individual consciousness and society, fittingly enough a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual. (2014, p. 192)

It is more likely, however, that Finn draws this analogy from Carl Rogers. With a degree in psychology and literature, Finn was well-trained in establishing the link between these two disciplines. He mentions Rogers approvingly in his poem "The Cultivation of Human Flowering" (2010). Finn says: In his classic *On Becoming a Person* Carl Rogers writes about his awe before nature's unfolding whether in flowers or human beings. His gigantic faith in each human organism's thrust towards a flowering he called self-actualization throws light on why unconditional positive regard is for him the foundation counseling stands on.

In Rogers's book *On Becoming a Person*, the author contends that the process of self-actualization starts when the experiencing self "begins to drop the false fronts, or the masks, or the roles, with which he has faced life. He appears to be trying to discover something more basic, something more truly himself" (1961, p. 109). This process is painful but rewarding: "To remove a mask which you had thought was part of your real self can be a deeply disturbing experience, yet when there is freedom to think and feel and be, the individual moves toward such a goal" (p. 110). As in Finn's poem, Rogers's words also refer to the freedom that the true self seeks after a long imprisonment by these masks.

In a book entitled *Healing the Child Within: Discovery and Recovery for Adult Children of Dysfunctional Families*, psychiatrist Charles L. Whitfield and Cardwell C. Nuckols rely heavily on Finn's poem, using the same metaphor of the "child within" to describe the concept of "the Real Self." They argue that "The Child Within refers to that part of each of us which is ultimately alive, energetic, creative and fulfilled; it is our Real Self—who we truly are" (2015, p. 1). They explain that

"Our Real Self is spontaneous, expansive, loving, giving, and communicating. Our True Self accepts ourselves and others... Our Real Self accepts our feelings without judgment and fear, and allows them to exist as a valid way of assessing and appreciating life's events" (p. 9).

Whitfield and Nuckols quote Finn's poem as a validation for their theory (pp. 13-14). Through the poem, they demonstrate the process of the development of the false self as a front to hide the authentic child self. They explain that as children, we are subjected to negative messages from authority figures such as parents and teachers. These messages tell us that "our True Self, our Child Within is not acceptable" (p. 49). In an attempt to get this acceptance, the child starts to develop a false self. By time, this false self becomes mistaken for the real identity. This makes the process of discarding the false masks more and more difficult (p. 12). The process of healing starts with a recognition of the "child within":

Gradually, as more and more of our needs are met, we discover a crucial truth: that we are the most influential, effective and powerful person who can help us get what we need. The more we realize this, the more we can seek out, ask for and actually realize our needs. As we do so, our Child Within begins to awaken and eventually to flourish, grow and create. (p. 70)

It is worth noting that Whitfield and Nuckols use the same terms used by eudaimonic theorists, such as "true self," "false self," "flourish" and "grow." They also underline the two main eudaimonic dogmas of self-actualization and volition. Moreover, they contend that healing is a life-long journey.

Both Oliver and Finn refer to the true self or soul as a luminous essence. In "The Journey," Oliver describes how, when the disturbing voices started to fade, "the stars began to burn / through the sheets of clouds." This coincides with the emergence of the inner voice coming from the depths of her authentic self. Oliver often refers to the soul as "light," "lightning" or a "luminous" core. In "Poem," she explains how the soul needs the "metaphor of the body" only in order to be understood,

to be more than pure light  
that burns  
where no one is --

so it enters us --  
in the morning  
shines from brute comfort  
like a stitch of lightning;

and at night  
lights up the deep and wondrous  
drownings of the body  
like a star. (1986, p.52)

Graham argues that Oliver always privileges the body over the mind; the sensual over the spiritual; the physical over the non-physical (1994, p.358). Oliver, however, states very clearly: "I am sensual in order to be spiritual" (2000, p. 100). This can be seen in her poem, "May," where she compares herself to the bees that gather the "spiritual honey" of the spring flowers which are

