The (Dis)enchanted Liminal Representation of the Female in the Poetry of Louise Glück

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Abstract

The shift in the approach to enchantment from complete rejection by Max Weber in the 20th century to the spread of "enchanted" worldviews at the outset of the 21st has led to a new revised paradigm in which both rationalism and enchantment are intertwined and can be dealt with as complementary rather than contradictory. The liminal representation of the creative psyche has established a realm where both rationalization and imagination interact in novel manners, formulating a "second life" and a "second nature." This view takes Belk *et al*'s (2021) Disenchanted Enchantment Model (DEM) as a basis for reevaluating the power-orientated *status-quo* of the female, transforming it into a form of initiation in which productivity and freedom become the new norm. The 2020 Nobel Prize winner Louise Elisabeth Glück (1943-2023) manifests in her poems a modernist version of this paradigm. This form of disenchanted enchantment has given her a liminal time-space in which she could revisit issues such as the female's relation to family, husband, children, and nature, using world myths, rituals and fairytales. This paper examines the liminal representation of the female that could, through the DEM model, reshape her identity and comment on pivotal issues in a female's life. As such, the present study can pave the way for a new handling of the benefits of liminal thinking and the presentation of (dis)enchantment.

Keywords: Louise Glück, liminality, (dis)enchantment, myth, DEM, second nature

"التمثيل البيني (غير)المسحور للأنثى في شعر لويز جليك"

مستخلص:

عقب ذيوع صيت المذهب العقلاني الذي انتهجه ماكس فيبر وانتشاره كالنار في الهشيم بين علماء الاجتماع والدراسات الإنسانية بصفة عامة إبان القرن العشرين، تعالت الأصوات المنادية بتهافت هذا النهج، نظرًا للدور الذي يلعبه الخيال وأدواته من قصص تراثية ودينية وأساطير في تشكيل العقل البشري وتأطير العلاقات البشرية داخل المجتمع. ومن هذا المنطلق، يقدم بيلك وآخرون (2021) نموذجًا للتمازج بين العقلانية والخيال السحري مكونًا من أربع مراحل تمثل ما يمر به المرء من خبرات مستمرة في الحياة، بدءًا من الرغبة الجامحة في الوصول للمستحيل ثم الوصول إليه عبر الخيال المسحور، يليها مرحلة الاستمتاع بما حققه المرء من إنجاز في الوصول لمبتغاه، لتنتهي حلقات النموذج بالمرحلة الرابعة وهي العقلانية في الحكم على الأمور والخروج من دائرة السحر لتبدأ الدورة ذاتها من جديد. ونظرًا لما تمر به الأنثى من تقلبات حياتية تجعلها أكثر تمرسًا بنموذج بيلك وآخرين، يمكن النظر إلى تلك التقلبات والمراحل من منظور حَدّي بيني يقوم على ما قال به عالما الاجتماع أرنولد فان جينيب وفيكتور تيرنر في أهمية تلك المرحلة الحدية التي يمر بها المرء عند انتقاله من مرحلة أو تقلب حياتي لآخر. وتتمثل تلك الأهمية في الشعور بالتحرر من كل القيود السابقة والفرصة المواتية لإعادة تشكيل هوية الفرد في ضوء تلك الحرية، مما يعطي أساسًا قويًا لهذه الدراسة التي تتناول أشعار الكاتبة الأمريكية لويز جليك الحائزة على جائزة نوبل في الآداب عام 2020 من منظوري التمازج بين العقلانية والخيال في نموذج بيلك وآخرين وكذلك النظرة الحدية البينية، التي استطاعت الشاعرة من خلالهما إعادة تأطير العلاقة بين الرجل والمرأة على أساس الإتقان والإبداع وليس على أساس القوة والهيمنة التي عانت منهما المرأة كثيرًا.

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Introduction

The disenchanted enchantment discourse has preoccupied several sociologists as well as anthropologists (Michael Saler 2006, Sara Lyons 2014, Belk *et al* 2021). The basic contention of these studies is the major shift from Max Weber's phrase (the disenchantment of the modernist world) which has acquired wide currency to the belief that Western modernity is still enchanted, providing an antinomial understanding of modernity as a case of disenchanted enchantment; rather than one of an enchanted disenchantment. It seems useful for the purpose of this study to start with the limitations set by Weber's disenchantment of the world, then to proceed to the examination of the view of disenchanted enchantment.

