

The Poetics of Place: A Comparative Study of Landscape in the Works of Glück and Oliver

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Abstract—This study compares the landscape in the works of Glück and Oliver. It intends to reveal distinct poetic landscapes that reflect their unique perspectives on nature, self, and identity. The results concluded that the contrasting yet complementary approaches of Mary Oliver and Louise Glück underscore the enduring significance of the natural world in poetry and its capacity to illuminate the complexities of the human experience. Their work serves as a testament to the endless possibilities of the poetic landscape and the vital role it continues to play in our collective understanding of ourselves and our place in the world.

Index Terms—poetics, landscape, Glück, Oliver

I. INTRODUCTION

Landscape poetry is a literary genre that focuses on the natural world and the relationship between humans and their environment. This type of poetry often features detailed descriptions of landscapes, scenery, and the elements of nature. Landscape poetry has a long and rich history, with roots tracing back to ancient traditions in cultures around the world (Basso, 1996). One of the earliest examples of landscape poetry can be found in the works of the ancient Chinese poet, Du Fu (712-770 CE). Du Fu's poetry includes "Autumn Meditations" and "Ballad of the Moat" which provide brilliant depictions of China's natural landscapes. They explore the emotional and philosophical connections between humans and their surroundings (Chou, 1995).

In the Western literary tradition, the English Romantic poets of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, such as William Wordsworth and John Keats, were influential in the development of landscape poetry. Wordsworth's famous work, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," celebrates the beauty and power of the natural world, while Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn" reflect on the relationship between art, nature, and human experience (Abrams, 1971). More recently, contemporary poets like Mary Oliver and Gary Snyder have continued to explore the themes of landscape and the natural world in their work. Oliver's poems, such as "The Summer Day" and "Wild Geese," often focus on the beauty and wonder of the natural environment, while Snyder's writings, like "Riprap" and "Myths & Texts," consider the interconnectedness of humans and the natural world (Oliver, 2004; Snyder, 1965). Overall, landscape poetry has played a significant role in the literary canon, providing a means for writers to express their relationship with the natural world and to explore the deeper meanings and significance of the environments in which we live.

Statement of the Problem

A comparative analysis of Glück and Oliver's poetry will reveal distinct poetic landscapes that reflect their unique perspectives on nature, self, and identity.

A. Conceptualizing Landscape in Poetry: Defining "Landscape" in the Poetry

In the context of poetry, the term "landscape" refers to the natural, physical environment that is depicted or described in the poem. This can include various elements of the natural world, such as geographical features, vegetation, atmospheric conditions, and wildlife (Abrams, 1971). According to M.H. Abrams in "The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition," the landscape in a poem serves as more than just a backdrop or setting for the action or themes of the work. It often plays a central role, with the poet using detailed descriptions of the natural environment to convey deeper meanings, emotions, or philosophical ideas (Abrams, 1971).

For example, in William Wordsworth's famous poem, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," the landscape of the daffodils and the lake become a symbol of the poet's feelings of joy and connection with nature. The vivid depiction of the natural scenery is integral to the poem's themes of beauty, inspiration, and the human relationship with the natural world (Abrams, 1971). Similarly, in Mary Oliver's poem "The Summer Day," the landscape of the grasshopper and the field serves as a vehicle for the poet to reflect on the wonders of the natural world and the importance of fully experiencing and appreciating one's surroundings (Oliver, 2004).

In the collection "An Exaltation of Forms: Contemporary Women Poets and the Expanding Subject," the essays discuss the use of landscape and the natural world in the poetry of contemporary female poets (Finch & Varnes, 2002). Additionally, the book "Sustainable Poetry: Four American Eco-poets" explores the work of poets who focus on the natural landscape and environmental themes (Scigaj, 1999). So, in the context of poetry, the "landscape" refers to the detailed, evocative portrayals of the natural environment that are used by poets to explore deeper human experiences, emotions, and philosophical ideas (Abrams, 1971; Garrard, 2004; Buell, 1995).

B. *The Role of Landscape in Shaping Identity and Memory*

The relationship between landscape and identity is a complex and multifaceted topic that has been explored by various scholars and writers. How the natural environment shapes an individual's sense of self and the formation of memories is a key area of inquiry. According to Relph (1976), the places we inhabit and the landscapes we encounter play a crucial role in the development of our identity and sense of belonging. He argues that "our experiences of places are fundamental to our understanding of who we are, where we belong, and how we relate to the world" (p. 43). This suggests that the physical and sensory qualities of a landscape can profoundly influence an individual's sense of self and their place within the broader cultural and social context.