Mute and meek, yet theirs  
is the deepest certainty that this existence too—  
this sense of well-being, the flourishing  
of the physical body—rides  
near the hub of the miracle that everything

is a part of, is as good  
as a poem or a prayer, can also make  
luminous any dark place on earth. (1984, p.53)

Commenting on these lines, Mann explains that when read within the context of her works, they testify that for Oliver, well-being lies in the integration of body and soul (2004, p. 58). It is noteworthy that she uses the exact words "well-being" and "flourishing" in connection with the image of the flower, though there is no evidence that she was familiar with Carl Roger's book *On Becoming a Person*. The soul is like spiritual sweetness within the "flower" of the body. This integration is the secret of flourishing; the key to well-being.

In the poem on Rogers, Finn also explains that the hidden self is like "a shining core in each human being." The reference to a luminous core inside all humans is also found in his poem "After Long Gypsying." This

... Light within each illuminating life if allowed to,  
Voice within each guiding life if listened to.  
From such experience of attentive communion,  
as naturally as roaring stream down mountain  
flows action for justice and peace. (2007, p. 278)

In these lines, the poet links the inner light to the inner voice. This "Original Light" arrives for the seeking self here and now, at "The Portal of the Moment." "Mystics know it, /poets sing it, /flowers and cats, mountains and trees, live it" (2004, p.142).

Some critics emphasize Mary Oliver's tendency to dissolve into the natural world, vanishing into the life of a tree, a cloud or a fish (See Davis & Womack 2006). It is true that Oliver sought to find her "place / in the family of things" (1986, p. 14), but as she explains in *Winter Hours* (2000), she does this in order to comprehend the condition of her "own spiritual state" (p. 102). Oliver believed that "everything has a soul" (1995, p. 63), and that "there exist a thousand unbreakable links between each of us and everything else" (2000, p.102). However, this does not negate her conviction of the uniqueness and individuality of the human soul. She speaks about a "private realm" which lies in "almost impenetrable depths" despite the numerous "mundane details." She explains that this place exists in every human mind... It is where some understanding about our lives is sought, even if it is not always found (1995, pp. 109, 110). This is the place where poems spring, though it is not exclusively found in poets. It is in "each of us" and it is uniquely human. In fact, nature teaches the poet to be herself and not aspire to be anyone else. Addressing the mangroves once, the poet asks: "Are you trying to fly or what?" and "they answer back, "We are what we are, you / are what you are, love us if you can." (2014, pp. 35-36). The mangroves are not aspiring to be something other than they are and they require the same from the poet. What unites them is love and appreciation of their uniqueness. Nature does this naturally, whereas humans have to do it "willingly." Thus, despite her longing to belong to the "family of things," Oliver never loses sight of "the only life" that she could save; her own.

This leads to the next point which is the place of the poem "The Journey" in the whole process of the poet's life, which is also described in terms of a journey, similar to the main stages of the hero's journey that are mentioned in Campbell's book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, namely, separation, initiation and return (2004, p. 28). Oliver chose the title *Upstream* (2016) for the collection of her autobiographical prose essays. Some of these essays were published in earlier works, but the collection starts with an original essay carrying the same title, "Upstream." This essay serves as a background to the poem "Journey." The incident mentioned in the poem is described in greater intimate detail. The poet says: "In the beginning I was so young and such a stranger to myself I hardly existed. I had to go out into the world and see it and hear it and react to it, before I knew at all who I was, what I was, what I wanted to be" (pp. 3-4). She started her journey upstream, leaving her home downstream. In the process, she got lost, but paradoxically, when she moved away from the negative self-image imposed on her, represented by the loud voices mentioned in the poem, she finally found herself. She writes:

I walked, all one spring day, upstream, sometimes in the midst of the ripples, sometimes along the shore... My parents were downstream, not far away, then farther away because I was walking the wrong way, upstream instead of downstream. Finally I was advertised on the hotline of help, and yet there I was, slopping along happily in the stream's coolness. So maybe it was the right way after all. If this was lost, let us all be lost always... My heart opened, and opened again. The water pushed against my effort, then its glassy permission to step ahead touched my ankles. The sense of going toward the source. (pp. 4-5)

The movement upwards as opposed to downwards is significant. Usually moving upwards involves difficulty. The tug at the ankle that is mentioned in the poem is clarified further in the prose essay where the movement against the flow of water takes effort. Gradually, however, the current seems less resistant, just as the gravity becomes gradually weaker and weaker with the upward movement. Though the poet was moving away from home, it felt like progressing toward the source.

