Exploring the Places that Language and Nature Converge. Ethics and Aesthetics in Jody Gladding's Poetry

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Spring 2019
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Abstract

The need for sustainable solutions to the negative state of the Earth is urgent. Ethical choices need to be made and humanity's endowed imagination needs to be employed to find creative ways ahead. Literature has a potential to open minds and challenge perceptions, which is necessary to activate the creative imagination needed to find visionary solutions. This analytical research paper explores how a contemporary poet attempts to represent a holistic existence merging the ethics of environmentalism, in particular ecologic criticism, with the aesthetics of art, in particular ecopoetry, or rather ambient poetry. The artist studied is Jody Gladding, who defines herself as a translator and "explorer of the places that language and landscape converge" (Gladding 2018, 63). The selection of Gladding's work is based on poems published on her homepage and in the three most recent publications *Rooms and Their Airs* (2009), *Translations of Bark Beetle: poems* (2014) and *the spiders   my arms* (2018). In order to identify the terminology and a set of conceptual tools for the analysis, the thesis starts with a theoretical overview of ecocriticism and ecopoetry, and a brief practical review of the main stages how humanity's relation to nature has been represented in poetry. Gladding's poems are then studied and examined through the two filters provided, in order to map out the place that language and nature converge. The conclusion is that Gladding's explorations result in intellectually stimulating and aesthetically entertaining pieces of art, which also serve as platforms for ethics and aesthetics to converge. These places can then perform as creative venues for the exploration of difficult issues, free of judgements as well as of anxiety. Through its multidimensionality in content and form, Gladding's creative art, once understood, has the potential to be an eye-opener that can offer a ticket out of today's dangerous carelessness and open up the mind's imaginative powers to come up with sustainable solutions for the Earth, for the future.

Keywords: Jody Gladding, ecocriticism, ecopoetry.

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1. Introduction

> "Artists […] always ask the imagination to move beyond its usual confines, to see the world in new ways […] Entertainment is crucial to the ability of the arts to offer perception and hope. It's not just the experience of the performer, then, that is so important for democracy; it's the way in which performance offers a venue for exploring difficult issues without crippling anxiety."
>
> Martha Nussbaum, "Education for Profit, Education for Freedom" 2009

The need to find sustainable solutions for the environmental disaster dawning upon the Earth is urgent. Already in 2013, Ann Fisher-Wirth (henceforth AFW), a former president of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) stated that the current worrisome status of the environment is the result of the fact that "we are living out a colossal failure of heart, will and imagination" (Fisher-Wirth and Street xxxv) when it comes both to the environmental consequences of our actions and our ability to find ways of changing the direction the world is heading regarding sustainability. According to AFW, one the last remaining means to move the world is poetry, since it has the capacity to reawaken our senses so as "to break through our dull disregard, our carelessness, our despair" (Fisher-Wirth and Street xxxvii). As the introductory quote from ethical philosopher Martha Nussbaum's article argues, artists are key to "ask the imagination to move beyond its usual confines" by creating space for the investigation of difficult and potentially terrifying issues, without the presence of a "crippling anxiety" but by offering a venue for perception and hope. It can thus be deduced that both the literary scholar and the ethical philosopher agree about the power of aesthetics, and in this particular case, poetry, to free the imaginative powers humans are endowed with and to relieve the mind from anxiety and despair. Once this is achieved, art can facilitate the processes needed towards finding solutions to difficult situations, which, at their core, are actually ethical questions.

This analytical research paper explores how contemporary experimental ecopoetry attempts to represent a holistic existence by working in and with spaces where ethics and aesthetics merge with language and nature. The focus on Jody Gladding has two objectives. The first one is to show with practical examples what the theoretical part will present in abstract terms. The

second is to introduce to the academic world in Sweden a new artist whose work has not yet been scholarly assessed. The close readings of selected poems as well as the overview of her work in broad terms through the lens of ecocriticism as a field of literary studies, are used to examine the why, the how, and the what of Gladding's exploration of the places that language and landscape converge (Gladding 2018, 63).

The underlying theoretical argument is that ecocriticism includes the ethics behind the need to find sustainable solutions for the negative state of the Earth, while ecopoetry and especially ecological poetry, works with the creative aesthetics of language to allow for an interplay between perception and action. Ethics and aesthetics could thus jointly modify the current destructive culture and collaborate to allow humans to find solutions that could save what still can be saved of Earth's nature - including the human race.

The next chapter will provide an introduction to ecocriticism and ecopoetry and some historical examples of major themes and styles used when referring to humanity's relation to nature. This chapter will allow for the identification of key terminology and a set of conceptual tools that will be useful for the poetry analysis. In the third chapter, Gladding's artistic production will be the focus. Poems will be analyzed through the filters provided by the discussion of ecocriticism and ecopoetry. The findings will be summarized in the concluding chapter which then will reconnect with the original quest. The conclusion will argue that Gladding's exploratory work results in intellectually stimulating and aesthetically entertaining pieces of art, which also serve as platforms for ethics and aesthetics to converge. These places can then perform as creative venues for the exploration of difficult issues, free of judgements as well as of anxiety. Through the multidimensionality in content and form, Gladding's creative art, once understood, has the potential to be an eye-opener that can offer a ticket out of today's dangerous carelessness and open up the mind's imaginative powers to come up with sustainable solutions for the Earth, for the future.

2. Background

2.1 Ecocriticism and Ecopoetry

Ecocriticism and ecopoetry are related yet separate terms that are sometimes being used interchangeably since both are concerned with the same subject matter: the environment. A distinction needs however to be kept since not all ecopoetry is ecocritical, as we will see later, and especially because not all ecocriticism is ecopoetry. Ecocriticism originates from the ecological movement arising in the 1960s and means the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment in order to understand how nature and the natural world are imagined through literature (Glotfelty in Hiltner 121). Both ecocriticism and ecopoetry are based on the ethical concerns underlying ecology, which sometimes is referred to as the study of the natural "web of life" (Shephard in Hiltner 62). Ecopoetry is a later concept, still not included in the *Oxford English Dictionary* where the only similar term is "ecopoiesis" which is not to be confused with ecopoesis, since it means "the establishment of an artificially assembled, self-sustaining ecosystem on a lifeless planet" (OED). Fortunately, most scholars agree on the definition of ecopoetics or ecopoetry being poetry concerned with environmental issues such as climate change, but there is still disagreement about whether nature poetry and politically motivated environmental activist poetry should be included under the same umbrella term.

One way of understanding how literature and the study of literature can influence the way humans look at nature is, as Ken Hiltner suggests, to separate ecocriticism as a reading experience or analysis of a text, from ecocriticism as a writing process (Hiltner xxiii). Hiltner further states that the environmental writing process (which is the literary representation of different issues related to nature or the environment), has had a strong impact on how we as cultural beings perceive them and how our cultures perpetuate these views. Ecocriticism as a reading experience on the other hand is a branch of literary and political criticism that addresses works of art (mainly literature) from the point of view of ecology, i.e. of the "oikos" which in Greek means house, or environment (Encyclopaedia Britannica). The first experience could thus be ecopoetry, while the second one, the reading, is generally referred to in academic circles as ecocriticism, the field of literary analysis.

