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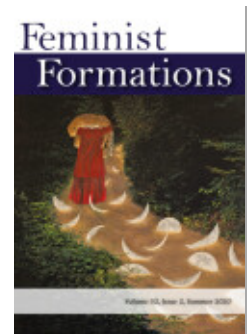
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Reframing Nature Within the Garden Walls: Feminist Ecological Citizenship in the Work of Louise Glück, Jeanne Larsen, and Anat Shiftan

Sarah Mead Wyman

Poets Louise Glück and Jeanne Larsen and ceramic artist Anat Shiftan use the theme of the garden to establish a commons of thought from which to negotiate questions of environmental preservation. Their aesthetic expressions reshape feminist ecocritical discourse to foster connection and frame productive responses to environmental crises. The garden-based work of these women provides a means to restore the lost connection between humans and the natural world, with an emphasis on feminist ecological citizenship. Through formal experiments involving the defamiliarization of human bodies, other natural phenomena, and the material media in which they operate, Glück, Larsen, and Shiftan call attention to ways we conceptualize the natural world and our relationship to it. Without offering technical solutions, they recapitulate complex social forms and structures that perpetuate ecological damage as well as collective actions that could lead to a sustainable future for the planet.

Keywords: ecocriticism / feminist ecological citizenship / garden / lyric / poetry / sculpture / sustainability

Before poetry began pitching its tent in the library and museum, before, that is, mediated experience supplanted what came to seem the naïve fantasy of more direct encounter, a great many poems began in the garden.

Louise Glück (2017, 97)

The trope of the garden provides an aesthetic realm for contemporary myth-making and knowledge-seeking as artists rethink *human-nature* intersections. At a crucial moment for the planet, poets Louise Glück and Jeanne Larsen and ceramicist Anat Shiftan share the goal of feminist art: to rethink cultural assumptions about norms and values, often distorted by gender bias, and to change the attitudes that issue from them. They reject the normalization of Earth's steady destruction and assert the importance of environmental stewardship over economic profit or unbridled human use. They investigate the false division between *human* and *nature* that disconnects users from the resources that sustain them. All three employ the garden theme to reshape feminist dialogue on environmental preservation and sustainability.¹ Glück and Larsen use language to complicate the variously gendered body couched in a cultured space. Femininity as ideal is replaced by more contemporary notions of nonbinary or fluid gender expression. Consequently, lyric messages that seem to emerge from the earth itself foil patriarchal structures that harm the planet, including corporate, governmental, and military mismanagement.² Anat Shiftan uses imaginary flowers and mimetic failures to suggest a rupture between intellectual concepts and the natural referents they represent. Her feminist materialist approach takes into account the artwork as it exists in the market and as a product of *making*—both aspects subject to patriarchal regulation and interpretation. Through ecocritical experiments that involve the transformation and estrangement of human bodies, other natural phenomena, and the media of language and clay, Glück, Larsen, and Shiftan call attention to ways hierarchical human societies conceptualize the natural world and their relationship to it. Their poetry and sculpture lead readers and viewers to see or imagine the world in unexpected ways, and by extension, to care for it more deeply.³

As active arbiters of global culture at a precarious moment for the planet, these poems and sculptures liberate the plant from the pot, the ideal of *nature* from hackneyed conceptions, as they enact and articulate *feminist ecological citizenship*, as defined by Sherilyn MacGregor (2006). They move beyond romanticized deep ecology or the traditionally gendered language of care to challenge ideas and orientations that have led citizens away from adequate stewardship of the earth. The category of the garden, involving both *nature* and *place*, marks the intersection between individual and collective, subject and material object, contained and created. As a realm of growth and change, the garden can become a figurative space where fixed notions of gender and sexual identity fall away. Glück, Larsen, and Shiftan use their work in a contemporary feminist manner, to the extent that they acknowledge and seek to transform “the asymmetrical gendered relations that structure historical, legal, economic, and social systems.”⁴ Glück's lyrics in *The First Four Books of Poems* (1995) and *The Wild Iris* (1992) and Larsen's meditations in *Why We Make Gardens* (2010) often issue from the dynamic plant rather than the human body, shifting the focus from social structures to material forms in flux. In similar fashion,

Shiftan's *Still Life* series (2010–14) builds gardens in clay as commentaries on contemporary concepts of nature as present, abundant, and expendable. Her more recent *Flora* series (2015–20) introduces philosophical renditions of plants mixed with shapes inspired by industrial pipes that do not bring her audience closer to the natural world, but ask viewers to confront their own constructs of that reality. Shiftan asserts the precarious state of nature by presenting it as mechanically produced rather than organically evolved (2018). Plants, bodies, and the industry that holds them in thrall are all machine-like, embedded in seemingly static social structures despite a culture in constant transformation. Thus, these three women artists engage in what Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock call “a contest for the occupation of an ideologically strategic terrain” (2013), in this case, that of earthcare (Tickner 1988, 54; Horne and Perry 2017, 18). Their feminist approach, informed by poststructuralist concerns, leads them to see verbal and visual art not as a mere reflection of society, but rather as a powerful tool that can illuminate and negotiate cultural ideologies (Broude and Garrard 1982, 14; quoted in 1992, 3).

Glück, Larsen, and Shiftan share a project when they break down boundaries between art forms and a still-rigidly-gendered society to envision alternate ways of seeing and, by extension, living. Their art enters a contentious space in the face of dominant ideologies that perpetuate damage and wastefulness. The aesthetic activity of *making*, like the human-nature collaboration that informs gardening, complements Nobel Prize–winning economist Elinor Ostrom's ecological call to action, particularly her wish for “more self-consciously creat[ing] arenas for experimentation and learning” (2002, 42). Ostrom values the human capacity to devise and agree to regulatory practices apart from the external authority of the government or privatized enterprise (2014).⁵ New expressions and sculptures in word and image partake in this grassroots effort as they pose complex questions of value and call for political change via confrontation with the status quo. Glück sees the myth of the garden in terms of a forbidden that “exerts over the susceptible human mind irresistible allure” and acknowledges human desire and imperfection without dismissing possibilities for productive engagement (1994, 53). Larsen sees poetry, in all its indeterminacy, as “a practical gateway . . . to grasping what the actual situation is and how, in light of that, we might get on” (2008, 3). In Larsen's “Why We Make Gardens,” the title poem from her book, these creative spaces are beyond the physical; they are *metaphysical* loci for thought (2010, 65). As sites of struggle and change, gardens, like art works, combine work and repose, cultivated and wild, the homogeneous and the heterogeneous, the indigenous and the imported, the chaos of generation and the impulse to control and contain nature's “captive, firm, / inarticulate thorns” (2010, 8 [“The Garden of Roses”], lines 16–17). Shiftan begins from the ontological position that we cannot *see* nature, because it has become utterly distorted and distanced through our conceptions, “however we can strive to see it, interpret it, and talk about it” (2018). Her 2018 *Flora in Bronze*, for example,



Figure 1: *Flora in Bronze* (2018)

gilds porcelain flower petals with industrialized metallic paint to defamiliarize a familiar emblem of delicacy (Figure 1). Nevertheless, the ceramic still life on a table proves lifelike enough to bring people together and invite conversation that may or may not prompt reconsideration of cultural assumptions and, by extension, change.

