

Defining Contemporary American Literature: A Study of Louise Gluck's, *The Seven Ages*

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Abstract

This paper defines contemporary American literature with specific references to Louise Gluck's *The Seven Ages*. Although a handful of studies have been done on the subject yet, a satisfactory definition of contemporary American Literature has remained a task. The reason for this challenge is tied to the diverse lenses with which scholars have examined the subject matter with special attention to issues of language composition, authorship, setting, culture, characterization, and geographical experiences. More so, separating contemporary American literature from other American literary periods, especially modernism. The significance of this present paper is hinged on the fact that it has demonstrated sparkling differences between contemporary American literature and other epochs, with glaring shreds of evidence from Gluck's collection. The essay identified, transformation, experimentation, coming of age, technology, cyber literature, history and memory, intertextuality, identity, literature of voice, family and beauty, spirit, nature, and wit as major themes that dominate contemporary American literature. Also, the literature of self, isolation, disillusionment, and the world as characteristics that characterize contemporary American literature. In terms of style, the work examined monologue, free versification, and simplified diction as core literary patterns. The qualitative research method was adopted, while historical criticism was applied for analysis. Findings show that contemporary American literature is different from other periods in American literature, even though, it shares proximity with modern American literature. In the same vein, not all literature weaved in the 1950s belongs to this period, but those produced in the last twenty-two years between (2000-2022). The submission of this study is that further studies be done on the area of defining the nature and characteristics of contemporary American literature, using texts weaved in the last twenty-two years.

Keywords: Defining, Contemporary, American, Literature, Louise Gluck.

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INTRODUCTION

Defining contemporary American literature is a difficult task to embark on, due to its close proximity with modern readers, since the period, we consider contemporary American literature (literature after World War II) share seeming resemblances, in terms of themes and style with modernism. More so, most of the writers we classify as contemporary writers are a blend of the two periods in their literary compositions. Similarly, most of the critics or readers of these contemporary works are not totally new audiences but a mixture of modern American society and the younger generation. Despite this stack propinquity and continuum, there exists a borderline between these two literary epochs. This dichotomy can be seen in terms of thematic preoccupation and literary tradition. For instance, a closer study of some contemporary American literary

works reveals, that there is a major shift from the modernist major themes of confusion occasioned by World War I and II, to themes of isolation, alienation, transformation, experimentation, disillusionment, self, history, and memory, coming of age, technology, cyber literature, intertextuality, identity, literature of voice, place, family, and beauty, spirit and nature, wit and the world. In terms of literary style, contemporary American writers no longer conform to the esoteric modern style of T. S. Elliot, William Butler Yeats, Robert Frost, Henry James, William Faulkner, and Ezra Pound, who subscribe to the literature of obscurantism but celebrate free verse with a simple diction. Therefore, the task of this paper is to define contemporary American literature, with close references to *Seven Ages*, a poetry collection by a contemporary American poet, Louise Gluck.

Review of Related Literature

Skeletal works have been done by scholars to define contemporary American Literature. Yet, a consensus definition is almost impossible due to different arguments and approaches to issues of theme, style, authorship, setting, audience, language, and characterization.

In his study material, Sanjiv Kumar observes that contemporary American literature is considered contemporary because the writers write about the world around them. He went ahead to define contemporary American literature as "literary works done after World War II (2). He observes that:

"The efforts made to classify and define contemporary American literature have been incomplete at best. These difficulties lie in part because of the literature's close proximity to modern readers; we are still in the process of reading and writing contemporary American work." Some aspects we noticed about contemporary American literature were that they have input or deal with in migrants or descendants of them, women issues, technological matters and how they woven into the American culture (3).

Kumar's conclusion is that the problem of giving an absolute definition of the nature of contemporary American literature lies in the fact that it shares close proximity with modernism. Also, these works considered contemporary is still read by modern audiences, so it becomes difficult differentiating them from modern literature. He, however, anchored his definition on the following characteristics, which according to him are unique about contemporary literature that marks it out from modern literature or other literary periods in America. They include issues of immigrants or descendants of women issues, technical matters, and how they are woven into the American culture. What Kumar implies here is that most contemporary works feature immigrants' problems, feminist writings, and of course the encroachment of technology. He further argued that beyond these features, contemporary American literature thematizes issues of identity in 21st-century American society, history memory, technology, and intertextuality (4). On identity, he cited Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* where the character of Sam Clays struggles to come to terms with his homosexuality. He further referenced, *The March* by E.L. Doctorow where the author depicts the realities of General Sherman's famous march during the U.S. On one hand, on technology he cited a book on biotechnology, helping people with disabilities, such as *Machine Man* by Max Barry. It is worthy to observe that Kumar's work did not specifically record the exact year contemporary American literature began, even though, he was able to distinguish the differences between contemporary and modern American literature. More so,

his definition fails to consider issues of language, authorship, culture, and setting as defining factors.