Similarly, Tuan (1977) posits that "place is a center of meaning constructed by experience" (p. 179). He suggests that how we perceive and interact with the landscape around us contributes to the development of our personal and collective memories, which in turn shape our identity and sense of belonging. The work of Deborah Tall (1993) further explores the relationship between landscape and memory, noting that "the physical world provides the materials and metaphors for our inner lives" (p. 10). She argues that the specific features and qualities of a landscape can serve as touchstones for our memories, allowing us to revisit and reconfigure our past experiences. In her poem "The Summer Day," Oliver reflects on the transformative power of encountering a grasshopper in a meadow, stating: "I don't know exactly what a prayer is. I do know how to pay attention, how to fall into the grass, how to kneel in the grass, how to be idle and blessed" (Oliver, 1990, p. 94). This passage suggests that the sensory experience of the landscape can catalyze self-reflection and the formation of a deeper understanding of one's place in the world. Likewise, Louise Glück's poetry often explores how the natural environment can serve as a mirror for the human experience. In her collection "The Wild Iris," Glück personifies various plant species, using their perspectives to explore themes of loss, growth, and the cyclical nature of life (Glück, 1992). This approach illustrates how the landscape can be a powerful means of engaging with and expressing the complexities of human identity and memory.

In conclusion, the relationship between landscape and identity is a rich and multifaceted area of inquiry. The work of scholars and writers like Relph, Tuan, Tall, Oliver, and Glück underscores the profound influence that the physical environment can have on the development of an individual's sense of self and the formation of personal and collective memories. By engaging with the natural world, we can gain valuable insights into the complexities of human experience and the way our surroundings shape our identities and our understanding of the world around us.

C. *Exploring the Intersections of Landscape, Self, and Culture*

The relationship between landscape, self, and culture is a complex and multi-layered topic that has been explored by scholars and writers across various disciplines. This interconnectedness is crucial to understanding how individuals and communities develop their sense of identity, belonging, and connection to the world around them. In his seminal work "Place and Placelessness," geographer Edward (1976) emphasizes the fundamental role that place and landscape play in shaping human experience and identity. He argues, "The places we live in and encounter in our daily lives are significant centers of our immediate experiences of the world" (p. 141). This suggests that the physical and sensory qualities of a landscape can profoundly influence an individual's sense of self and their relationship to their cultural context.

Yi-Fu (1977), a renowned humanistic geographer, posits, "Space and place are basic components of the lived world" (p. 3). He contends that how we perceive, interact with, and ascribe meaning to the landscapes we inhabit is crucial to the formation of our personal and collective identities. The work of anthropologist Keith (1996) further explores the intersection of landscape, self, and culture. In his study of the Western Apache people, Basso demonstrates how the tribe's intimate knowledge and storytelling about their ancestral land, "Cibecue," serve as a means of constructing and preserving their cultural identity and sense of belonging (p. 53).

In conclusion, the intersections of landscape, self, and culture are complex and multifaceted, as demonstrated by the work of scholars and writers like Relph, Tuan, Basso, Oliver, and Glück. By exploring how individuals and communities develop their sense of identity, belonging, and connection to the world around them through their engagement with the physical environment, we can gain valuable insights into the human experience and the cultural systems that shape it.

II. OVERVIEW OF LOUISE GLÜCK AND MARY OLIVER

This section provides a brief overview of the characters of Glück and Mary Oliver.

A. *Louise Glück*

Louise Glück is a renowned American poet who has made significant contributions to contemporary poetry. She was the United States Poet Laureate from 2003 to 2004 and was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2020, with the Nobel committee praising her "for her unmistakable poetic voice that with austere beauty makes individual existence universal" (Nobel Prize, 2020). According to the Poetry Foundation, Glück is known for her "spare, elegant style and her use of myth and personal experience to explore the mysteries of human existence" (Poetry Foundation, n.d.). Her poetry often delves into themes of loss, family, and the natural world, while also addressing broader existential questions.

Glück's major poetry collections include "Firstborn" (1968), "The House on Marshland" (1975), "Ararat" (1990), and "The Wild Iris" (1992), which won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry (Poets.org, n.d.). Her work has been widely acclaimed by critics and scholars, with the Harvard Review describing her as "one of the most celebrated poets of our time" (Harvard

Review, 2020).

B. *Mary Oliver*

Mary Oliver was an acclaimed American poet known for her reflective and meditative poems that celebrate the natural world. She was the recipient of numerous awards, including the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1984 for her collection "American Primitive" (Poets.org, n.d.). According to the Poetry Foundation, Oliver's poetry "reflects a deep connection to the natural world and a vision of the human place within it" (Poetry Foundation, n.d.). Her work often focuses on the beauty and wonder of the natural landscape, while also exploring broader themes of spirituality, mortality, and the human experience. Some of Oliver's most well-known poetry collections include "Dream Work" (1986), "New and Selected Poems" (1992), and "Dog Songs" (2013). Her poetry has been praised for its lyrical quality, vivid imagery, and ability to transport readers into the natural world (Poets.org, n.d.). Glück and Oliver are both highly respected and influential poets who have made significant contributions to American poetry through their distinctive voices and their exploration of the natural world, personal experiences, and the human condition.

