



# ECOPOETICS IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LITERATURE: AN ANALYSIS OF LOUISE GLÜCK'S *THE WILD IRIS*

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**Abstract:** The emergence of eco-poetry demonstrates ecological awareness, connects with the status of environmental deterioration around the world, and promotes change in poetic engagements. This essay discusses the idea of 'ecopoetry' to reflect upon environmental concerns of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It intends to focus on poetry's ability to enhance individual readers' awareness of their physical surroundings by an analysis of selected poems from Louise Glück's anthology *The Wild Iris* (1992). It explores the relationship between literature and the natural world, and between human beings and the environment around them in Louise Glück's poetry by studying her use of landscape imagery such as seasons, gardens, plants, fruits, flowers, animals, etc.

**Index Terms:** Contemporary poetry, ecopoetry, environmental concern, Louise Glück, nature.

## INTRODUCTION:

In contemporary time, there has been an ecopoetic blossoming and different poets currently approach 'nature' and 'culture'. Topics like the environment and the need to maintain ecological harmony seem to be major trends in the current flow of the poetic world. Indeed, the new trends of poetry are experimental in both theme and language. Poetry frequently strives to explain the universe and the role of humanity in it. It is reliant on distinctive formal traits, possibly even more than other literary genres, and is able to include open-ended, complex, and often even contradictory levels of meaning, this makes poetry interesting. It looks for images that challenge established patterns of environmental thought and twenty-first-century human-environment relations between local and global, social and ecological, perception and imagination.

Etymologically, 'eco-poetics' is a combination of two Greek words. Oikos, from which 'eco' is derived, implies 'house', a dwelling place, and Poesis means 'making' or 'creation'. The chief characteristic of ecopoetry as given by James Engelhardt (2007) is that it is connected to the world in a way that implies responsibility. M. Jimmie Killingsworth turns to Whitman in his book *Walt Whitman and the Earth: A Study in Ecopoetics* (2004) for a more detailed examination of the potential and limits of human creativity in order to better comprehend how we use language to figure out our relationship to the planet. In his examination of the connections between environmental rhetoric and eco-poetics, Whitman's poetry is shown to embody the kinds of conflicting experiences and words that repeatedly come up in the discourse of political ecology. Thus, ecopoetry is a form of poetry that recognizes and questions our pronounced alienation from nature and proposes means of reconnecting. To an ecopoet, nature is not seen as a separate entity, but as an integral being to humans and their existence. Besides, it can be established that eco-poetry is seen as a subset of environmental poetry. However, environmental poetry only foregrounds the existence of a human-nature relationship and its significance while ecopoetry moves a step further by not only taking cognizance of this relationship and its related problems but also working towards finding solutions to these existing problems, thereby effecting a change. Eco-poetry is invested with a longing to bring about change. The proposed change can only be achieved when there is an awakening of the consciousness of the populace, and that is what literature concerns itself with.

Ecocriticism is an examination of the relationship between literature and the environment from multiple distinct academic perspectives, as all sciences put in a collective effort to study the environment, and strive to proffer viable solutions to its pathetic state in recent times. In essence, ecocriticism is a reflection in the literature of humans' interactions with their material and natural habitat. Ecopoetics draws the attention of eco-critics to the role of poetry in raising environmental consciousness. Ecopoetics gives emphasis on drawing connections between human activity specifically the making of poems and the environment that produces it. It provides that line of connection to the surroundings that is necessary to find a relationship with the natural world: the feeling that one actually belongs here. Many ecopoems share a common goal, despite their stylistic diversity, which is to arouse awe and appreciation for the non-human world. Their tone is frequently celebratory, and they frequently concentrate on aspects of nature that are reasonably easy to visualize and relate to. The understanding of ecology and worries about the environmental catastrophe in the late 20th century gave rise to ecopoetics. Many critics like Terry Gifford, and Kate Soper, have noted that instead of putting ourselves

in a "war against climate change," we need a more positive and creative approach to the concept. We should be able to integrate "social" and "natural" into the idea of nature studies.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Many eco-poets and critics have drawn attention to the distinctive nature of eco-poetry. In "Literature and Ecology" (1978), William Rueckert explores the energy within a poem by comparing poems to plants. First, he establishes the creative accomplishment of plants by reminding readers that the sun's energy is "on its path to entropy." A plant captures that energy and turns it into a creative force. Then Rueckert suggests that "poems are green plants" and that their sun is the poet's imagination. Just as a plant captures the sun's energy, a poem captures the ideas from the poet's imagination, thereby becoming a "matrix of stored poetic/verbal energy". Significantly, Gifford contends that there cannot be an "innocent" allusion to nature in poetry in the essay "Social Construction of Nature" (2000). Any reference will either obliquely or overtly express an idea of nature that is connected to increasingly sophisticated cultural presumptions about metaphysics, aesthetics, politics, and status, which is often to say, ideologies. Or, to put it another way, "nature is a culture in literature."