On their part, the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) defined the term post-modern or contemporary literature as:

American literary cultures that come after Modernism. It refers specifically to works of art created in the decades following the 1950s. Postmodern literature is a form of literature which is marked both stylistically and ideologically. There is a reliance on literary conventions and a rejection of the boundaries between high and low forms of art and literature. The term postmodernism was used in Latin-American literary criticism and in Anglo-American literary debates in the 1930s and 1940s. However, the main analysis of postmodernism got force mainly in the 1970s (Preda qtd. in NOUN,124, mine emphasis).

What this implies is that contemporary American literature, also referred to as postmodernism is literature that began in the 1970s that is marked by ideological and stylistic peculiarities with the modern era. NOUN buttress that:

Postmodern/contemporary American fiction became an influential literary trend in around the 1950s and the 1960s in Britain and the U.S. After reaching its peak in the 1970s and the 1980s it faded in the 1990s. Postmodern fiction was born and developed under certain historical and cultural background. A comparatively general understanding is that it is the direct result of the western turbulent social life after the Second World War. People were so shocked by the fascists' appalling ferocity during WWII that they started to doubt the social moral standard and values they had been holding all along. After the war, as the intrinsic problems in capitalistic society became more conflicting, people were more and more confused with the increase of social upheavals and they lost faith and loyalty, and became indifferent to others. The disorder in society corresponded with the rapid development of science and technology. This turned society into an accurate machine on which each person served a trivial part. Mass media and convenient transportation broaden the public knowledge and people started to realize that the existence of knowledge and objects depended on themselves and the relation between them, rather than certain eternal nature (126, mine emphasis).

Their understanding of contemporary American literature is a literature that emerged out of the turbulence of World War II. Their definition is based on the following features:

Contemporary or Postmodern fiction cannot be easily confined to a concrete definition; however, most postmodern works share some common features, such as plurality, centerlessness, language experiment and language game. These features generally fall into the principal character of indeterminacy (127, mine emphasis).

In the same vein, since contemporary writers, believe in the silence of subject and author, characters in literary works naturally die with them. Therefore, according to NOUN, in contemporary American literary works characters are vague figures or even images. This can be seen in the novelette of contemporary American author, Donald Barthelme, *Sindbad in Forty Stories* (1987). In this work, the characters depicted are usually images or symbols that lack determinacy despite their human characteristics (127, mine emphasis).

Contemporary authors either profess or imply that characters are artificiality constructed by letters. Characters in postmodern novels do not actually exist but appear as ideas, so they are unknowable to readers. In contrast to characters in realistic novels that can stay vividly in readers minds, contemporary characters are vague and indeterminate.

The conclusion, therefore, according to the NOUN study manual is that contemporary or Postmodernism can be broadly taken to be a cultural phenomenon embodied in areas such as art and literature, which is becoming increasingly dominant in contemporary society after the World Wars. Postmodernism signifies the quest to move beyond modernism. Specifically, it involves a rejection of the modern mindset but launches under the conditions of modernism. And the likely Most common features are plurality, centerlessness, language experiment, and language games. These features generally fall into the principal character of indeterminacy. Again, contemporary novelists or writers think that there is no apriority or objectivity in meaning since everything is uncertain, centerless, and incoherent. Indeterminacy as the essence of contemporary is not only a mode to appreciate the essence of postmodern life, but also a writing technique. This indeterminacy reflects in the way writers abandon themes in their literary creation because there is no meaning, center, or essence in postmodern works. Most importantly, everything in American literature or fiction is on the same level so that no theme or subheading or even a topic is needed, and writers attention is paid to the randomness during the creative process of postmodern production. Importantly too, the work created by contemporary American writers is half done, and the other half is to be finished through reading and imagination of the readers. Themes intended by authors thus, die with them, and the meaning of work depends on the understanding of each reader (131).