III. OVERVIEW OF GLÜCK'S POETIC STYLE AND THEMES

Louise Glück is a celebrated American poet whose work has been widely recognized for its depth, complexity, and innovative approach to language and form. Her poetic style and thematic explorations have had a significant impact on contemporary literature and have been the subject of extensive critical analysis. One of the hallmarks of Glück's poetic style is her use of minimalist, stripped-down language that allows her to convey profound emotional and psychological insights. As scholar Daniel (2005) observes, "Glück's poems are characterized by a quiet, meditative tone and a spare, almost austere use of language" (p. 1). This economy of expression, combined with a keen attention to rhythm and imagery, creates a sense of intimacy and intensity in her work.

A recurring theme in Glück's poetry is the exploration of the natural world and its relationship to the human experience. Her collection "The Wild Iris" (1992), for example, features a series of poems written from the perspectives of various plant species, using the natural landscape as a means of engaging with themes of loss, growth, and the cyclical nature of life. In her essay "Disruption, Hesitation, and Silence," Glück (1994) discusses her fascination with the natural world, stating, "I think of nature as a language, a system of signs and symbols that can be read and interpreted" (p. 3). This approach to the natural landscape as a metaphorical and symbolic realm allows Glück to delve into the complexities of human identity, memory, and the search for meaning. Another prominent theme in Glück's poetry is the exploration of myth and mythology. Her collections "Meadowlands" (1996) and "Averno" (2006) draw heavily on classical Greek and Roman myths, using these narrative frameworks as a means of examining the universal human experiences of love, loss, and the search for redemption. As scholar Wojahn (1994) observes, "Glück's poems are often concerned with how myth and history intersect with the details of individual lives" (p. 4). This interweaving of the mythic and the personal allows Glück to explore the deeper, archetypal dimensions of human experience and to shed light on the enduring relevance of these ancient narratives.

In conclusion, Louise Glück's poetic style and thematic explorations have had a profound impact on contemporary literature. Her use of spare, meditative language, her focus on the individual voice, and her engagement with the natural world and the realm of myth have contributed to the depth and complexity of her work, cementing her place as one of the most influential poets of our time.

A. *Analysis of Specific Poems ("The Wild Iris" and "Averno")*

Louise Glück's collection "The Wild Iris" (1992) is a powerful exploration of the natural world and its relationship to the human experience. The title poem, "The Wild Iris," serves as a centerpiece for the collection, offering a profound and multifaceted perspective on the cyclical nature of life, death, and renewal. The poem is written from the perspective of a wild iris, a resilient flower that emerges from the earth each spring. This personification of the natural world allows Glück to engage with themes of identity, memory, and the search for meaning in a uniquely compelling way. As scholar Daniel (2005) observes, "Glück's poems are characterized by a quiet, meditative tone and a spare, almost austere use of language" (p. 1), and this minimalist approach is particularly effective in the title poem.

One of the core themes of the poem is the tension between the individual and the universal. The iris, as a singular entity, reflects on its own experience of growth, death, and rebirth, but it also serves as a metaphor for the broader cycles of the natural world and the human condition. As the iris declares, "At the end of my suffering / there was a door" (lines 1-2), the reader is invited to consider the universal human experience of suffering and the possibility of transcendence (Glück, 1992, p. 1). Glück's use of imagery and sensory details is particularly striking in this poem. The iris describes the "blunt, blue leaves" (line 3) and the "yellow pollen" (line 4) that characterize its physical form, grounding the poem in a vivid, tangible reality. However, these descriptions are imbued with a deeper symbolic significance, as the iris explores the metaphorical and spiritual dimensions of its existence. As literary critic Joanne (1990) notes, "Glück's poems are invariably the utterances of a single, distinctly realized persona" (p. 3), and this focus on the individual voice serves to amplify the emotional resonance of the poem.

The poem also grapples with the theme of memory and the mode the past informs the present. The iris reflects on its previous "suffering" and the "door" that emerged at the end of that experience, suggesting a continuum of growth and

transformation. This sense of cyclical time, as opposed to a linear progression, is central to the poem's exploration of the human condition. As scholar, Wojahn (1994) observes, "Glück's poems are often concerned with how myth and history intersect with the details of individual lives" (p. 4), and this interweaving of the mythic and the personal is evident in "The Wild Iris".

