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The Poetry of Louise Glück: The Search for a Feminine Self through the Lens of Kristevan Psychoanalytic Feminist Literary Theory

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“Who is ‘you?’” asks the speaker in Louise Glück’s poem “Fugue.” This question, much like the poem in which it appears, demands consideration of the significance of identity, and in particular, the identity of a young woman. In other words, what does it mean to be a woman, and to find identity in that term, that body, that conception of self? Across Glück’s poetic oeuvre, many of her poems’ central figures are feminine, yet the most recurring types of feminine figures are either a young woman, who often is distinguished as a daughter, or a mother. This paper delves into the psychoanalytic and philosophical implications for these two feminine figures, first looking at the young woman/daughter in the poem “Fugue,” and then the mother in “Persephone the Wanderer.” In these two poems, Glück shows the difficulty the young woman has with the idea of a maternal and body-focused femininity. Either the young woman desires to maintain her non-maternal, pre-adolescent self, and struggles against her mother, who represents that restrictive, female-gendered body identity onto her; or the young mother develops a narcissism with and abjection of her own body as it becomes the space wherein a child develops. The question “who is ‘you?’” for the female figures in Glück’s two poems can be better understood and analyzed through the framework of these main concepts: *chora*, potential capability, and paralogy, as well as Julia Kristeva’s concepts of the mirror stage, the abject, and narcissism. These key concepts found in “Fugue” and “Persephone the Wanderer” illustrate the complex and perilous journey of identity that a young woman experiences; as she creates and understands her self-identity, she grapples with the disjunction of her body and her mind in order to find a truer understanding of herself as an individual.

In this paper’s analysis of Glück’s poems, the concept of *chora*, as it has been developed in the field of philosophy by Jacques Derrida in his essay “Khora” and in psychoanalytic literary theory by Julia Kristeva in her dissertation *Revolution in Poetic Language*, represents a space where being and nonbeing develop into a fluid singular meaning or signification. *Chora* has often been associated with feminine attributes, namely the womb, even though these attributes function only as analogies, rather than as essential properties of *chora*. However, this fact does not dispel the significance of such analogies between *chora* and the feminine. In his essay, Derrida argues that “the femininity of the mother...will never be attributed to it/her [*chora*] as a property, something of her own” (98).

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His argument further suggests that *chora*, by possessing no essential attributes of itself (especially feminine attributes), thereby renders itself *nothing*, while also containing attributes of other things that give *chora* its shape and presence, thus making it also *something*. In connection to Glück's poems, this understanding of *chora* resembles the self-identity development in the feminine figures. The *chora* allows for the lack of a resolved feminine identity—which forms the crux of “Fugue” and “Persephone the Wanderer”—because it rests in the historical analogy of *chora* in Plato's *Timaeus* to “mother” and “nurse” (Derrida 92), and in Kristeva's comparison of it to the womb in the mother's body (27). The womb, therefore, is, in a more general sense, a symbolic *chora*. By providing a space wherein meaning, i.e. signification, and being, i.e. identity, can and cannot occur, the *chora* functions as a space of acceptance for the feminine self to be feminine, masculine, both, and neither all at the same time. Both feminine figures in “Fugue” and “Persephone the Wanderer” seek and attempt to create this space for themselves.

From this understanding of *chora*, the concept of potential capability arises to give the feminine figure in Glück's two poems her ability to attain self-identity through the simultaneous action of losing and gaining her self-being. Resembling John Keats' negative capability, but standing significantly different from it,¹ potential capability is a moment of deep self-reflection carried out as an act of creative loss, where the loss of self-identity allows for that identity to be more fully acknowledged and made aware to the individual. This uncertain state of being

¹ His concept of negative capability suggests the role of the poet as experiencing the uncertainties of different objects of being, which refers to how the human individual is passive and receptive to the experience of another object to find some meaning from that different object's perspective for the human individual (“Biography – John Keats: 1795-1821”). Potential capability, on the other hand, rests in the uncertainties of different *states* of being; i.e. rather than a person questioning what an object's reality is like, that person questions their own ability to be and not be their self. The adolescent female and pregnant woman both exemplify this capability.

