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## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL UNDERTONES IN THE SELECT POEMS OF LOUISE GLUCK

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### Abstract

*In this article, the researcher derived poems from Louise Gluck. Glück replicates and revises her lyrical patterns in A Village Life (2009) to reflect philosophical shifts. Thus, repetition becomes crucial to our comprehension of Glück's poetry since it serves as the cornerstone on which she enacts transformation. She recalled the event and said, "The moment I started teaching, I started writing. A miracle occurred (Moyer, 2016). She clung to her youth, which she regarded as the most enjoyable stage of both her own life and of human existence in general and which served as the inspiration for much of her poetry, as a result of these psychological upheavals throughout her late adolescent and adult years. It is usual to see "confession as part of a broader discourse of gender and sexuality, and indeed identity" in the context of confessional poetry (Gill, 2006, p. 6). This autobiographical viewpoint makes it possible to assume that the poet herself is the speaker in her poems. Observations on William Wordsworth's poetical philosophy.*

Keywords: Autobiographical, Poems, Louise Gluck Etc.

### Introduction

Louise Glück's poetry is renowned for its propensity for change; each of her eleven volumes purposefully diverges from her earlier work, and Glück herself has expressed a wish to avoid "repeating" herself in her writing. I'll make the case that Glück paradoxically uses patterns of repetition—titles, themes,

forms, and syntax—to deepen her meaning in her later collections. In the *Wild Iris* (1992) author Glück crafts a "prayer sequence" of poems by using the names "Matins" and "Vespers" again. This invokes the Divine Office and refers to the conflict between faith and doubt. Glück retells the narrative of Persephone in *Averno* (2006), making comments about the morals and purposes of doing so. Finally, Glück replicates and revises her lyrical patterns in *A Village Life* (2009) to reflect philosophical shifts. Thus, repetition becomes crucial to our comprehension of Glück's poetry since it serves as the cornerstone on which she enacts transformation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

“Without remembering, there is no identity. In amnesia, one loses oneself. In memory, one finds an identity.”

Kevin Vanhoozer (2005)

The issue of identity crisis and how to overcome it is one of several that can be found in the works of American poet Louise Elisabeth Glück, born in 1943, who has received numerous literary honours and awards and served as the country's Poet Laureate from 2003 to 2004. She is one of the prominent contemporary female poets in America, and many psychological difficulties are addressed in her writing (Doreski, 1995, p. 150). The circumstances of Glück's life have a significant impact on the way she handles identity issues. She didn't seem to have any major problems when she was a little child. My family was quite amazing," she wrote in her essay "The Education of the Poet" from her book *Proofs and Theories: Essays on Poetry* (1994). Both of my parents valued intellectual prowess; my mother in particular prized artistic abilities. My mother fought to attend college at a time when women were not typically well educated (p. 5). Glück and her sister were raised by indulgent parents who granted all of their desires. The poet recalls,

My sister and I were encouraged by every gift. If we hummed we got music lessons. If we skipped, dance. And so on. My mother read to us, then taught us to read very early. Before I was three, I was well grounded in the Greek myths, and the figures of those stories, together with certain images from the illustrations, became fundamental referents. My father told stories. (Glück, 1994, p. 7)

The onset of an eating disorder called anorexia nervosa, which includes loss of appetite and weight among its symptoms, forced her to seek treatment, was the first significant issue she faced during her late youth and early adulthood. She recalled, "one day, I told my mother I thought perhaps I should see a psychoanalyst" (Glück, 1994, p. 11), which led to her undergoing seven years of psychoanalytic therapy and having her academic courses interrupted to prepare for her rehabilitation program (Morris, 2006, p. 24). She fought desperately to stay alive. She once reflected on those trying times by writing, "I realized that I had no control over this conduct at all."