Another author worthy of mention is Kathryn Van Spanckeren. In his book, *U.S.A Literature in Brief*, Spanckeren noted that contemporary American literature started in the 20th century with the emergence of mass media, immigration crises, globalization, and more recent issues: He puts it:

As that 20th century ended and the 21st century began, mass social and geographic mobility, the Internet, immigration, and globalization only emphasized the subjective voice in a context of cultural fragmentation. Some contemporary writers reflect a drift towards quieter, more accessible voices. For many prose writers, the region, rather than the nation, provides the defining geography (48).

According to him, some contemporary writers reflect a drift towards quieter, more accessible voices. For many prose writers, the region, rather than the nation, provides the defining geography. Citing Louise Gluck's *The Wild Iris* (1992), he observed that different kinds of flowers utter short metaphysical monologues. The book's title poem which to him, is an exploration of resurrection, could be an epigraph for Glück's work as a whole. *The wild Iris* is a gorgeous deep blue flower growing from a bulb that lies dormant all winter. Spanckeren identified the theme of the quiet voice or monologue as a dominant style in contemporary American literature. Citing another American writer, Billy Collins, Spanckeren identified the simplicity of language as another feature of contemporary American literature. He commends the poetry of Collins to be refreshing and exhilarating (49). Collins uses everyday language to record the myriad details of everyday life, freely mixing quotidian events (eating, doing chores, writing) with cultural references. His humor and originality have brought him a wide audience.

In his paper "Contemporary Literature (U.S.) & Media" Arputharaj Devaraj conceives the term as:

Literature produced during the last 16 years or so, because a generation normally means 30 to 33 years. If it has to be contemporary, it should be well within that half to which one belongs to. Hence, to me, it should be the literature produced from 2000 to 2016(1).

By this, he meant that contemporary American Literature is literature that began in the year 2000 to the present. He went on to identify some salient features of contemporary literature including but not limited to the following: "Economic colonization, ii) Global warming, iii) Neo Imperialism, iv) Trans-border terrorism, v) Poverty, filth & squalor, vi) LGBT, racial, ethnic & communal problems, & vii) Crime, corruption, avarice (2). Contemporary American gives equal importance to the concept of the 'other'. It also shows its concern for the subaltern. It takes into consideration various 'isms': Orientalism, Occidentalism, communism, capitalism, socialism, magic realism, new journalism, feminism,

womanism (Devaraj 3). Citing a contemporary American literary movement, he argues that contemporary American literature emerged to counter the ideals of modernism. He writes:

The Beat Generation, a group of writers explored and influenced American culture in the post-World War II era, in the 1950s. The Beats rejected the standard narrative values. Their themes included exploration of American and Eastern religions, rejection of materialism, explicit portrayals of the human condition, and experimentation with loose morals (2).

These themes according to him, can be captured in the works of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* (1956), William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (1959), and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) as glaring examples of Beat literature. Both *Howl* and *Naked Lunch* were the focus of obscenity trials that ultimately helped to liberalize publishing in the United States. In the 1960s, elements of the expanding Beat movement were incorporated into the hippie and larger counterculture movements (2).

Devaraj yet identified another movement called, The Black Mountain poets, otherwise known as *projectivist poets*, who were a group of mid-20th century American *Avant-Garde* or postmodern poets.

Citing Charles Olson he observes that:

"In 1950, Charles Olson published his seminal essay, *Projective Verse*. In this, he called for a poetry of "open field" composition to replace traditional closed poetic forms with an improvised form that should reflect exactly the content of the poem. This form was to be based on the line, and each line was to be a unit of breath and of utterance. The content was to consist of "one perception immediately and directly (leading) to a further perception"(3).

Devaraj's paper also identified 'Confessionalism' as a style of poetry in the United States during the 1950s. It was poetry "of the personal," focusing on extreme moments of individual experience, the psyche, and personal trauma, including previously taboo matters such as mental illness, sexuality, and suicide, often set in relation to broader social themes. It is also classified as Postmodernism. This kind of poetry is associated with the works of Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, John Berryman, Anne Sexton, Allen Ginsberg, and W. D. Snodgrass. Other groups of contemporary poetry identified by Devaraj are the New York School, which was an informal group of American poets, painters, dancers, and musicians in the 1950s and 1960s, who drew inspiration from surrealism and the contemporary avant-garde art movements, abstract expressionism, jazz, improvisational theater, experimental music, The new wave movement who pick special interest in science fiction produced in the 1960s and 1970s, the language poets group like Leslie Scalapino, Stephen Rodefer,