occurs most readily in “Fugue,” where the young woman recognizes her unwanted transition into womanhood and thus struggles with the disjunction between her body identity and her mental one. Potential capability is also seen in “Persephone the Wanderer,” with the mother resting her identity upon the child who is simultaneously present and absent. In the application of Kristeva's theory to the Glückian mother figure in “Persephone the Wanderer,” the role and identity of “mother” is confirmed in the birth of the child, who by occupying a physical presence establishes the sign of “mother” onto her, as the child serves as a signifier for the signified relationship between the mother and child.² Yet this dependency leads to the mother substituting the child for the phallus, which then causes birth (and in the poem, Persephone's death) to function as castration and catalyst for the mother's abjection of herself, as the phallic object/child which her identity had contained both figuratively and literally within her body is now separated from her (*Powers of Horror* 13). In this manner, the mother figure demonstrates the concept of potential capability, which pushes negative capability's loss of the self into a moment of both loss and re-cognition of *becoming* and having the ability to become through loss. This concept resembles Kristeva's expansion of Jacques Lacan's mirror stage and castration, but in Glück's poetry, the two developmental moments are condensed and demonstrated through a mother's perspective on loss and re-self-identification, and through a female child on the verge of adolescence rather than in infancy. For both women, the *chora* helps to unlock potential capability by being the space wherein this occurs.

² Similar as well to Kristeva's discussion of the pre-verbal in *Powers of Horror*, the child can serve as physical analogy to “an outside in the image of the inside, made of pleasure and pain,” which then by “naming” or “introducing language” differentiates the outside from the inside (61). Yet because the Glückian mother sees the child as an extension of herself, the child is not fully an outside object to which she can attach or fully separate from as a stable identity; this results in the mother developing a narcissism that in turn affects the child's own identity development (62).

It is precisely this struggle of the young woman that is explored in the poem “Fugue,” which demonstrates the concept of potential capability along its central thread of the daughter’s search and struggle for a stable self-identity as her body and her mind take on differing gender identities. The poem’s title carries two meanings that go into play in the poem itself. Not only a musical term describing the gradual interweaving of melodies, according to the *OED Online*, fugue means “a flight from one’s own identity, often involving travel to some unconsciously desired location” (“Fugue, n.”). The daughter’s loss of awareness of her self-identity occurs along the dualism of distinctly gendered body/mind identities in a manner like the Kristevan mirror stage wherein the dual selves, the real and the image, create a “spatial intuition” that separates the subject/self, seen here as split into two genders (*Revolution* 46). The opening line works upon a stereotype of physical masculinity, yet this masculine trait appears in a feminine body: “I was the man because I was taller” (Glück 1.1). Because of the combined presence of masculinity and femininity in the speaker, she is posited in an androgynous body-self: her height defines her as a man in comparison to her sister, but not the rest of her body (1.1-4). The androgynous body that conflicts with gendered roles in society, especially as the speaker’s physically female body begins to develop, leads to an identity crisis in the daughter about her gender, her body, and the relation of these to her self-identity.

But the daughter’s body-self is not entirely paralleled with her soul-self. The soul is her masculine gendered sense of self: “[the soul] attached itself to a man. / Not a real man, the man / I pretended to be, playing with my sister” (4.2-4). Because of the gender performative aspect of the soul,³ the daughter’s self feels more identity towards what she can control, what she can, in a way, choose to be or act upon. But this

masculine soul remains in conflict with the uncontrollable performance of her feminine body, i.e. the physical changes that occur during adolescence. This conflict makes the daughter aware of the Other that her body has become, which can be seen through the distance between the masculine soul-self and the feminine body; the soul is distinguished as a “flag flown / too high on the pole” apart from “[t]he body / [that] cowers in the dreamlike underbrush” (7.2-5). This metaphor given by the daughter demonstrates how her own self-identity becomes confused and other: the soul is unreachable but desirable, and the body is unwilling to reach the soul. The lack of stable identity that results from the distance between body and soul opens the space for the daughter to reflect on her moment of self-loss, while also making her aware of the need to search for her self-identity. This moment demonstrates a flicker of potential capability beginning to be realized.