According to Bennett and Royle, the two core ecological questions that inspire all ecocriticism, are: what drives humans to destroy the world? and "how we can prevent this destruction" (Bennett & Royle 160)? Their brief introduction to the subject of ecocritic*ism* reveals that despite the fact that it might seem to be a distinct methodology of reading, as for example new historic*ism*, there is no specific theory behind it, so it cannot be considered a methodology. To sustain this statement, they quote Timothy Clark's definition of ecocriticism as "a provocative misfit in literary and cultural debate" (Clark 2011 in Bennett and Royle, 160). They further refer to ecocriticism as a "new dimension and emphasis in literary studies and beyond" (162), involving the change of scale and of perspective or vision. There are however a set of terms such as "externality", "ethics of the future", "nature", and "environmental criticism" that Bennett and Royle bring forward as tools for reconceiving literature and re-read literary texts under the auspices of ecocriticism. For the purpose of this essay, these terms will be merged to identify three key themes in ecocriticism through which to filter Gladding's work: the *one world* concept (merging "externality" and "nature"), the *language debate* (included in "environmental criticism") and the *orientation towards the future* (as in the "ethics of the future"). The *one world* concept entails the argument that everything is connected to everything else, which leaves no space for externalities. It also entails a questioning of the perceived dualism between human and nature (164) and other binary oppositions such as life and death or us and them. The theme of *language discourse* consists of the differing views in environmental thought about written language as either yet another technological tool for separation between humans and the rest of nature, or as an integrated part of the nature of the human species (161). The *future orientation* refers to the fact that ecocriticism is advocating a rethinking of ethics (165), as to extend the notion of responsibility to also include the responsibility towards future generations which is an integral part of the environmental justice movement and also connects to deep ecology.

The **one world concept** is emphasized by several key authors in the field of ecocriticism. The pioneer of ecocriticism in Britain, Jonathan Bate, addresses the perceived dualism between nature and humans in *The Song of Earth* (2001). This is Bate's second scholarly work on the topic, the first being from 1991: *Romantic Ecology. Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition.* In this second scholarly work focusing on Coleridge, Byron and Keats, Bate extends the claims of natural right to the nonhuman existence. Bate introduces and discusses the possibility available for humans to listen to the environment in addition to their own voices, not as an alternative to it (Johnson 9). The same idea is supported by the father of ecocriticism in the United States, Lawrence Buell, who has been teaching about literature and environment

before the concept of ecocriticism was acknowledged by academia as such. It was in fact Buell's ecocritical approach to Henry David Thoreau's work published in 1996 *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* that has made him one of the first ecocritics when this field of literary study was starting to develop. In tune with Bate, Buell revokes the dualism between humans and nature and supports the *one world* concept.

In *The Future of Environmental Criticism* Buell introduces the concept of different waves, or rather 'palimpsests', in ecocriticism. However, he also warns against viewing these as successive, since both waves are still applied (Buell 2005, 17). According to his categorization, first wave ecocriticism is focusing on nature writing, ecocentric texts and natural history (Buell 2005, 21). Second wave ecocriticism, on the other hand, moves beyond nature writing to also include the built environment, urban landscapes and eventually also "nonspace" (69). This last feature shows that the environment should be considered everything that surrounds anything, thus a blank page may be an environment. Buell embarks also on the task to define certain criteria that determine whether a text is environmental. The four criteria he identifies are: the active presence of the non-human environment as more than a frame or a setting; the fact that other interests are presented beyond the human interest; at least part of the text's ethical orientation is human accountability to the environment; and finally that this same environment is presented as a process (Johnson 8).

Relating to the concept of **language** the debate is about the function of the written language. One extreme of the discourse is represented by David Abram, who argues that written language is yet another technique that separates humans from the natural world, and thus adds to the distancing of human from the natural in the same way as all other technology has done (Knickerbocker 3). The other extreme is represented for example by Charles Bernstein and Laura-Grey Street (henceforth LGS) who argues that "the Word" is something that is "an integral part of our biological selves" rather than something elevating us, or separating us, from the rest of this planet (Fisher-Wirth and Street xxxvii). Street exemplifies this statement by making a parallel with the natural world and saying that human beings are "language-making creatures in the same way that spiders are web-making creatures" (Fisher-Wirth and Street xxxvii).

In *Ecology without Nature,* Timothy Morton reflects upon the tendency of certain nature writing to put Nature on a pedestal and admire it from a distance, calling it "a paradoxical act of sadistic

admiration" similar to patriarchy's admiration for the" figure of Woman" (Morton 2007, 5). In addition, Morton claims that ecocriticism, which he sees as part of environmental art, represents the environment by its focus on the content of the examined texts, and calls for questioning it critically by looking at the form, the aesthetics of the representations of the environment in the studied works. (Morton 2007, 33). He highlights the importance of close reading as a method to explore the realm of form beyond what he terms "ecomimesis" in order to go deeper into the sphere of "ambient poetics". Ecomimesis is for Morton the literary device used for nature writing, which he sees as an integral part in the construction of the idea of nature with its beliefs, practices and processes. Ambient poetics, which is the basis of, but not limited to, ecomimesis.

Founded on a real sense of a surrounding world, ambient poetics provide both a material and an immaterial space which can be exemplified by the margins on a page, as well as the silence before and after a musical piece (Morton 2007, 34). The concept of ambient poetics is further explored through identifying its six partially overlapping elements. These elements are: "rendering" or the construction of an artificial sense of reality (35); the "medial" or the view of contact as content (37); the "timbral" or the part pointing out the physicality and materiality of language (40); the "Aeolian" or the rise of images in poetry without or despite the narrator's control (42) (such as in experimental poetry where different layers of accounts co-exist in specific typographical arrangements); the "tone" or simply the atmosphere which can be both positive and negative imagery (including the extreme negativity of ellipsis (…) and erasure, exemplified by Heidegger's word ~~Being~~ or silence in music) (45); and the "re-mark", an echo-like property that enables the differentiation between the phenomena of the objective "space" and the subjective "place" (49). Despite being potentially vague, these elements are useful for the study of environmental poetry as a medium, a space, a contact between the environment and the mind, nature and human, aesthetics and ethics, thus a useful tool for the investigation in this thesis.

The perception of poetics being the contact zone between ethics and aesthetics, is explicitly present in Scott Knickerbocker's *Ecopoetics: The Language of Nature, the Nature of Language.* In this publication, Knickerbocker refers to poetry and especially ecopoetry as "the space where ethics and aesthetics converge", which illustrates his view of the centrality of language to connect the human with the natural. Reflecting upon the multi-sensorial awareness of poetry and the function of language, Knickerbocker coins the term "sensuous poesis" in juxtaposition to the mimetic representation of the natural world. Sensuous poesis in Knickerbocker's view undoes the opposition between human and nature by employing "artefacts", language that is

more than mimetic and at first may even seem foreign (13 and 162). Though sensuous poesis, which can be claimed to be aesthetic language, Knickerbocker shows how poetry can enlarge the frontier zone between nature and language as a translation of nature into language as well as language into nature.

Further regarding the aesthetics of poetry, Morton develops his previously mentioned ideas from 2007, to state that "art happens in the liminal space between things" (Morton 2014: 269). This statement becomes relevant for this thesis as Morton argues that poems are material entities that encompass ecologies within themselves. The basis of this concept is that poems are composed of text, content and a relevant physical architecture with surfaces and volumes as musical instruments or pieces of art (271). Recalling Jacques Derrida's phrase *il n'y a pas d'hors-text* , Morton reasons that "a text must exist in some kind of (physical) medium, a carrier wave for meaning" which allows it to "talk" about this same medium. The statements the poems thus conceive are "phatic" statements, a term Morton borrows from Roman Jacobson, meaning that they draw attention to the medium in which they exists (274).

Regarding the **orientation towards the future**, the ethical dimension which is considered to be the morale invoked, is based on the ethics of ecological thinking that underlies ecocriticism. First wave ecocritics, fascinated by nature's magic powers, highlight its virtues (Hiltner xiv). The ethical imperative can be deduced to be that wilderness is the original state of being and it has to be preserved. The effect of such imperative was the upsurge of natural parks but also an over romanticized view of the environment as being limited to these spaces. Second wave ecocritics focus on nature as a real existence, on the environment as more than virtuous, underlining the inherent problems, the uncomfortable issues of its current state. Scholars look beyond the ideal nature perceived as "wilderness" and question whether critics are looking at the "right" nature (Cronon in Hiltner 102), warning for a construction of "wilderness" and differentiation of it from the environment which is more than "wild". The ethical questions in focus here are the interconnectedness of existence on Earth and the responsibly dealing with the entire environment rather than cuddling up with the idealized image of a part of nature. Twenty-first century ecocritics are still not a homogenized group but contain pieces of both of these main waves. However, ecocriticism as a reading experience is by now looking at all types of literature with the trained eye of the environmental reader to understand how the human species' relationship to nature has been created, formed and re-created through literary texts. Meanwhile, writers of ecocriticism (in Hiltner's distinction), even considered practitioners of the environmental literary theory called ecopoetics (Hass in Fisher-Wirth and Street lxiv), are

attempting to change the way we think and redefine our relationship to the planet to a more environmentally sound one, by trying to make art out of this historical experience.

