

Ecopoetry and Eco critique in George Kenny's "*Sunset on Portage*"**Dr. N. Lakshmi**HOD, Department of English, Government Degree College,
Ramachandrapuram. Ramachandrapuram, Konaseema. AP**Article Received:** 28/07/2026**Article Accepted:** 30/08/2026**Published Online:** 31/08/2026**DOI:** 10.47311/IJOES.2026.8.08.561**Abstract:**

The article offers an analysis of George Kenny's "Sunset on Portage" from an ecological criticism perspective. It looks into how nature interacts with technological development, environmental exploitation, and Indigenous ecological knowledge. In this poem, the author questions the dominant way of thinking that sees progress solely as the result of technological advancement and economic prosperity. Its main line, 'Man's creation supplants God's technology, ' (Kenny 120) points out the irony of human trying to do what is naturally done with the help of technology. Kenny depicts the results of that kind of ecological domination mainly the destruction of the forests wildlife water resources, and ecological balance.

The research is based on the ecocritical perspective of Lawrence Buell and it explores, among other things, how nature becomes an independent, active element rather than only a setting for human activities. In the poem, the Anishinaabe point of view brings about a direct linking between the degradation of the environment and the loss of culture. It indicates how nature land tradition community memory, etc. have an inalienable connection with one another. By focusing on the imagery of wild animals, it highlights the non-human world and so questions the perception of nature as a mere object of human use and consumption. For one thing, the poetic symbol of the 'sunset' may refer to the fading of a pristine environment, while 'portage' then again might be interpreted so that refers to Indigenous people's understanding and connection with the land and landscape. The conclusion of the study claims that Kenny's poem works as a work of not only ecological critique but also a form of cultural resistance calling in favour of environmental stewardship humility restraint, and respect for nature.

Keywords: Ecocriticism; George Kenny's collection of poems; Indigenous Ecology; Environmental Ethics.

Introduction

Ecopoetry has become one of the significant modes of writing that reveals the complicated bond between man and nature. Versus traditional nature poetry that usually presents the scenic and tranquil features of the landscape, ecopoetry raises awareness about today's ecological problems, environmental degradation, human responsibility and the network between all beings. The author, Neil Astley, says that beyond nature poetry ecopoetry, besides identifying the "dependence of all life on earth," (Astley 15); it even questions humanity's domination and utilization of nature. Ecology criticism, per Glotfelty, is a study that investigates interaction between literature and the physical environment. Through the work of nature critics, literature is not seen as a human-centered subject anymore but as a subject that must be viewed with an ecological outlook. Lawrence Buell similarly emphasizes the importance of representing the non-human environment as an active presence rather than merely as a background to human action (Buell, 7). Within this framework, George Kenny's "Sunset on Portage" can be read as an important example of Indigenous ecopoetry because it challenges the human desire to control, replace, and commodify the natural world.

George Kenny is a First Nation writer who is also an Anishinaabe poet and a playwright. He comes from Lac Seul First Nation of north Western Ontario. His works are deeply conceptually rooted within experiences of Anishinaabe culture and describe the relationship between the native community and their traditional landscape. His writing fuses cultural and political issues with literary writing, contextualising the struggles of the indigenous population related to European entry and presence in their settler state. *Indians Don't Cry* was published in 1977, (after that updated with further material) with the later included 'Sunset on Portage'. In this poem Kenny writes a critique that is thoroughly ecological against technological and material development, emphasizing that the natural world should not become so consumable that it is simply 'nothing'. It documents the consequences of technological development in a context of self-imposed dominion over the natural, including imagery about land game trees and human intervention, which counter the assumption that technological change equates to progression.

The ecocritical significance of Kenny's poem can be understood for various ecocritical setups, like the human bias (anthropocentrism), the interconnectedness of all forms of life, environmental ethics, and Indigenous ecological worldview. At the crux of the poem, lies the antagonism between nature and technological civilization. Though human existence is rooted in his perception of humankind as nature's tamers, Kenny draws our attention to actually damaged ecological systems essential to our survival. So, Kenny's poem is not only a reflection of degradation in the environment but also a critique of a growth-oriented worldview. It derives its Indigenous ecocritical significance from the question raised by this worldview, which recognizes the existing gap between mankind and nature, contrary to kinship ties and ecological connectedness.