Adolescence further complicates the daughter’s struggle between femininity and masculinity, as her body-self becomes even more distinctly and unwillingly feminine during puberty. In the recurring motifs of the mother, her golden bow/harp, and the garden, the feminine speaker experiences the suppression of her truer self-identity and begins to define it in her own terms. The mother represents the oppressive, uncontrollable transition into a distinctly female-gendered body, a transition aided in the symbol of her mother’s golden bow: “A golden bow: a useful gift in wartime. // How heavy it was—no child could pick it up. // Except me: I could pick it up” (10.1-3). When the bow later changes into a harp, the harp symbolizes poetry and song, and these become the means in which the daughter can express her true identity, emblemized as the fertile but not yet flowering garden. The motifs of mother/bow obscure the presence of the masculine soul by forcing the feminine body as the sole identity for the daughter, while the motifs of the harp/garden reveal the daughter’s androgynous sense of identity within herself.

The oppressive femininity embodied by the mother threatens the daughter’s self-identity that seeks balance between femininity and masculinity. The threat of the mother, and of

³ Gender performance here refers to Judith Butler’s concept developed in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, in which she posits that “what gender ‘is,’ is always relative to the constructed relations in which it is determined” (10) and that an appearance can make “itself convincing as a ‘being’” (47).

this oppressive femininity, is emblematic in the dreams the daughter has of her mother, especially the first dream. In this dream, the mother falls out of a tree which then dies because “it had outlived its function” (6.3). Not only does this image imply the inherent ability of the mother as life-giving, but it also demonstrates that separation from the mother reverses her life-giving ability, making it a life-taking one instead. Thus, the threat the mother holds over the daughter is that to not become and embody (literally as well as figuratively) such a maternal/feminine figure is equivalent to not having a sense of being, an identity. What is interesting is that, for the daughter, to be so completely feminine in body, without any account for the mind, is what defines non-being, in that she becomes a negation or Other of herself. This idea can be seen in the second dream she has of her mother, in which she is at war with her mother and picks up her mother’s golden bow. During the war, when her mother has left her crossbow, the daughter states, “My childhood, closed to me forever, / turned gold like an autumn garden, / mulched with a thick layer of salt marsh hay” (9.4-6). She then picks up her mother’s bow, stating that “no child could pick it up. // Except me: I could pick it up” (10.2-3). These two passages demonstrate the daughter’s beginning transition into the distinctly female body that her mother symbolizes. Her childhood, now “closed to [her] forever,” and her ability to pick up her mother’s bow illustrate her self-negation by “taking up” the female body as a part of her identity that at the same time “closes” the androgynous identity she had in childhood.

The recurrence of the garden motif demonstrates the development of the feminine speaker’s inner but hidden androgynous self-identity. The autumnal garden, which on the surface appears dead but in truth is being prepared for the blossoming garden of spring, becomes the symbol of the speaker’s self-identity in the face of the threat of a purely female-gendered body self-identity. The daughter questions the finality of the threatening separation from her childhood androgyny, wondering if her childhood is “under the mulch—fertile” (12.1-2). Traditionally, the garden recalls feminine attributes in literature,

namely in its being a place of fertility and growth, and the use of the word “fertile” here likewise recalls the maternal capability. Yet the autumnal garden changes this meaning, keeping it in reference, but not being entirely defined by it. The autumnal garden effectively “hides” what will grow in the spring just as it “hides” the daughter’s sense of identity that she had in childhood that is neither feminine nor masculine, but a coalescence of both. It is in the depths of the mulch—a “very dark and very hidden” chora where meaning can arise—that the self resides (12.3). The hidden fertility of the androgynous self the daughter searches for demonstrates the search for potential capability.