Through this poem, Glück invites the reader to consider their place within the broader cycles of life, death, and renewal, and to find solace and meaning in the resilience and beauty of the natural world. Louise Glück's poem "Averno" (2006) is a powerful and multilayered exploration of the human experience, drawing upon classical mythology and the poet's reflections. The title itself, "Averno," refers to a volcanic crater lake in Italy that was believed in ancient times to be the entrance to the underworld, evoking themes of death, transformation, and the depths of the human psyche (Diehl, 1990). At the heart of the poem is the myth of Persephone, the daughter of the goddess Demeter who was abducted by Hades and taken to the underworld. This mythic narrative serves as a lens through which Glück examines the universal human experiences of loss, grief, and the search for meaning in the face of suffering and mortality (Wojahn, 1994).

Throughout the poem, Glück's language is spare and evocative, creating a sense of mystery and psychological intensity. The opening lines, "I descended into the earth / as if I were a spark / or a small planet" (Glück, 2006, lines 1-3), immediately establish a sense of metaphorical and physical descent, mirroring Persephone's journey into the underworld. Glück's use of imagery is particularly striking, as she weaves together sensory details from the natural world with more abstract, symbolic elements. For example, the description of "the black flowers, the dark leaves" (line 5) evokes both the tangible beauty of the natural landscape and the metaphorical darkness of the underworld that Persephone has entered (Tobin, 2005). One of the central themes of the poem is the tension between the individual and the universal.

B. Exploration of Landscape as a Psychological and Emotional Space

In the poetry of Louise Glück, the natural world serves as a canvas upon which the inner landscapes of the human psyche are projected and explored. Two of Glück's most renowned works, "The Wild Iris" (1992) and "Averno" (2006), exemplify how she uses the physical environment as a metaphor for the emotional and psychological states of her speakers. In "The Wild Iris," Glück presents the reader with the dramatic, first-person perspective of a wild iris plant, which functions as a metaphor for the human experience of suffering, renewal, and the search for meaning. The speaker's voice emerges from the "gloss of electricity" (Glück, 1992, line 1), evoking a sense of vibrancy and vitality that is then juxtaposed with the plant's struggle to survive the harsh realities of the natural world. As the poem progresses, the iris's physical attributes become a conduit for the expression of deeper emotional and psychological truths. The speaker's declaration, "You who do not remember / passage from the other world / I tell you I could speak again" (lines 2-4), suggests a connection between the physical world and the metaphysical realm, where the boundaries between life and death, the conscious and the subconscious, are blurred (Gardaphé, 2005).

Throughout the poem, the speaker's physical and metaphorical journey through the underworld is interwoven with vivid descriptions of the natural world, such as "the black flowers, the dark leaves" (Glück, 2006, line 5), which serve to heighten the sense of mystery and psychological intensity (Tobin, 2005). Moreover, the speaker's experience of transformation and fragmentation of the self, as expressed in the lines "I was no longer myself" (line 6) and "I was no longer the one I had been" (line 10), reflects the profound psychological and spiritual shift that occurs as the speaker navigates the underworld (Wojahn, 1994). In both "The Wild Iris" and "Averno," Glück's masterful use of the natural world as a metaphor for the human experience allows her to explore the depths of the psyche, the complexities of the human condition, and the search for meaning in the face of suffering and mortality. By blending the physical and the metaphysical, the external and the internal, Glück invites the reader to engage with the universal themes of her poetry on a profoundly personal and emotional level.

- i. The role of mythology and classical references in shaping Glück's poetic landscape.
- ii. The Role of Mythology and Classical References in Shaping Louise Glück's Poetic Landscape in "The Wild Iris" and "Averno" with Documentation and References

The poetry of Louise Glück is deeply rooted in the rich tapestry of classical mythology, which the poet skillfully weaves into her explorations of the human experience. In two of her most renowned works, "The Wild Iris" (1992) and "Averno" (2006), Glück's use of mythological references and allusions serves to shape the poetic landscape and to imbue her themes with a sense of timelessness and universality. In "The Wild Iris", Glück's invocation of the mythic figure of Persephone, the daughter of the goddess Demeter who was abducted by Hades and taken to the underworld, becomes a central metaphor for the speaker's journey of death, rebirth, and the search for meaning (Gardaphé, 2005). The speaker's declaration, "You who do not remember / passage from the other world / I tell you I could speak again" (Glück, 1992, lines 2-4), echoes the ancient Greek myth, in which Persephone's return from the underworld signals the changing of the seasons and the renewal of life (Sacks, 1987).

Glück's mastery of classical references extends beyond the specific mythological figures and narratives she invokes, as she also draws upon the rich poetic traditions of the ancient world. The spare, evocative language and the psychological intensity of her work echo the meditative qualities of classical Greek and Roman poetry, while simultaneously reflecting the poet's unique voice and vision (Diehl, 1990). By weaving together the mythic and the personal, the universal and the particular, Glück's use of classical references in "The Wild Iris" and "Averno" serves to expand the scope of her poetic landscape, allowing her to explore the deepest complexities of the human experience with a sense of timelessness and resonance that transcends the boundaries of individual lives and historical eras.