One of the constraints set by the Weberian claim of disenchantment is the limited view to the past, hinted at by Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000). The role played by the past in formulating human minds throughout ages is, in Weber's view, understated, since most emphasis is given to the rationalization, the secularization and bureaucratization of the world. Another disadvantage of the disenchantment of the West is the loss of "the overarching meanings and spiritual purposes formerly provided by religious worldviews" Saler (2006, 693). Ironically, Saler finds that the Western elites have been "enchanted" with the incantatory phrase "the disenchantment of the world" (693). With the passage of time, disenchantment has been proven to be a spell enchanting elite modernist thinking that depends mainly on the power-oriented relations of master-slave. Finally, a disenchanted world, one rid of myths, rituals and fairytales, is ultimately dehumanizing; it is deprived of one of its pillars: spirituality.

Depending on the dialectic of enchantment and disenchantment, Russell Belk, Henri Weijo, and Robert Kozinets (2021) have provided a model for disenchanted enchantment. Despite the limitation of their study to the world of business and marketing, it takes as its core the human aspects of desire and enchantment, making enough room for transporting their findings to the humanities in general, and literature in particular. Belk *et al* base their Disenchanted Enchantment Model (DEM) on both Weber's and Saler's work. For Belk *at al*, the consumer of technology, representing for the purpose of this study humans in general, and the

liminoid female in particular, moves in a cycle that starts with enchantment, then proceeds to disenchantment, frustration and ends with enchantment again. As will be examined in the forthcoming sections below, the common factor upon which Belk *et al* build their paradigm of the (dis)enchanted consumer is desire: an innate component of the female's experiences of the world and the driving force for most of her behaviors.

The second basic component of this study is the benefits highlighted by theorists of liminality and liminal thinking pioneered by Arnold van Gennep (1960), Victor Turner (1969), Bjørn Thomassen (2015) and others. Van Gennep's seminal work *Rites of Passage* (1960) formulates a threefold model of initiation into a new phase in human life such as adulthood, marriage and death. They are separation, transition and reintegration (11). In *The Ritual Process* (1969), Turner has investigated in detail the second phase of transition (i.e. liminality) and highlighted a number of benefits of being on the threshold, paramount of which are the feelings of freedom as a result of the separation from the old long-held beliefs and the time-space granted for reshaping one's identity.

With these two components in mind (i.e. the Disenchanted Enchantment Model and liminal representation), the present study explores the techniques through which American poet Louise Glück (1943-2023) could present the female as one who is totally dis(enchanted) in the sense that she could grasp both the physical and spiritual, the material and imaginary simultaneously. Assisted with the freed identity reshaped in the liminal time-space 2hich is primarily possible due to initiation into several phases of human life, the poet could move freely from the disenchanted present to the enchanting past, represented in world myths, rituals and traditional fairytales laden with a wealth of cultural connotations.

The female in Glück's poems is one who celebrates a power-free relation with the family, the husband and even death. Liminal thinking makes the liminoid female abler to cope with the master-slave, male-female power relations that have preoccupied most of the academia throughout the first and second waves of feminist thinking. Since being on the threshold in most of her life span - moving from being a girl to an adult to a wife then a mother – gives the female a true sense of the utopian void which marks the absence of the power relationships that have long been characteristic of the feminist approaches to most issues related to patriarchy. Instead of the struggle for adequate rights (political voting and equal pay, for example) in the first and second waves of

feminism, the liminal female has been much more preoccupied with proving her creative productive Self, regardless to her stance from the male, the family and the whole society.

A study of select poems from the various volumes by Glück – notably *Ararat, The Triumph of Achilles* and the *Wild Iris* – will unmask this liminoid female: at once in good terms with her surroundings thanks to the DEM cycle of desire through which she has become assertive of her productivity and ableness to be really what she aspires for.

The (Dis)enchanted Glückian Female

In the wake of her winning the Nobel Prize in literature in 2020, *The Guardian* highlighted that Louise Glück is the first American woman poet to receive the world-class award 27 years after Toni Morrison. The major reason is "her unmistakable poetic voice that with austere beauty makes individual existence universal." Claudia Rankine, Glück's fellow poet, told the Guardian that "Louise has spent a lifetime showing us how to make language both mean something and hold everything" (*The Guardian*). The universality of Glück's poetic voice stems from her infatuation with the female's independence and role in guiding others to apprehend life from a novel vista, devoid of all forms of power-oriented relations which did found a patriarchal image of the female.

Most of Glück's poems are the byproduct of experiences of loss and frustration in her family life as a sister, a daughter, a wife and a divorced. This accounts for her presentation of myths in a very personal way. She balances enchantment with disenchantment; she does not recount the mythical or religious story as is. On the contrary, she reverses the traditional story line to delve into a female's space where she showcases a woman's productivity and will-power, distorting the long-held belief that a female is, and must always be, under patriarchal control expressed in the maxim of might-makes-right. Notable examples of such reread stories include Abishag, Persephone, Ulysses, Odysseus, Joan of Arc, and Gretel, to name just a few.