One of the most inclusive definitions of ecopoetry today is provided by AFW and LGS in the *The Ecopoetry Anthology* in 2015. In their view, American (eco)poetry written since the onset of the environmentalist movement in the 1960s, consists of three main groups: nature poetry, environmentalist poetry and ecological poetry. Nature poetry is described to be poetry that "considers nature as subject matter and inspiration" (Wendell Berry in Fisher-Wirth and Street, xxviii). Environmentalist poetry emerges from nature poetry (that is still being composed), but the difference is that it is poetry that has been highly politicized, and contains a clear agenda. Ecological poetry is less politically motivated, but is still concerned with the environment. Both later types have a distinct ecological agenda. The way ecological poetry distinguishes itself from environmentalist poetry is by encompassing a multitude of experimental methods of expressing the poets' concern with the current environmental crisis, rather than being overtly anti-establishment (Fisher-Wirth and Street xxix). The three groups are theoretically separate, but in reality poems can be included in more than one group.
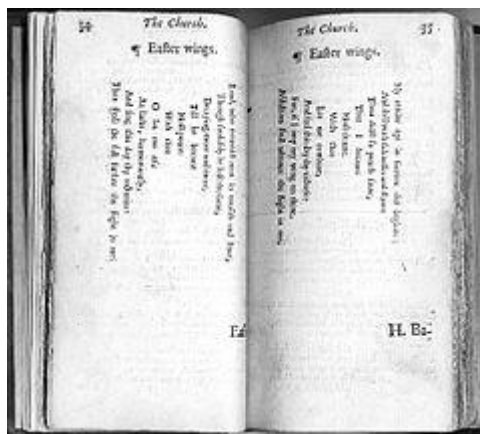
2.1 Representations of Nature and Nature Writing

Nature has been a theme as well as a key ingredient in literature since the first written texts. In fact, even before writing about it, songs were sung about nature, both as praise for its goodness and nurturing, and as warning against its unreliable "character", a source of danger, a feared and uncontrollable force. Phrases such as "mother nature" disclose that nature is often gendered as female (Bennett and Royle 160, Merchant in Hiltner 10), which partially explains the associations to an instable character that has been ascribed to it. Stories have been told about the ways of nature and how humans were interacting with it already 5000 years ago when *The Epic of Gilgamesh* described and analysed how a culture, in its drive to thrive, deforested vast areas of land (Hiltner 1). Verses have been passed on from mouth to mouth, generation to generation. Verses, the key components of poetry, could thus be assumed to be the original means of expression, the earliest and still one of the most efficient ways of transferring knowledge between generations by humans, which could eventually support AFW's claim that they are also the last remaining means to move us (Fisher-Wirth and Street xxxviii).

Poets have early on verbalized the process of interaction between humans and nature. The general prologue of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* from the 14th Century (Carter and McRae 11) starts with the description of an organic symbiosis between humans and nature, where the change of seasons (1-7) inspires a positive change of minds (10-11) and lifestyles (11-12). The nourishing April rain brings nature to life (1-4) and nature is explicitly "inciting" people 'in their hearts'.

> 1 Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
>   The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
>   And bathed every veyne in swich licour
>   Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
> 5 Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
>   Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
>   The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
>   Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne,
>   And smale foweles maken melodye,
> 10 That slepen al the nyght with open ye
>   (So priketh hem Nature in hir corages),
>   Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,

One of the first methods applied to use language for more than its content was the shape or pattern poem. Originating from the ancient Greeks and increasingly popular in the seventeenth century, this method of two-dimensional impression was used in England as exemplified by "Easter Wings" from 1633 by George Herbert (1593-1633). The words of the poem are arranged on the page in the shape of a pair of angel wings as shown below.

"Easter Wings" in the 1633 edition of *The Temple*

The theme of the poem is inspired by the Christian belief in the bodily and spiritual resurrection. The pattern thus empowers the words to take shape and form images that, by mirroring the content, reinforce their message.

A third dimension of communication through and with language has been experimented on by William Blake (1757-1827) in the 18th century. Besides the content of his poems, as a talented printmaker and painter Blake prepared original relief etchings or outgravings (as opposed to the traditional engravings) to make the text stand out from rather than letting it sink in the material. This method allowed for a tactile perception of the poems but also symbolised his ethical standpoint of wanting the words to stand out. Blake symbolically 'burned' away the lies and left the truths, the words without a value judgement, on the metal plaques. Blake is arguably one of the first English poets who, through his work, questioned the associations humans have to nature, as exemplified by the poems "The Tyger"' and "The Lamb" that questions what the lamb has to do with its symbolic association to innocence while the tiger, equally innocent of being anything else than its own natural self, to be associated by humans to fear and danger.

It is interesting to mention that the Romantic poets, traditionally associated with nature writing, did not experiment with language as form, but focused mainly on its capacity to illustrate feelings and perceptions by content. However, their work was the strongest reaction thus far against the environmental devastation of the Anthropocene age (this term was coined by atmospheric scientists for the geological epoch that has been characterized by the fact that humanity has as pervasive and profound impact on the planet's ecology and geology as the great forces of nature (Clark 2015, 1)). Their devotion to the untouched scenery has profoundly influenced the imagery of what nature and the natural are, and is arguably still the basis for the current perception of landscape (source). On the other hand, it was this imagery interlinked to the feelings associated to it by the poets, that caused "unintended consequences" (Clark 2011, 1). Mass tourism to the Lake District area's "wild" sceneries eventually led to an overexploitation of the same "worshipped" nature and made necessary the creation of natural parks.

The same focus on content is also traceable in the more realistic nature writings that followed the Romantics. For example, the poetry of Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892), later Lord Tennyson, refers to "(n)ature red in tooth and claw" showing also the raw side inherent to it. The imagist movement continued the focus on content, yet concentrated it to "short sharp images of a scene of a mood" (Carter and McRae 184) as exemplified by Ezra Pound's verse in the book *Lustra:*

> The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
> Petals on a wet, black bough.

The last century's increasing human disconnect effected further the content of poetry and its performance of nature. As illustrated by T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land,* there is a clear distancing to everything harmonious, even the past, which is achieved by evoking it (see the similarities to prologue of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales)* mainly to illustrate the contrast to it:

> April is the cruellest month, breeding
> Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
> Memory and desire, stirring
> Dull roots with spring rain.
> Winter kept us warm, covering
> Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
> A little life with dried tubers.

Eliot wanted the poem to reflect the "fragmentation of emotion, experience and society" (Carter and McRae 190) after the war and used extensive intellectual references to other texts as well. Despite the complexity of the poem, the images described in *The Waste Land* echoed far into the twentieth century, and nature started to be perceived as a victim of the disaster humanity was inflicting upon on all, including itself.

Content was still in focus when writing techniques started to be radically diversified. The language used in literature and poetry was branching out from a streamlined communication tool, to a means of transcribing thoughts. The stream of consciousness style introduced by James Joyce's *Ulysses (*published the same year as *The Waste Land*) with its complete lack of punctuation in the final monologue, allows thoughts and feelings to merge (Carter & McRae 165-166). The focusing on 'the individual or essential quality of the things' or "inscaping" (179) originating from the poetry of Hopkins emerged.

Partially breaking the increasingly reductionist trend that is still a reality in many examples of today's poetry, Dylan Thomas's poetry goes beyond the fear of death, and shows a bright view of nature (Carter & McRae 217). The language used is again rich, rhythmic and colourful and the message is empowering for life, for action.

> Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
> Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
> Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Considering nature as both subject matter and inspiration is what nature poetry does. This definition by Wendell Berry (Fisher-Wirth and Street xxviii) also permeates his own work. The change of perspective emerges also in the oeuvre of another "poet of nature", Ted Hughes

(Carter & McRae 221). Hughes writes of nature from the viewpoint of other species, as shown by the lines from the poem "Hawk Roosting":

> I kill where I please because it is all mine
> My manners are rearing off heads, the allotment of death.

The thoughts of the hawk, that enjoys the act of destruction it engages in, invokes the question of justice, of the rightfulness of destruction. Reversing the image can be argued to be an ecological writer's approach to call upon human conscience in order to change the current behaviour of destruction.

Expanding the focus on nature to encompass the entire environment, all space as well as non-space in one organic entity is what ecopoetry is involved with. Part of this can be seen as previously mentioned nature poetry, part of it as activism. The attempt to make art of historical experiences is not new yet making art involving the subject as content and language as part of art is fairly recent. What ecopoetry adds to the field, is its attempt to change the way humans think, and redefine the relationship to the planet to a more environmentally sound one (Hass in Fisher-Wirth and Street lxiv). As a general remark it can thus be argued that the pattern from nature writing to ecological writing and experimental environmental writing is both shaping and mirroring the way society has transformed through the years. This is however neither a linear nor a one dimensional process. It is an expanding and extending of styles, as the branches forming the crown of a tree, enabling a multitude of expressions to coexist in time and space as new art forms develop.

There are several hundreds of poets who in their work are addressing complex environmental issues, the current crisis and the complex interrelations between human and 'other-than-human worlds' (Fisher-Wirth and Street xxxi), but only one, as known by the author of this thesis, who defines her work as exploring the "place that language and landscape converge" (Gladding 2018, 61). This poet is Jody Gladding. The poems that will be tried with the tools of ecocriticism and ecopoetry are selected from samples available of poems in *Stone Crop* (1993) on Gladding's official homepage and the printed editions of the three most recent publications *Rooms and Their Airs* (2009), *Translations from Bark Beetle: poems* (2014) and *the spiders my arms* (2018).

3. The Poetry of Jody Gladding

Jody Gladding is an American poet and translator. Born in York, Pennsylvania on July 10, 1955, she received her MFA from Cornell University, where she later taught. Gladding has translated about 30 books from French into English and published six poetry collections so far. Currently living in Calais, Vermont, she is active as the director of the Writing Program at the Vermont Studio Center. Gladding writes that her work "explores the places that language and landscape converge" (Gladding 2018, 63) but she is also involved in "collaborative site-specific installations that explore the interface of language and ecology" (Gladding 2014, 85). These statements are the main reason behind choosing to explore Gladding's work rather than any other ecopoets'.
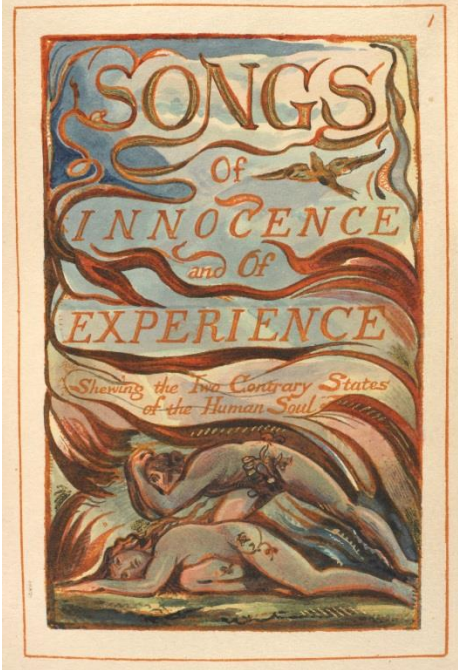
This chapter will attempt to answer three questions - the *What*, *How* and *Why* of Gladding's poetry. The poems that will be mentioned are from Gladding's first collection *Stone Crop* (1993) – obtained from Gladding's official homepage or as quoted in other publications - and the printed editions of her three most recent publications *Rooms and Their Airs* (2009), *Translations from Bark Beetle: poems* (2014) and *the spiders my arms* (2018).

A chronological presentation of Gladding's work in terms of intertextuality, main themes and methods applied in the exploration will answer the question of *what* the actual results of Gladding's explorations so far have been. The second, the *how*, refers to the approach, method, style, language, the overall aesthetics of this exploration. The third and final question, the *why,* aims to look at Gladding's oeuvre in terms of potential ethical content as well as attempting to identify the reasons behind and usefulness of this exploration as well as its relevance for ongoing and future research.

3.1 Intertextuality, Main Themes and Artistic Development

Answering the question of *what* Gladding's explorations have been so far must arguable start with addressing the material used to base the exploration on, her sources of inspiration. Besides the two obvious source of inspiration, language and nature, it will be shown that Gladding's work often recalls either explicitly or implicitly the works of some of the poets mentioned in the background. For example, the letterpress edition of her poem "Old Moon", can be interpreted as an echo of the cover of William Blake's prints from *Songs of Innocence and*

Songs of Experience. While Blake's print features both a naked man and a woman, the woodcut illustration (Gladding's website) chosen by Gladding is a naked woman alone (see below). While connecting to the past by evoking the imagery used by Blake, Gladding also answers Morton's call to broaden the scope of ecopoetry by adding form and space to content, by applying the technique referred to as "medial".

Jody Gladding's letterpress edition of "Old Moon"	The poem "Old Moon"	Cover of William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*
	Old Moon The whole of me from which emerged one perfect child is what gives way what gives way back into where it turns to no one else's home again—	

A closer look at the two women's body language - with their heads hanging - can lead to interpreting them as expressing a similar type of tiredness, exhaustion. Since nature has traditionally been viewed as female (as mentioned in the background), the images could possibly allow for the interpretation that the woman is Earth, the mother of all living creatures. The tiredness can further be perceived to surge from it being overpowered by the task of constantly having to give birth to new life "(t)he whole of me / from which / emerged / one / perfect child / is that gives way". Motherhood is the process of creation of life, of re-creation, but it is also tiring, wearing out the body.

The theme of maternity surfaces on several occasions in Gladding's work. It seems to convey one of the spaces perceived by Gladding that language and landscape converge. Darren Higgins notes that already the first poem "Midwifery" of Gladding's first book *Stone Crop,* takes the reader "from 'pregnant' garden stones […] to the birth of her daughter" quoting the poem in its entirety: "These stones / I unearth / squatting / in my garden/ working them / into the light" (Higgins 2014).

Gladding explores further the concept of space in her second collection, *Rooms and Their Airs*. In fact there are several traces of ambient poetic elements that Morton calls "re-mark" and "tone" in most of the poems in this collection. Gladding plays with the concepts of place and space, introduces non-space as concept in both content and through negative imagery. It is in this collection that she first explores the perceived dichotomy between thing and *no*thing. Initially looking at spaces left behind by creatures in the life-death cycle, she continues on to (historical) trace places in the past, present and the future. The spaces, places, things as well as the voids and *no*things such as a hole (made by a moth in a piece of cloth), are populated with several layers of significance. In the poem "Moth Hole", the pile of clothes remaining after a dead person are presented as things, at the same time as they are nothings since they are not worn by the person anymore. A moth hole is similarly a void, yet it is a trace remaining after the moth after eating up parts of the clothes. The absence of people from their clothes is equalled to the absence of the moth after making a hole in the cloth. Despite the seemingly dark content, the tone of the poem is light: the creature whose voice (or rather thought) is present in the poem puts her arms through the sleeves of the deceased persons' clothes. She does this not to claim that the person does not exist anymore, but arguably to fill the perceived void, the space between existence and non-existence, life and death. Such traces of transcendentalism, based on the belief in the essential unity of all creation, can be found in most of Gladding's work.