Moving away from the familiar that has mistakenly become part of the identity is not easy. Campbell gives this process the name of "separation." In tune with the metaphor of the journey upstream, Oliver calls this experience "estrangement from the mainstream" which, as she explains, "was an unavoidable precondition, no doubt, to the life I was choosing from among all the lives possible to me" (p. 9). The obstacles on the road are also described in the poem, "The Journey." The poet says that she carried on

though the wind pried  
with its stiff fingers  
at the very foundations,

though their melancholy  
was terrible.  
It was already late  
enough, and a wild night,  
and the road full of fallen  
branches and stones. (1986, p. 38)

The obstacles are represented by the prying wind, the melancholy voices of those who wanted to hold her back, the encroaching wild night, and the branches and stones on the road. Little by little, however, she manages to override these obstacles and she finally discovers the inner voice that would keep her company for the rest of the journey. In "Upstream," Oliver recounts: "With growth into adulthood, responsibilities claimed me, so many heavy coats. I didn't choose them, I don't fault them, but it took time to reject them." In another essay in the collection, namely, "Of Power and Time," the poet explains that "the interruption comes not from another but from the self itself, or some other self within the self, that whistles and pounds upon the door panels and tosses itself, splashing, into the pond of meditation." She calls this self "the attentive, social self." This self is concerned with the "dailiness of life." It is the "regular and ordinary self." The poet, however, has two other selves: the child self which, unlike the child in Finn's poem, is the egotistical, hurting child that is always crouching somewhere in the memory; and the creative, artistic self that needs recognition. This is the third self "within each of us." It is "a third self, occasional in some of us, tyrant in others. This self is out of love with the ordinary; it is out of love with time. It has a hunger for eternity" (2016, pp. 23-29). Oliver ends her essay with the prayer: "May I stay forever in the stream" (p. 8). The choice that she made at the prime of her life needed consolidation throughout the rest of the journey.

To balance out the hindrances on the road, Oliver found support that encouraged her to go forward. Nature and literature played the role of the mentor. In the essay "Staying Alive," Oliver says: "I quickly found for myself two such blessings—the natural world, and the world of writing: literature. These were the gates through which I vanished from a difficult place" (2016, p. 13). Also in the essay "My Friend Walt Whitman," she recalls how she spent time with her brother poet whom she calls her friend, her uncle, her best teacher as well as the brother she never had (p. 9). Attentiveness to Nature also sustained her. She managed to maintain her sense of wonderment and amazement at the little things throughout her life. In her final collection: *Devotions – The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver* (2017), Oliver says that when her eyes grow weary of looking she wants to shut them down "not without amazement." Now using the personal pronoun in the plural, she figures how we would allow ourselves to be carried to the river that is without the least dapple or shadow—that is nothing but light—scalding, aortal light—in which we are washed and washed-out of our bones. (pp. 324-325)

The stream now merges into a larger river that will carry us all into the land of light. Even our own bones can no longer detain us. No winds will pry and no more voices will cry. Parting would finally feel like a "return to the source."

Oliver sums up the different stages of her journey in another poem entitled "To Begin with, the Sweet Grass." She writes:

What I loved in the beginning, I think, was mostly myself.  
Never mind that I had to, since somebody had to.  
That was many years ago.  
Since then I have gone out from my confinements,  
though with difficulty.  
I mean the ones that thought to rule my heart.  
I cast them out; I put them on the mush pile.

...

And what do I risk to tell you this, which is all I know?