Methodology

This research work uses mainly qualitative, hermeneutic, and text-based approaches to studying literature to investigate the natural aspects of George Kenny's "Sunset on Portage." The poem is analyzed in depth, mainly looking at the images, symbols, choice of words personification contrasts, and how the worlds of nature and technology are shown in the poem. The study is based on the theory of ecocriticism, focusing mainly on Cheryll Glotfelty's understanding that literature can be related to the physical world as well as Lawrence Buell's idea that the non-human environment is an integral part of literary works. And, the paper refers to the theory of anthropocentrism in the analysis of how human supremacy over nature is criticized in the poem. It is in particular looking at the descriptions of "Winnipeg sun," (120) "Fluorescent and neon lights," (120) "man's creation," (120) and "God's technology" (120) to get a clear image of the opposing of nature with the technological civilization by Kenny. That means, the paper concentrates on finding ways to how poetic words make people aware about the environment issues as ethical and cultural ones.

This study adopts a view through which the Indigenous ecology can be analyzed, showing how the poem relates the concepts of land nature technology, and cultural identity. Rather than using only a Western ecocritical frame of reference, the study is informed by the Anishinaabe cultural background of the author, and is a critical exploration that questions what the human - natural world divide actually entails. By carrying a themes-based analysis, the paper identifies some of the ecological aspects that emerge in the poem, like the relationship between man and nature as a unity, technology's overwhelming dominance, man's consciousness of the environmental situation, man's centralism, and appreciation of natural processes. To help readers understand these points, the analysis is supplemented with references to a range of secondary sources, mostly to ecocritical theories, studies of the Indigenous literature, and critically oriented discussions of the poetry of Kenny. The outcome of the investigation is yet discussed related to today's ecopoetry so that we are able to see how "Sunset on Portage" by the poet turns the common sight of a city sunset into a critique of technological modernity as well and a call to be more environmentally conscious and responsible.

Literature Review

The main theoretical basis for the analysis of George Kenny's "Sunset on Portage" lies in the growth of ecocriticism and ecopoetics. Cheryll Glotfelty is one of the main names in defining ecocriticism: "it explores literature's relationship with the physical environment" (Glotfelty, xviii), thereby highlighting the environment as a subject of literary criticism apart from human activities. Lawrence Buell expands on that approach by focusing on literary works where the non-human environment is an agent and human history is viewed in a broader ecological context (Buell 7–8). For poetry, ecopoetics brings up another level by discussing the way poetic language form perception, and the idea of environment mutually interact.

The contrast between the conventional nature poetry and ecopoetry is very significant since ecopoetry not only describes or celebrates the landscape but also investigates the very complex relation of human culture to its surroundings. As per the Poetry Foundation, a core characteristic of ecopoetics lies in how it perceives human beings as being embedded in the world around them without the need of the concept of nature as something other or apart from human existence. Leonard Scigaj also asserts that ecopoetry brings to the foreground a human centred thinking and seeks to find a way of life where both human interests and natural needs are addressed (Scigaj, 37). These theoretical viewpoints set the stage perfectly for looking at Kenny's succinct poetical work as a critique of ecological aspects of urbanity, technological innovations, and the human attempt at substituting nature through artificial processes.

Another major theoretical lens that can serve to unlock the meaning hidden in Kenny's poem is ecocriticism based on place and bioregionalism. Nowadays, the growing trend in ecocriticism acknowledges that ecological awareness is deeply rooted in the particular landscapes, communities' histories, and cultural experiences. "Sunset on Portage" is one such poem where Kenny pinpoints a specific place - Winnipeg, and then builds the whole poem around the speaker's immediate visual encounter with that place. The first picture we get of the poem is the "Winnipeg sun" (120) juxtaposing it with the artificial light coming from the Bank of Montreal sign.

A close textual interpretation of Kenny's writing notes that the poem creates a mental link between the location and the speaker by more exactly anchoring the speaker within Winnipeg and interpreting the whole picture of the city as it will be seen from Winnipeg. Place-awareness gives this poem the ability to transcend the generic portrayal of "nature" (120). This blending of the natural with the human constructed environment results in the creation of a single ecological picture.

The Canadian school of ecocriticism has also stressed out the relationships among ecocriticism regionalism bioregionalism studies of Indigenous peoples, the postcolonial, the material, and the animals. Because of this, Kenny's poem could be read for place-based ecocritical lens in which the city sunlight commercial buildings, and human technological work are analyzed as integrated parts of a given ecological and cultural setting. A fourth theoretical setup relevant to this discussion in particular from Kenny's poem, Indigenous ecocriticism and relationality. Here, it can hardly be stressed enough that the article by Joni Adamson, entitled American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism, is very crucial. In this work, the author shows how Indigenous peoples' literary representations of nature are typically a way to question and challenge Western ideas about 'wilderness' or 'nature', landscapes, and concepts of environmentalism. Through that ecocritical lens of hers, Adamson emphasizes in reality environmental conditions cannot be disentangled from race class gender, culture difference, and environmental justice.