Rooms and Their Airs is also Gladding's first attempt at what Knickerbocker calls "sensuous poesis". The collection is composed of poems roaming around and illustrating in content the illusions surrounding humans. Several poems play with the world of senses, the subjective perceptions of the surrounding space such as the fragrances in the air, the movement of sound and the connected vibrations, the shape of objects, patterns of surfaces, and taste of things. It is also here that Gladding takes the first steps towards using patterns such as illustrated earlier by "Easter Wings". The poem "For Piano and String" can be viewed as an image of piano keys while its content recalls the musical chords:

```
1          In G minor
           grief
           is that high
           note sustained then descending
5          the bows drawn
           slower
           then healing
           meanwhile
           at the broken
10         surface where business
           must go on
           so many little steps
           for the restless
           hands.
```
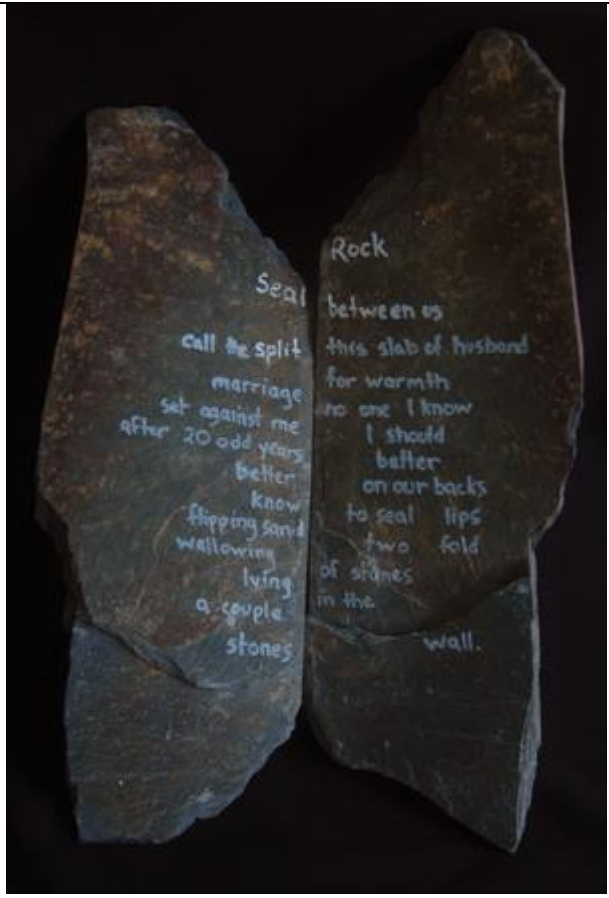
Besides the visual similitude of the shape, the words of the poem invoke the G-minor note of the string instruments. The sound recalled is connected to grief (2) and its sound pattern described to descend in (3) and (4). The bows appears drawn (5) as the tune fades out "healing" (7). Without explicitly accounting for it, it is made obvious that the piano takes over the lead from the string instruments (9), onset by the fingers whose "little steps" (12) are the movements on the keys that are part of a "surface". The "restless / hands" (11 and 12) make the fingers play by breaking the surface of the piano keys. The connection of the bodily perceptions of tactile, audio and visual senses to the world of emotions - grief, can be interpreted as the link between the human and the environment, an interspace where language materializes into sound through the instruments. The physicality, materiality of language expressed in this manner recalls the third element of ambient poetics, the "timbral".

The explorative path Gladding engages on in this collection touches also upon the olfactory sense. In the poem "One Day" for example, a lily is described as opening up with all her beauty, breaking into an "unfaltering present" (12, 13) by her perfume. The space here can be claimed to be touching upon yet another dimension: time. The moment of "now" is captured in the space between "before" and "after", between the smell being undisclosed and it being shared openly to the world. In "Red Moon", the cigarette smell is associated to freedom, yet the red ash falling off the cigarette and thus becoming red dust can be understood as the cause of the redness of the moon. This layering of imagery illustrating both sides of a coin, the price of the perception of freedom as defined by humanity with material tools such as cars and cigarettes, "renders" reality through several filters. The "rendering" element interplays with the "Aeolian" but does not yet become evident in these poems. The evolution in depth and variety of sensorial

connectedness is however already starting to recall how Gladding's art performs, rather than mimetically describes, certain moments. Higgins refers to *Rooms and their Airs* as a collection of "tactile, sensory poems […] grounded in seasonal shifts, in soil and snow, death and life, cycles unending" (Higgins 2014).

Translation from Bark Beetle: Poems (2014) can be read as Gladding's official manifesto as an eco-translator. The trans-dimensional work of art the poet engages in, becomes physically tangible. Both Darren Higgins and Molly Bendall describe the collection as not merely using language and content to get through the messages, but as part of it. "The matter/substance interpolates the voice and vice versa", Bendall writes (2014). Inscribing poems on different material manifest the material itself as part of the message, forming the "phatic" statements Morton asserts as essential part of the Aeolic dimension in ambient poetry. The poem "Seal Rock" (see below) can be viewed to exemplify the above.

call the split	between us
marriage	this slab
of	husband
set against me	for warmth
after twenty odd years	no one I know
better	I should
know	better
flipping sand	on our backs
wallowing	to
seal	lips
lying	two fold
a couple	of stones
stones	in the wall

Above: Transcript of "Seal Rock"
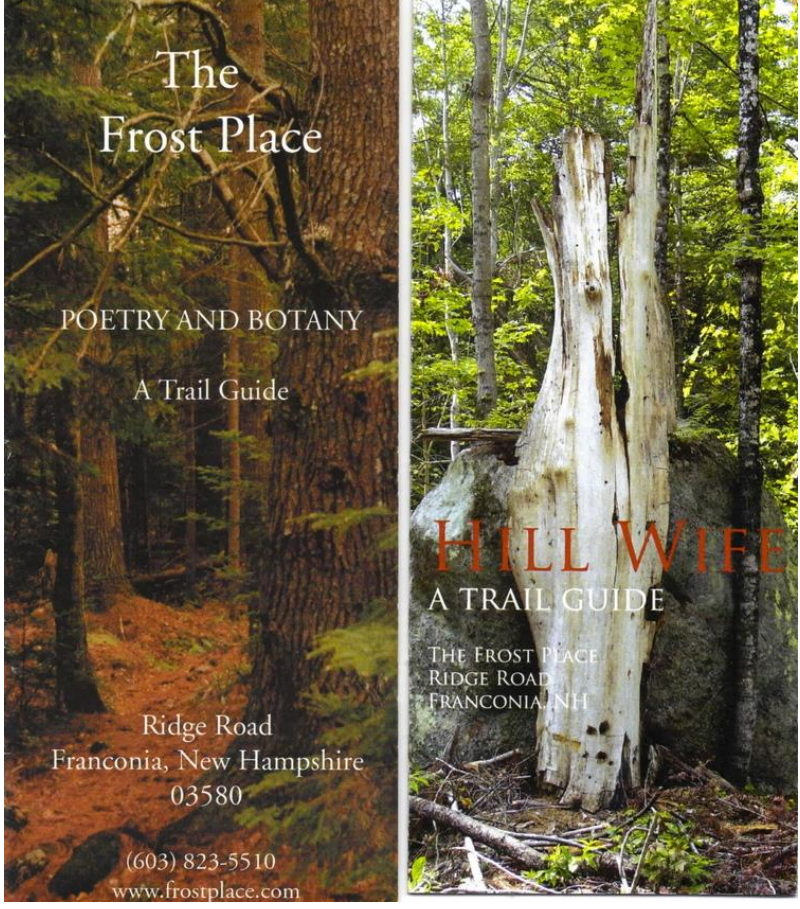
Left: "Seal Rock", the original poem

Written on a split slate, the poem renders the contact as content. The language content is also the split: the split marriage between a husband and a wife, the spilt between two lips that are sealed, the split between stones in a wall. Evoking the tactile sense in connection to the "medial"

element strengthens and deepens the understanding of the split in all its forms – material and spiritual.