At the threat of losing this androgynous self by the mother’s forced-upon femininity, the daughter attempts the process of potential capability through writing to find her true self. After taking in this feminine body as part of her identity, she is wounded by the bow as it transforms into a harp:

Then I was wounded. The bow
was now a harp, its string cutting
deep into my palm. In the dream

it both makes the wound and seals the wound.
(11.1-4)

This wounding by the bow first demonstrates the harm of taking in the female body as her sole identity. But it is important that the harp—which symbolizes poetry and literature, methods of revealing expression and conflict at an often universal scale—“both makes the wound and seals the wound” of being and becoming a woman (11.4). To be wounded and effectively healed by the same instrument then suggests that literature and poetry reveal both the pain of identity loss and the new identity that arises within that loss. The symbolic expression of self-identity in the harp is demonstrated in conjunction with the motif of the garden in the final section of “Fugue”:

I know what you want—
you want Orpheus, you want death.

Orpheus who said “Help me find Eurydice.”

Then the music began, the lament of the soul
watching the body vanish. (22.1-5)

Orpheus is hailed as one of the greatest poets and musicians in mythic legend; and to connect him with drawing Eurydice from death, which connotes images of the earth, suggests that the daughter likewise wants to write poetry that will reveal and draw out her hidden true identity from the autumnal garden. The final two lines further demonstrate the daughter’s potential capability, wherein the loss of the body causes the soul to lament that loss and to recognize the creation of a new self-identity. This lament shows the importance of the body in conjunction with the soul to achieve a sense of identity. However, the self is not restricted just to the body or to the soul. Writing and poetry allow the daughter to recognize the separation of herself from her female-gendered body, thus permitting the soul to “lament” the loss of herself that is restricted to her body, while providing a way for the young woman to create her self-identity. Writing and poetry then demonstrate the way a young woman can attain an androgynous self-identity.

Yet before writing and poetry can take place as a new symbolizing system is the pre-linguistic, i.e. pre-symbolic or non-symbolic, understanding between a mother and child. Here termed “paralanguage” as borrowed from Margaret Homans who expands upon Kristeva’s theory of the semiotic, this non-symbolic relationship allows for greater understanding of not just the young woman’s identity crisis and reconstruction when she separates from her mother, but also the mother’s. The mother has already undergone the transition from a girl to a young woman through adolescence, experiencing the identity crisis that plagues the young woman/daughter, but the mother undergoes yet another identity transformation when she becomes a mother. The physical connection of the mother to her unborn child through the womb becomes important to the shaping of the mother’s identity. During the time that she and her child are together in her body, a paralanguage develops between them. Paralanguage as defined in the *OED Online*

is the “non-phonemic but vocal component of speech, such as tone of voice, tempo of speech, and sighing, by which communication is assisted” and includes non-vocal factors such as gesture and facial expression (“Paralanguage, n.”). Because her womb functions as a figurative *chora* in which paralanguage opens or “ruptures” meaning,⁴ the mother’s body “is therefore what mediates the symbolic law organizing social relations and becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic *chora* which is on the path of destruction, aggressivity, and death” (Kristeva *Revolution* 27). Thus, the identity of the mother begins to include the child as part of herself; yet upon giving birth to her child, she experiences the physical separation of their bodies alongside a lack/loss in her self-identity. Because of this lack, the mother becomes aware of the space/*chora* her womb represents, and therefore her self-identity is in this open space from which new meaning can arrive through her potential capability.

However, when the child is born and the physical connection is separated, the paralinguistic understanding between the mother and her child becomes weaker and subordinated to spoken language, which carries figurative and abstract concepts of the things referred to in speech, contrasting the more physical or “real” language of the mother. Linguistic subordination, as the result of the physical separation of the child from the mother, leads the mother to experience yet another disruption of her concept of her self-identity. Homans in *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women’s Writing* discusses how paralanguage operates against the overwhelming

⁴ Kristeva argues that the pre-linguistic process of meaning-making between a mother and her unborn child leads to the formation of poetic language—a language that breaks from the symbolic (or figural) language we often use in everyday speech. “[T]he *chora*, as rupture and articulations (rhythm),” “is a modality of signification in which the linguistic sign is not yet articulated as the absence of an object and as the distinction between the real and symbolic,” Kristeva writes (*Revolution* 26). In this break from symbolic language is *chora*—a space for new, deeper meaning and signification beyond language, posited as undeniably real, in that it has presence and being.

