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Ecopoetry in , Jorie Graham's "The Geese," and "At
Luca Signorelli's Resurrection of the Body."

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# **Dedication**

To our first teacher prophet Muhammad (peace and prayer upon him).

To our parents with great love.

### Acknowledgements

There are a number of people whom we would like to express our appreciation to for their help and support which enabled us to produce this piece of work.

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## **Abstract**

This paper is devoted to exploring Ecopoetry in Jorie Graham's poems. It is divided into two chapters.

Chapter one is subdivided in to two sections, section one sheds light on Definition of Ecopoetry, while section two deals with Jorie Graham's life and career.

Chapter two is an analysis Ecopoetry in Graham's "The Geese," and "At Luca Signorelli's Resurrection of the Body."

Finally, the conclusion sums up the findings of this paper.

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## **CHAPTER: ONE :INTRODUCTION**

## 1.1 Definition of Ecopoetry

Scott Bryson defining ecopoetry as:

The term ecopoetry is used to portray the most recent development in tradition has been online since of nature-oriented poetry. Ecopoetry uses language to deepen a sense of nature's presence in the life; and these supplication of nature's presence celebratory of the biological fact

that individuals are nature suggest an ecological understanding of nature and its processes. <sup>1</sup>

As John Elder explains in the first book-length treatment of the intersections between poetry and ecology, *Imagining the Earth* (1985), "the principles of ecology change one's vision of nature as well as the form in which that vision is expressed."<sup>2</sup>

Writers have since quite a while ago envisioned something like an environmental world view. This lovely, social and profound introduction to the world is sorted out around a feeling of association between the human and the more-then human world. The weakening of this world view shows up in the more hesitant nature composing generally eighteenth-century Romantic artists in Europe and also the mid nineteenth-century scholars in America. Crafted by these scholars communicates a pained partition from nature, and also a worry with the irreversible modern, mechanical, and political occasions that were forming new conditions for human life <sup>3</sup>.

Ecopoetry is poetry with a strong ecological emphasis or message. Many poets, poems and books of poems have expressed ecological concerns; but only recently has the term ecopoetry gained use. There is now, in English-speaking poetry, a recognisable subgenre of ecopoetry.<sup>4</sup>

Preceding the term, various ballads had biological messages. In spite of the fact that these writers did not specify the word, they were unmistakably 'Ecopoetic' in position and applied an impact on the ensuing subgenre. Illustrations include:

The White Poem by Jay Ramsay and Carole Bruce, Bosco (Hearing Eye, 1999; 2001) and Heavy Water: a lyric for Chernobyl (Enitharmon Press, 2004).<sup>5</sup>

One of a number of seminal texts helping to introduce the term into wider, critical use was *Ecopoetry: a Critical Introduction* edited by J. Scott Bryson (2002). Another example of the burgeoning use of the term at the millennial turn was the journal *Ecopoetics*, which broadened the term from poetry into poiesis interpreted as making or writing more generally.<sup>6</sup>

Since then, a spate of poetry anthologies and books has appeared, either employing the word explicitly or using the idea as a guiding principle. Recent instances include Alice Oswald's *The Thunder Mutters* (2005), Forrest Gander and John Kinsella's *Redstart: an Ecological Poetics*, and the ground-breaking *Earth Shattering: Ecopoems*, edited by Neil Astley at Bloodaxe Books (2007).<sup>7</sup>

One of the central attributes of ecopoetry, as characterized by James Engelhardt, is that it is associated with the world in a way that suggests obligation. Likewise with different models that investigate and accept engagement (Marxism, women's liberation, and so on.), Ecopoetry is "encompassed by inquiries of ethics". As a methods for portraying verse or beautiful tasks that grasp the biological basic for individual affectability and social change, ecopoetry has been referred to by such authors as John Burnside and Mario Petrucci.<sup>8</sup>

Skinner identify four approaches to the term 'ecopoetics':

The first is *topological* 'referring beyond the poem to a specific space or 'natural topos'. Secondly, he recognizes a *tropological* poetics, which

indicates a hybrid fertilisation of the language of environmental sciences performing as 'exercises in analogy, casting poems as somehow performing like ecosystems or complex systems'. Next is an *entropological* poetics that is a practice 'engaged at the level of materials and process, where entropy, transformation and decay are part of the creative work'. Finally, ecopoetics may also practise in an *ethnological* way<sup>9</sup>.