In the Biblical story, Abishag is King David's royal concubine who is, by nature, silenced and made an object of male desire. In "Abishag," she becomes, in Glück's view, a creative female power. The temporal element in Abishag's story in the poem is when she was still a young girl full of potential, just before she was taken a nursemaid to the aging King David. However, Glück transforms Abishag from one who is helplessly obeys the "word of God" and her father into a more autonomous female who has the luxury of the freedom of choice:

In the recurring dream my father
stands at the doorway in his black cassock

telling me to choose
among my suitors, each of whom
will speak my name once
until I lift my hand in signal. (97)

Clothed as a priest, the father now bears the double connotation of God and man. The lines respond to the traditional representation of Abishag, and the poet, as silent and powerless. She, rather, has the will to choose among her suitors. Pronouncing her name as part of the method of choice negates her stillness. Even if she is silent, a "signal" by her hand will determine the successful suitor. Daniel Morris finds in this revision of Abishag's story "a source of potentially subversive strength, an expression of dignity in inconspicuousness that cannot be contained by Abishag's father, David, Solomon, or Adonijah" (83). Instead of choosing one suiter, it is Abishag who decides that they were "not all alike," and it is also she who refuses all of them and prefers death, or suicide in Morris's interpretation, to marrying one who once absented her from society. This reading of Abishag's story asserts the poet's own attitude towards her family members in general, and her father in particular, who, to use Glück's words in *Proofs and Theories* (1994), frustrated her as they had "the right…to complete the sentence of another" although she had "a strong desire to speak….My sentences were, in being cut off, radically changed" (5).

In the case of Penelope in Homer's *The Odyssey*, Glück reverses, in *Meadowlands,* the tale of the forsaken, helpless wife (Penelope) whose husband (Odysseus) leaves her, wandering after the end of the Trojan wars for ten years. The image of their son (Telemachus), who is torn between his desire to safeguard his mother and restore his father back home, completes the overall portrayal of a family on the verge of dissolution. The story parallels Glück's familial crisis, giving Morris ample evidence to maintain that Penelope represents the poet's alter ego (235). One way to forebear Odysseus' absence is expressed in "Penelope's Song" in which Penelope finds common ground between her and her husband:

He will be home soon
It behooves you to be
generous. You have not been completely
perfect either, with your troublesome body (308)

The poem bears witness to the split nature of Penelope's situation: at times she does not deserve to be deserted by a reckless husband since she is too "generous" to be victimized, while at others she equates both of them as not "perfect;" accepting the sense of shared guilt.

As for Telemachus, his representation is Glückian par excellence. The traditional story tells of his heroic role in holding off the advances of the suitors that show an endless attempt to marry his mother. It is he who spares no effort in restoring his father home. Nonetheless, Glück portrays his psychological agony due to his parents' maltreatment. This accounts for the aggressive attitude he takes towards them. He laments his mother for not paying attention to her son's role in the family. He confesses:

> It seemed clear to me
> that from her perspective
> I didn't exist, since
> my actions had
> no powers to disturb her
> ……
> I used to smile
> when my mother wept.
> I hope now she could
> forgive my cruelty; I hope
> she understood how like
> her own coldness it was,
> a means of remaining
> separate from what
> one loves deeply. (324-25)

The three pillars of the family – mother, father and son – are suffering of both physical and psychological detachment. By the end of the volume, the son declares that his only remedy for his suffering is through self-distancing from both parents. Like Glück herself that could not forgive her dead sister and parents for whatever suffering she underwent, Telemachus would "look at (his) parents / impartially, and pity them both." The reason for this is that, according to Morris, "his parents impeded his ability to form his own identity independent of their versions of him" (247). His is exactly Glück's cry for self-assertion and desire to prove her productivity, and hence, importance to all the family members.

A third example of Glück's inversion of the mythical tales to show a state of disenchanted enchantment is Persephone. Originally, Persephone is generally known as the abducted wife of Hades who later

became the queen of the underworld. Persephone's myth has been open to numerous interpretations because of, as Iman El-Bakary (2019) maintains, its recurrent themes of body ownership, familial liaisons, love and desire (128). Most commonly, the abduction of Persephone is either forced, in Homer's version, by her father Zeus who "gives his daughter away against her will and without Demeter's (her mother) consent" or, as recounted by Ovid, is caused by Venus who orders Cupid to hit Hades with his love arrow to fall in love with Persephone (El-Bakary 128). Glück's tenth collection of poems *Averno* (2006) provides a new view of the myth through the same lens of a (dis)enchanted female who proves her power as a productive, willful being. El-Bakary's note that Glück's "multifaceted interpretations of the myth puzzle her reader" (130) does not contradict the poet's insistence on "shifting from the mythic to the modern, from tradition to subversion, and from distance to violent anger" (129). Since Averno is the name given to the crater lake that is believed to be the gate to the underworld, representing a point of initiation from one world to another, *Averno* also represents Persephone's metamorphosis from a silenced female manipulated by patriarchal powers into a more powerful figure who, in El-Bakary's reading of the myth, can be seen as an accomplice in the abduction.