A relational ecological view yet is not only about understanding, but also recognizing and appreciating the interconnectedness of elements, people, and the surroundings in the entire ecological system. For instance, the way land, humans, animals, water, sky, and other environmental components relate and interact is considered altogether. The work of Ranjan Datta on Indigenous environmental philosophy, in his turn, also highlights the theme of relationalness; spirituality, traditional experience, culture, and connections between human and non-human beings.

More contemporary research in the area has come out with the identification of relationality, mutual benefit, and kinship with the non-human world as central concepts of Indigenous environmental thought. This is quite a useful structure for interpreting “Sunset on Portage”, mainly for Kenny's conflict between the sun (a natural element) and man-made human technology, one could argue that a deeper layer of meaning is hidden, i.e. that this is not at all a case of nature versus culture but it is basically a critique of the perspective that sees human creation and technology as superior to natural processes. Also, other ecopoems that critique man's meddling with nature can also be made to parallel Kenny's poem.

For instance, Robert Frost's “A Brook in the City,” one of his last poems that was written in a state of visual impairment, evokes the memory of a natural stream that once ran through the city and was covered up by urban development, which especially parallels Kenny's portrayal of the sun in Winnipeg being overshadowed by commercial lighting. Besides, both pieces of writing give examples of natural things that coexist with human-made environments and disclose the incompatibility between the two. Another Canadian example is Earle Birney's “Bushes,” which deals with alienation from nature at the psychological, cultural and even metaphysical levels. Wendell Berry's “The Peace of Wild Things” depicts a radically different ecological perspective, whereby the natural environment serves as the antidote to the stresses caused by human civilization.

Berry's work, similar to Kenny's, challenges man's over-centrism, though Berry points more clearly to nature as the place for awakening and moral equilibrium. But, Gary Snyder's ecopoetry is yet another significant correspondence as his poetry questions the human-nature dichotomy and highlights ecological interdependence. Scigaj's research on ecopoets such as Wendell Berry, W. S. Merwin, Gary Snyder, and A. R. Ammons is extremely helpful for placing Kenny within a wider context of poetry that aims at reconciling human desires with ecological imperatives (Scigaj, 37). Such correspondences indicate that Kenny's poem is one of the many works of ecopoetry that address urbanization, technological development, ecological displacement, and human responsibility from a poetic perspective.: As a result, the current scholarship presents various theoretical and comparative pathways for interpreting “Sunset on Portage,” but Kenny's short Indigenous ecopoem, which deals with urban ecological consciousness at the same time, is worthy of more specific focus.

Studies of Indigenous writings have proven that the separation of environmental concerns from historical questions, cultural identity colonialism land, and environmental justice does not work. Adamson's environmental-justice approach and the contemporary Indigenous writings based on relationality have shown weaknesses of earlier ecocritical models which at some moment treated nature as abstract or universal category. One of the main reasons why Kenny's poem is so fascinating is its non-conventional setting. It does not show a typical scene of nature in the untouched wilderness instead it connects the natural sunset with the technological commercial lights of the city in one piece. This way the poem undermines the 'nature' and 'culture' dichotomy by placing them within a city context.

With a brevity of form and clever juxtaposition of themes, the poet employs personification and irony to convert an ordinary scene of a sunset into a deep philosophical insight for technology and human relations to nature. The paper draws on the insights of ecocriticism ecopoetics place-based criticism and Indigenous relationality to support its argument that "Sunset on Portage" is a highly effective short poem and one that deserves serious literary attention for its environmental message. It questions the primacy of man's perspectives and shows the reader through various examples how nature's rhythms get replaced by the culture of technology and it makes the native voice of environmental awareness heard more profoundly.

Discussion

Nature versus Technological Development

One of the main thematic interests of "Sunset on Portage" concerns the conflict between technology and nature. Kenny shows technology and its developments as human attempts to dominate and change nature. The line that recurs in the poem, "Man's Creation Supplants God's Technology," brings out the main irony of the story. It seems deliberate, in the use of the word "supplants," (Kenny 120) that there is a complete replacement. Human technology so tries to outdo and completely change the natural processes of creation. A critical study of the poem, in the same way, finds this as a central reversal that supports Kenny's ecological argument, saying that human beings, through technology, are at once creators and destroyers.