In their art, Glück, Larsen, and Shiftan touch on the sectors Ursula Heise identifies as ecocriticism's "triple allegiance" to: 1.) the scientific study of nature, 2.) the scholarly analysis of cultural representations, and 3.) the political struggle for more sustainable ways of inhabiting the natural world (2006, 506). They employ scientific knowledge and nomenclature to represent or render visible natural phenomena, using Latinate terms for flora. Or, they meta-discursively call attention to the act of labeling as in Larsen's "Garden of Roses," where "Its blooms have been named / & been named *Beyond / naming*, flowering icons no one / can read" (2010, 8, lines 6–9).⁶ By repeating the pronoun "it" to mark the garden's subjectivity and using "you" and "we" rather than "I," Larsen grants agency to the garden and un-genders the inclusive human presence, the speaker, reader, or vicarious viewer.

By surprising the reader/viewer, each artist narrows the distance and invites closer attention. In Glück's sequence *The Garden*, from her 1980 *Descending Figure* (1995), the poet employs familiar genus categories (tulip, rose, willow), but moreover, estranges cultural, often gendered representations of the life cycle by presenting them in unexpected ways. In one instance, she upsets traditional distinctions between humans and stones, plants and animate, umbilical life: "the least shrub that walks / stiffly out of the dirt, trailing / the twisted signature of its root, / even to a tulip, a red claw" (1995, 106, lines 12–15).

In certain interdisciplinary works, such as her 2007 *Study of Cotton Flower*, Shiftan incorporates scientific charts for their figurative qualities so that the information they deliver signifies in multivalent ways (Figure 3). She claims that “we have processed information regarding nature in scientific reposts (drawings) that we use to get as close as we can to nature” (2018), however futile that effort may be. For, as Glück argues as well, “The vanishing garden currently revived by poets suits a period in which experience is filtered, prismatically, by art and history: it is not so much a real garden as a garden previously real” (2017, 98). Nature commodified and mediated by art and culture may nevertheless speak through the verbal/visual artists who engage it.⁷

Human-Nature Intersections

Glück and Larsen offer the gently tended floral world as a hinge between present existence and a sustainable future. Shiftan, as well, creates delicate petals that sign fragility itself, with no trace of fingerprints. Each asserts a feminist alternative to Garrett Hardin’s threatened commons, where selfish interests can compromise the whole (1968).⁸ Far from Voltaire’s cultivated garden (Voltaire [1759] 1959), Glück, Larsen, Shiftan open a space for mindful consumption and production when they stage the self’s interface with the metaphysical at the locus of growth. While Shiftan’s allusion to the human must be abstractly meta-discursive or inferred, Glück and Larsen use the figure of the garden to investigate intersections between the human, natural, and spiritual worlds in more overt ways that resist gender definition. They raise concerns that have informed feminist art history, including Julia Kristeva’s insistence on the signifying capacity of the human body (1984) and Michel Foucault’s acknowledgement of the body as a site of power, knowledge, and control (1975). Yet, their methods vary.

Glück, who refuses to discriminate between realism and fantasy (2017, 55), writes an integrated series of ventures into the natural world that are individual and often autobiographical in their approach. Long before *The Wild Iris* (1992), Glück began merging the human with the vegetal. For example, in the final poem of *The House on Marshland* (1975), the speaker and son inhabit a type of apple garden anti-Eden, from which the persona beseeches the child’s retreating father:

I raised him to the window saying
 See what you have made
 And counted out the whittled ribs,
 The heart on its blue stalk
 As from among the trees
 The darkness issued
 (“The Apple Trees,” 99, lines 11–16)

The wooden ribcage and plant-like heart estrange the infant body in his garden-crib and insist upon the proximity of the human, nonhuman animal, and plant worlds. Corresponding forms tracing veins, roots, and tree branches assert a connection between body and environment. Whether or not the speaker is allied with “women rooted to the river” and destined for abandonment, this voice resists specific gender identification and opens a space for new family configuration within a patriarchal environment. While the distant father and a son have agency to leave, the women assert a faceless stasis, solid and historical. Glück has reworked the heteronormative family structure in terms of an absent or avoidant father figure rather than a present patriarch. Furthermore, she has deconstructed the stereotypical passive female position as woman appears, paradoxically, at the nexus of stasis (root) and movement (river). She avoids expected social constructs of binary gender to forge new stories rather than typical representations of femininity.⁹ The work of art acts as cultural agent and the personal (coincidentally autobiographical or not) asserts itself as myth (Broude and Garrard 1992, 12; 19).

Larsen, on the other hand, speaks collectively about why we make gardens. Sometimes, the poetic voice meditates in lush language on what it sees, inviting the reader to participate. Other times, it revels in the associative thinking that allows the poet to narrow the gap between the human body and the natural world. In “Heart’s Own Garden,” for example, Larsen presents the circulatory system as an unfamiliar territory in which the “Gangly trunks” of the human heart carry blood through a “landscape of calcium, heavy-soiled / field of what goes” (2010, 48, lines 12, 22–23). In another sequence, she pictures famous US mythmakers Edith Wharton, Mark Twain, and Bronson Alcott in conversation in their backyards. In more polemical poems, she calls bluntly for “An end to the ravaging” of the natural world (2010 [“Alpine Gardenlands”], 49). The diversity of approaches, from reverence to remembrance to rage against destruction, demands environmental preservation. Both poets insist upon the earthiness of the human body and the transcendent elements of the natural world. Larsen’s lyrical catalogue titled “Why We Make Gardens,” the final poem of the collection, ends with, “Because we are physical. / Because gardens are not” (65). When her Emersonian eye elevates nature to the metaphysical, it inversely relates to Glück’s and Shiftan’s deconstruction of nature itself as materially present and knowable.