The previous experimentation with sensuous poesis involving poetic devices to enact the human experiences of nature, is taken one step further in the poem "Sonogram of Raven Calls". This time the letters recall the original sounds in nature creating what Knickerbocker calls an 'artifice'. When read out loud, the combination of letters and spaces sound as the raven's call. It could be argued that compared to Hughe's poem "Hawk Roosting" this poem lacks content, but then the counter argument would be that in that case even the original call of the raven lacks content. Or does it only seem so to the uninformed observer while it makes full sense to an ornithologist? The transcription of sounds into written text is used in natural science as a way of documenting the world, but is this then nature poetry? For Knickerbocker the answer is obvious, it is exactly what "sensuous poetics" is about.

Gladding continues exploring different patterns and images to go as far as the title of the collection says – translating bark beetle into language. Despite the fact that translations "take some liberties with the original" (Gladding 2014, 68), the matter or substance manages to "interpolate the voice and vice versa" (Bendall), creating a full ecology within the poem. Though difficult to understand or see the face value of these translations of paths created by the bark beetle into the bark of trees, one title avails the potentially political meaning of her work: "After the Vote to Mass Discontinue Unmapped Invisible Town Roads." The bark beetle traces can in this light be seen as the invisible town roads that the government has just voted on to discontinue, to declare non-existent, despite their being used and thus having a function. These roads' only fault is that they haven't been mapped yet, and now, with the vote to discontinue them, they will not even have the chance to be mapped. Is this open environmental activism? No, since there is no clear standpoint voiced in the work, yet yes, since the work itself focuses on preservation of trails that can be seen as the parallels to roads and keeping, safeguarding nature is a typical ecological concern.

Through the years Gladding's initially two-dimensional and content-wise deep poems have branched out into multiple dimensional, multi sensorial pieces of art. One clear example of this process is how the poem "Hill Wife" became reinterpreted by the poet upon a snag of maple tree that had grown against an enormous granite boulder.

"hill wife", the poem	The folder with the image of "Hill Wife", the installation
hill wife beside the grave the ties gave was she there everywhere in the fern or return when he called her of black alder on her lips the fresh chips or felled tree she was free and no child and too wild	

The snag was "brought to light" by the damages occurred to the Frost Place's Poetry Trail area in Franconia, caused by two winter storms and the logging that followed in 2007. The effect achieved was twofold: firstly, the poem "Hill Wife" materialized into "hill wife" and secondly it led to adding an ecopoetic perspective on Frost's work, leading to an alternate poetry trail in the damaged area (Gladding, homepage).

Gladding's most recent collection of poems *the spiders   my arms* returns to the page, yet continues the style of illustrating poems with patterns. This brings Morton's ambient poetics into focus again especially since yet another dimension is added to many new poem's content and shape, namely "tone". Gladding returns to the exploration of space and non-space by including both the extreme negativity of ellipsis (…) and ~~erasure,~~ and what could be called extreme positivity, words in **bold** and potential choices in *italics.* By braiding strings of stories together into a communicating, interacting whole-ness, the poems enact a new type of three-dimensional spaces (Bervin). Once the concept is grasped, readers can make their own way though the poems that this time remain on the pages. The first poem "the hawthorn" illustrates

the complexity of Gladding's most recent work. The poem is reproduced in its entirety below and beside it there is the picture of a branch of a hawthorn plant to help follow the close reading.

the
hawthorn
came
into
in   flower

a
was   my   first

white
flame

turning
the
alphabet

to
kindling

Image of a branch of a hawthorn

"the hawthorn"
Poem by Jody Gladding

The through line reads "the hawthorn in flower was my first alphabet", channelling René Char (Higgins 2018). The first reading opens up for the perception of the parallel between human communication through the alphabet, and nature's communication through its cycles: blooming, bringing fruit, hibernating, blooming again. The hawthorn in flower can be seen as the marker for the start of the reproductive season, the same way as learning the alphabet is arguable the start for the conscious learning and communication for humans. A second interpretation of the through-line can be the process of symbiosis through which the flowers are the source of nourishment for other species, such as for example many nectar-feeding insects. Just as humans get nourished by understanding written texts with the help of decoding it with the help of the alphabet, different species in nature communicate with each other by decoding the possibilities and threats around them through signals. By evoking the alphabet and its significance or symbolic value, Gladding engages the reader in the second key theme of ecocriticism, language. The duplicity between protection and shelter is also inherent in this image - the hawthorn protects itself with its thorns but through its flowers, fruits, leaves and strong branches it also provides shelter and food to other species. Yet another way of understanding the through line is by the symbolic value of the hawthorn. Hawthorn has namely

been regarded as the emblem of hope and the branches having been carried at wedding processions by the ancient Greeks (Encyclopaedia Britannica). From this perspective, the message can be interpreted as the wedding flowers, or actually the act of wedding itself to be the alphabet of love. The communion by law teaches couples how to care for each other, which is a different type of language of love. Finally, when considering the legendary associations of hawthorn trees with the fairies, the poem receives an almost magic undertone, whereby the world of the ordinary meets the extraordinary world of magic and learns from each other. Thus, with the statement "the hawthorn in flower was my first alphabet" Gladding could be both referring to herself as the person who has learned the language of love through her wedding (symbolized by the hawthorn flowers), but the poet could equally well have had in mind the humming bees or the fairies as the entity behind "my".

Through the inherent dualism of the pattern, but also of the different readings, Gladding touches again on the *one world* theme, showing how the two opposing sides are actually belonging to the same entity, just like the two sides of a coin. While the through line's readings are predominantly about various images of life, the other line twisting around it gives a different picture. Here the white flowers are white flames, and turn the hawthorn into kindling, firewood. Burned up, destroyed by fire, extinct. The lines are forming a "double helix" of life and death (Bervin). There is however no judgement in the content, there are only the images. A thoughtful and informed reader might however go beyond the surface of the first interpretation that life and death are parts of the same encompassing nature, parts of the same cycle. The thought arises of who turned the tree into kindling, and why. The step from there to understanding and implicit ethical questioning of how humans see nature as a source for their immediate, short term gains, without considering the consequences of their actions upon other living creatures, is close at hands. Between the words of the poems there can be sensed a call out for humans to stop abusing their power for limited scopes and look beyond their own immediate interest, see the kindling they are using in their fireplace as parts of a complex eco-system, of cultural symbols and even sources of magic and re-think before throwing them thoughtlessly into the fire. On the other hand, the poem does not communicate anything else than the coexistence of flowers and flames within the same entity, separated perhaps only by the aspect of time. Both fire and flowers have a right to exist regardless what humans might perceive or do about them.

Ecocriticism's key themes are thus all present in Gladding's work, so it could be called ecocritical. It is however only in Gladding's choice of publishing houses that she actually takes

a stand and sides with her personal awareness and conviction that each individual action has an effect on the whole, and vice versa. Except for the publication of her first collection by Yale University Press as part of the award she received, there arguably is a connection between her poetry and the concepts driving the publishing houses of her later works. *the spiders my arms* is published by Ahsahta Press of Boise State University in Idaho, which is a non-profit publisher aiming to preserve and publish surprising, relevant, and accessible experimental poetry. The name *ahsahta* is the name of the "Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep" in Mandan (Ahsahta Press), the language of Mandan Indians from the Northern Plain and the Missouri Valley, a Siouan language considered extinct today. The connection to Native American culture is traceable to several poems in *Rooms and Their Airs.* Milkweed editions, the printing house of *Translations from Bark Beetle: poems* and *Rooms & Their Airs* is also a non-profit organization with a name that recalls the milkweed plant, claiming to support "a livable future and vibrant literary ecosystem" in the same way as the milkweed plant offers a site for monarch butterflies to reproduce by hosting and feeding the egg, the lava and the caterpillar (Milkweed Editions).

3.2 Experiments with Language and Material

How does Gladding explore the space that language and nature converge? The answer to the question has been already touched upon above. Gladding uses the works of other authors, other colleagues and extends them, builds on them and adds new dimension to them. This practice reminds of the "enveloping" poems in Emily Dickinson's volume *The Gorgeous Nothings,* but also show similarities to works by Anne Carson and Jeff Griffin, as Molly Bendall notes in her review of *Translations from Bark Beetle: poems* (2014).