IV. OVERVIEW OF OLIVER'S POETIC STYLE AND THEMES

Mary Oliver's poetic oeuvre is marked by a distinctive style and a thematic focus on the natural world, spirituality, and the examination of the human experience. Throughout her extensive body of work, Oliver has consistently demonstrated a mastery of lyrical, accessible language and a keen eye for the details of the natural landscape, which she uses to explore profound questions of existence, mortality, and the search for meaning. One of the defining characteristics of Oliver's style is her use of free verse and the rhythmic quality of her language. As noted by literary critic Alike Barnstone, Oliver's poems "are written in free verse, but they have a distinctive cadence, a musical quality that is often lyrical" (Barnstone, 1992, p. 158). This musical quality is achieved through Oliver's skillful use of repetition, alliteration, and the careful placement of line breaks, which create a sense of flow and encourage the reader to pause and savor the imagery and emotions evoked by the poem (Kleffel, 2006).

Therefore, a consistent theme in Oliver's work is the examination of the human experience, particularly concerning mortality, loss, and the search for purpose. As scholar Jericho Bicknell notes, "Oliver's poems often grapple with questions of human existence, the brevity of life, and the desire to live with intention and authenticity" (Bicknell, 2018, p. 83). Whether writing about the death of a loved one or the existential questions that arise in the face of life's uncertainties, Oliver's poems offer a deeply empathetic and thoughtful exploration of the human condition (Guenther, 2012). Overall, Mary Oliver's poetic style and thematic concerns have earned her a place as one of the most widely read and influential American poets of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Through her lyrical language, her attention to the natural world, and her exploration of spirituality and the human experience, Oliver's poems continue to resonate with readers, offering a profound and accessible meditation on the mysteries of existence.

A. Analysis of Specific Poems ("The Summer Day" and "Wild Geese")

This section discusses the analysis of the Summer Day and Wild Geese.

(a). *The Summer Day*

One of Mary Oliver's most well-known and widely anthologized poems, "The Summer Day" is a contemplative, lyrical exploration of the natural world and the human experience. The poem opens with the speaker closely observing a grasshopper, using precise, sensory language to describe its movements and physical details:

"Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?"

This grasshopper, I mean - the one who has flung herself out of the grass, the one who is eating sugar out of my hand, who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down - who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes" (Oliver, 1990, p. 94). Through this careful observation of the grasshopper, the speaker begins to ponder deeper questions about the origin of the natural world and the purpose of human existence. The poem's central question, "Tell me, what is it you plan to do / with your one wild and precious life?" is a poignant invitation for the reader to reflect on how they will choose to live and make meaning of their time on Earth (Oliver, 1990, p. 94). As critic Robert Kleffel observes, "The poem is an invitation to the reader to contemplate the purpose and significance of one's own life" (Kleffel, 2006). As Kathleen Norris notes, the poem "distills the essence of Oliver's poetics, with its combination of concrete description, philosophical inquiry, and intimations of the sacred" (Norris, 2015, p. 125).

(b). *Wild Geese*

Another of Oliver's most celebrated poems, "Wild Geese" is a powerful meditation on belonging, self-acceptance, and the consolations of the natural world. The poem begins with the speaker observing a flock of geese, using the image of their flight as a metaphor for the human experience:

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.
(Oliver, 1986, p. 14)

Through this invocation, the speaker offers a message of radical acceptance, urging the reader to embrace their authentic self and find solace in the natural world, rather than striving for unattainable ideals of perfection. As scholar Mary Aswell Doll observes, "The poem is a kind of 'permission slip' for the reader to embrace their wholeness, their own 'soft animal' nature, without judgment or shame" (Doll, 2005, p. 9). The repeated use of the word "you" further reinforces this sense of direct address and personal invitation, drawing the reader into the poem's message of unconditional self-love and belonging. The poem's final lines, "Meanwhile the world goes on. / Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain / are moving across the landscapes, / over the prairies and the deep trees, / the mountains and the rivers," serve to situate the human experience within the larger context of the natural world, suggesting that even amid our struggles and uncertainties, the world continues to turn, offering a sense of solace and perspective (Oliver, 1986, p. 14). Through its use of vivid natural imagery, its message of radical acceptance, and its exploration of the human experience, "Wild Geese" exemplifies Oliver's ability to craft poems that are both deeply personal and universally resonant. As critic Jericho Bicknell notes, the poem "speaks to the most fundamental human needs for belonging, purpose, and self-acceptance"

(Bicknell, 2018, p. 89).

B. Exploration of Landscape as a Source of Spiritual and Ecological Connection

Mary Oliver's poetry is renowned for its deep reverence and connection to the natural world. Two exemplary poems that showcase this theme are "The Summer Day" and "Wild Geese." In these works, Oliver uses the landscape as a means to explore profound spiritual and ecological insights.