A distinct feature of *Averno* is the seemingly endless questions the speaker (be it Glück or the female in general) poses. It opens with "The Night Migrations" that marks the "moment when you see again/ the red berries of the mountain ash" (494). It is a moment of transformation, of seeing the world anew, and of being reborn. The poem also declares the gap between this world and that of the dead where it seems impossible to see neither these red berries nor the birds' migrations. However, a dis(enchanted) female tells herself that "it won't need / these pleasures anymore" (494). Put simply, an entrance into a new world is just at hand and initiation into a new Self is possible.

One aspect of Persephone's aware Self is her ability to meditate her lot. In "Persephone the Wanderer," Glück moves freely from the mythical atmosphere to the *status quo* of "modern girls" who are violated against their will. She then wonders whether Persephone's return to earth after her abduction is rightly called a return, or even "earth" can be called "home" again. In a flashback mode, the scene becomes that of Persephone portrayed as lying in bed after being taken away to the underworld, and the poet wonders: "What is in her mind? / Is she afraid? Has something / blotted out the idea / of mind?" (504). This moment of deep-thinking witnesses Persephone's identity remaking. This is obvious in her, as well

as Glück's, presentation of Hades as a thoughtful lover who spares no effort in creating a haven for Persephone. The poet even expounds his motivations for building her a "duplicate of earth/ everything the same, down to the meadow/ but with a bed added" (539). He finds it hard, the speaker explains, for a young girl to move "quickly from bright light to utter darkness." He is rather sure that Persephone will get used to it slowly, and she will ultimately find it comforting. This is a natural outcome of the shift in her look to what happens to her. She accepts this migration from earth to the underworld where she becomes queen with a devoted lover. The main reason for this transformation is her realization of her being able to be heard. In this case, she feels really alive. In "A Myth of Devotion," one encounters the real Glückian Persephone: at once a "smeller, a taster" in the meadow, being watched by Hades. She is a doer, a desired soul. She, albeit the darkness of the underworld, rejoices that she can "hear the quiet breathing that says / I am alive, that means also / you are alive, because you hear me," (539).

What really matters for Persephone is the new identity she is initiated to. She is now a powerful creator of the winter. When "(I)t is snowing on earth," Persephone "doesn't know / what winter is, only that / she is what causes it" (504). It is sufficient for her to know that she can achieve her potential. She is no longer in a power relationship with man, giving ample evidence for Ira Sadoff (2001) to contend that such a (dis)enchanted female is in constant fluctuation "from the fragile victim to the grandiose goddess" (82). This constant movement from the traditional to the modern, from the objective to the subjective and from the enchanted to the disenchanted Self is what marks the Glückian female.

The (Dis)enchanted Female according to DEM

Belk *et al*'s (2021) model of disenchanted enchantment relies mainly on the disapproval of Max Weber's claim of a disenchanted world where "the emergence of modern 'rational' science and the advanced capitalist order" eliminate, according to Nicholas Gane, "prehistoric forms of magical religiosity with the rise of universal religion" (15). Nonetheless, Weber's grand claim could not withstand the human nature that cannot proceed in existence without being enchanted; i.e. without being driven by imagination through which human desire can direct social behavior. The model substitutes Geroge Ritzer's enchanted disenchantment with disenchanted enchantment. For Ritzer, manufacturers and consumers "initiate a set of practices to incorporate non-fictional sources of value in goods and services, and turn them into sources of hedonic symbolic, and

interpersonal value" (in Belk *at al* 27). In other words, enchanted disenchantment makes of disenchantment a base through which enchanted objects take shape. By analogy, Belk *et al* describe it as "a gilded withering husk" (28), denoting that disenchantment is just a husk ornamented with a gold coating. Its impact remains ineffectual. However, disenchanted enchantment, a term coined by Saler (2012), can be defined as one that "enchants and disenchants simultaneously" where "(M)odernity remains enchanted in a disenchanted way, rendering the imagination compatible with reason, the spiritual with secular trends" (12-13). To be clear, the (dis)enchanted individuals, be they consumers, females, children…etc., have the capability of moving freely between reality and imagination, or, rather, move in a cyclic structure from imagination (enchantment) to reality (disenchantment) then to imagination again. Belk *et al* contend that enchantment is "a deeply felt yet fleeting set of emotional commitments involving wonderment, anticipation of joy, euphoria, and an expanded sense of human potential" (27). Although Belk *et al*'s findings relate to the sociological aspect of consumer conduct, it can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, on the poetry of Louise Glück.