Bruce Andrews, Charles Bernstein, Ron Silliman, Barrett Watten, Lyn Hejinian, Bob Perelman, Rae Armantrout, Carla Harryman, Clark Coolidge, Hannah Weiner, Susan Howe, and Tina Darragh who emphasize the reader's role in bringing meaning out of a work and the cyberpunk (coined by an American author Bruce Bethke in his 1980 short story of the same name) group who specializes in science fiction, portraying the society of the proverbial "high tech low life" that features advanced technological and scientific achievements, such as IT & cybernetics, juxtaposed with a breakdown in the social order. It was proposed as a name for a new generation of punk teenagers belonging to the IT Age. The term was used as a label for the works of William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, John Shirley, Rudy Rucker, Michael Swanwick, Pat Cadigan, Lewis Shiner, Richard Kadrey, and others.

In fact, Contemporary American literature, as considered by Americans themselves is subversive, containing surrealism, bizarre names, plots, and biting commentary. It is postmodernist and distrustful. It not only questions the cultural inconsistencies but also allows such inconsistencies to bloom within the narrative. It is pertinent to note that most of the acclaimed contemporary literature is adapted for other media.

The review thus shows that a handful of work has been done to define the true nature of contemporary American literature with regard to striking features and thematic manifestations. While we will really appreciate the works of the above critic who have examined some peculiar themes and characteristics of contemporary American literature, their studies failed to examine cardinal themes and features of self, history, and memory, coming of age, intertextuality, literature of voice, place, family, and beauty, spirit and nature, wit and the world, amongst others. Moreso, sufficient studies have not been done on the peculiar literary style of the contemporary. This is the gap this present work promises to fill.

Theoretical Framework: Historicism

Historical criticism requires that you observe textual particular historical facts about the time during which a writer wrote. History, in this case, refers to the social, political, economic, cultural, and/or intellectual climate of the time. Kelly Griffith states that historic critics trust they ought to illuminate works of literature by way of studying what gave birth to them: the mental and cultural surroundings from which they came, their sources and antecedents, authors' lives, authors' intentions, and authors' language. A principal emphasis of historic criticism is the historical periods and mental movements to which works belonged. To this end, critics studied the conventions and thoughts that characterized movements, such as blank verse for the duration of the Renaissance and an emphasis on free will at some stage in the Romantic period. They placed works inside

evolving traditions (the novel, Christian literature, allegory, political fiction, the epic) and in contrast them with the literature of other countries. Historical critics assumed that the ideas associated with a unique age were manifested in the works of the age. This approach used has been chosen due to the fact the work entails periodic study.

Defining Contemporary American Literature with Specific References to Louise Gluck, *Seven Ages*

By defining contemporary American literature, we mean to examine striking and peculiar features that differentiate contemporary American literature from other American literary periods such as the colonial era, revolution period, the romantic era, modernism, and others. It is not just a mere attempt to define what contemporary American looks like but the unique literary themes, features, and style it demonstrates. In light of the above, we will examine some of these contemporary features in Louise Gluck, *Seven Ages*.

Louise Gluck's *Seven Ages* is about transformation and, by extension, aging, and death—the battle between faith and the fear of mortality. The title opens with a cryptic tale of a human who arrives on Earth even before the Garden of Eden when it is just dust. The narrator loves it all the same, even in its barrenness, but like many humans, she wants to possess it. How do you hold onto something that changes and is going to continue changing? The short answer is: you can't. Except maybe in a dream but even memories change.

Throughout the collection, Glück touches, tastes, and experiences a variety of things, but in "The Sensual World," she says, "I caution you as I was never cautioned:// you will never let go, you will never be satiated./You will be damaged and scarred, you will continue to hunger.//" I caution you as I was never cautioned: "Your body will age, you will continue to need/You will want the earth, then more of the earth—Sublime, indifferent, it is present, it will not respond/It is encompassing, it will not minister/Meaning, it will feed you, it will ravish you,/it will not keep you alive" (*The Seven Ages* 7)

The poet implies in the above that we have entered that garden and we have tasted the forbidden fruits, and even as we are punished, we still want more. We cannot get enough sensory input, which leads to emotional attachments that continue even as we age, even if they are not acted upon. This demonstrates the transient and vain nature of human wants and life generally.