Both poets consciously move beyond the confessional mode in order to broaden if not universalize human-nature intersections by calling attention, as Kristeva would (1984), to the human body as signifier or source of meaning. One way to avoid the risks of melodrama and self-indulgence inherent in the overtly autobiographical is to radically transform the position from which the voice speaks. Glück and Larsen consistently activate the body apart from the gender binary and engage the power and contingent value of *place*. Whereas the persona of “The Apple Trees” above likely speaks from the position of woman

“rooted to the river” (Glück 1995, 99; originally published in Glück 1975), the persona surely stands in a bedroom where mythological figuration allows for numerous possibilities to coexist. In several poems from Glück’s *The Wild Iris*, the poetic voice merges with the material world by *being* a plant, a tuber, a body “curled in the split trunk, almost at peace” (1992 [“Matins”], 2, line 9). This decidedly inhuman voice, ungendered yet generative, lies buried like a bulb, only to “release [the] splendor” of summer. In reviewing Peter Streckfus’s 2004 *The Cuckoo*, Glück observes a gesture similar to her own: “By positioning his speaker in a tree, Streckfus has managed to transcribe a great mystery: a soul passes from its body into air; the human species is carried off like a seed. . . . This is a world of transformations, mutations, the physical transformed to the spiritual and back again” (2017, 83). Glück admires such worlds that refuse to center the human.

In Larsen’s poem, “Garden of Consummation” (2010, 64), we also find the human humbly caught up and constituted by nature. While the poetic voice invites a lone person into the garden, disarmed of twine and trowel, it understands the difficulty for the rigid individual to overcome its “guarded” boundaries, to curl into the natural cycles of rain and sun, of spring’s endless repetitions (2010, 64). By avoiding stereotypical evocations of sexual difference, even in Larsen’s “Garden of Sex” parts I and II (2010, 13, 31), cultural representations of gender and sexuality expand to include unforeseen possibilities.

Analyzing Nature as Cultural Product

Feminist ecological citizenship extends Garrett Hardin’s emphases on morality and exploitation (1968), mediated by Ostrom’s humanization of individual players and allowance for complex creative solutions (1990). This interdisciplinary feminist approach to counterculture activism, motivated by a second-wave feminist *ethics of care* and by a postcolonial orientation toward a global culture, examines a world known only through representations. Glück observes the egotistical motivation for our contemporary fascination with nature-as-reflective-image: “Recently, disinterest has given way to fierce stewardship as the environment grows more and more imperiled. . . . [N]ature threatened and uncertain has been restored to a certain dignity as the mirror of our own precariousness” (2017, 97). Whereas the earlier *deep ecology* approach presents nature as a palpable, intrinsic good, this orientation gives way in recent decades to *social ecology*, by which transhistorical concepts such as *wilderness* are seen as “the product of cultural processes”; for example, the creation of national parks that displaced Indigenous populations (Heise 2006, 507). An intersectional approach that takes into account gender, race, class, and place reveals that environmental damage is disproportionately borne by disenfranchised populations.¹⁰ Whereas Glück explores gendered power dynamics throughout her poetry, she generally eschews overt political engagement with intersectional topics (except in her 2017 essay,

"American Originality"). She probably sees herself as she does Fady Joudah, as "a deeply political artist (though never an artist who writes to manifest or advance convictions)" (2017, 118). Larsen, however, takes on political struggle directly in her poetry. Of the three, Shiftan has been most overt in her theoretical writings about art's relevance to issues of environmental preservation due to the human inability to see nature as authentic, as *there*. Acknowledging the unreality of her still lifes and the potential consequences of neglecting the world to which they refer, Shiftan has stated, "I'm not sure if *nature* is there to be seen anymore" (2020). With her direct presentation of strikingly vivid yet highly conceptualized natural objects, she combines both deep and social ecological approaches.

In Larsen's "Gardens of Refuge" (2010, 46), spontaneous gardens crop up or persist despite the designs of humankind. Accidental plants appear, asserting arbitrary borders, as in the Chinese butterfly bush discovered on a Blue Ridge Mountain nature trail. If such nonindigenous found gardens are placed there, the poem insists, there must be some force greater than humans at work. Positing the garden as an escape from the real in the concluding couplet, gardens again appear metaphysical. In this poem, the voice encourages the reader to surrender him/her/themself and enter into the immaterial realm of the garden. Yet, in the quasi-surreal "A Garden Without Chlorophyll" (2010, 34), the epiphyte legions are closer to home, as "your inhuman & deviant kin" (lines 19–20). The poet asserts material similarity that could be an intersectional nod to solidarity rather than gender/race/class difference, and further dismantles distinctions between plant and human-animal life. The poem suggests an alternate, mythic space that prompts us to see our commonly held reality and social divisions in new ways.

Likewise, Shiftan invites the viewer to use art as a lens to look at nature from a new perspective because nature no longer exists except as a theoretical idea. For Shiftan, the still life constitutes a type of garden because both are artificial. The artist sees herself in these terms as well: "I am a garden. I make things" (2012). Even if nature exists as a construct beyond our reach, art's formal structures, capitulated in the iconography of the garden, can make statements about human experience that lead to self-understanding and to a more productive relationship with the planet. Hardin's earthy approach to the cow's muddy pasture may seem outdated for just this reason: our theoretical concepts and artistic renderings have led us far from the physical, from illusions of one-to-one correspondences via traditional notions of either aesthetic or technical representation. Both *nature* and *art* become newly contested terms in the early twenty-first century, answerable to contextual questions of gender/race/class/place/ability and, in Ostrom's opinion, belong to grassroots voices rather than so-called experts.¹¹

Shiftan explores sculptural forms as counterparts to social structures. She cites Jared Diamond's *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, in which Easter Island, a "highly organized and technologically advanced community[,] destroyed itself by overusing its natural resources" (2005, 1). Shiftan sees this



Figure 2: *Still Life with One Fig* (2008)

commons-scenario “as a metaphor for the planet today,” writing, “I would like to explore the issue of art making that deals with nature and the environment within the context of the history of botanical and zoological renderings as scientific, ecological research as well as to learn how social awareness and political attitudes influenced the art of rendering nature” (2020). Tight weaves of language or clay layers in glaze correspond to the ways nature lives through its constructed signs.

As Shifan demonstrates, our interface with nature conceived as an entity separate from ourselves has alienated us from the real. In fact, Heise raises the question of “whether an aesthetic appreciation of nature brings one closer to it or alienates one from it” (2006, 503). In Shifan’s *Still Life with One Fig* (Figure 2), an idealized symbol of fertility and prosperity floats in Zen meditation atop a sea of delicate petals, some scorched at the edges. The recognizable fig fruit and its vegetal pedestal evoke balance and calm, yet the too-perfect sheen of the tinted skin and the seductive churn of the support evoke more abstract concepts of equilibrium and precariousness: a tiny world upon an uncertain tide. Despite the disconnect between *human* and *nature* based on a false binary—one that has cost us the health of the planet—the highly affective garden-based work of these artists not only comments upon this dilemma, but provides a lens by which to restore the lost connection between people and the natural world. The work involved in creating art, like tending gardens, involves an impulse to create order as a stay against the chaos of reality.