The Disenchanted Enchantment Model (DEM) provided by Belk *et al* is a paradigm of how people react to their desire for a utopian future and willfully participate in an enchanted form of liberation of human potential. Thus, the DEM hovers with two wings: the will to change and the imaginative utopian projection of desire. To achieve this, temporality must be taken into consideration. Hartmann and Brunk (2019) argue that (re)enchantment can be created through "temporal experience of belonging anchored to a particular (lost and/or utopian) place and time…thereby valorizing a particular nexus between past, present, and future" (7). This temporal aspect of disenchanted enchantment is aided by a sense of suspension of disbelief which is innate to the imaginative journey one goes through. In this way, individuals "recover a sense of magic, myth, specialness, and romance by imaginatively inhabit multiple times, including the future, and multiple places, including utopias" (Belk *et al* 29). With this suspension of disbelief, one can take part in an enchanted experience in which desires come true, gratification is guaranteed, and freedom of choice is largely celebrated.

The DEM is a four-stage cyclic paradigm. It starts with the paradox of the impossible realized. The individual is always haunted by some form of utopian expectation: the promise of liberation and transformation. This steers one's imagination towards the future as if it were a milieu of

fulfilled desires and complete metamorphosis. Change becomes a central component of the desired form of the Self everyone aspires to be. Put simply, it is "a brand-new self in a brand-new world" (Belk *et al* 30). In the second stage of DEM, once the paradox is realized and the suspension of disbelief is complete, one begins to sense a growing promise of gratification. This is where, to use Belk *et al*'s words, "the barriers between belief and disbelief" are pierced (30). In this stage, enchantment mechanisms play a role in preparing the individual to the following one through expecting utopian results ensuing the previous state of being. It is a stage of mystification assisted by religion, magic, myth and rituals. Belk *et al* find in it a kind of "ludic speculation and what-if fantasizing about yet to-be-released products" (31).

Such a promise of gratification is followed by the third stage of ludic satiation which can be viewed as a long-waited destination. Here, one enjoys the apparent fulfilment of their aspirations and a remarkable transformation in identity. A growing sense of productivity and command over one's destiny overwhelms one's mind, thinking, in the same way as new technologies unboxing, in a manner described by Belk *et al* as " romantic, revolutionary, and transformative" (31). Then, "(W)ild satisfaction is followed by the crescendo of release and dissipation" (32), and longing for more and more gratification of desires appears in the horizon, leading to the fourth stage of DEM: normalization and rising sense of loss. The reason for this is that enchantment cannot last forever. The person gets disenchanted once they are normalized with the new state of being. However, the fruits of the enchantment process in the three previous stages form a baseline upon which one can start again in initiating the perpetual cycle of desire. Richard Stivers (2001) attributes this sense of loss and the initiation of the enchantment cycle to human split between reason and emotion. "Despite our supposed rationality, we are still, as human beings, suckers for religious iconography, myth, storytelling, spirituality, and mysticism. We are addicted, in other words, to enchantment " Stivers contends (138). Belk *et al* summarize what happens by the end of this fourth stage:

> The sense of loss and the hunger for a new sense of a desirable and utopian future drive the push for new technologies that open the doors for the cycle to run anew, based on yet another paradoxical possibility for a realized, yet impossible, technological miracle. (37)

The DEM, in sum, can be grasped as desire-centered, future-oriented, and culturally grounded. It provides a model that counterbalances the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) which replaces wonder with reason. Louise Glück's poetry may be read as one that exemplifies the various steps of DEM, with a plethora of connotations that assist the female speaker in the poems in her odyssey to self-assertion as a productive free thinking human being.

Louise Glück's Poetry and DEM

Glück's poems showcase a type of disenchanted enchantment that parallels what Belk *et al* describe in their model of technology adoption. The female in the poems moves through the four steps of the desire-centered DEM: the paradox of the impossible realized, the growing sense of gratification, ludic satiation and the normalization and growing sense of loss. This perpetual cycle of desire relies on the imaginative Self that uses myths, traditional stories, and fairytales as a never-ending source of enchantment. However, the poet more often than not insists on reversing such myths and tales in a way that reveals her disenchantment. In a sense, the goal of the poet is to mix the now and the then in one crucible so that the reader is presented with a sense of here and there simultaneously, turning her message at once plausible and individualistic. Morris, thus, finds in Glück's work a "blurring of the borders" between the individualistic and the universal, and the momentary and mythic" (21).