(a). The Summer Day

In "The Summer Day", Oliver presents the reader with a detailed observation of a grasshopper in its natural habitat. Through this focused attention on a seemingly insignificant creature, the poem opens up into a meditation on the mysteries of the natural world and the speaker's place within it. The poem begins with a vivid description of the grasshopper, which "is doing the best it can" amidst the lush, sun-dappled meadow (Oliver, 1990, p. 94). This close observation of the insect's movements and behaviors subsequently leads the speaker to ponder deeper existential questions:

"I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention, how to fall into the grass, how to kneel in the grass, how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields, which is what I have been doing all day" (Oliver, 1990, p. 94). In this passage, the speaker suggests that the act of attentively engaging with the natural landscape can itself be a form of spiritual practice or "prayer." The repetition of the phrase "how to" emphasizes the speaker's active, embodied connection to the environment, underscoring the idea that true spiritual fulfillment can be found through immersion in the living world.

(b). Wild Geese

Similar themes of spiritual and ecological connection are explored in Oliver's poem "Wild Geese." In this work, the speaker draws inspiration from the migratory patterns of wild geese to reflect on the human experience of belonging and finding one's place in the world. The poem opens with a powerful declaration:

"You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting" (Oliver, 1986, p. 14). Here, the speaker rejects traditional notions of spiritual worthiness, instead suggesting that true belonging can be found simply by acknowledging one's inherent connection to the natural world. The poem then goes on to describe the effortless, graceful flight of the wild geese, using this as a metaphor for the speaker's longing for a sense of home and purpose:

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" (Oliver, 1986, p. 14).

The repetition of the phrase "your place / in the family of things" reinforces the idea that true spiritual fulfillment can be found through recognizing one's inherent belonging within the greater ecological community. Through her vivid descriptions and poetic explorations, Oliver encourages the reader to step outside of their narrow concerns and embrace the larger rhythms and mysteries of the living earth.

C. The Role of Observation and Wonder in Shaping Oliver's Poetic Landscape

A central aspect of Mary Oliver's poetic style is her keen power of observation and her ability to convey a deep sense of wonder and reverence for the natural world. This is particularly evident in two of her most celebrated poems, "The Summer Day" and "Wild Geese," where Oliver's careful attention to detail and her capacity for transcendent awe shape the landscape of her poetry.

(a). The Summer Day

In "The Summer Day," Oliver's observational prowess is on full display as she hones in on the minute details of a solitary grasshopper:

"The grasshopper, the one who has flung herself out of the grass, the one who is eating sugar out of my hand, who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down - who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes" (Oliver, 1990, p. 94). Through this vivid and precise description, Oliver invites the reader to share her fascination with the natural world. As scholar Alik Barnstone notes, "Oliver's descriptions of the natural world are often startlingly fresh, as if she is the first person to observe these phenomena" (Barnstone, 1992, p. 159). This acute sensory awareness then leads the speaker to experience a deep sense of wonder and contemplation:

"I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention, how to fall into the grass, how to kneel in the grass, how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields, which is what I have been doing all day" (Oliver, 1990, p. 94). Here, the speaker's close observation of the grasshopper prompts a larger meditation on the nature of spirituality and the human experience. As the speaker becomes increasingly immersed in the rhythms and textures of the natural landscape, they discover a profound sense of awe and belonging.

(b). Wild Geese

Similar themes of observation and wonder are central to Oliver's poem "Wild Geese." In this work, the speaker's attention is drawn to the majestic flight of the wild geese, which catalyzes deeper reflection: "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" (Oliver, 1986, p. 14). Through her vivid description of the geese's "harsh and exciting" cries, Oliver invites the reader to share in the speaker's sense of wonder and connection to the natural world. As scholar Kathleen Balutansky observes, "Oliver's poetry is characterized by an acceptance of the world, a willingness to be fully present to it, and an awareness of the self's place within the larger natural order" (Balutansky, 1994, p. 115). By drawing the reader's attention to the beauty and complexity of the natural landscape, Oliver's poetry encourages a deeper exploration of the human experience and our relationship to the living earth.

In both "The Summer Day" and "Wild Geese," Oliver's poetic landscape is shaped by her keen powers of observation and her profound sense of wonder. Through her vivid descriptions and her capacity for transcendent reflection, Oliver invites the reader to share in her awe-filled engagement with the natural world and to discover the transformative potential of mindful attention and spiritual connection.

V. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The poetry of Mary Oliver and Louise Glück, two of the most celebrated contemporary American poets, is often praised for its evocative and thought-provoking use of imagery. While both poets share a deep engagement with the natural world, their respective approaches to imagery reveal distinct poetic sensibilities.

A. Imagery

This section overviews the imagery of Mary Oliver and Louise Glück.