Shifan insists that our attempt to regulate by organizing material into geometric forms or planting poetic lines is a faulty, futile project. In her opinion, such an effort to make sense is “an empty accomplishment, because although we create more facts, more *stuff*, we do not necessarily deepen our level of

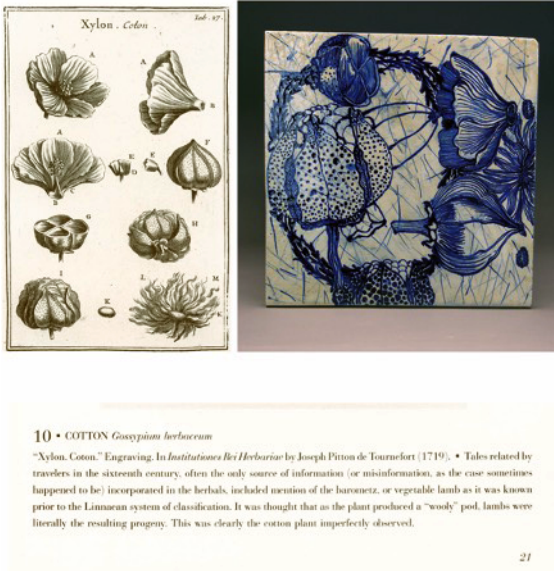


Figure 3: *Study of Cotton Flower* (2007)

understanding of the world" (2012). A more optimistic if ironic Larsen celebrates these garden spaces as "chambers for chaos" in "Why We Make Gardens" (2010, 65, line 1) that provide an arena for pleasing work, a place to park pathos, a space that holds wisdom. Although Shiftan diminishes the value of artistic production in light of a commercial art market that makes a mockery of *value* itself, her work, like that of the poets, productively initiates dialogue, develops myths, and by extension, works to reconfigure stereotypical concepts reified and regulated by culture.

Shiftan questions the unregulated global market by using found objects that trouble the art/artifact divide, such as scientific documents or other realia. With *Study of Cotton Flower* (Figure 3), for example, she translates an academic floral diagram to a ceramic tile. The documentation of nature during the Renaissance and later botanical studies purport to look at nature in an objective, authentic way. The desire to express oneself is so strong, however, that even a scientific floral chart ends up being art, she explains, while tulip-filled still lifes become social commentary that document colonization or thematize the *vanitas* of wealth.

On the *Cotton Flower* tile, one sees the cotton blossom, a commodified crop of great worth, rendered in cobalt blue, a color that carries its own history and surplus value as a popular hue used in Europe, Asia, and the (so-called) "Middle East," but unavailable in the Americas. One notices, as well, how the artist questions limits between object and subject, science and art, by conflating scientific



Figure 4: *Still Life with Ceramic Shards* (2010)

fact—the relative dimensions, proportions, and textures of the plant—and the aesthetic qualities of reconfiguration. She rotates and repositions the depicted bud, blossom, husk, seed, and wispy fibers to increase the effects of formal integration and circling motion. The authority and precision of the diagram, titled “Xylon, Coton,” in elegant, willowy script, contrasts with Shifan’s version of the subject in a thick cobalt that challenges the two-dimensionality of the tile itself and produces affective qualities through its rounded shapes, its significant (or signifying) form (Langer 1953, 24). The eighteenth-century cotton industry, dependent on this crop, provides an example of the relocation and cultivation of natural resources for profit that transformed trade, art, and fashion, solidified class division, and normalized the exploitation of human life, labor, and land, at the cost of long-term sustainability. Industrial cotton farming, practically and conceptually abstracted beyond the dimensions of the garden, continues to constitute a tremendous capitalist impact on the global commons.

Art as an Arbiter of Culture

The aesthetic object, be it the poem or the sculpture, marks the intersection of art and culture as it reshapes perceptions. Whether or not art is a commodity or luxury—and Shifan insists on the decorative decadence of our wealthy society—art proposes alternative ways of being in and caring for an endangered environment. In her 2010 *Still Life with Ceramic Shards* (Figure 4), the natural and the industrial collide, here rendered in blossom and cup. While Shifan’s cup is not the product of assembly-line mechanical production but rather one she built by hand then broke, it raises questions of functionality, form, and

use-value in the craft tradition. Glück calls “breakage, whatever its cause . . . the dark complement of the act of making; the one implies the other” (1994, 75). Hagai Segev literalizes this dialectic potential for ruination when he identifies Shiftan’s work as a distinctive example of early twenty-first century *hybrid* sculpture that, “incorporate[s] ancient traditions, modern technologies, and a clear expression of the fragility of the ‘culture of plenty’” (2009, 97). By presenting a defamiliarized reality including natural elements and a defunct tool (cup), the aesthetic object becomes not only a reflection of culture, but also an arbiter of culture through suggestions of change and transformation. Likewise, Glück investigates the “power of ruins . . . works of art [that are] either damaged or incomplete” to argue that they “inevitably allude to larger contexts; they haunt because they are not whole, though wholeness is implied” (1994, 73). A planet damaged by the colliding goals of individual needs, communal welfare, and warfare searches for such recovery or wholeness.

As expressive objects, the still life *shrunk worlds*, as Shiftan calls them, reflect our reality and manifest intersections of waste, value, creation, and destruction. In heterogeneous works such as *Still Life with Ceramic Shards* (Figure 4), including once-useful fragments and cylindrical test tiles, one finds a corollary to cultures condensed, an arguably postnational deconstruction of geographical limits between lands and peoples. Segev explains,

The artistic paradox that [Shiftan] expresses is of a world on the brink of a global catastrophe, a world on the threshold of ecological and cultural annihilation in which artists continue to address minor issues. To a great extent, creating ceramic works means creating objects that cannot be recycled. The waste stems from blunders hopefully leading to a peak of artistic creation . . . an expression of the flaws on the path to excellence. (99)

Shiftan also uses kiln catastrophes to make new art. During one phase, white glazed flowers blew up and were rescued and reassembled with some of the randomness one sees in the world itself. While poets recycle images and appropriate other texts through allusion or quotation, their works may be less approachable or even *readable* than concrete objects.

In a kindred work from 2010, *Collapsed Still Life*, the tulips, fig, and other objects tumble off a base. What Leigh Taylor Mickelson has called a classically triangular structure decomposes traditional and historical origins of the highly symbolic tulip and fig (2008, 51). Shiftan insists on the short pedestal as integral to the work, an element that traditionally asserts authority and renders objects artful. Issues of patriarchal control, ownership, and corrupting conceptualizations arise in the seventeenth-century Dutch Golden Age still life paintings Shiftan references, with their assemblies of nonindigenous and local flora or blossoms that would never bloom simultaneously. She explains that the tulip functions as an emblem of platonic perfection and, consequently, is not *there* to touch. Like the cotton plant, the Dutch tulip became a symbol of wealth

only after it became an object of extraordinary international market value, a player in a male-engineered and male-dominated economy. Rendering nature by using a decorative tradition and insisting on the human experiences of vision and touch, Shiftan subversively asserts the corruption of nature as she insists on renewed awareness of what *remains* in the world around us. When the artist intentionally knocks her shrunken world off-balance, she quietly troubles artistic traditions that have reflected dominant ideologies and perpetuated inequalities, including attitudes that compromise the natural environment.