usage of “figurative” or “Symbolic” language, which is associated most often with spoken language and men, though this language is not exclusive to men. Kristeva and Homans both build upon Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, yet Homans argues that paralinguage is a way to experience *chora*, through a “literalization” of language that women writers, and particularly those who are also mothers, use. This “literalization” of language that goes beyond “just words” correlates the physical connection between a mother and child as a more tangible relationship of pre-linguistic understanding between the two. Homans then argues that women writers balance between the more literal, or tangibly real, language developed in their bodies, and the more figurative or symbolic language of men, which refers mostly to ideas of the things represented in language. However, this kind of balance between the “literal” and the “figurative” poses difficulty for a woman’s concept of her self-identity. Homans argues that

...the literal both makes possible and endangers the figurative structures of literature. That we might have access to some original ground of meaning is the necessary illusion that empowers the acts of figuration that constitute literature... This possibility is always, but never more than, a threat, since literal meaning cannot be present in a text: it is always elsewhere. This position of the literal poses special problems for women readers and writers because literal language... is traditionally classified as feminine, and the feminine is, from the point of view of a predominantly androcentric culture, always elsewhere too. A dualism of presence and absence, of subject and object, structures everything our culture considers thinkable; yet women cannot participate in it as subjects as easily as can men because of the powerful, persuasive way in which the feminine is again and again said to be on the object’s side of that dyad. Women who do conceive of themselves as subjects—that is, as present, thinking women rather than as “woman”—must continually guard against fulfilling those imposed definitions by being returned to the position of the object. (4)

Women’s identities, then, operate between the two languages of figuration and paralinguage to develop a truer understanding of meaning between their bodies and their subjective selves, in the Kristevan sense of being the subject rather than object of their identity. For the mother, especially, this complexity of identity located in language and body together places not just her body as a *chora* of meaning for the child, but places her in her own *chora* of meaning development, as she is and is not a part of the dominant figurative language (operating within paralinguage) and both is and is not herself in her *body*.

This complexity and *agon* of the mother’s identity closely relates to Kristeva’s theory of the abject, as the mother’s body becomes both repulsive and fascinating to herself, not just to the child. Through the *chora* comes the realization of this abjection to the mother—she begins to experience herself as both subject and object juxtaposed against her own non-being/non-subjectivity/non-objectivity that has resulted in the birth and further separation of her child (Kristeva *Powers* 99-109, 161). The abjection of the mother’s identity can be seen in Glück’s second version of “Persephone the Wanderer,” which demonstrates the mother’s grief in response to her daughter’s death and separation, showing how the mother’s identity and being shift in connection to her daughter’s. Removing the “problems of sexuality” by retelling the story of Persephone as if she had died, rather than was raped, the poem can focus on the mother, who remains the primary figure in the story, representative of the concepts of grief and mother identity (3-6). Yet the mother’s grief highlights and focuses the attention on what it means to be a mother when the child, who establishes the mother’s identity as such, is gone.

We have here
a mother and a cipher: this is
accurate to the experience
of the mother as

she looks into the infant’s face. She thinks:
I remember when you didn’t exist. (9-14)

The “cipher” suggests the dilemma of the mother:

Persephone's death leaves Demeter to question her identity as a mother. Persephone's presence in death and in the absent-like "before" of her existence transform and redefine the mother's identity. By remembering a "before" before the child's existence, the mother's meaning of herself as a woman has changed. In the "before," the mother's body is her own, that upon the child's entrance into it is altered forever. For Demeter, her mother identity is inextricably attached to her daughter, most especially to her daughter's presence of being. In contrast, Persephone, who is never a mother, experiences the anxiety of becoming one, of becoming a being that is two-in-one that is and is not wholly herself, mentally and bodily. But she is the cipher that transforms the mother's meaning of herself. In her own transformations of being and not-being, Persephone continues to transform the mother's meaning by her presence and her absence. It is specifically the felt absence of her now in death that causes the existential grief of the mother.