*The Poetry of Louise Glück: A Thematic Introduction* (2006) looks at the poet's use of masks that symbolize characters from the Bible, history, and even fairy tales. Morris examines Glück's three main 1990s book-length sequences, *Ararat*, *Meadowlands*, and *The Wild Iris*, in order to highlight her recurrent themes of desire, hunger, trauma, and survival. A separate chapter devoted to *The House on Marshland* (1975) explains how this book's reconstruction of Romanticism and nature poetry came before these later works. But this paper will focus on the notions of nature in the poetry of Glück *The Wild Iris*.

## AMERICAN NATURE POETRY:

American poetry is marked by the novelty of poetic forms and poetic variety. Global events are almost never disregarded in American poetry. A more fair description would be inherently transnational. It has a wide range of influence, and its gaze cuts over national lines. Like individual artists do when they move between different nations, American poetry frequently embraces techniques, styles, and traditions from other cultures. Understanding American poetry requires an understanding of two characteristics and their close, dynamic interaction. All national literary works are somewhat inward- and outward-looking, but American poetry has a particularly strong combination of the two qualities, influenced by its late historical start and swift development.

It is impossible to separate the two characteristics. Instead, they engage in a productive dialectic that promotes both personal and broader progress. The quality of American poetry that is generally undervalued is its transnationalism; its distinctiveness is frequently overemphasized. These two characteristics of American poetry encourage the development of overlapping, conflicting, and persistent interests. American poetry is characterized by these characteristics that give life to the poet's use of forms, meter, and language as well as the emphasis placed on originality, convention-mastery, or a combination of the two.

Many early American poets wrote in the style of British metaphysical poets, who often used nature as a metaphor for spiritual and moral truths. Anne Bradstreet, one of the first American poets, wrote about nature in her poetry. Her work celebrated the beauty of the natural world, as well as the power and benevolence of God in creating it. Writers such as Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson were central figures in the American Romantic movement. During the Transcendentalist movement, poets such as Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson celebrated the beauty and power of the natural world, as well as its ability to connect humans to the divine. American poets such as Robert Frost and Carl Sandburg also wrote about the natural world in a way that reflected the realities of life, exploring themes of mortality, change, and human struggle. Contemporary poets such as Mary Oliver and Gary Snyder have celebrated the natural world in their work, often emphasizing the need for environmental conservation and preservation.

## GLÜCK AS A NATURE POET:

Nature has been an important concern for Glück for a long time, although 'ecocriticism' has been only recently adopted as a critical stance to analyze American literature. As the region's history does not allow for a neat nature-culture division, American history has been named as one of the most important areas for an eco-critical lens. Thus, a common tendency in American literature is to deconstruct the nature-culture binary and develop a local sense of place. It is vital to understand that 'ecology' is the relationship between landscape and humans. The use of American landscape imagery such as seasons, fruits, flowers, trees, rivers, lakes, and animals, and also the location (i.e. the motif of departure, arrival, or sea voyage) is central to Glück's poetry. Also, maritime imagery has a special place in American poetry, besides plants and gardens. Even cities, the sea, and islands are the predominant motifs.

Rather than merely serving as a backdrop, nature in Glück's poetry frequently functions as a protagonist. In the vein of natural cultural ethics, the traditional binaries of nature/culture, land/sea, and place/exile are confounded. When Glück refers to nature, she merely means things that are natural rather than artificial. It can be the nearby trees, the changing seasons, the biota, or the expanding city. It might be the beautiful green or the vulnerable blue earth. In a botanical conservatory with strict management, it might be a rare orchid. It can be human nature or, on the other hand, nonhuman nature.

**THE WILD IRIS BY LOUISE GLÜCK:**

The book *The Wild Iris* talks about the themes such as feminism, mythology, and eco-criticism. Her work is more interesting when she uses nature study and classical literature to enlighten contemporary life. Louise Glück uses the eco-critical method in her poetry, using a modernist and aesthetic approach that balances culture with nature. In her poetry, she states that environmental issues to a large extent have changed the scope of poetry. While part of Glück's poetry outlines how poems can contribute to interdisciplinary environmental thought, we also agree with Glück that modern environmentalism has changed the field of poetry in fundamental ways. It can be also said that 'environmental poetry,' tries to grapple with the changing relationship between human societies and natural environments. Glück's poetry gives emphasis on twenty-first-century human-environment relations between local and global, social and ecological, perception and imagination. Poems depend on unique formal qualities and are perhaps even more than other literary genres animated by and able to contain open-ended, multiple, and even contradictory levels of meaning. Climate change and other environmental concerns that only indirectly become visible or recognizable to us increasingly challenge the limits and abilities of our environmental imaginations. These qualities of poetry appear relevant and intriguing.