Likewise, Larsen's concentration on borderlands, on the seams between nature and culture or the wild and the supposedly civilized, leads her to gauge the relative equilibrium inherent in literal and figurative gardens as microcosms. In "Garden of Consummation" (2010, 64), the poetic voice directs, "let things come / to balance—the scarlet, the drab" (2010, 64, lines 8–9). The work organizes into neat couplets that turn about one single-line *volta*. Nevertheless, this balance is upset by dichotomies of work and reverence, controlled productivity and free growth, consumption and consummation.¹² Larsen plays up the tension inherent in this acknowledgment of superhuman energy in the predictability and certain surprise of spring. The poem self-reflexively opens upon rhetorical questions concerned with place and time: "Where does it rise up? / When does it manage perfection?" (lines 1–2). As in *The Wild Iris*, garden voices investigate philosophical questions of being and merge human-animal with vegetal existence. The poem investigates various limits, as the basil seeds sow themselves across garden bed boundaries and winter enters through a door, while seasonal snowmelt recedes its wet tide over the earth's surface. The literal and figurative intersect with the metaphor and musicality of "basil's cheap / amethyst" seeds (lines 21–22). The multivalent connotations of a word such as *root* multiply semantic possibilities and defy strict categories (line 23). The term evokes verbs for digging, for growing roots, for feeling grounded, and also the metaphor of family history tied to a particular location as evoked in Glück's poem, "The Apple Trees" (1995, 99).

Community and Citizenship

As verbal and visual structures build wholes, establish rhythms of repetition, hierarchies of value, and interlocking systems, they refigure and reflect upon the real world and lived experience to which they correspond. As Caroline Levine has explained, such aesthetic forms can inform readings of political structures that naturalize and perpetuate systems of inequality and oppression, and for the planet, destruction (2015). Such artistic efforts may, then, act as a corrective to the ecocritical movement's blind spot with regard to actual conditions for many marginalized groups—an oversight that compromises the ecofeminist platform in serious ways. The space of the garden provides both a theoretical and a material model of the intersectional confrontation between the human

and the radically *othered* natural world and dissolves the boundary between them. These works, either overtly political or more covertly exploring power dynamics, including their own discursive voices, are themselves activism and, by extension, expressions of citizenship (MacGregor 2006, 5; Levine 2015, 22).

Dichotomies between the sovereign human and the *othered* world of nature fall away in works by Glück, Larsen, and Shiftan. They dismantle binary gender limits and present instead an empathetic “partnership ethic of earthcare” that emphasizes the relational, nongendered, fluid self, fundamental to intersectional and postnational concepts of citizenship (MacGregor 2006, 4).¹³ All three artists insist on their connection to a broader community and a story grander than individual experience. Although Greta Gaard emphasizes a “sense of an interconnected self” that leads feminist writers, artists, and intellectuals to value community and to identify themselves through social relationships, this orientation extends, certainly, to all beings (Gaard 1993, 2; quoted in Cook 2008, 33). Concern and support for others becomes, then, an expression of citizenship rather than an aspect of womanhood.

While Glück does not overtly protest the destruction of the planet or condemn the global marketplace, as do Larsen and Shiftan, her mythologizing moves and balancing acts afford a socially engaged dimension as well. Glück’s reluctance to address environmental destruction directly in her poems (as does Larsen), or to theorize about it (as does Shiftan), does not indicate disinterest.¹⁴ She describes the poetry of Fady Joudah (2008) in terms that reflect the political element in her own poetry: “In their purposefulness and economy, these lyrics represent scientific proofs, but proofs written in an utterly direct and human language; in their implicit drivenness, their wish to change the reader as the poet has been changed” (2017, 123). Despite the private intimacy of her tone, Glück strives to merge her own poetic voice with the collective, an impulse reinforced in her philosophical essays on poetry: “It was clear to me long ago that any hope I had of writing real poetry depended on my living through common experiences. The privileged, the too-protected, the mandarin in my nature would have to be checked” (1994, 105). Thus, the former US Poet Laureate longs to partake of the human community, to lend her voice to a broader effort at expression and exertion. Although many critics have traced autobiographical content in her poetry, Glück delicately negotiates this juncture between the personal and the poetic: “Poems *are* autobiography, but divested of the trappings of chronology and comment, the metronomic alteration of anecdote and response” (1994, 92). With an eye to both rhetorical structures and public-private intersections, she emphasizes her freedom to construct her own generative myths.

Reconfiguring the purview of the human allows Glück to broaden experience, via imagination, beyond limits of gender, class, and able body. In her title poem, “The Wild Iris” (2012, 1), a voice seems to speak from beyond death, from past the limit of a door. Yet this entity is not dead, but rather “survive[s] / as

consciousness / buried in the dark earth" (1, lines 8–10). To be buried, according to this trochaic conceptualization, is to be allowed to grow. The poet subtly contrasts the human trajectory as linear (birth-to-death) with the cyclical dynamic of plant life. On the literal level, internment becomes generative. A buried bulb erupts: "a great fountain, deep blue / shadows on azure seawater" (lines 21–23). The regenerative force of flora suggests an infinite repetition in contrast to our dominant anthropocentric concept of death (or negative profit margin) expressed in terms of individual loss.

The human impulse towards connectedness and spirituality may play out as a merger with the physical environment itself. Yet that effort proves a false escape as well:

Whatever you hoped,
 You will not find yourselves in the garden,
 Among the growing plants.
 Your lives are not circular like theirs
 (2012 ["Retreating Wind"] 15, lines 15–18)

Thus, any easy identification with the vegetal world by way of a retreat to some false Eden or seduction by floral beauty, must be dismissed. Glück nevertheless presents this position with a sense of wit and humor that emerges from her varied tonal registers and frequent irony (1994). She undercuts such a radical position with delightful ambiguity and insists, "no one myth can explain all reality" (107). Carol Muske has identified the iris plant in this volume as one that propagates *wildly* with little respect for borders, especially the uncultivated *pseudacorus* variety (1993, 52). Such disregard for boundaries relates to Glück's preoccupation with limits in general, her somewhat obscured link to contemporary feminist approaches informed by poststructuralist theory, and the ever-negotiated boundaries of *self* vis à vis society.