The child, however, has yet to grasp the abjection that the mother is experiencing. Having no concept of a time "before" with her own existence, the child understands the role of the mother as "wait[ing]" for the child to arrive in order to place the meaning of "mother" onto her:

... Her mother
is like a figure at a bus stop,
an audience for the bus's arrival. Before that,
she was the bus, a temporary
home or convenience. (18-22)

The "before" now has appeared in the form of the mother *as* the bus that carries the child, who then becomes the central figure that the mother anticipates and is separated from. The bus metaphor illustrates Kristeva's analogy of the *chora* to the womb as a transformative place of meaning-making by being indefinable and unstable. In the process of "carrying" a child, the woman/mother undergoes a self-identity transformation, as the meaning of "mother" is itself unstable while the child is in the womb. The bus metaphor further maintains her in this *becoming* role of mother, as she is always in anticipation of

or moving towards the child. When Persephone appears as a figure "staring out the window of the chariot," the focus shifts briefly back onto Persephone's state of being rather than the mother's (22-3). The choice of the word "chariot" connotes a relationship to death, as it recalls the myth of Persephone being carried away by Hades, the god of the Underworld or death, in his golden chariot. But then the question becomes whether Persephone is being carried into or out of "death" in this moment. Because the child does not exist before being in the mother's womb, the child is essentially non-existent and dead until the child is brought into life by the mother and lives until death comes again. Persephone, then, presents that kind of dual movement into and out of death in this moment, which in turn presents a dual identity-transformation of the woman-mother into, and possibly out of, motherhood.

Indeed, Demeter's mother identity relies greatly on Persephone's state of being, as the mother's abjection is caused by the twofold loss of the daughter (through birth and death), which thus leads the mother into a "narcissistic crisis" (Kristeva *Powers* 14). While Persephone has "two adults: death and her mother" (29) that shape her state of being, she has "twice what her mother has: her mother has // one child, a daughter" to influence her conception of herself and her identity (31-33). "As a god, she could have had / a thousand children" (34-35), but the significance of having an only child demonstrates the deeper narcissistic connection Demeter has and depends on with her daughter. This increased importance on Persephone is further demonstrated in the "hostility" (38) and "deep violence of the earth" (37) that Demeter, in her grief and resulting identity crisis, commits on the earth. This action demonstrates how "[t]he object is the violence of mourning for an 'object' that has always already been lost" (Kristeva *Powers* 15). Because Persephone is dead, Demeter wants to follow suit, having "no wish / to continue as a source of life" (39-40), effectively negating her understanding and role of "mother" as a fertile or life-producing being. While the mother's grief structures the dilemma she faces, her hostility and violence signify the mother's reactions to her

daughter's death as reflective representations of her own turmoil and abjection of her self-identity as a mother.

To restore her self-identity as a mother, Demeter "wanders the earth," searching for herself by trying to find and bring back Persephone from death (46). The necessity of bringing Persephone's *presence* back to life, her physical bodily self, suggests that for Demeter, the daughter's physical self is a part of the mother's physical, and internal, conceptualization of self.

What is she planning, seeking her daughter?
 She is issuing
 a warning whose implicit message is:
what are you doing outside my body? (56-9)

The mother's pain and grief at the loss of her child is most especially drawn from the physical separation between the two. Yet this separation is not just from the mother's own body, but also from the earth, which, being Demeter's godly domain, acts as an extension and representation of her own body. The bodily connection between mother and daughter heightens in importance here. Since the woman/mother first formed her identity around her body's transformation to become a mother during pregnancy, while the meaning of the daughter occurs within the conceptual womb-*chora*, the child's separation from the mother not just through birth but also through death demonstrates the mother's double loss of self. Possessing the womb-*chora*, she provides a framework that shapes as much the child as herself, and the child's presence shapes the mother, too. The question "*what are you doing outside my body?*" also implies that the daughter cannot exist without or outside of the mother's body, yet this question also demonstrates the way the *chora* allows for the mother's narcissism and abjection to arise. This existential identification within the mother is further shown as

the daughter's body
 doesn't exist, except
 as a branch of the mother's body
 that needs to be

reattached at any cost. (64-8)

Recalling how Persephone was an "existential replica" of the mother in an earlier "Persephone the Wanderer" poem, here she is again a physical, existing body that needs to be a part of the mother. The daughter embodies a necessary part or property (in the logical sense of property as a trait that necessarily follows from a thing's essence) of the mother's meaning and significance; otherwise, the mother faces the question of "Is she really a mother without her child?"