### 1.2Jorie Graham's Life and Career

Jorie Graham is an American poet whose abstract intellectual verse is known for its visual imagery, complex metaphors, and philosophical content. She was born in '1951New York City. Jorie Graham is a cerebral and complex poet whose early poems deal with such philosophical questions as the nature of reality and the divisions between mind and spirit and between spirit and body. Her later poems are no less complex but show a greater interest in myth and history <sup>10</sup>.

Graham's background is unusual. She was brought up in Italy, although her parents were Americans. She attended a French school in Rome, and later the Sorbonne in Paris. She is trilingual, and in one of her early poems, she speaks of needing three different words to name a chestnut tree. She returned to the United States in 1969 to complete her university education and graduated with a B.A. from New York University in 1973<sup>11</sup>.

At first a film student, she was drawn to poetry when she heard M. L. Rosenthal, teaching at N.Y.U · .read a T. S. Eliot poem aloud. She then received an M.F.A. from the University of Iowa at its renowned Writers' Workshop. She has taught at Murray State University in Kentucky and at California State University at

Humboldt and has been a professor of English at the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop and at Harvard University. She has been the recipient of a number of awards, including a MacArthur grant and the Morton Dauwen Zabel award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Graham was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in poetry in 1996 for her collection The Dream of the Unified Field<sup>12</sup>.

Graham's first book 'Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts 'was published in 1980. The title of the work is taken from Friedrich Nietzsche's definition of human beings, and a number of the poems deal with the divided human condition. Graham is the author of numerous collections of poetry, including Fast: Poems) Ecco, 2017 '(From the New World: Poems) 2014-1976 Ecco, 2015 '(Place: New Poems) Ecco, 2012 '(Sea Change) Ecco, 2008 '(Never) Ecco, 2002 '(Swarm) Ecco, 2000), and The Dream of the Unified Field: Selected Poems) 1994-1974 Ecco, 1997), which won the 1996 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry<sup>13</sup>.

Graham has also edited two anthologies :*Earth Took of Earth 100* :*Great Poems of the English Language*) Ecco, 1996) and *The Best American Poetry* 1990 )Scribner, 1990). She served as a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets from 1997 to 200 .3In 2017, she received the Wallace Stevens Award, given annually to recognize outstanding and proven mastery in the art of poetry. She has taught at the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop and is currently the Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard University 14.

### Notes

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Scott Bryson, Ecopoetry: a Critical Introduction (Utah: Utah University Press 2002 (p.1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> John Elder, *Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature*2 .nd.ed. (Athens: Georgia University Press, 1996 (p.5

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Scott Bryson p.4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup>https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ecopoetry&oldid=805590056. (Accessed on 11/12/2017).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

- https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Jorie\_Graham&oldid=812857846 (Accessed on 17/12/2017).
- <sup>14</sup> Thomas Gardner, "Jorie Graham: The Art of Poetry LXXXV" "*The Paris Review* 'no. 165, 2003, p.96.

#### **CHAPTER TWO**

Ecopoetry in Jorie Graham's "The Geese" and "At Luca Signorelli's Resurrection of the Body."

In Hybrids of Plants and of Ghosts, Graham's love of conceptual pattern of the orienting grids of thought - questions, over and over, its perpetually vexed relation to sensory perception even before the two are formulated in language.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> As qutet by Nerys Williams, *Contemporary Poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd,2011 (p.158.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Thomas Gardner, "An Interview with Jorie Graham "Denver Quarterly 26 no.4, 1992, p.98.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Ibid,p.99

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Here is the poem 'The Geese,' which displays two contrasting patterns - one in the sky, made by the ambitious, goal-directed 'conceptual' paths of migrating geese, and another, parallel one on the earth, made by the textual netting of spiderwebs. There are two organizing remarks in the poem. The first remark expresses a fear of being overwhelmed by 'texture' - the infinite web-like registering of perceptual data that cannot be codified either by time (into 'history') or by space (into 'place'); the second remark expresses a dissatisfaction with the voyaging mind alone, since the body tells the mind that in its lofty activity it has missed something crucial, 'a bedrock poverty'.<sup>1</sup>

"The Geese"

Today as I hang out the wash I see them again, a code as urgent as elegant,

tapering with goals.