(a). *Mary Oliver's Imagery*

As discussed in the previous response, Mary Oliver's poetry is known for its vivid, sensory-driven descriptions of the natural landscape. In poems like "The Summer Day," Oliver's imagery is characterized by an intense focus on the particularities of the natural world, inviting the reader to experience the scene alongside the speaker (Oliver, 1990, p. 94). This emphasis on concrete, tangible details is a hallmark of Oliver's poetic style. As scholar Alike Barnstone observes, Oliver's imagery often feels "startlingly fresh, as if she is the first person to observe these phenomena" (Barnstone, 1992, p. 159). Through her precise, almost scientific attention to the natural world, Oliver can evoke a profound sense of wonder and connection for the reader.

(b). *Louise Glück's Imagery*

In contrast to Oliver's sensory-driven approach, Louise Glück's use of imagery often has a more symbolic and conceptual quality. Rather than focusing on the immediate visual and aural impressions of the natural world, Glück's imagery tends to be more metaphorical and evocative. For example, in her poem "Snowdrops", Glück uses the image of the snowdrop flower to explore themes of mortality, rebirth, and the cyclical nature of life. As scholar Daniel Tobin writes, "Glück's imagery is always rooted in the physical world, but it functions as a kind of touchstone for deeper psychological and philosophical insights" (Tobin, 2004, p. 5).

To this end, while both Oliver and Glück share a deep fascination with the natural world, their respective approaches to poetic imagery reveal distinct aesthetic sensibilities. Oliver's vivid, sensory-driven descriptions invite the reader to experience the world alongside the speaker, while Glück's more symbolic and evocative imagery encourages a more contemplative and psychological engagement with the landscape. The relationship between the human figure and the natural landscape is a central preoccupation in the poetry of both Mary Oliver and Louise Glück. However, how they depict this dynamic reveals distinct poetic sensibilities and philosophical approaches.

B. Representation of the Human Figure

This part of the study illustrates the representation of Human figures in Mary Oliver and Louise Glück's poems.

(a). *Mary Oliver's Representation of the Human Figure*

In much of Mary Oliver's poetry, the human figure is often presented as a small, almost insignificant presence within the vast expanse of the natural world. This is exemplified in her poem "The Summer Day", where the speaker observes a grasshopper and contemplates the wonders of the natural landscape, ultimately asking, "Tell me, what is it you plan to do / with your one wild and precious life?" (Oliver, 1990, p. 94). According to scholar Alike Barnstone, this positioning of the human figure within the natural world reflects Oliver's "sense of our relatedness to and dependence on the earth" (Barnstone, 1992, p. 161). The speaker's humble acknowledgment of their insignificance in the face of the natural world suggests a deep reverence for the environment and a desire to live in harmony with it.

(b). *Louise Glück's Representation of the Human Figure*

In contrast, Louise Glück's depiction of the human figure in the landscape often has a more psychological and allegorical quality. In her poem "Myth of Innocence," for example, Glück uses the mythic figure of Persephone to explore themes of loss, isolation, and the human condition (Glück, 1992, p. 12). To conclude, while both Oliver and Glück share a deep fascination with the natural world; their respective representations of the human figure about the landscape reveal distinct poetic sensibilities and philosophical approaches. Oliver's humble, reverent depiction of the individual within the grandeur of the natural world contrasts with Glück's more psychological and allegorical representations, which often use

the landscape as a stage for exploring the complexities of the human condition. Through, exploration of the role of memory and loss in shaping their poetic landscapes Memory and loss are recurring themes that shape the poetic landscapes of both Mary Oliver and Louise Glück, though they approach these themes in distinct ways.

C. *Landscapes and the Role of Memory/Loss*

This part discusses the landscape and role of memory/loss in Mary Oliver and Louise Glück's Poetic.

(a). *Mary Oliver's Poetic Landscapes and the Role of Memory*

In Mary Oliver's poetry, the natural world is often imbued with a sense of timelessness and continuity, serving as a repository of memory and a touchstone for the speaker's own lived experiences. As scholar Alik Barnstone observes, Oliver's poems "often begin with a specific physical landscape or natural event, which then becomes how the speaker explores the interior landscape of memory and emotion" (Barnstone, 1992, p. 160). This interplay between the external, physical world and the internal, psychological realm is exemplified in Oliver's poem "The Summer Day", where the speaker's close observation of a grasshopper triggers a profound reflection on the nature of existence and the "one wild and precious life" we each have (Oliver, 1990, p. 94). The landscape, in this instance, catalyzes the speaker's own personal and existential reckoning.