I was more conscious of the fact that I didn't want to pass away (Morris, 2006, p. 26). She developed the mindset that the past—whether it be one person's history, such as the time of childhood and adolescence, or the historical past—is the time of joy and glory, in contrast to the present, which she views as "an allegory

of waste" (Azcuay, 2011, p. 11). She treasures the past so much that she constantly imagines and "reimagines" it (Bloom, 2011, p. 80). However, Glück was able to turn tragedy into optimism since she gained a lot of knowledge from her own psychoanalytic case. She gained critical thinking, introspection, and speaking skills from it:

Analysis taught me to think. Taught me to use my tendency to object to articulated ideas on my own ideas, taught me to use doubt, to examine my own speech for its evasions and excisions. It gave me an intellectual task capable of transforming paralysis – which is the extreme form of self-doubt – into insight. I was learning to use native detachment to make contact with myself, which is the point, I suppose, of dream analysis. (Glück, 1994, p. 12)

Thinking of "detachment" as a type of "contact" may seem counterintuitive, but knowing how Glück uses this paradox to inform her approach to 88 identity crisis and her strategy for avoiding its unfavorable resolution is essential. Similar to Lee Upton's (2005) observation, Glück's poetry is said to be "woven with a certain detachment toward her sources and toward the reader" (p. 85). The analysis of Glück's collection *The Seven Ages* in this chapter will demonstrate how detached Glück is in her treatment of the issue of an identity crisis. After Glück was married and got divorced twice, more issues arose (Morris, 2006, p. 29). Grace Cavalieri interviewed her in 2006, and she talked about the "horrors" of divorce and how much it costs.

In most of her poems, the human speaker's yearning to have a transcendent viewpoint on her loss of innocence is projected as nostalgia, as Daniel Morris (2006) noted in his analysis of her work (p. 77). The statement "Every poem is the passion of Louise Glück, starring the anguish and suffering of Louise Glück" has also been made (Robbins, 2020). This nostalgia is accompanied by a rejection of and alienation from the current state of humanity:

What is most powerful in Glück's work, however, is not simply the struggle, nor the transformation of the personal into the mythic, but the responses of each speaker, echoed forcefully in the form and texture of each poem. In the face of every wound, Glück and her speakers respond with a stony silence, a sense of brooding isolation that acts as both a weapon and a barrier.

(Cucinella, 2002, p. 150)

Through her emphasis on recollection, nostalgia, and autobiographical descriptions of her youth, she addresses the issue of identity in her verse. She once said, "I draw on the tools my life has given me," in an interview with Grace Cavalieri from 2006 89 According to Cyril Mun (2008), Glück's poetry "uses the Modernist strategy of speaking through the masks of mythical figures to elevate the merely personal and autobiographical, and she also combines it with suggestive references to a brand of popular, present-day reality." Glück's verse can be described as an "autobiographical journey of spiritual and existential self-

discovery." For instance, Glück "looks back on her youth, especially recollections regarding her sister, and also turns her lyric attention to nature, to confront her mortality" in her collection *The Seven Ages* (2001). (Mun, 2008, p. 19). The criticism that Louise Glück is "clearly a Confessional poet in some basic sense" is closely tied to the autobiographical quality of her poetry (Baker, 2018). Confessional poetry focuses on the poet's unique circumstances and experiences (Abrams and Harpham, 2012, p. 62).

It is usual to see "confession as part of a broader discourse of gender and sexuality, and indeed identity" in the context of confessional poetry (Gill, 2006, p. 6). This autobiographical viewpoint makes it possible to assume that the poet herself is the speaker in her poems. Observations on William Wordsworth's poetical philosophy, Glück once wrote that

The idea of "a man talking to men," the premise of honesty, depends on a delineated speaker. And it is precisely on this point that confusion arises, since the success of such a poetry creates in its readers a firm belief in the reality of that speaker, which is expressed as the identification of the speaker with the poet. This belief is what the poet means to engender. (Glück, 1994, p. 43)

Wordsworth's belief in childhood and the innocence associated with childhood (Williams, 1996, p. 134) also suits Glück's themes of nostalgia and the loss of innocence which are incorporated into the topic of identity crisis presented in *The Seven Ages*.

### **IDENTITY CRISIS IN THE SEVEN AGES (2001)**

*The Seven Ages*, Glück's poetry book, is named after a soliloquy from William Shakespeare's comedy *As You Like It*, which features mistaken identities as one of its 90 major themes. The title is directly tied to the subject of identity crisis (Chandra, 2015). One of the characters, Jaques, offers a pessimistic outlook on life in the seventh scene of the second act by comparing the real world to a stage in a theatre. The soliloquy begins with the following lines:

All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances,  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages.  
(Shakespeare, 2006, p. 227)