The first step in DEM is the paradox of the impossible realized. It crystallizes the sense of expectation and the prophecy that something marvelous is about to happen. In Glück's case, it is the sense of loss that was a catalyst in her foretelling the realization of the impossible. Her divorces and the death of her young sister, father and mother were prominent landmarks in the poet's life. In April 1980, her isolated house in Vermont was completely destroyed by fire; an incident that Morris considers "the most dramatic if not the most emotionally stunning" (29). These personal calamities did aid the formulation of her vision of what she really aspired to achieve: a voice to pronounce her creativity and outlooks on familial as well as human issues. For her, this was a real impossibility from a female's point of view who used to consider her mother a judge upon whose approval of her poetic production she lived (*Proofs* 6).

Loss and personal suffering are the driving forces for Glück's poetics of attaining the impossible – i.e. a listened-to personal voice. *The Triumph of Achilles* (1985) presents this (dis)enchanted female who tries

to assert her long-neglected voice. In "Mock Orange," she pins down her hatred for everything that "seals" her mouth, especially those objects that are concealed under the mask of love, romanticism or gratification. The poem opens with the proclamation that the moon is not the source of light. This source is, rather, the flowers that light the yard. This stark contradiction to the reader's perception paves the way for her own conviction that she hates them as well as romantic love on the grounds that they negate her right for pronouncing her views:

> I hate them as I hate sex,
> The man's mouth
> sealing my mouth, the man's
> paralyzing body-
> and the cry that always escapes
> the low, humiliating
> premise of union- (151)

The poem infuses the natural with the personal in an attempt to cast the poet's opinion on what has long been declared about physical love: it guarantees union. After an illuminating conversation with herself, she reaches the conclusion that "(W)e were made fools of" (151), and her interrogating Self at once screams in agony:

> How can I rest?
> How can I be content
> when there is still
> that odor in the world? (151)

Thus, the poet's aspiration for the impossible is the negation of the power relationship that governs her body and soul which she finds humiliating. This aspiration for the impossible to be realized is always there, and her ignored scream is heard here and there throughout her work.

To realize this seemingly impossible state of a content and independent female who is in control of her body and identity, Glück makes of renunciation a successful strategy through which she asserts her reverence and ability to go through life. It is a type of "renunciation of battle for the sake of honor and humanity" (Morris 37). Desire forms the base for her deep belief in the necessity of detachment from all traditional ties, and this perpetual yearning for achievement and creativity must be taken into consideration while reading her poems. In her answer to the role of desire and perpetual progress towards its fulfillment, Glück replies

to Joanne Feit Diehl (2005) that "art begins and survives as a craving, a hunger for what eludes, a beacon, a lighthouse" (185); however, the poet maintains that to reach this lighthouse means being discontent with the *status quo*, and, arguably, to change it. The answer to her question: "If the self is already worthy or loveable, how dare to change it?" (185) is the poet's fascination with what is left unsaid, what really needs to be listened to.

"Dedication to Hunger" presents the paradox of the impossible realized in the view of death as the threshold through which she will achieve her goal. She recognizes that a female's body is "a grave" that "will accept anything" (135). The poem, thus, is a glorification of desire as a means to achieve what seems to be impossible for most females: the assertion of female productivity. She must recline her body and physical gratification for this target; a notion highlighted in the concluding section of the poem: "the child / having no self to speak of, / comes to life in denial-" (135). The outcome of this denial is a sort of "power to expose / the underlying body like a god / for whose deed / there is no parallel in the natural world" (135).

Nonetheless, the poet does not fixate on the first step of the paradox of the impossible realized. She moves on to the next step: the growing promise of gratification. Her strong belief in her creativity encourages her to manipulate every enchantment source. That is to say, the poet's rereading of fairytales and mythical stories reflects this growing sense of gratification. Once freed from her surroundings, she begins to search for a utopia where her vision comes into being. This search is coupled with her inclination for being anorexic: "a physical state," Morris contends, "of not having…is in the speaker's mind directly related to her entrance into another arena of power and control" (39-40). One possibility for this utopian space is that it can be found after death. In "Lost Love," for instance, Glück identifies the dead with the absent, the free and above all the powerful:

> Then it seemed to me my sister's body
> was a magnet. I could feel it draw
> my mother's heart into the earth,
> so it would grow. (211)

Contrary to the direct interpretation of the poem as a scream of a neglected firstborn girl (i.e. the poet), Glück focuses on the effect of her sister's death; the initiation into a utopian realm where a female can

control her world. As such, the heart would grow just like the tree of life in traditional fairytales or religious stories, granting the poet a utopian excitement that is accompanied by topics of religion as the liminal female worships at mecca of newness and the miracles that can be realized.