Love yourself. Then forget it. Then, love the world. (2009, p. 36)

These lines sum up the whole journey. The first inevitable step on the road is finding out one's own voice. To do that, one has to break away from all confinement, despite the difficulties of separation. Finally, one is able love the whole world.

Likewise, Charles Finn's poem "Please Hear What I'm Not Saying" not only depicts the process of evolution of the real self through listening to the child within, but it also represents an important stage in the poet's journey throughout his whole life. Finn uses the analogy of life as a "journey" extensively. In fact, most of his works, whether individual poems, collections of poems or prose autobiographies, have this term included in their titles. Two outstanding examples are the prose collection entitled *Earthtalks: Conjectures on the Spirit Journey* (2004), and the poetry collection, *Crafting Soul into Words: A Poet Sings of the Journey* (2011). Moreover, Finn gives his autobiography the title *Ithaca Is the Journey: A Personal Odyssey* (2007). In this latter book, he "attests to the magnitude of the impact of the life and writings of Joseph Campbell" on his own "spirit journey" (p. xi). He even calls this journey a "personal odyssey," and the back cover of the book explains the paradox that the "highly personal" nature of the myth allows it to throw light on "the odyssey of all."

Like Oliver, Finn's life journey involved painful separations that were balanced by the sustenance of mentors. Throughout his work, Finn refers to the main stages of separation, initiation and return mentioned in Campbell's book. In one of his public talks entitled "Anniversaries of the Spirit," Finn Explains how the journey begins:

Everybody starts off with what can be called an environmental self which simply means there is no way we cannot be shaped profoundly by the environment we begin our lives in. All sorts of values, biases, and doctrines seep in before we are able even to begin to sort them all out. Our sense of self then is not so much our own as borrowed... The spiritual task of life, it seems to me, is to brave the rigors of a long journey in order to find one's real self. (2004, p. 95)



As evident in the quote, Finn does not mean by “environmental self” the ecological self, but rather Rogers’s “social self”, or the “*persona*” as Jung calls it. It takes courage to start on this strenuous journey, as it involves the process of “separation,” which Finn calls “partings”:

There are going to have to be painful partings of the way--painful because to question and sometimes go beyond the prevailing culture... So what I'm suggesting as you reflect back on and jot down your spiritual steppingstones is to pay attention especially to the partings, to the difficult times in your unfolding history when, for the sake of your emerging real self-calling you to be true to the voice within, you took the path less travelled. (p. 95)

The breakthrough, as seen in the poem “Please Hear What I’m Not Saying,” starts with the willingness to listen to the “voice within,” even when it entices the voyager to take the “path less travelled.” Finn calls these breakthroughs “anniversaries of spirit” worth celebrating. The poem mentions a very early breakthrough in the poet’s life. This, unlike physical birth, is a single ring in a chain of successive occurrences that together constitute one’s life journey.

As in Oliver’s case, the difficult partings are balanced by mentors that aid the traveller along the road. In the poem entitled “Why I Bother,” Finn refers to the time he wrote his earlier poem “Please Hear,” and how “at the ripe age of 18,” a young Jesuit teacher opened up his soul to “poetry’s magnificence” and inspired him to write poems of his own (2011, p. 56). This mentor helped the poet to take his first steps on the road. Another milestone in Finn’s life was Joseph Campbell to whom he dedicates a whole chapter in his autobiographical book, *Ithaca Is the Journey*. Finn gives this chapter the remarkable title: “Validation and Confirmation: Joseph Campbell.” In this chapter, he recounts how Campbell began “thundering through” his life and how his work had a lasting impact on him (2007, p. 239). He even calls him his “Spirit father” and describes him as the “thousand and first” face of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (pp. 245-246). Finally, the poet realizes near the end of the journey that the land that he has always been yearning for is here and now, at “The Portal of the Moment”:

I've been rising to this moment  
all my life.  
This moment has been rising to me  
since the Original Light. (2007, p. 325)

The blissful eudaimonic state is nowhere if not here and now. This is how the spiritual journeyers learn to live each moment of their one precious life as a portal to a new beginning which, in itself, includes the “entire sweep of the extravagant universe” (p. 325).