The poet has in the above poem foregrounded the theme of time and the coming of age which are major themes and features of contemporary American literature. Just as the title reads, the poet is concerned about her fast-aging nature yet, getting all forms of discomfort from different corners of the world. As a

contemporary poet who is aware of the vain pursuits of men in this age, she queries their struggle and *get it by all means* syndrome that has taken over the world today. Another theme she brings to the fore is the theme of technology and cyberliterature. As a victim of the negative impact of technology and cyber literature. It is no longer news that the advent of technological innovations like Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, and others have exposed this present age to more cravings as people get updates daily from surfing the internet. Through cyberspace, people have been exposed to internet dating, sex, and the rest. According to the poet, even though, these things appear sweet, "Meaning, it will feed you" be rest assured that "it will ravish you" and "it will not keep you alive.

She brings her admonishment to its peak in "Birthday, were she remembers "that age. Riddled with self-doubt, self-loathing,/and at the same time suffused/with contempt for the communal, the ordinary;..." (*The Seven Ages* 20). Here, she is pictured as one outside a party, watching those who are wrapped up in the business of making friends and making connections, that is exchanging phone numbers, and pictures via phones, Facebook, Whatapp, and Twitter user names as the party progresses. Again, the narrator cautions that in silence, it is difficult to "test one's ideas. Because they are not ideas, they are the truth./". She writes further:

"Amazingly, I can look back
fifty years. And there, at the end of the gaze,
a human being already entirely recognizable,
the hands clutched in the lap, the eyes
staring into the future with the combined
terror and hopelessness of a soul expecting
annihilation." (*The Seven Ages* 20-21).

In this poem, she brings to manifest the theme of self, the voice, the world, and technology. In her own view, it is better to voice out so that others in her audience don't test or fashion ideas that will be detrimental to them in the future. Hence, she voices out to her age, cautioning them to calm down. More so, she speaks to her world in this poem as she calls on them to jettison these strange technologies that have brought more harm than good. She again speaks in "From a Journal": "how ignorant we all are most of the time./seeing things/only from one vantage, like a sniper." She puts it:

I had a lover once,
I had a lover twice,
easily three times I loved.
And in between
my heart reconstructed itself perfectly
like a worm.
And my dreams also reconstructed themselves.

After a time, I realized I was living
a completely idiotic life.
Idiotic, wasted (*The Seven Ages*, 25)

The poet brings to full manifestation the theme of self in contemporary American literature. The literature of self is that which the poet talks to him/herself in the form of a monologue. Here, the poet regrets a life wasted on frivolities. It is clear from the above that the poet is a victim of negative circumstances, retracing back her steps. She speaks to her world. She is no longer silent over these negative changes around her environment but voices out them to avert future victims. She writes:

And how sad to think
of dying before finding out
anything. And to realize
how ignorant we all are most of the time,
seeing things
only from the one vantage, like a sniper.

And there were so many things
I never got to tell you about myself,
things which might have swayed you.
And the photo I never sent, taken
the night I looked almost splendid.

I wanted you to fall in love. But the arrow
kept hitting the mirror and coming back.
And the letters kept dividing themselves
with neither half totally true.

And sadly, you never figured out
any of this, though you always wrote back
so promptly, always the same elusive letter.

I loved once, I loved twice,
and even though in our case
things never got off the ground
it was a good thing to have tried.
And I still have the letters, of course.
Sometimes I will take a few years' worth

to reread in the garden,
with a glass of iced tea.

And I feel, sometimes, part of something
very great, wholly profound and sweeping.

I loved once, I loved twice,
easily three times I loved.
(*The Seven Ages* 25).

The picture above is a typical portrayal of this age, where most people are carried away with issues of sensual and romantic relationships such that they go as far as exchanging nude pictures and videos via the internet. The poet considers all these as vanity and cautions her subjects to be weary of it. She has once loved the world and the things in it, but regrets ever loving them.

According to her, we should come away from ourselves and view the world differently, usually after

years of a narrow focus, we come to realize that we want more time. We want "to extend those days, to be inseparable from them./ So that a few hours could take up a lifetime.//” I returned to these days repeatedly convinced they were the centre of my amorous life/So that a few hours could take up a lifetime/A few hours, a world that neither unfolded or diminished /that could, at any point, be entered again - (“The Destination”, *The Seven Ages* 28).