On an ecocritical level, the human-centered viewpoint of anthropocentrism, where one thinks that human needs should be the primary concern in moral and ecological decision-making, is challenged by this idea. Usually, technology is linked to human advancement, civilization, and mastery over nature. Instead of conforming to this image, Kenny points out a situation when human-created technologies could turn into destructive ones through a neglect of intrinsic value of the natural world. So, the poem invites a reflection upon the term "progress." If the result of the technological progression is the ruin of forests animals water resources, and ecological balance, then it cannot be genuine progress. As it questions the dominant human-centered model of development, the poem's ecological awareness is manifested.

The incongruous juxtaposition of man's creation with God's technology subverts ethnocentric notions of technological ascendancy; while man creates artificial light, Kenny embodies the aspiration for this creation to emulate the natural technological function exemplified by the sun. On a critical note, the juxtaposition of creation/ man with technology/ God and the sun's "surprising displacement" can be read as Kenny articulating a "resounding reversal" of the contemporary trend of technologizing the divine" as he turns technology on its head" (Charlton, 81). The poem this way enacts an examination of the human cravings for destruction and repetition of the natural process and holds ecological import in transcending a simple opposition between technology and ecology to pose the question whether the power inherent in technological humanism should be justified in replacing the natural 'paces and patterns' of nature.

Human Domination and Environmental Exploitation

The poem also vividly illustrates the disastrous effects of humanity's endeavour to master nature. Forests and animals are presented not just as sources of supply but also as the interdependent parts of a living nature. By humans, the balance that nature keeps can easily be disturbed when they start seeing a forest merely as a warehouse of timber oil coal, etc. This mentality is precisely, what ecocriticism names as the exploitative relationship of modern economic systems with the environment.

From the environmental criticism point of view by Lawrence Buell the understanding of this aspect of the poem is made more accessible. Buell advocates the literary representations in which the non-human environment is not the subsidiary of human affairs and can even overshadowing the human concerns by being a major presence in its own right (Buell 7–8). Kenny's poem is along the same line when it calls attention to the outcome of changes in the physical environment. The forest and scenery attain value independent of their utility to humans. Their extinction is regarded as both the moral and ecological issue.

Indigenous Ecological Consciousness

The particular strength of Kenny's "Sunset on Portage," as well as the Indigenous perspective of Anishinaabe culture, is one of the reasons the poem is mainly significant. Kenny's poems are generally very personal recollection, and at the same time they portray the community, as well as animals and land. University of Manitoba Press notes Kenny's poetry as being a representation of the cultural traditions of the Lac Seul and English River, which were Anishinaabe communities at the time of Kenny's writing. Having that kind of ancestry gives Kenny's poetry a particular depth, one that can give readers, and in particular Indigenous readers, some insight into the environment that inspired the writings, and in turn into the poet's environmental mindset.

Many indigenous ways of thinking about the relationships between humans and nature can seem quite a bit different from the western perspective. Land, for indigenous people, is often not considered to be solely property or a source for money. It is a relation, a

responsibility, and a way through which one can understand where one stands. This indigenous view is also reflected in Kenny's poem. This is also quite interesting from the point of view of indigenous literature because often environmental degradation is also a form of cultural displacement. Communities that have strong bonds with nature, that is forests rivers, habitats of animals and traditional landscapes, would find their identities and way of life deeply challenged by such changes. Kenny's ecological critique That's why functions on two levels: the environmental, and the cultural. In a way, his poem is telling readers, to remember that damage of the land means damage of the memory, the identity and the community that is there and also the cultural continuity.

Wildlife and the More-than-Human World

Yet another major feature of Kenny's ecopoems is the inclusion and depiction of wild animals. Wild animals do not just appear as mere decorative details of the scenery; they serve to show that a single environment can consist of several connected life forms. It is such a line of thought that ecocriticism calls the more-than-human world, a world in which the human is considered one more link in the chain but not the ruler of the chain.

Kenny's representation of wildlife challenges the perception of nature as something that exists mainly for human consumption. The animals themselves have an essential ecological role and their lives depend on the well-being of forests rivers etc. So, the destruction of nature leads to more than the deaths of humans. It affects different animal species as well this way the poem leads towards an ethical way of thinking moving away from the exclusively human-centred view of nature to ecological responsibility.

This change of perspective can also highlight John Elder's claim that ecological insights can change how nature is conceptualized and as a result, what literary genres best express such a vision. Kenny's poetry is a perfect illustration of how the landscape, which was merely a backdrop, becomes the subject that raises ethical questions.