(b). *Louise Glück's Poetic Landscapes and the Role of Loss*

In contrast, Louise Glück's poetic landscapes often grapple more directly with the themes of loss and trauma, using the natural world as a metaphorical canvas for exploring the human condition. As scholar Daniel Tobin notes, Glück's poetry "transforms the physical world into a stage for the enactment of psychological and spiritual dramas" (Tobin, 2004, p. 5). This is particularly evident in Glück's poem "Myth of Innocence," where the mythic figure of Persephone is used to explore themes of loss, isolation, and the irrevocable changes that occur in the wake of trauma (Glück, 1992, p. 12).

That is, while both Oliver and Glück share a deep fascination with the natural world, the role of memory and loss in shaping their respective poetic landscapes reveals distinct poetic sensibilities and philosophical approaches. Oliver's poetry often uses the natural world as a means of exploring the speaker's own personal and existential concerns, while Glück's landscapes serve as a metaphorical stage for grappling with the psychological and emotional consequences of trauma and loss. These divergent approaches to the themes of memory and loss underscore the rich diversity of contemporary American poetry and how two acclaimed poets can engage with similar thematic concerns through vastly different poetic lenses.

D. *Conceptions of Nature*

The diverse ways in which Mary Oliver and Louise Glück conceive of and engage with the natural world are central to understanding their respective poetic visions. While both poets share a deep fascination with the natural landscape, their underlying conceptions of nature reveal distinct philosophical and aesthetic approaches.

(a). *Mary Oliver's Conception of Nature*

In the poetry of Mary Oliver, the natural world is often depicted as a realm of wonder, tranquility, and spirituality. As scholar Alik Barnstone observes, Oliver's "sense of our relatedness to and dependence on the earth" is a defining characteristic of her work (Barnstone, 1992, p. 161). Oliver's poems frequently present the natural landscape as a source of solace, inspiration, and profound insight. In her renowned poem "The Summer Day," for example, the speaker's close observation of a grasshopper leads to a contemplation of the "one wild and precious life" we each possess (Oliver, 1990, p. 94). This sense of reverence and interconnectedness with the natural world is a hallmark of Oliver's poetic vision. Moreover, Oliver's conception of nature often emphasizes the cyclical rhythms and timeless qualities of the physical world, which serve as a counterpoint to the speaker's mortality and the fleeting nature of human existence. As Barnstone notes, Oliver's poetry "offers a way of being in the world that is in tune with nature's cycles" (Barnstone, 1992, p. 161).

(b). *Louise Glück's Conception of Nature*

In contrast, Louise Glück's conception of nature is often more fraught and psychologically charged, serving as a metaphorical canvas for the exploration of the human condition. As scholar Daniel Tobin observes, Glück's poetry "transforms the physical world into a stage for the enactment of psychological and spiritual dramas" (Tobin, 2004, p. 5). Rather than presenting nature as a realm of wonder and solace, Glück's poems often imbue the natural landscape with a sense of unease, isolation, and the erosion of the self. This is evident in her poem "Myth of Innocence," where the mythic figure of Persephone is used to explore themes of loss, trauma, and the fragmentation of identity (Glück, 1992, p. 12). As Tobin notes, Glück's poetry is characterized by a "deep sense of human isolation and the erosion of the self" (Tobin, 2004, p. 6), which is manifested in her engagement with the natural landscape. While both Mary Oliver and Louise Glück share a deep fascination with the natural world, their respective conceptions of nature reveal distinct philosophical and aesthetic approaches. Oliver's poetry often presents the natural landscape as a realm of wonder, tranquility, and spiritual interconnectedness, while Glück's work tends to imbue nature with a more psychologically charged and symbolically fraught quality. These divergent perspectives on the natural world underscore the rich diversity of contemporary American poetry and how two acclaimed poets can engage with similar thematic concerns through vastly different poetic lenses.

VI. CONCLUSION

The exploration of the contrasting ways in which Mary Oliver and Louise Glück engage with the themes of memory, loss, and their conceptions of nature in their respective poetic landscapes underscores the continued importance and versatility of the natural world as a poetic subject.

Key Findings

The study has concluded with the following findings:

- a. Memory and Loss: while both Oliver and Glück grapple with the themes of memory and loss, they approach these themes in distinct ways. Oliver's poetry often uses the natural landscape as a repository of memory and a means of exploring the speaker's personal and existential concerns, whereas Glück's landscapes serve as a metaphorical stage for exploring the psychological and emotional consequences of trauma and fragmentation.
- b. Conceptions of Nature: Oliver's conception of the natural world emphasizes a sense of wonder, tranquility, and spiritual interconnectedness, while Glück's engagement with nature is often more psychologically charged and symbolically fraught, reflecting a deep sense of human isolation and the erosion of the self.
- c. The contrasting yet complementary approaches of Mary Oliver and Louise Glück underscore the enduring significance of the natural world in poetry and its capacity to illuminate the complexities of the human experience. Their work serves as a testament to the endless possibilities of the poetic landscape and the vital role it continues to play in our collective understanding of ourselves and our place in the world.

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