For days they have been crossing. We live beneath these geese as if beneath the passage of time, or a most perfect heading.<sup>2</sup>

(Hybrids, 38-39)

The two patterns - the skyey adventurousness of the geese, the anxious closures of the spiders - dictate the alternately expansive and contracting lines of Graham's stanzas. Unable to decide between the directed urgency of the mind and the restrictive chainlink of perception, Graham stops 'somewhere in between,' in 'the astonishing delay, the everyday.'<sup>3</sup>

"The Geese" is original in its juxtaposition of two matching and yet contrastive instinctual patterns, and in its refusing to choose one over the other, instead taking as its resting-place the 'delay' between them. Yet the stanzas in which these things take place are, perhaps, imperfectly articulated with the crux that stimulates them, the relation of body to mind. The two movements that close the poem - the one, a mental fall without a sense of traversing reality; the other, the real that 'cross[es] you' in a false 'arrival' in the body are not quite clear enough in themselves or in their relation to the adventurous geese and the spiders fearfully binding things against a potential disintegration. And yet the perplexity they embody is at least partially conveyed: that all perception arrives first at and through the body, and that the ambitious mind cannot 'outrun' the body, which always precedes it. How to give bodily perception its due in thought is a question already vexing Graham's verse. How to match thought and perception with language remains as yet an unnamed problem.<sup>4</sup>

In this poem, geese fly overhead, "a code tapering with goals," as the poet hangs laundry. "Between the lines," spiders connect things, try to hold them together. The poet wonders if this natural binding puts humans in or out. The poet expects an end to the world as it is the rushing geese, the fearful spiders, her own activity. Meanwhile, "this astonishing delay, the everyday, takes place". It is a recognition of limited time, borrowed time, of "a feeling the body gives the mind/of having missed something . . . ." A natural scene, the human uneasy within it.<sup>5</sup>

The procedure of "The Geese" is one that many of Graham's early poems will follow. First, a mundane beginning (here, 'hang[ing]out the wash') situates the speaker in the natural world; then, a natural emblem or set of emblems (here, the geese and spiders) is carefully rendered; next, a quasi-philosophical formulation of a problem is offered; and finally there appears a resolution, which may, and often does, evade the terms in which 'philosophy' has posed (or would pose) the original

problem. In "The Geese," by the single concluding line of the poem, with its 'astonishing delay, the everyday,' freeing the awaited remainder of its incomplete stanza into invisibility, openness and escape.<sup>6</sup>

In "The Geese" history' is only a word. Graham's natural emblems, the geese and spiders, are themselves detached from history; and 'the everyday,' while it gives something in place of appalling random 'texture,' does not embody memory, either personal or historical, but remains an interval, without any apparent continuity with the past. Elsewhere in Graham's first volume, the past frightens by its destructive completeness it is too great to be remembered, and too intimidating in its gaps representing the forgotten, 'the world too large to fit.'

"The Geese," for example, anticipates the theme of what Graham would eventually call, in her own distinctive metaphysical code, "hurry" and "delay"—which can be translated, but roughly, into the paradoxes of temporality and timelessness. Alternatively one might translate these terms as "flux" and "form," the changing temporal body and the permanent body of beauty, or as designations of the longing human beings have for change against their longing for fixity and stability.<sup>8</sup>

In "The Geese," Graham incarnates the paradoxical terms with which people think their reality into simple, earthly activities and forms. While she is hanging out clothes, she sees geese flying overhead. Their flight becomes an "urgent" and "elegant" code for "hurry," for the flowing onwardness of time. Spiders that spin filaments between the clotheslines become an emblem for those forces in the world that hold things together that bind, as the poem says, "pins to the lines, the lines to the eaves." More largely, the spiders on their clothesline loom signify the desire to

keep human meanings intact and to mend the rifts and wounds of time. Between these two contending forces is an "astonishing delay": "And somewhere in between/ these geese forever entering and/ these spiders turning back,// this astonishing delay, the everyday, takes place."