As individual bodies enter the social sphere with its shared resource challenges, they necessarily confront questions of community and belonging. Both Daniel Morris (2006, 199) and Linda Gregerson (2001, 120) point out the way the *scilla* flower in Glück's work (1992) deconstructs individuality as a value: "why / do you treasure your voice / when to be one thing / is to be next to nothing?" (14), playfully evoking zero and one, side-by-side on a number line. Consequently, one witnesses gendered autonomy diminish in favor of the social, of a feminist ecological citizenship in which personal-public boundaries are abolished to provide for inclusive spaces that resist and destabilize dominant ideologies. Both Glück and Larsen thereby acknowledge culture, gender, and history as unfixed properties of the text. Although, surprisingly, Glück refers to the generic poet, reader, and artist with an inclusive male pronoun in *American Originality* (2017), the speaker in her latest volume *Faithful and Virtuous Night* (2014) speaks from indeterminate or variously gendered subject positions, even within single poems.

Throughout Glück's oeuvre, up to her latest "A Summer Garden" sequence in *Faithful and Virtuous Night*, gardens provide virtual spaces for domestic drama and self-reflection (2014, 64–70). This series of poems includes specific dates, places, and events (real or imagined) to create biographical focus and narrative thrust. *The Wild Iris* (1992), in contrast, offers a more self-consciously mythic prayer sequence of lyrics, as passing seasons structure a narrative pull. One overhears a polyphony of voices in (mis)communication: a searching human speaker, an Old Testament-type god or transcendent spirit, and the voice of the garden itself. Morris refers to this divided lyric trio as a set of "masks" (2006, 191). Frank Bidart describes the overall structure of intersecting voices of *The Wild Iris*: "The poet makes the reader privy to a vast hierarchic celestial conversation in which those who talk only dimly apprehend one another, a conversation which (fugue-like) intertwines identities that remain separate but whose coexistence sustains the grandeur and stability of the whole" (2005, 24). This polyvalent contexture unfolds through time and becomes evident upon completion, a commons of expression and provocative thought, collective rather than strictly individual.

Renewing Perceptions Through the Materiality of the Medium: An Approach to Social Activism

Glück's and Larsen's poems and Shiftan's still lifes do what all successful art does: they renew our perceptions of reality by presenting familiar objects and situations, as well as the medium (language, clay) in new and often startling ways—they wake us up. These works defamiliarize both ecological elements and human relationships to them. As a stay against the numbing effects of habitual perceptual experience, art forces us to notice. This may happen on the thematic level when the subject matter is presented in an unfamiliar way, as in Larsen's striking "Garden After Winter's First Storm" (2010, 14) or Shiftan's *Garden View: Winter* (2012). With a single zeugma in Larsen's poem, "a dry rainbow unbolts," and the reader makes sense of the multivalent image (lines 15–16). Glück creates a similar effect in "The Garden," when she uses the noun *leaf* as an active verb: "the wind / leafs through the bodies of animals" (1995, 106, lines 3–4). In such rhetorical situations, the reader must commit to an interpretive path through uncertain terrain, as the viewer does when Shiftan idealizes a fig or Larsen presents *sex* from a space where "purples of salvia cast / tiered whorls of shade / from each dark torch" (Larsen 2010 ["The Garden of Sex II"], 31, lines 1–3). With a more confessional touch, Glück estranges and transforms tomato cultivation into a fascinating, life-threatening project due to the persona's radical identification with the vegetal world through a tomato-heart identification:

I planted the seeds, I watched the first shoots
like wings tearing the soil, and it was my heart



Figure 5: *Still Life with Blue Drip* (2009)

broken by the blight, the black spot so quickly
multiplying in the rows.

(1992 ["Vespers"], 37, lines 12–15)

This awakening of perceptions, this opening of the eyes to nature, however red and remote, may help to counter the costly and unsustainable separation between humans and the natural world.

The effects of defamiliarization depend on the treatment of subject matter, but equally on an estrangement of the medium itself, language or clay. In Shiftan's *Still Life with Blue Drip* (2009) (Figure 5), with the cobalt drip displayed rather than corrected, the piece insists upon its own artificiality, its own constructedness. The detail upsets transparent mimesis and invites the viewer to separate the work of art from the world itself and to contemplate their relation. The drip suggests time as it marks the trace of a movement and the pull of gravity. The emphasis on the materiality of the element, a blob of blue glaze, finds its correlative in the poets' use of language for sonic or even visual effects beyond the expected function of verbal expression and communication. For example, in "Garden of Consumption," Larsen mixes vernacular diction with obscure, Latinate phrases such as *obdurate saxifrage* (2010, 64, line 21), which seems, through at least one phonetic echo—"obstinate sacrifice"—to personify and dramatize.

In her prose commentary, Larsen returns to the earthy materiality of language (2007). With an acute ear for cadence, she pays minute attention to the aural impact of her words. She refers to the poetic project of seeking "to voice perceptions and knowledge that are elevated beyond the chopped up grunts of word, then word, then word. Some of them . . . grow out of language's very nature—both its limitations and its stuff" (52). Using a sonic flourish to

accompany a vivid, kinetic image in “Garden of Consumption” (2010, 64), she writes, “Not when the whole porcelain theater / of winter unlocks its doors” (lines 9–10). Here, the alliteration of sonorant *w* mingles with the assonance of *o*’s, long and short, that includes the consonance of “porcelain . . . doors” and chiastic flip of “whole . . . unlocks,” then slides to its sibilant end stop. “When our linear language makes full-tilt-boogie use of such effects as sound,” Larsen explains, “then word-boundaries soften” (2007, 53). Larsen describes this dynamic feature in visceral, earthy terms, “The use of [‘high-flying’] language intensified by assonance, consonance, rhyme, or by increased rhythmicity . . . will . . . paradoxically, ground itself *below* ground (below-brain maybe) in the body” (54). Similarly, the smooth surfaces of Shiftan’s figs seem to foreground touch itself. The physicality of Glück’s, Larsen’s, and Shiftan’s use of media signals their feminist return to the body as a site of knowledge, power, and relative autonomy in the assertion of aesthetic voice.

Glück is equally aware of the physicality of a poem that seems to venture not only through time, but also into three-dimensional space where meanings may emerge beyond the poet’s purview: “I don’t like reading aloud. It turns a poem into an experience that’s exclusively sequential, chronological and dramatic, instead of a web of perceptions and ideas that weave in and out in complicated ways” (Green 2010, 48). In another instance, Glück captures a poem’s holistic meaning according to a similar dynamic: “We don’t follow poems as arguments, step by step. We grasp them entire, and what we first grasp is tone” (1994, 115). This synesthetic process occurs once one reaches the last line or completes a visual reading, and all parts combine into a single, complex sign. Likewise, as one circles Shiftan’s three-dimensional sculpture, one gradually takes in the relations between figs and leaves, glaze cracks and clay curves, and forms associations. In a similar vein, Larsen cites Derek Attridge to explicate the dynamic effects of meaning-making in poetry: “Because verse heightens the reader’s sense of language moving through time . . . [p]oetry possesses a special power to present meaning as a constantly changing process” (Attridge 1995, 17–18; quoted in Larsen 2007, 53). Thus language, like clay, asserts its materiality even as it builds up meaning that the reader/viewer experiences through time and space.¹⁵ A poem, by its dynamic nature, incites semantic instability and exhibits the change and transformation that feminist ecological citizenship demands. Shiftan’s sculpture can also perform moments of change and perspectival transformation despite seeming stasis.