Most of Gladding's poetry is a sequence of words, expressions and spaces, reminiscent of the stream of consciousness technique mentioned in the background. The poems multidimensional structure allows for including illustrations of feelings and perceptions, reminding of the Romantic views of nature, overlapping with more realistic images, which recall the poetry of Tennyson, as the two helixes in the poem "the hawthorn". The images of scenes obtained recall moods, such as grief in "For Piano and Strings" and brings Ezra Pound's verses to mind. The way the words are scattered on (and off) the page, might seem to reflect Eliot's view of a fragmented emotion, experience, and society, but it is actually showing the unity and interconnectedness of things, as in the poems "the icebergs" or "do if you have to practice", that will be presented in the next part. Transcendentalism is thus part of both the content of

Gladding's poetry, as earlier mentioned, but also of the form. Despite the reductionist style, or perhaps because of it, the poems show an underlying reflection, and allow for reflection.

The way Gladding works with language as a tool for communicating with the other than human world, as well as trying to translate it to a message in human writing, is summarized by Higgins's review of Gladding's most recent publication *the spiders   my arms:*

> "(o)ver the years her words have journeyed out across the page. In her last book, Translations from Bark Beetle, they slid right off the edge. She wrote on icicles, egg shells, slanting chunks of slate, a poetry of objects and objects as poetry. Words became stone and were heavy and scraped both plinth and page. All day under the sun cold words dripped from the eaves, letter by letter, and fell away."

Gladding listens to the environment, not instead of the human voice, but in addition to it, recalling Bate's arguments mentioned in the background part. Being a great listener (Higgins 2014), Gladding processes and translates both the language of nature, and the nature of language, onto material, into words, shapes, sounds, rendering a multitude of dimension into each and every piece of art her poems develop into. The presence of the nonhuman environment as more than a frame or a setting is unquestionable even if sometimes the setting itself is the nonhuman environment communicating through it being elevated to the role of piece of art or installation such as in the case of "Hill Wife" or "Seal Rock".

Regarding the language aspect, Gladding is truly a language making creature. Her art explores the full potential of language both as a tool to communicate content and as form to shape further the message she wants to bring forward. The strong presence of the elements of ambient poetics in her work makes each individual piece a unique environment, yet integrated part of the one interconnected world.

The final answer to the question how she does what she actually achieves, lies however in the method of her quest: exploring the places that language and nature converge. This implies that she perceives and treats both language and nature as active contributors to her work and allows them ownership rather than imposes messages on them, at least in her own perception. Readers and critics might disagree and argue that there is no agency in places and spaces but so far no one has ventured into actually investigating the boundaries of linguistic beings.

3.3 Ethics and Future Orientation

Reading Gladding's poems as proposed above can lead to the claim that ethics are recalled by both the content and the aesthetics of these poems. The orientation toward the future is shown in how Gladding's poetry engages with issues related to the preservation of natural habitats. This can be claimed that it is done in a truly broad sense, since natural habitat includes both the nest for birds, glaciers for the climate and libraries for books, for the preservation of knowledge. The following three poems show examples of ethics coming through her work.

Picture of bird nest

"do if you have to practice"
Poem by Jody Gladding

In this poem the through line imposes "you have to leave the nest in place even after it's empty". The surrounding words recall a morning conversation between a mother and a child that leaves for school with the school bus. Gladding translates the bird's absence from the nest into the human absence from the house and connects the two parallel images by the question at the bottom "won't you need your music?". The technique used is evoking music by highlighting non-music which is the element of negativity in "tone". The silence is present in the content as what is left behind in the empty house, in the empty nest. Gladding performs the act of materializing sound onto paper by doing just the opposite, leaving a void in the middle of the words. In addition, the void's shape can be seen both as a nest and as a musical key for "semibreve" which is symbolized by a circle.

Image of a glacier.

"the icebergs"
Poem by Jody Gladding

The poem content (arranged spatially):

```
1
the icebergs

                calving          to reproduce
what I heard                        though              ice
                caving
        in
like whales             we'd tried
                        the women                blue
        and                                 that
    the light               to tend them              sang
                        their
                        enormity            it's going
                        so
    breaking                                      to
off
                        fully           al
blue        enormous
                        changed         though
pods
    disappearing
                        any
        too small       question of     how can it
                                                be
                        saving
                                        al

                                        right
```

The shape of the lines invoke the shape of glaciers as illustrated by the image beside the poem. The content plays with calving, recalling the birth-life-death cycle when invoking the image of women trying to save the enormous icebergs and the blue whales; and caving, breaking-off, disappearing, fully changing. The final words though are a puzzle that can be composed into the question: "how can it / be / al / right" (Gladding 2018). The poem continues to the page across in "2 the library" keeping the same format of the columns inviting for a top-down reading as Chinese or Japanese writings would, an aesthetic method which despite its simplicity still challenges the set perceptions of reading. The second part of the poem, "the library", is inspired by the real Library of Water on Iceland (Gladding 2019) and continues to connect images of sites with words, and the words form images. The patterns of words in the poem recall the shape of the water columns that contain water from different glaciers on Iceland. The through line is "water-ice-light" and it connects to the poem on the page to the left, also shaped as pillars and where the key words are "light-ice". This conceptual cycle of light-ice-water-ice-light invites the reader to connect the heat of the sun, the provider of light, to the melting of ice as well as the absence of light to the creation of ice. Gladding's thoughts about reading and remembering what is read, emerge in the surrounding words. Through the imaginary recall of the library of Alexandria, it returns to the shelves of the library of water, where the history of earth can be viewed from the colours of the different melted glaciers (Library of Water).

The poem can be read as a way for Gladding to raise her voice about global warming, and climate change, about glaciers melting and the need to preserve history through maintaining

libraries. In fact, Gladding mentions before reading the poem at the launch event, that she wrote it when she found out that one of the libraries she appreciated was being considered to be closed down and turned into different use.

the library

of **water**

houses

snow melt

core samples

you can read through

the history

of glaciers

there

are words for weather

all

over

the

floor

in Berlin

when it rains

plastic tubs

like

plinths

drips through the library

roof

or skull

since the library

was designed

to re-

semble

the human brain

I

forget

most

of what I read

a library in Alexandria

and then a daughter

library

these columns are

what's left

of the

glaciers

pulled from

the shelves

the **ice**

re-

ceding

what can be

re-

collected

the sheer volume

of

each

glacier

how they encased

the earth

how

they are crossed

by the

light

View of the Library of Water, Iceland

"the library"

Poem by Jody Gladding

The library can be interpreted to stand for accumulated knowledge, for history, for the possibility of humans to learn from the past, successes as well as mistakes, thanks to the unique means of written language that conserves knowledge through times. Yet, knowledge is a controversial issue in itself as it is set to be tried on the premises of endurance and changeability (Bennett and Royle 46). Libraries however can also be seen as means of transportation in time and space as while reading humans can transcend time and space and take mental strolls both historically but also in the consciousness of other people when reading their thoughts. As a translator Gladding is familiar with the power of language, of books as enrichers of human lives and of their capacity to open mental doors to other dimensions, other awareness, other lives, thus enriching imagination and perception, and creating a space for creativity.

The poem "February 14 – Dordogne" is an imagined immersion into the mind of the cave-painting-artist, a woman who lived twelve thousand years BC. It mentions briefly the fact that the painting can only remain visible, unharmed, if the carbon dioxide levels are not altered by the visitors to the cave. Further on, the poem develops into a series of eight poems, eight steps

in the birth and growing-up process of a child, in the delivery and letting-go process of the mother. The language of nature is less directly described but the message of creation is clearly traceable. The pre-historic artistic creation that is endangered by human alteration to the environment can be translated into the biological creation of a child that starts living her own life but whose existence is equally endangered by her own actions as well as of other humans. The child's fragility is described in "6 She comes home sick" and the innocent fantasy and belief in the tameness of birds in "7 She says the snow" and "8 She kneels out". In the midst of this the artist comes to life again as she goes to work upstairs while the feverish child sleeps in front of the fire, recovering.