Graham has been called a gnostic poet, and it is true that she presses thought against the secret places and conundrum points of the universe. She asks not only, "Why this strange process called time?" but also, "How do consciousness and flesh coincide?" The title of her first volume signals Graham's interest in these ontological questions. <sup>10</sup>

In later volumes, The End of Beauty and Region of Unlikeness, Graham would extend these ontological concerns by undertaking to explore woman or the anima and its relationship to the animus through rewritings of the stories of Eve and Adam, Penelope and Ulysses, Eurydice and Orpheus, Daphne and Apollo. In recasting these cultural mythologies, Graham portrays woman as the will toward change and transformation that chooses against the stasis of paradise and perfection, and the overlords who would paralyze woman within the form of the beautiful. Eve's coming out of Adam's body is, for Graham, the tragedy that makes time and history, an ongoing tragedy that she embraces and loves, though with suffering. Similarly, Eurydice and Daphne are used to signify the will to change. Eurydice goes back to Hell because Orpheus tries to fix her form with his backward gaze. Daphne transforms herself when Apollo tries to snare her within the trammels of beauty. In Graham's rewritings of all these stories, woman becomes that principle of escape from fixities that makes time and history. "Gnosis," for Graham, will entail an exploration not only of the unthinkable interface of body and soul but also of an archetypal Eve-life within and outside the body of Adam.<sup>11</sup>

"At Luca Signorelli's Resurrection of the Body." This poem is written in the short, musing, in-and-out delaying phrases that characterize Graham's style at this period, phrases grouped in an orderly stanzaic style standing for gradual and patient advance, advance, advance - without any real promise of final closure. These phrases reflect, in this poem, Graham's sense of Signorelli's deliberate search for accuracy, as he dissected corpses so as to understand human musculature and articulation.<sup>12</sup>

... In his studio

Luca Signorelli

in the name of God

and Science

and the believable

broke into the body

studying arrival.

It is because of his patient dissection that Signorelli can leave behind the flat, symbolic, medieval rendering of persons and depict instead, with unprecedented accuracy and intimacy, the actual beauty of flesh. This is nowhere more evident than in the great painting (from which Graham takes her poem) of the Resurrection of the Bodies in the Cappella Nuova of Orvieto Cathedral. The doctrine of the General Resurrection symbolizes, of course, the insufficiency of the

soul alone as a representation for the human: though the redeemed dead enjoy eternal blessedness without their bodies, and presumably could do so forever, nonetheless, at the Last Judgment, when time comes to an end, the bodies of the dead will be reconstituted, and the souls in heaven will be allowed reunion with their long-lost flesh.<sup>13</sup>

Signorelli, with enormous sympathy for the prolonged yearning for the body which he imagines must be felt, even in heaven, by the disembodied souls of the dead, shows them on the Last Day eagerly re-finding their individual bodies - names, speech. perfected human flesh - and finding human company once again, too, in the re-animated bodies of others. Unable merely to rejoice in the moment with Signorelli and his subjects, the speaker in Graham's poem persistently questions the premise of the painting that the eagerness of the spirit to rejoin the flesh is understandable and good.<sup>14</sup>

See how they hurry

to enter

their bodies,

these spirits.

Is it better. flesh.

that they

should hurry so?

From above

the green-winged angels

```
blare down
trumpets and light. But
they don't care,
they hurry to congregate,
they hurry
into speech, until
it's a marketplace.
it is humanity. But still
we wonder
in the chancel
of the dark cathedral,
is it better. back?
The artist
has tried to make it so: each tendon
they press
to re-enter
is perfect. But is it
perfection
they're after.
pulling themselves up
```

through the soil
into the weightedness, the color,
into the eye
of the painter?