Glück’s general rejection of stasis seems to inform her attitude toward rigid or prescriptive definitions. For example, she disdains the essentialist idea of writing “as a woman,” and claims the male literary tradition for herself (1994, 7). “I hardly know what ‘feminism’ means,” she admits; and further, “[a]s the term has tended to be used (at least in my hearing) it has seemed to me constricting and tyrannical” (2006, 31). Lynn Keller has famously called Glück an *antifeminist* poet who “raises crucial, disturbing issues about women’s complicity in their



Figure 6: *Flowers in Blue* (2012)

own oppression” (1990, 129). Glück’s focus on motherhood, body image, sexuality, and heterosexual relationship, however, involves an important critique of expectations and assumptions that live through their cultural representations. In contrast, Larsen advocates the idea of feminine language (available as well to men) for its potential to trouble boundaries and to inspire (1989, 244). Shifan does not see her art or environmental preservation itself as a gendered topic, yet she identifies herself as female and “with that comes caring for the world. . . . [H]owever, it is not exclusively true for women; men feel that way too (2018).”¹⁶ Glück, Larsen, and Shifan build ecological citizenship by acknowledging the legacy of sexual bias that continues to drive patriarchal society, even as they invite more gender-fluid subject positions by merging the human, industrial, and floral and by using language and clay in unconventional ways.

Shifan’s flowers in imagined, non-naturalistic form, her abstracted *Flowers in Blue* (2012) (Figure 6), resonate with the challenges of knowing and interacting within a plentiful, burdened world, a global commons. From the fragility of the porcelain petals to the crowded feel of hollowed-out objects depicting heaviness, this piece seems to thematize both the human condition and a shrunken world at once. The work suggests a fascination with form, in the most childish sense: the sensual need to touch and let texture itself overwhelm mimetic traces. This cultivated patch, delicate and abundant, presents itself on a shelf, not a pedestal. Like a garden, one can read it as a landscape with depth, receding backwards to distant trees. Or, one could emphasize the strictly abstract qualities, the mythic grid structure that Rosalind Krauss might argue makes it a quintessentially modernist work (1986). Accordingly, it is organized and controlled by

a schema of relative flatness that normally hems in the second dimension, yet here, allows for a third.

This historied color—the heavily saturated cobalt blue of the cotton tile (Figure 3)—returns to raise the question of color as subject, as experience itself. Shiftan tells the childhood tale of holding a yellow daisy up to her eye, experiencing *yellow*, not as a quality or an attribute, but as a thing in itself, then pulling the blossom away and, in this process of distancing, coming to see color as object (2020). Through this simple process, her child's mind defamiliarized color to assign it phenomenal significance, much the way estranging nature through poetry and sculpture can lead us to new conceptualizations of its elements and of our relationship to it.

The Act of Expression at the Limits of Meaning

Despite Shiftan's radical position that nature does *not* exist for us except through corrupted representations, she attributes restorative value to the act of expression:

I am interested in that moment where skillful application of technique and image become significant and where the ornamental and the decorative become a visual language and gain a critical voice. Similarly, I am interested in the moment where the scientific drawings become more than a neutral scientific quest (2020).

Although she emphasizes the moment when meanings emerge, when signification evokes a referent, Shiftan also invites consideration of the moment before meaning, including the aesthetic potential of the *scientific*. Her compelling conceptualization of a pre-symbolic space suggests the *semiotic chora* for Kristeva, *before* the verbal, *before* the subjectivity of the scientist, so cleverly concealed in claims of objectivity (1984, 36). In a similar vein, Larsen describes her creative process when she attempts to convey unspeakable states in the feeble medium of language: "The attempt to find words for being overcome by ecstasy—whether 'spiritual' or 'bodily'—is like an attempt to photograph darkness, to sing about silence, to sketch the invisible" (2007, 51–52). Glück, as well, claims, "The unsaid, for me, exerts great power: often I wish an entire poem could be made in this vocabulary" (1994, 73). Shiftan evokes an utterly silenced and "unsaid" nature, subject to the necessary distortions of representation.

In each of these artists' works, one sees a patterning toward abstraction in which whiteout and silence become positive signifiers. As Glück reminds us, "When poems are difficult, it is often because their silences are complicated, hard to follow. For me, the answer to such moments is not more language" (1994, 82). Larsen's reduced palette in "Garden Without Chlorophyll," for example, insists on the exclusion of green. By not naming this expected color, she allows for a muted spectrum of what's left: "Dull yellow, pinkish, red-tinged, / tawny



Figure 7: *Still Life with Apple and Bud* (2011)

or white. Lavender, even" (2010, 34, lines 6–7). "Garden After Winter's First Storm" investigates the erasure of limits not only within or without the framing garden beds, but inside and outside phenomena as well, enabled by X-rays and ice crusts (2010, 14). The intentional difficulty of these aesthetic constructs invites a greater commitment on the part of the reader/viewer, who must determine an interpretive position.

Another way to approach silence or absence as positive modes of signification in visual art is to evoke the platonic ideal through minimalist detail and literary contextualization. With her 2011 *Still Life with Apple and Bud* (Figure 7), Shifan appropriates the classical Greek vessel for pouring oil, an attendant laurel wreath fragment, and an idealized, *unreal* apple beside an imaginary flower or *invented bud*, as she calls it. The four integrated objects are rendered in negative space, in whiteness that is anything but absent as a positive signifier in a virtual world. The blank vase involves no graphics, no battling heroes or clever goddesses. The artist compares the lecythus to text before the book's invention, or an object that allows people to relate to each other and creates a connection before words articulate it (2012). The absence of color or explicit context returns us to Shifan's preverbal moment, before language colonizes and corrupts our conceptualization of nature, shaped as it is by patriarchal cultural ideology.

Conclusion

As players and pawns on the global literary and artistic commons, Glück, Larsen, and Shifan are familiar with the space where values are assigned and

agendas promoted or destroyed. The cultural negotiation of contested terms such as *nature* and *place* depends in part on the impact of writers and artists. The disembodied voices and forms of their poetic speakers and visual works manifest *place* in time and space when they insist on the illocutionary presence of utterance and the materiality of the medium. They question the limits of being by dismantling boundaries between self and other (including *othered* nature), between what is and what may imaginatively come to be. Quoting Jane Hirshfield, Larsen concurs: “However much we may come to believe that ‘the real’ is subjective and constructed, we still feel art is a path not just to beauty, but to truth: if ‘truth’ is a chosen narrative, then new stories, new aesthetics, are also new truths” (2007, 3). These abstracted concepts in cultural negotiation will impact individual lives. In a way that still resonates, Susanne Langer’s *Feeling and Form* (1953) claims, “art penetrates deep into personal life because in giving form to the world, it articulates human nature: sensibility, energy, passion, and mortality. More than anything else in experience, the arts mold our actual life of feeling” (401). Art-signs, Langer’s *virtual* spaces (72), are not only attributes of but also shapers and envoys of cultural ideology.