In conclusion, with the turn of the century, there emerged another turn in the fields of literary criticism and social sciences which scholars refer to as the “eudaimonic turn.” This trend reflects a general disenchantment with the negative attitude that prevailed for over a century. The main axiom of this new school is to promote well-being rather than dwell on ill-being. Eudaimonic scholars rely heavily on the distinction between “hedonia,” which involves a pleasurable feeling, and “eudaimonia” which associates well-being with virtue. Their main reference is Aristotle’s ethical principles. Eudaimonic scholars also rely on the findings of existential-humanistic psychology on the “true self” and the “false self.” The two founding tenets of new eudaimonism are self-realization and self-responsibility. Eudaimonic scholars also believe that self-actualization is a process rather than a product. At this point, they converge with Joseph Campbell’s theory of “monomyth” where he outlines the major stages of the journey of self-realization. Mary Oliver’s poem “The Journey” and Charles Finn’s poem “Please Hear What I’m Not Saying” provide evidence for the personal journey of the two poets towards self-realization. They both describe an inner self that needs to be acknowledged. This real self is depicted in Oliver’s poem as an inner voice and in Finn’s poem as an inner child. The false self/selves are described in terms of disturbing voices in Oliver’s poem, and as confining masks in Finn’s poem. Besides describing the process of self-discovery, the two poems represent turning points in the life-journeys of the two poets as a whole. Though the two poems speak about a very private experience, they found their way to a wide public, sharing in promoting the eudaimonic stance in life.

## References

- i. Aristotle, Ross, W. D., & Urmson, J. O. (1925). *The Nicomachean Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- ii. Aristotle, & Crisp, R. (2000). *Nicomachean Ethics*. Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge University Press.
- iii. Bauer, J. J., Mcadams, D. P., & Pals, J. L. (2008). Narrative identity and eudaimonic well-being. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 9(1), 81–104. doi: 10.1007/s10902-006-9021-6
- iv. Campbell, J. (2004). *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- v. Colburn, N. (2019, August 5). Trauma, Mary Oliver and Me: How Poetry Saved My Life. Retrieved August 17, 2019, from <http://www.themanifeststation.net/2019/08/07/trauma-mary-oliver-and-me-how-poetry-saved-my-life/>.
- vi. Davis T.F., Womack K. (2006) *Always Becoming: The Nature of Transcendence in the Poetry of Mary Oliver*. In: *Postmodern Humanism in Contemporary Literature and Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- vii. Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2008). Hedonia, eudaimonia, and well-being: an introduction. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 9(1), 1–11. doi: 10.1007/s10902-006-9018-1
- viii. Diener, E., Oishi, S., & Tay, L. (Eds.). (2018). *Handbook of Well-Being*. DEF Publishers.
- ix. Finn, Charles. (2004) *Contemplatively Sweet*. AuthorHouse.
- x. Finn, Charles. (2011). *Crafting Soul into Words: a Poet Sings of the Journey*. Authorhouse.
- xi. Finn, Charles. (2010). “The Cultivation of Human Flowering.” Retrieved October 10, 2018, from <https://poetrybycharlescfinn.com/products/the-mastery-of-the-thing>.
- xii. Finn, Charles. (2004). *Earthtalks: Conjectures on the Spirit Journey*. AuthorHouse.