The speaker warns the heedless spirits that 'there is no entrance, / only entering.' The illimitable nature of sense-perception guarantees, for Graham, that one is never at rest in the body: once one possesses a body, the clear geometric absolutes of the spirit are confused by the ceaseless profusion of sense-data that must somehow be put into relation with the knowledge proper to the soul. This is an interminable process ' there is no / entrance, / only entering.' 15

It is only now that Graham can face the question that must conclude Signorelli's progress from the Medieval symbolic to the Renaissance beautiful: 'How far is true?' Modernity, because of the importance it ascribes to empirical knowledge, demands that art be true as well as beautiful; and Signorelli, pursuing his Renaissance aesthetic ideal of a believable and beautiful rendering of flesh, has almost unwittingly stumbled, through his dissections, on empiricism. And yet the word 'true' for Graham does not mean representational accuracy or scientific accuracy alone; the true, for an artist, must involve the accurate transmutation of feeling into knowledge, perception into categorization. Therefore, to close her poem, Graham invokes the exemplary anecdote of Luca Signorelli's dissection of the body of his son, dead by violence. Signorelli finds the true mending of grief in acquiring an exhaustive knowledge of the effects of violent death on the flesh of

his flesh.16

When his one son

died violently,

he had the body brought to him

and laid it

Like 'The Geese,' this poem ends with an incomplete stanza. The body of his son cannot appear to Signorelli under the sign of the symbolic or the sign of the beautiful; it bears the wound of truth, and the father's mind, wounded by the wound of the son, has further to go as the poem ends two-thirds of the way through a stanza. The extended analytic process of examining grief under a cold light is, for Graham as for Signorelli, the necessary precedent to art. Fact, including the fact of feeling, must undergo a long testing by analytic understanding before it can become, as art, 'true.' <sup>17</sup>

The body, in this formulation, becomes the subject of intimate and prolonged examination by the investigative mind; and it is in this somewhat uneasy way, with a 'mended' mind dominating the extinguished body, that Graham here reconciles the cohabitation of the spirit with the flesh. Even the violence of history can be contained within analysis; but the earlier aphorism, 'Contained damage makes for beauty,' has now to be emended to 'Damage, if investigated in a cold light, can be contained in beauty insofar as beauty is an ongoing entrance into the true.'

Materialism, for Graham at this point, is still governed by intellectual

analysis; and the true, even if it is a process rather than a conclusion, comes by even and measured and deliberate steps by the spirit through the evidence of matter. Yet against the closing image of Signorelli mending his marred heart by analysis of his son's body, we feel the earlier-described desire of the spirits of the dead, who want not to analyze the body but to join its living self in ecstatic oneness. That sensual desire, too, is Graham's own, and it is bound to come into conflict with the 'cold' analytic desire of the mind.<sup>19</sup>

### **Notes**

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Helen Vendler, *Jorie Graham: The Nameless and The Material* (Harvard: Harvard University Press,1995), p.91.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Jorge Graham Collected Poems (New Jersey: The Eco Press, 1987),p.39.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992),p.67.
<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Mark Doty, *Seeing Venice: Bellotto's Grand Canal* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2002), p.125.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), p.266.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Ibid. p.287.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> T.J. Clark, Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism (New

Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), pp.7-8

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid,p.9.

<sup>16</sup> Jane Frazier, From Origin to Ecology: Nature and the Poetry of W.S. Merwin (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999),p.9.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Gardner, *Regions of Unlikeness: Explaining Contemporary Poetry* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

#### **Conclusion**

Readers use the term ecopoetry to describe the most recent development in a longstanding tradition of nature-oriented poetry. Ecopoetry uses language to deepen a sense of nature's presence in our lives; and these invocations of nature's presence celebratory of the biological fact that people are nature suggest an ecological understanding of nature and its processes.

The poem is about the tension between modernism and postmodernism. The geese are modern because they are perfect and do not stray from their heading and modernism is all about proving things exist.

"At Luca Signorelli's Resurrection of the Body" is a poem that contemplates the relationship between body and mind. At what point, the poem asks of its readers, subject, and speaker, can the work of the mind transcend the body, or is the mind permanently fixed to the body? There is a paradox in this relationship in Graham's poem. Signorelli, who painted bodies of exquisite precision and beauty, who understood the physical nature of the body as well as anyone of his time, found himself plagued by doubt upon the death of his son and could not understand his son's death until he explored every cavern of his corpse.

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