This separation between the mother and the daughter demonstrates a weakening of the paralinguistic understanding of the two, thus allowing for a masculine voice operating with figurative language to appear as an authority on reality at the end of the poem. The weakened paralinguistic appears in the question the speaker directs toward the reader: "You must ask yourself: / are the flowers real?" (84-85). Flowers being emblematic of Persephone's return/renewal into life suggest Demeter's return/renewal into her mother identity. But the cost of this return/renewal is the threat of reality: "either [Persephone] was not dead or / she is being used / to support a fiction" that real things can return (88-90). These passages instill doubt into the idea that a physical state of being is like a *real* state of being, thus suggesting doubt in the mother's paralinguistic understanding of herself with her child through her body (recalling that the daughter is "a branch of the mother's body" and is not strictly her, the daughter's, own body). In this moment of doubt of the reality of the mother's identity, subsuming her daughter's within that identity, the speaker approaches Zeus in death, asking "how can I endure the earth?" (94). Endurance of the physical world, of reality, is not met with physical language, but rather with figurative language, as Zeus answers that "those fields of ice will be / the meadows of Elysium" (99-100). The confluence of winter with the idyllic and heroic realm of the dead demonstrates the way figurative language takes the literal object or signified meaning and positions it into a signifier that contains other traces and nuances of meaning. Here arises the situation that Homans described in her book

how women's literal language "both makes possible and endangers the figurative structures of literature" (4). The paralanguage of the mother attempts to make reality her identity in relation to her daughter's state of being, but this narcissism in turn has threatened that very connection, therefore allowing the figurative language of Zeus to arrive and give the final voice in the poem, demonstrating the symbolic language of the father as having more authority than the body language of the mother.

In her essay, "Entering Language in Louise Glück's *The House on Marshland: A Feminist Reading*," Diane S. Bonds argues that Glück's poetry demonstrates the purposeful "disconcertion of the...literal and figurative" languages through a "[dramatized] collision" of the androcentric and gynocentric myths of language (60). What she finds in Glück's poetry is that "the process by which literary meaning is constructed depends upon the death of absence of the literal, of nature" and that many poems "question or undermine the opposition of male self and female other" (71). With Bonds' essay in mind, the ending to "Persephone the Wanderer" demonstrates this "collision" between masculine, figurative language and feminine or literal paralanguage. The mother's identity, vulnerable and threatening to be lost in literal reality ("those fields of ice" which represent the death of Persephone), can continue to exist in figurative language or in a blending of figurative with body language: "those fields of ice will be / the meadows of Elysium" (99-100). Still, the ambiguity remains as to whether it is the mother in control of her identity at this moment or the father.

Glück's poems explore and illustrate the truth of the perilous journey a young woman takes as she grows up and becomes a woman of and beyond her body and mind. This difficult and traumatic journey places her in a deep identity crisis which threatens the loss of herself by being forced into a new identity. Her reaction to this self-transformation—rejection and/or reconciliation—resounds in the lines from the titular poem of Louise Glück's Pulitzer Prize-winning collection of poetry, *The Wild Iris* (1992):

I tell you I could speak again: whatever
returns from oblivion returns
to find a voice. (18-20)

In the journey a female individual takes as she grows up, the oblivion of identity loss is ever present, posing simultaneously as the opposition *and* the gateway toward her return to her self-identity. The young woman in Glück's poetry enters the decades-long feminist discourse of "what it means to be a woman." In Glück's poems a woman is not defined as just her body or as what her body can produce. When she is, she struggles against this limitation of self-identity as forced upon her by others. What she truly is, is her body and more; she is deep, emotionally and intellectually, and deep within a *chora* of her self-conception. The way the young woman achieves any awareness of her self-creation is through *chora*, which provides the necessary space for her potential capability to occur and for the strict definitions of female/femininity and male/masculinity to assemble into androgyny and gender fluidity. From the "oblivion" that is *chora* arises voice, self-identity, and finally the *woman*, embodied in, beyond, and ultimately by herself.

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