In their intricately balanced poems and ceramic garden works, Glück, Larsen, and Shiftan negotiate the place of nature on a rapidly changing global commons. Despite the terminator technology of corporate farming, barren seeds that cannot be saved year to year, boundaries are only illusory, as roots wander under walls and new ideas spread. On the commons of artistic expression and material being, these artists further the discussion of feminist ecological citizenship and feel its effects. Gauging the limits of the self as it enters the public realm relates again to Ostrom’s call for more communication between society’s stratified segments. The commons of academia can be especially contentious. Ostrom explains, “The incentives to stay within the confines of the way a discipline asks questions—particularly for younger scholars—are powerful and frequently counterproductive for the achievement of knowledge needed to analyze policy questions” (2002, 42). Glück’s, Larsen’s, and Shiftan’s gardens expand the limits of ecocritical discourse by defamiliarizing human-nature intersections and by calling attention to ways we conceptualize and inhabit powerful environmental and cultural forces in a merger of public and private experience.

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Notes

1. The work of Glück, Larsen, and Shiftan parallels Laura Severin's past critique of poets in these pages, whose work "suggests that a feminist environmental art requires an equally feminist aesthetics, one that breaks down boundaries—between various art forms, between art and nature, and art and society—in order to change perception and envision alternate ways of living" (2011, 98).

2. Victoria Horne and Lara Perry point to Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock's *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* and its critique of femininity as "an ideological position that has consistently (although varyingly) functioned as a foil to maintain the dominance of the masculine subject and his art and/or scholarship" (Horne and Perry 2017, 14; Parker and Pollack 2013). Glück, Larsen, and Shiftan have a similar orientation, I contend, when they replace the "feminine" as ideal with nonbinary gendered experience to speak from and through organic structures. These voices are gendered, or even queered, as they speak from political positions of relative power and agency as a counterpoint to male-dominated structures of global, patriarchal society that perpetuate ecological and societal damage.

3. Here, I am particularly interested in these three artists' *lyricism*, as defined by Charles Altieri, with an emphasis on "the basic imaginative aspect by which writers imagine how poems [and sculptures] are linked to the world" (2017, 12). Rather than defining the social function of the lyric (Burt et al. 2007), I examine the effects illocutionary moments that constitute lyric poetry. As Jonathan Culler observed, "the poem, and ultimately the poet, makes real assertions about the world" (2017, 33).

4. I borrow Victoria Horne and Lara Perry's concise definition of contemporary *feminism* (2017, 2). This transformation happens through *effect*, not utilitarian means, as Daisy Fried explains: "poetry's social function comes not from what it means but from what it is" (Burt et al. 2007, 298). Furthermore, what it *does* is an illocutionary act (Culler 2017).

5. As Elinor Ostrom insists, there are ways beyond centralized "Leviathan" control, socialism, and corporate privatization by which groups can "organize and govern themselves to obtain continuing joint benefits when all face temptations to free-ride, shirk, or otherwise operate opportunistically" (1990, 29).

6. This attention to language's ability to shape the unconscious and, with that, the conceptual framework within which humans represent nature stems from Lacanian psychoanalytic theory and is a central element of feminist poststructuralist theory (Broude and Garrard 1992).

7. Glück defines the American (US) archetype: "the artist must look like a renegade and at the same time produce, whether by accident or design, an aesthetic commodity, a set of gestures instantly apprehended as new and also capable of replication" (2017, 7).

8. Garrett Hardin concludes, "Therein is the tragedy. Each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit—in a world that is limited. Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons" (1968, 1,244). Elinor Ostrom points out that Hardin's theory has come under plentiful critique and revision, and that he is only one of many thinkers to take on this problem (2014).

9. As both Jonathan Culler (2017) and Fredric Jameson (2002) have argued, poetry asserts no “fictional world” (Culler) or “aesthetic space” (Jameson) apart from our commonly held and ideologically informed reality.

10. Such intersectional evaluations acknowledge both “alternative knowledge claims,” as Susan Mann points out, and the social and health costs of environmental damage at the extraordinary expense of *othered* segments of the global population, including children, women, gender nonconforming bodies, and racial minorities (Mann 2011, 2).

11. Kate Soper has laid out three ways the problematic term *nature* operates in contemporary culture:

It functions (1) as a *metaphysical* concept through which “humanity thinks its difference and specificity,” (2) a *realist* concept that refers to “the structures, processes and causal powers that are constantly operative within the physical [environment],” and (3) a *lay* or *surface* concept used in relation to “ordinarily observable features of the world” (Soper 1995; quoted in Coupe 2000, 125; Huggan and Tiffin 2010, 203)

12. Seamus Heaney presents poetry’s rhythms in similar terms of a “balancing act,” a “form of redress or countervailing gesture” that issues from “its being a glimpsed alternative, a revelation of potential that is denied or constantly threatened by circumstances” (Heaney 1995, 4; quoted in Raglon and Scholtmeijer 2001, 249).

13. Sherilyn MacGregor quotes Carolyn Merchant to demonstrate the pitfalls of adhering to a gender binary that essentializes the woman’s position in the struggle for ecological preservation: “Women have had no voice, but ecofeminism is a radical new language. Women must provide the moral energy and determination for both the First and Third Worlds. They are the future and hope in the struggle over life” (Merchant 1996, quoted in MacGregor 2006, 3). Nor do these artists enter the fray of backlash against thirty years of ecofeminist insight, elegantly recuperated by Greta Gaard in these *Feminist Formations* pages (2011, 27).

14. See especially Glück’s reviews of Jay Hopler’s 2006 *Green Squall* and Katherine Larson’s 2011 *Radial Symmetry* (Glück 2017, 97–106; 153–63).

15. As Larsen describes textual structure’s impact on meaning, the echo of particular rhythms from sentence to sentence or poetic line to line “pulls the receptive reader’s mind back to similar figures of syllabic stress earlier in the piece, or even in other chunks of language previously read and heard. And sets up pre-conscious expectation of more such to come” (2007, 54).

16. MacGregor attempts to decouple a traditionally feminist ethics of care from binary gender limitations when she seeks to “reinvigorate citizenship as a political location from which to destabilize the boundaries between public and private and to argue for the collective provision of social goods like care” (2006, 5).

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