The sense of gratification reaches its height in "The Triumph of Achilles" where "the power of grief", an emotion that often accompanied the poet, is sufficient "to motivate heroic action" (Morris 50). The poem begins by grounding Achilles' relationship to Patroclus as one of equals since "they wore / the same armor" (163). Glück envisions the true feeling of empathy for a friend as a healing factor for human misguided hierarchical relationships:

> In the story of Patroclus
> no one survives, not even Achilles
> who was nearly a god.
> Patroclus resembled him; they wore the same armor. (163)

For Glück, it is not the idea of survival that defines an individual, yet it is the sense of being, of achievement that matters most. That is why she poses the rhetorical question: "What were the Greek ships on fire / compared to this loss?" (163). The answer is that the friend's loss is more grievous than setting all Greek ships to fire. Achilles, in this case, was "a man already dead, a victim / of the part that loved, / the part that was mortal" (163). For Glück, love is not the motive that ensures one's immortality. It is, rather, empathy and the feeling of equality. This accounts for her claim that it is the "story of Patroclus" and not of Achilles. According to tradition, the triumph of Achilles refers to his victory over Hector after Patroclus's murder. However, in Glück's reading, it is Achilles's insistence on the value of his friend's recognition even if the cost is his own life that makes him victorious. Morris summarizes this as "the illogical yearning to possess what one cannot obtain in life distinguishes the human hero, who is willing to risk his life for a symbolic value that stems from the gods, a value apprehended by the immortal fame of poetry" (51).

During the period of her anorexia, Glück felt that growing sense of gratification. Fearing that having a female body will ultimately limit her access to the realm of poetic productivity, she resorts to anorexia as a form of nothingness, a void, or even a utopia. Lisa Sewell suggests that "the anorexic, by starving themselves and losing their secondary sex characteristic, can be understood to reject their femininity, refusing to

participate in cultural norms" (50). Like Achilles, Glück could have this sense of achievement through her strategy of being out of all traditions, able to be enchanted and disenchanted simultaneously through her rereading of such traditions. This leads to the third step of DEM: the ludic satiation which represents the post-utopian phase. Belk *et al* remark that the wild satisfaction is followed by the crescendo of release and dissipation. In the case of Louise Glück, this phase does not last for long, since desire is ingrained in her poems and is largely seen as a painful necessity. In *Proofs and Theories*, she describes this vicious circle of desire, fulfillment and desire:

> Most writers spend much of their time in various kinds of torment: wanting to write differently, being unable to write differently. In a whole lifetime, years are spent waiting to be claimed by one idea…. It is a life dignified by yearning, not made serene by sensations of achievement. (3)

Perpetual desire is always anticipatory of execution. She is comfortable with the idea that the goal is to exist in writing, not to finish writing. Satisfaction will be forgotten the moment it is realized.

This marks the fourth step in Belk *et al*'s model where one starts to long for more and the cycle goes on endlessly. Glück's analogy is remarkable in this respect; she likens the desire for poetic productivity to a lighthouse which one tires hard to reach and the more one gets nearer, the more it backs away. She underlines a state of amnesiac forgetfulness at the moment the poet finishes "the working" phase of the poem when "no record exists of the poet's agency." The poet is no more a poet, but "wishes to be one" (*Proofs* 16).

The Liminal Glückian Female

The (dis)enchanted female as presented in Louise Glück's poems could never have achieved the goal of personal recognition but for her resourceful sense of liminality. Ideally, liminal thinking entails certain characteristics, prominent among which are the detachment from all previous traditions, the growing sense of liberation, the reevaluation and reformation of one's identity, and the reintegration into the new society. These represent an elaboration of Arnold van Gennep's three stages of the rites of passage. Initiation into a new stage necessitates: (preliminal) separation from society, (liminal) erasing all social marks reidentifying

oneself, and (postliminal) full reintegration (11). This process goes on *ad infinitum*.

The affinity one finds between van Gennep's threefold cycle of social rites of passage and Belk *et al*'s DEM is worthy of note here. The (dis)enchanted female's non-stop initiation into various stages throughout life posits an opportunity to reap the fruits of liminal thinking, notable of which is the shift from the attitude of might-makes-right which characterizes patriarchal societies into right-makes-might with which power relations become a thing of the past, and a non-hierarchical attitude to male-female coexistence comes into being.

In their introduction to *Breaking Boundaries: Varieties of Liminality* (2015), Horvath *et al* value liminality as "a prism through which to understand transformations in the contemporary world" (1). The etymological reference of the term denotes a point of intersection between the land and the sea: a harbor. Traditionally, harbors have long been thought of as thresholds where not only people meet and goods are exchanged, but, as Mihai Spariosu (2015) maintains, also cultures, languages, customs and religious practices (22). Victor Turner (1969), who has rediscovered the importance of liminality, insists that liminal personae enjoy a sense of identity dissolution bringing about new possibilities of reframing one's status in the world. "In many kinds of initiation where the neophytes are of both sexes, males and females," Turner maintains, "are dressed alike and referred to by the same term" (102-3). Turner's remark crystallizes most of what the liminal persona experiences where the paradigm of male-female power relations falls apart.