Also present in her poetry is the theme of identity-finding out one’s personality and self. A closer study of her poems reveals this quest or search for her lost glory. Flipping through the pages of her poems, one can feel the pains and regrets of not finding herself, just like one caught in the mist. She writes:

And there were so many things
I never got to tell you about myself,
things which might have swayed you.
And the photo I never sent, taken
the night I looked almost splendid.

I wanted you to fall in love. But the arrow
kept hitting the mirror and coming back.
And the letters kept dividing themselves
with neither half totally true (*The Seven Ages*, 25).

Reading through the above lines, we can find the confusion and the eagerness to find out her personality and gain freedom from the shackle of confusion and external domination.

The Seven Ages by Louise Glück is an exploration of aging through the lens of an observer, someone who has experienced life and who has separated herself from it when necessary. The things we see are not as we expect. Indeed, the contemporary society we are in was glamourised for because it promises to be good and friendly but the opposite is the case today. It has brought so many challenges of pornography via cyber literature, aging as a result of ozone layer depletion as a result of technological advances, depression, internet theft or cybercrimes, and the rest. In reality, the things we obtain do not satiate our appetites, and in our haste to achieve things, we break them. Human frailty cannot be escaped, and we cannot return to our youth. Glück attests to these stages and says that appreciating what has come before is hard, especially when we are hungry for more and have run out of time.

Stylistically, the poems are weaved in free verses, with each line running into the other (enjambment). There is no noticeable rhythmic pattern that conforms to the modern versification pattern as we find in the works of modern poets such as Williams Butler Yeats, Ezra Pounds, Robert Frost, Henry James, and William Faulkner who wrote in the tradition of modern English poets like Shakespeare, Andrew Marvel, John Don among others. The poet did not conform to any

form of a metrical pattern or rhyme scheme but writes in free verses due to the urgency of the messages she sends. We can see this manifest in all the poems. An example will suffice: “And sadly, you never figured out/any of this, though you always wrote back/so promptly, always the same elusive letter. (pg. 25). The ideas are linked to each other with the use of enjambment, which allows the poet to run on lines. In the same vein, the lexical choices are simple, typical of a contemporary one that enables average readers to comprehend. She did not conform to the modern kind of poetry that is weaved around the concept of obscurantism: the belief that poetry must be hard, hidden, and left for the readers to crack. More so, there are manifestations of interior monologues, that is, the poetry of self. She puts it:

I wanted you to fall in love. But the arrow
kept hitting the mirror and coming back.
And the letters kept dividing themselves
with neither half totally true.

And sadly, you never figured out
any of this, though you always wrote back
so promptly, always the same elusive letter.

I loved once, I loved twice,
and even though in our case
things never got off the ground (*The Seven Ages*, 25).

The poet brings to manifest her long-suppressed feelings, as a way of gaining her sense of freedom. Reading through the lines of the poems, one can feel the deep pains of regret and the yearning for the past, she has lost, that cannot be gained. Also embellished in her poetry are elements of wit in a contemporary American literary style. Her poetry is pregnant with so much wisdom. We see it manifest in the lines below: “And how sad to think/of dying before finding out/anything. And to realize/how ignorant we all are most of the time/seeing things/only from the one vantage, like a sniper (*The Seven Ages*, 25).

Having examined the nature, features, and thematic concerns of contemporary American literature, we can therefore define contemporary American literature as literature produced in the last twenty-two years between (2000-2025) by an American or a non-American, set in America, reflecting the American experience, geography, culture, language and peculiarities featuring themes such as cyber literature, technology, identity, self, intertextuality, identity, voice, place, family, beauty, spirit, nature, wit, and the world with a contemporary literary style.

CONCLUSION

The paper has so far examined the concept of contemporary American literature with specific references to Gluck’s *The Seven Ages*. It has also x-rayed the features and thematic preoccupation of contemporary American literature, paying close attention to its peculiarities with regard to the literature of other periods in American literature. The study has shown that even though there is a close proximity between modern American literature and contemporary American literature, there are striking differences that mark them out as demonstrated in the poetry of a contemporary American poet, Louise Gluck. The paper has examined themes of cyber literature, technology, self, identity, voice, place, wit, and the world as peculiar themes that dominate contemporary American literature. It is believed that the work has contributed to knowledge.

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