- xiii. Finn, Charles. (2007). *Ithaca Is the Journey: A Personal Odyssey*. AuthorHouse.
- xiv. Finn, Charles. (2011). *Please Hear What I'm Not Saying: A Poem's Reach around the World*. AuthorHouse.
- xv. Firestone, R. A., Firestone, L. A., & Catlett, J. A. (2013). *The Self under Siege: A Therapeutic Model for Differentiation*. New York: Routledge.
- xvi. Graham, V. (1994). "Into the Body of Another": Mary Oliver and the Poetics of Becoming Other." *Papers on Language and Literature*, 30(4), 352–372.
- xvii. Hoffman, L., Stewart, S., Warren, D., & Meek, L. (2015). Toward a Sustainable Myth of Self: An Existential Response to the Postmodern Condition. *The Handbook of Humanistic Psychology: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 105–134. doi: 10.4135/9781483387864.n9
- xviii. Jung, C. G. (2014). *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 7*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- xix. Kraut, R. (2018). "Aristotle's Ethics." In *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University. Retrieved from [plato.stanford.edu/entries/Aristotle-ethics](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/Aristotle-ethics)
- xx. Mann, T. W. (2004). *The God of dirt Mary Oliver and the other book of God*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications.
- xxi. Marangos, J., Astroulakis, N., & Triarchi, E. (2019). The Philosophical Roots of Development Ethics. *International Journal of Social Economics*, 46(4), 523–531. doi: 10.1108/ijse-05-2018-0279
- xxii. May, R. (2011). *The Cry for Myth*. New York, NY: Norton.
- xxiii. Moores, D. J. (2019). The Disaster Artist of the long eighteenth century. *Journal of European Studies*, 49(2), 91–107. doi: 10.1177/0047244119837475
- xxiv. Moores, D. J, et al. (Eds.). (2015). *On Human Flourishing: A Poetry Anthology*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.
- xxv. Norton, David L. (1977). *Personal Destinies: a Philosophy of Ethical Individualism*. Princeton University Press.
- xxvi. Oliver, Mary. (1984). *American Primitive: Poems*. Back Bay Books.
- xxvii. Oliver, Mary. (2014). *Blue Horses*. Penguin.
- xxviii. Oliver, Mary. (1995). *Blue Pastures*. Harcourt Brace.
- xxix. Oliver, Mary. (2017). *Devotions: the Selected Poems of Mary Oliver*. Penguin Press, an Imprint of Penguin Random House LLC.
- xxx. Oliver, Mary. (1986). *Dream Work*. Atlantic Monthly Press.
- xxxi. Oliver, Mary. (2009). *Evidence: Poems*, Beacon Press.
- xxxii. Oliver, Mary. (1992). *House of Light*. Beacon Press.
- xxxiii. Oliver, Mary. (2016). *Upstream: Select Essays*. Penguin Press.
- xxxiv. Oliver, (2000). *Mary. Winter Hours*. Mariner Books.
- xxxv. Pawelski, James O. and D. J. Moores, editors. (2014). *Eudaimonic Turn: Well-Being in Literary Studies*. Fairleigh Dickinson Up.
- xxxvi. Rogers, Carl R. (1961). *On Becoming a Person*. Houghton Mifflin.
- xxxvii. Ryff, C. D., & Singer, B. H. (2006). Know Thyself and Become What You Are: A Eudaimonic Approach to Psychological Well-Being. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 9(1), 13–39. doi: 10.1007/s10902-006-9019-0
- xxxviii. Shriver, M. (2011, March 14). Behind the Scenes with Maria Shriver and Poet Mary Oliver. Retrieved August 17, 2019, from <http://www.oprah.com/spirit/maria-shriver-interview-poet-mary-oliver-o-magazine-poetry-issue>.
- xxxix. Vittersø, Joar, editor. (2018). *Handbook of Eudaimonic Well-Being*. Springer International Publishing.
- xl. Waterman, A. S. (2008). Reconsidering Happiness: A Eudaimonists Perspective. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 3(4), 234–252. doi: 10.1080/17439760802303002
- xli. Waterman, A. S. (1990). The Relevance of Aristotle's Conception of Eudaimonia for the Psychological Study of Happiness. *Theoretical & Philosophical Psychology*, 10(1), 39–44. doi: 10.1037/h0091489
- xlii. Whitfield, Charles L., and Cardwell C. Nuckols. (2015). *Healing the Child within: Discovery and Recovery for Adult Children of Dysfunctional Families*. Health Communications.