Fundamentally, reading the poetry of Glück in *The Wild Iris*, the reader needs to understand the dichotomy/dualism of meaning. On the one hand, the poet expresses the beauty of nature, on the other hand, the poems convey the voice of anxiety, concern, and alienation of people in their own territory. The poem "Vespers" from *The Wild Iris* is as follows:

*Once I believed in you; I planted a fig tree.*

*Here, in Vermont, country of no summer.*

*It was a test: if the tree lived, it would mean you existed.*

*By this logic, you do not exist.*

*Or you exist exclusively in warmer climates... (Glück, 278)*

The poem's ecocritical examination, which reveals the environment's both beauty and destruction, is described in this section. This study's initial stage examines the aesthetics of the environment and what humans have done to nature. It revives a memory in the present with a new connection that is long-term. This poem is a representation of pain, suffering, and destruction. In the plot, we can see how the poet negotiates with a world without certainty. "If the tree lived, it would mean you existed". Here, we can say that Glück is encouraging readers for participating in the protection of the environment. The poem also instructs that this is not the desired situation, but still, there is hope for repairing the broken or contaminated. We are aware of the defeat caused by natural disasters and pollution which leads to changes in weather. It is often not realized that the destruction of nature is often caused by human intervention and cultural change.

The poet's objective and prophetic tone, the poem's inner monologue, and the numerous cultural and allegorical voices all work in the collections to go beyond giving an account of an individual journey to involve the reader in connecting selfhood with the events and inspirations in the one's life. Glück's lyric "Snowdrops" recites:

*I did not expect to survive, earth suppressing me.*

*I didn't expect to waken again, to feel in damp earth my body able to respond again,*

*Remembering after so long how to open again in the cold light of earliest spring... (Glück, 250)*

Seasons play a great role in the poetry of Glück. The spring reflects the embodiment of the imagination. Glück speaks about the bond between self and environment. She traces a path from culture to nature. In order to survive the species need all types of weather. When Glück talks about spring, she means that spring is full of feelings. It is obvious that after the winter visit, the spring is awakened, and nature is rejuvenated. In this sense, the opening of the flowerpot, birds emerging, the clear sky, and the shining stars are emblematic of spring. She describes winter melting and the retreat of cold. In other words, she is happy that the beautiful spring doors have been opened. It is worth noting that the sound of the birds will delight the human heart in the spring. In the poetry of Glück, the idea of nature is connected to the portrayal of the seasons and their impact on humans. Her poems are distinguished by the breadth of philosophical thinking, and the variety and vitality of images.

In addition to her celebration of the natural world and her critique of human impact on the environment, Glück's poetry also engages with eco-critical themes by exploring the relationship between humans and animals. For example, in "The Wild Iris," she writes about the emergence of flowers in the spring and uses this imagery to explore themes of transformation, growth, and renewal. In "The Wild Iris," Glück also writes about the relationship between the flowers and the bees, saying "the bees / come out of the hive / and the petals of the flowers / rise up and surround them." Here, the bees and the flowers are depicted as interdependent, with each relying on the other for survival.

In the poem "The Garden," Glück reflects on the interconnectedness of all living things, using the imagery of a garden to explore the ways in which humans are both shaped by and shaping the natural world. She describes the cycle of growth and decay in the garden and suggests that this process mirrors the larger cycles of life and death that are part of the natural world.

In "The White Lilies," Glück explores the ways in which humans try to control and manipulate the natural world through gardening and cultivation. She describes how "the white lilies / standing on their feet / like players in a band" are carefully arranged and tended to by human hands. Through her use of metaphor and imagery, Glück suggests that our relationship with the natural

world is defined by this tension between control and surrender and that our attempts to shape the environment have both positive and negative consequences. Thus, in her poetry, Glück highlights the complex and often fraught relationship between humans and the natural world, and she challenges us to consider our own role in the ongoing destruction of the environment.

## CONCLUSION:

Ecopoetry speaks up for nature by expressing concern over the damage we cause to the environment and the harm it causes to living things, as well as by displaying a sense of duty towards the environment. Or to put it another way, American reclamation of ecopoetics shows that American poets have a relationship with the mainstream environmentalist movement that neither duplicates nor subsumes itself within the mainstream. Instead, American ecopoetics adds to our knowledge of what it means to care for "nature" in the twenty-first century, enabling us to move forward with taking action, particularly when it comes to environmental improvement. Glück's poetry, in particular, engages with a wide range of eco-critical themes, from the celebration of the natural world and the relationships between humans and non-humans to the critique of human impact on the environment and the ethical considerations that arise from our actions. Through her poetry, Glück reminds us of the profound interconnectedness between ourselves and the natural world and encourages us to take responsibility for our role in shaping the world around us.

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