A close reading of the different alternative patterns presented in Gladding's poems can claim to find the absence of explicit ethics yet the actual complementarity of the different readings allow for an aesthetics that in its duplicity invites for the emergence of ethical questions. Gladding abstains from passing judgement and this can be seen as an integral part of her style. The contradictory and complementary messages let the weight of the awareness of the issues presented up to the reader's experience and ethical judgement. The more aware, informed and knowledgeable the reader is, the more transparent becomes the depth of issues entangled in the poems.

Content-wise it can thus be concluded that Gladding's work comes across as an active translation between worlds that also serves as a transition. Usually it is the human world experienced through the senses and the natural world of objects, landscapes or living creatures, other than human, through language. The common denominator or the means of communication between these two worlds are the senses that are physical – the visual, the thermostatic, the auditive, olfactory, and taste. Language and format interplay in recalling the senses, reinforcing the messages at various levels and complete each other, as in *the hawthorn.*

In order to be understood in all their dimensions, many recent poems require a deep knowledge and detailed information about the sources for Gladding's inspiration. This might be a barrier to her deeper messages reaching out to a wider audience and can be brought up as a criticism against her work. The style is however pleasant and entertaining since it allows the reader to explore and experience on its own, within the frames provided. The mix of presence and absence in many of Gladding's poems invites to reflection. The descriptions, and at the same time questioning of her own perception of them, can be perceived to be balanced and natural. The fact that she mentions, as if just in passing by, that the cave drawings in France are about

to disappear due to the environmental changes in the content of air, is probably aimed to leave the reader thinking. It is typical of her style to share potentially devastating information as for example part of a guide's presentation of the site and leaving out commenting on it.

Is Gladding's poetry fundamentally ecocritical? Gladding's poetry often treats some aspect of the environment yet it is not overtly examining environmental problems. This could be brought up as part of the criticism against her work, despite the fact that her main subject is the *one world*. Her work is continuously playing on dichotomies and showing several sides of the same picture simultaneously. Despite the lack of value judgements, her ethical stand and future orientation is clearly for a responsible co-existence of all, in the unique shared space of the universe. Regarding the third key theme in ecocriticism, the language, Gladding's poetry evidently uses language both for content, and for visual, aesthetical representation, making it a tool not only to communicate between humans, but letting it interface the environment and become part of it as words spread out on different objects, in several poems. Gladding leaves agency to landscape and nature too, enabling them to communicate by the phatic statements included in the object-poems.

Can Gladding's poetry be seen as ecopoetry? Gladding uses almost all devices identified by Morton as elements of ambient poetics. In most of the viewed poems, several elements are present as integrated parts of the multidimensional aspect in both content and form. This technique renders a variety of images on the subject of the poems. The poem "the hawthorn" is a vivid example of this rendering element but also of the timbral one. The alphabet is mentioned yet calling the hawthorn to be "my first alphabet" points out the physicality and materiality of language. The Aeolian whereby images rise is strongly present in all her poems where she uses patterns. Gladding's use of negative imagery and even erasure is frequent and it enables many alternative readings.

The overview of her work as well as the close readings of representative poems show Gladding's employment of literary techniques complement the graphic techniques to present the multi-dimensionality of the *one world*. This allows her to synthetize and shape into coherent complexities the engagements with the environment as an experimenting ecopoet. Considering AFW and LGS's division of the three different groups within ecopoetry in American literature, Gladding would arguably place in the ecological poet category. Her poetry is not pure nature poetry neither is it clearly a political activist one, but rather strikes a balance that allows her

ecologic agenda and ecocritical approach to her fellow humans, to meet in an inter-space that could possibly also be conceived as a venue free of judgement and anxiety.

Is Gladding's poetry engaging ethics and aesthetics? Despite the difficultly accesssible symbolisms and often deeply intellectual content of certain messages, once accessed and understood, Gladding's poetry is highly engaging. The fact that especially her latest book allows for a multitude of readings of each piece for the emergence of a new spaces, a space where translations and transitions can take place. This proves what Morton writes about poems being ecosystems in themselves. In addition, Gladding's crafting of her poems endow them this "relationships between things" (Morton 2015: 269) to be perceived by readers through the content and experimental aesthetics. If indeed "(a)rt happens (…) in the liminal space(s) between things" (269), than Gladding's poetry is art.

Finally it must be noted that Gladding uses her sources of inspiration which are other texts, different sites, cultures, historical findings, habitats and biotopes, playfully, yet respectfully. She acknowledges the originals and adds an own "dimension" to them. This she achieves either by adding other words or by translating them into other dimensions. The translations are to be seen as changing perspectives, or as in *Translations from Bark Beetle: poems,* changing mediums of communication. Gladding presents language as those ecocritics such as Bervin and ecologist minded writers such as Street who consider it an integral part of the human nature, this species' means of communication.

As showed, Gladding's work combines the aesthetics of ambient poetry, the intellectual engagement of ecopoetry and integrates both the key themes of ecology and difficult existential issues. It can further be claimed that it provides inspiration to readers to reconsider their own values, actions and ways of perceiving the world. Her creations perform nature's complexity in an entertaining way rather than merely representing it as mimesis. Despite the sometimes complex intertextuality that reminds us of Eliot's work, the reductionist tendencies and the stream of consciousness style of her recent poems, the poetry of Gladding is a deep zoom-in on current environmental and difficult social and personal problems, but also on nature's beauty, fragility and joy. The balance she strikes between showing affinity and alienation opens up a space for visionary, positive reflection and could potentially open for cultural change.

4. Conclusion

The conclusion is that Gladding's work is an ecopoetry that in many aspects manages to offer an interspace, a poetry of contact zone a place as well as a space between ethics and aesthetics, a venue for the exploration of difficult issues, free of "crippling anxiety". Through its multidimensionality in content and form, Gladding's creative art, once understood, has even the potential to be an eye-opener that can offer a ticket out of today's dangerous carelessness and open up the mind's imaginative powers to come up with sustainable solutions for the future.

As showed through a series of examples, Gladding's oeuvre manifests the capacity of ecopoetry to reach beyond communicating through words or language as content. The showcased poetry is a true attempt for a visual, tactile, sensorial experience of the continuous connectedness, the multidimensional transactions between humans and nature. Gladding's poetry performs nature as "sensuous poesis" by using language to translate nature into human perception. Her poetry is also concerned with the key themes of ecocriticism and a recurrent theme in her work is the ongoing meaningless use of nature's resources for short-sighted human ends. Despite the fact that she is not overtly examining environmental problems in her poetry, her ecologic agenda and the process of environmental awareness and examination is clearly perceptible and deeply rooted. It can be traced to the meticulous craftwork where quotes from her inspirational sources interface with the quotes from the natural world, the spaces for translation, meeting spaces. The content and the shape together with the material itself form a contact zone between humans and nature in many of her poems.

In addition, by letting the reader's experience guide the awareness of the depth of her poems, Gladding is experimenting with inviting her audience to create their own personal understandings of the complex and urgent contemporary environmental issues. Gladding synthetizes and succeeds in shaping into coherent complexities both her own and the reader's engagements with the environment, and manages to do so without over-complicating, judging, or attributing values. Her poetry not only breaks through the reader's "dull disregard, carelessness (…and) despair" but also reawakens our sense of the vitality and beauty of nature. Gladding's original style of translating language into nature and nature into language is highly interactive and implicating both reflection and awareness in the audience. It empowers for freedom, for making one's own choices, finding one's own path through the poems and living

with the consequences of this, the way we ought to consider our freedom of responsible choices through life.

The final conclusion is however that this essay is hopefully not a conclusion. This glance at the ongoing exploration of fields converging in, and through art, can hopefully lead to further academic exploration of the space that language and nature converge, and where ethics and aesthetics meet. The journey has just started and it will hopefully be continued, deepened, broadened and stabilized as a venue for creative thinking, applicable to many other fields.

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