Jaques then describes a man at these seven ages as being an "infant", a "schoolboy", a "lover", a "soldier", a "justice", a "pantaloon", and finally a "second childishness" (Shakespeare, 2006, p. 227). The concept of a second childhood is comparable to the psychological concept of a "second adolescence," which was covered in this thesis' first chapter. Shakespeare's concept of the seven eras of man was not original, according to David Bevington in his 2005 book *Shakespeare: The Seven Ages of Human Experience*. In actuality, it was borrowed from earlier authors and was firmly founded in medieval philosophy (p. 6). Since

the idea of rebirth is directly tied to the resolution of the identity crisis, Glück's collection's title highlights "the notion of rebirth that has been important to Glück's poetry journey" (Mun, 2008, p. 70).

By choosing this title for her book, Glück makes clear how she views the psychological stages of human development and the changes in identity that occur as people age from infancy to adulthood. The collection's first poem is titled "The Seven Ages," taking its cue from the name of the book. Focusing on several concepts and issues establishes the tone and theme of the work. It is Glück's lyrical adaptation of Genesis, the first book of the Bible, the story of creation. Genesis claims that Adam and Eve were banished from paradise as a result of their transgression.

Their fall from grace and expulsion from heaven indicates their "loss of innocence" (Fruchtenbaum, 2008, p. 97). They, therefore, underwent a physical and moral transformation in their identity:

Their physical condition, it is plain, was greatly changed. They had heretofore enjoyed a painless, careless existence, with an unending vista of happiness. They now entered upon a scene of toil and suffering, with death and its terrors at no great distance in prospect. They had also undergone a moral change. This has been described as a corruption, disorganization, of their nature.

(Mitchell, 1897, pp.924-925)

Adam and Eve did not appreciate this metamorphosis as a result of losing their former elegance, joy, comfort, and purity and being exposed to a world of suffering, cruelty, anguish, and corruption. There are two sections to the poem. The speaker experiences a dream in the opening section that she refers to as "my first dream" (Glück, 2001, p. 343). It depicts a world filled with contradictions where the "bitter," "sweet," and "forbidden" coexist. The speaker then experiences what she refers to as her "second" dream:

In my second I descended  
I was human, I couldn't just see a thing  
beast that I am  
I had to touch, to contain it  
I hid in the groves; I worked in the fields until the fields were bare —  
time that will never come again —  
the dry wheat bound, caskets of figs and olives  
I even loved a few times in my disgusting human way  
and like everyone I called that accomplishment  
erotic freedom, absurd as it seems. (Glück, 2001, p. 343)

Words like "descended," "hid," and "figs" refer to the Genesis account of Adam and Eve who, after eating the forbidden fruit, felt ashamed of their nakedness and covered themselves with fig leaves. This passage also uses the adjectives "bare," "dry," "disgusting," and "absurd" to describe the earth as it appears in the speaker's second dream. Such phrases reveal Glück's poetic tone. The poet makes a clear comparison between the second and first dreams to demonstrate that the speaker did not benefit from the drop. After the



plunge, the speaker's only "accomplishment" was "erotic freedom," which Glück considers to be both "absurd" and "disgusting."

The speaker's decision to depart the first world is another significant point regarding this decline that is made in the poem. I had to beg to descend, the speaker claims. This demonstrates that the speaker was not forced to undergo the transition. The system that controls how the speaker's actions and behaviour are affected also appears to exist. There is a reaction to every action, as demonstrated by the words "I took, I was taken" and "I dreamed / I was betrayed." The speaker had the opportunity to seize and dream in the first world, and as a result, there is loss and betrayal in the second world. It's crucial to understand that the event this poem describes affects all of humanity, not just one person.

## Conclusion

First-person pronouns denote a group experience. The "I" in the poem is "a more general and symbolic 'I' that the poet has used to address the price of our existence," according to Mun (2008). (p. 71). To establish the mood and concept for the remainder of the collection, this poem is included at the start. It encapsulates Glück's perspective on identity evolution. There is no indication of development or advancement in the switch from the speaker's previous identity to the new one. The fact that there is no opportunity to bring back the first world makes this change heartbreaking because it is a "time that will never come again." Accordingly, Glück's poem characterizes the resolution of the identity crisis as a "preemptive" (Glück, 2001, p. 343) that a person feels, and the result of this resolution is painful or at least not as pleasurable as the earlier self-concept that has been given up.

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