The Glückian female presents an ideal form of this liminal persona. One major principle of being on the threshold is the void which the initiand feels. Once initiated into a new phase, they experience a type of freedom resulting from the complete separation from the previous ties. Since power abhors vacuum, to use Aristotle's words, this state of nothingness which the liminoid experiences allows for a restructuring of relations. Spariosu supports this point of view from the perspective that material force requires something to oppose it in order to manifest itself; otherwise, it will dissipate and disappear into the void (8). Societies that live according to the power principle fear this void.

In Glück's poetic world, the void takes the form of willful self-destruction. In various poems, it is evident that the female prefers death to life in order to prove her liminal thinking. A prominent example is "A Fable" in which Glück recounts the traditional story of the two mothers who claim one child as theirs. The king decrees that the child should be

torn to give each one a share and the real mother chooses renouncing her baby. Retelling the story from her point of view, Glück wonders:

> Suppose
> you saw your mother
> torn between two daughters:
> what could you do
> to save her but be
> willing to destroy
> yourself (218)

One can question the identity of the addressee in these lines; it might be the female's Self or the reader. She underscores self-denial and self-destruction as the best way to "save" the mother, contrary to the traditional story of saving the child. Annihilation for the speaker is a chance to assert the female's will-power; at least she could take a decision rather than accept submission to the other.

Glück's anorexia is part of her initiation into adulthood. Reassuring her rejection of the might-makes-right relations in her family, she resorts to anorexia. For her, "self-starvation was a means of self-construction," an attempt to "appear entirely free of all forms of dependency, to appear complete, self-contained" (*Proofs* 11). Free from all societal links, the initiand female has the chance to reevaluate her status in such a new milieu. She accepts new, even non-conformist, ideas. One such ideas is the view of death as an initiation into a land of promises and possibilities; something to desire and accept. The Glückian Persephone finds homage in the underworld, the land of the dead. In some ancient cultures, Spariosu remarks, death "is a welcome passage into the world of gods, whereas birth is an unfortunate, deplorable event" (88). *Firstborn* (1968) bears witness to this stance towards birth. Being the one who is firstborn in the family accounts for her lifelong suffering, for she was forced to sacrifice for her sisters, to accept being silenced and deprived from her rights as a human. "Parados" pronounces this suffering: "Long ago, I was wounded. / I learned / to exist in reaction, / out of touch with the world" (201). This detachment, typical of a liminal persona, entices her to reaffirm her new identity; she realizes that her mission is "to bear witness / to the great mysteries" (201). Once again, this detachment and looking at things from the lens of right-makes-might make it easy for the poet to fathom these "mysteries" as "proofs" in reality.

The concomitant reformulation of a female's vision will permit her to clearly perceive the meaning of freedom. In "New World," she describes the relation between her parents as one of fetters. While her

mother longs for travel, her father wanted to "lie on the couch / with the *Times* / over his face" (219). Glück's interpretation is that her father wished that death "wouldn't seem a significant change" (219). However, when her mother becomes free after his death, the poet discovers that it is a type of liberation similar to that of a child's balloon that "gets lost the minute / it isn't held," or an astronaut whose freedom means simply to be "without relation to earth" (220). This is what the liminal female experiences every time she is initiated into a new phase of her life: adulthood, marriage, divorce or even death. This very notion accounts for her choice of the poem's title. On the threshold, the world is restructured anew. "Honor and high reward" shall be the crowning achievement a female may dream of. In her Nobel lecture, Glück once again declares her innate faith in the female's productivity and rejection of the long-held beliefs about her role in the society:

> Competitions of this sort, for honor, for high reward, seemed natural to me; the myths that were my first reading were filled with them. The greatest poem in the world seemed to me, even when I was very young, the highest of high honors. This was also the way my sister and I were being raised, to save France (Joan of Arc), to discover radium (Marie Curie). Later I began to understand the dangers and limitations of hierarchical thinking.

Conclusion

The study of Louise Glück's poetry reveals a non-conformist (dis)enchanted female who could effect a change in the feminist attitude to family relations, marriage, divorce, and death. Enchanted with myths, religious stories and fairytales, she takes the role of a midrash interpreter who opens her readers' eyes to a new form of relation with man based on the right-makes-might maxim and not vice versa. What could assist her in her reformulation of a female's ties with the world around her are the liminal thinking strategies that have helped her detach from that world and bestowed her with a chance to form a new identity. After every liminal stage, the Glückian female is capable of the full reintegration required for getting through life on equal footing with the Other: mother, sister, father, and husband. Belk *et al*'s model of (dis)enchanted enchantment provides a lens through which one gets to grips with many issues that compose third wave feminism: self-assertion, creativity and productivity.

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