Ecological Ethics and Responsibility

To put it another way, "Sunset on Portage" in effect is a poem of environmental prophecy it points out the aftermath of human interference without any thoughtfulness and invites the audience to reassess their role vis--vis the environment. While ecopoetry need not offer technical resolutions against environmental threats, it is precisely here that its value is most felt, it helps to convert ecological concerns into issues of the emotional, the ethical, and the imaginative.

Another collection, Neil Astley's *Earth Shattering: Ecopoems*, is also poetry in an ecological context addressing the problems of environmental degradation and ecological balance. The critics of that poetry collection have said that the poems go from detailed portraits of animals and the changing seasons in nature, that is a very narrow and close-up observation, to a picture of the whole world, a representation of industrial pollution and environmental catastrophe. (Green Prophet) In this wider context, Kenny's poetry reflects poetry's power to give the ecological problems an emotional and cultural dimension.

The environmental message in the poem, because of this, can be best expressed as an appeal towards humility. People are the masters of technology, yet that alone is not the sign of their being free from the bonds of nature. Rather, the technological civilization still needs to rely on forests water animals, soil and ecological processes. With this thought, Kenny's poem reminds people of the risk when this fundamental interdependence is forgotten.

The Sunset as Ecological Symbol

"Sunset on Portage" is the poem title which one might think represents more than just words. If we are aware of traditional meanings, sunset may indicate not only transition, decline, and closure but also the end of a phase of life. In the ecocritical light, the poem may also point, among others, to a natural world being wiped out or completely changed because of humans' interference. In such a scenario, the sunset stands for the end of the untouched nature. The title of the poem, that means, introduces a sort of contradiction that lies in combining the natural landscape's beauty with the environmental crisis that the poem reveals.

Portage is also a significant term since it recalls traveling in nature and having a relationship with land based on the Indigenous experience. Kenny uses the ecological aspect to tie human awareness to a specific culture's geographical setting instead of depicting it as a universal event. By doing that, he makes location one of the elements shaping identification so that place is a source of identity. This way, besides land, the poem's ecological message also springs from a combination of memory culture technology, and human responsibility.

Findings

George Kenny's poem "Sunset on Portage" when read from an ecocritical viewpoint, the text opens a conversation. The first observation one makes from such reading is that ecopoetry, or poetry dealing with nature, is really a human-to-humans interaction instead of human to nature. Here, nature is more than a pretty background that people look up to. It is a living being whose extinction would result in a loss for humanity, because of this implying the moral responsibility of humans. Kenney also takes on human dominance by criticizing the human centered mindset. The poem is a strong message against the practice of anthropocentrism. He questions the idea that technology money economic development, etc. are alone signs of progress.

The lines "Man's creation supplants God's technology" (Kenny 120). embodies the main irony of the poem: that is, man attempts to supplant the natural order with technology, only to pose the threat of obliterating the very matrix of life that makes his existence possible. The poem exposes the inseparability of environmental and cultural survival. For Indigenous people, land and culture are intertwined and, from the native point of view, destruction of the environment is not distinguishable from the uprooting of native cultural identity with the extinction of the ecological environment.

Kenny's ecological awareness then is simultaneously an act of cultural resistance. Based on the four sections above, we find that technology is not cursed at all.

What Kenny is objecting to is technological domination without ecological ethic as; developmental ideology considers forest, animal and landscape to be only resources. The poem proposes to develop a more responsible attitude toward them using respect, restraint and ecological dependence as; Lastly, “Sunset on Portage” also exemplifies how poetry can be effectively used as an awareness-raising tool for issues of the environment.

Conclusion

Ecopoetry offers a means by which readers can experience ecological concerns through sensory and emotional encounters. The writer's challenge to make the audience consider the damage incurred by the environment is precisely the transference from ego to eco-consciousness that ecocriticism aspires to facilitate. George Kenny's “Sunset on Portage” is an important Indian ecopoem for its critique of the human relationship to nature and technology. As expressed in his depiction of landscape, animals’, forest and human intervention, the poem exposes that a human view of the natural world as an object of control, consumption and domination results in ecological destruction. Kenny's Indian worldview enhances the poem's ecocritical importance through situating ecology in memory community land and identity. Ultimately, the poem challenges the traditional doctrine of technological progress as a form of infinite human development.

It argues rather for progress based on an acceptance of ecological limits and an awareness of the interconnectedness of all life. Viewed through the lens of Glotfelty Buell Elder, and received ecopoetic theory, we see in “Sunset on Portage” the utility of the poetic voice both as ecological critique and as a mode of moral engagement. Kenny's poem is still relevant in current ecological thinking because it offers the voice of the poet as one that draws attention to a primary ecological reality; that our basic well-being is entirely dependent upon the continuity of our natural environment.

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