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A Journey through Ages: Revisiting the Traumatized Female Characters in Glück's Poetry: A Study of Selected Poems

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ABSTRACT

In the majority of her poems, Louise Glück fixes a great deal of her attention on traumatized female characters that are taken from different historical periods mainly by relying on Greco-Roman myths. Peculiar to her poetry, the common ground that linked, links, and will link female figures through time is the unchanging fact of being traumatized. Glück's personal experience, which is deeply interwoven with these characters as she attempts to express not only her own trauma but the trauma of women in her time, will be explored and highlighted. In the selected poems, typically through two main recurring and excessively utilized mediums of expression namely religion and mythology, the presence of evidently traumatized female characters dominates the stage of her dramatized poetic setting.

The present study sheds light on PTSD theory pioneered by Cathy Caruth and will give a brief account of Louise Glück's life, her works, and style. It will analyze selected poems from Glück's poetry collection *Poems 1962-2012* in the light of trauma theory. The showcased poems reveal how heavily Glück draws on mythology and religion as sources

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of her poetic output. These poems are Abishag, Persephone the Wonderer, Myth of Devotion, and Gretel in Darkness.

Key Words: Glück, Caruth, PTSD, Trauma, Mythology, Religion.

رحلة عبر العصور: إعادة النظر في الشخصيات النسائية المصدومة في شعر غلوك: دراسة في قصائد مختارة

علاء احمد عبدالله

كلية الآداب – جامعة تكريت

المستخلص

في معظم قصائدها، لويز غليك تُركز اهتمامها على الشخصيات النسائية المصابة بالصدمة مستلهمة من فترات تاريخية مختلفة، بالغالب بالاعتماد على الأساطير اليونانية والرومانية. والنقطة المشتركة التي تربط وستربط الشخصيات النسائية عبر الزمان هي حقيقة التعرض للصدمة التي لا تتغير. سيتم استكشاف وإبراز تجربة غليك الشخصية، التي تترايط بشكل عميق مع هذه الشخصيات، حيث تحاول التعبير ليس فقط عن صدمتها الشخصية ولكن أيضًا صدمة النساء في زمنها. في القصائد المختارة، من خلال وسيلتي التعبير الرئيسيتين المتكررتين بشكل مفرط وهما الدين والأساطير، يسيطر وجود شخصيات نسائية مصابة بصدمة واضحة على مسرح بيئتها الشعرية المسرحية.

ستسلط الدراسة الحالية الضوء على نظرية اضطراب ما بعد الصدمة التي قامت كاثي كاروث بتقديمها، وستقدم حسابًا موجزًا لحياة لويز غليك وأعمالها وأسلوبها. ستحلل القصائد المختارة من مجموعة قصائد غليك "قصائد 1962-2012" في ضوء نظرية الصدمة. تكشف القصائد المعروضة عن مدى استناد غليك الكبير إلى الأساطير والدين كمصادر لإنتاجها الشعري. هذه القصائد هي "أبيشاغ"، "بيرسيفونى المتسائلة"، "أسطورة التفاني"، و "غريتيل في الظلام".

الكلمات الدالة: غليك، كاروث، اضطراب ما بعد الصدمة، صدمة، أساطير، دين .

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Trauma theory proposed by Cathy Caruth in her 1996 seminal work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* is adopted as the theoretical framework of this study. According to this theory individuals who survive severe, stressful, catastrophic

and violent events are expected to re-experience these overwhelming events in a belated manner especially in the form of flashbacks and nightmares. Caruth suggests that the ability to express verbally these events is limited and that works of literature can express such events more profoundly. Such a suggestion is going to be reflected in the analysis of the poems taken from the works of the American poet Louise Glück. Louise Glück's poems exhibit reasonable examples of expressing traumatic event taken from the poet's personal life and are conveyed through poet's excellent adaptation of figures taken from religion, mythology, and history.

2. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades trauma theory has gained a considerable weight in the literary and cultural studies as it is applied to the interpretations and analysis of various literary works. The theory as proposed by the renowned cultural theorist, psychologist and literary critic Cathy Caruth in her 1996 seminal book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* is defined as: an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena (Caruth, 1995: 24). Caruth in this definition stresses the uncontrolled and belated repetitive nature of the traumatic event. Individuals who undergo traumatic event lose their sense of comprehensibility and normal register of the event. Caruth then elaborates on this stating: 'the response [of individuals] to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, ... return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena' (Caruth, 1996: 91-2).

Caruth's theory is in fact drawn from the works of Freud on psychoanalysis and traumatic neurosis. Through his study of war survivors, Freud found out that war traumatized individuals suffer from traumatic neurosis which is caused by the omission of anxiety that occurs on the on-set of the painful and overwhelming event or experience. In hopes to master the extremely painful and unpleasant event, trauma survivors, as noticed by Freud, are unconsciously compelled to repeat these experiences via flashbacks and nightmares. Freud asserts that because the patients "cannot remember the whole of what is repressed in [them], and what [they] cannot remember may be precisely the essential part of it", they "[are] obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary event instead of ... remembering it as something belonging to the past" (1920: 18, 19).

These Freudian psychoanalytic principles on trauma are going to resonate through Caruth's theory. In fact she didn't only embrace them in her theory but also expanded evolved them. What makes her theory significant is the fact that is an interdisciplinary approach that introduces insights from various fields as psychology, psychoanalysis, history, literary studies, and cultural studies to understand the experiences of those who have undergone traumatic events. For Caruth, trauma is not just physical or emotional, but cultural and linguistic as well. She emphasizes that trauma is a distressful and agonizing experience that cannot totally be articulated by ordinary language, because it is

usually marked by a sense of fragmentation, repetition, and dislocation. Trauma plays a vital role in disrupting the sense of time, space, and causes a fragmentation of identity; it can as well leave lasting psychological wounds which are hard to heal. She tries to make literature functions as a medium that can honestly bear witness to trauma as part of the healing process.

In short, this theory, as articulated by Cathy Caruth, explores the impact of traumatic experiences on works of art from the psychological and literary dimensions. It investigates the ways by which traumatized individuals cope with and represent trauma. It often emphasizes the delayed and fragmented nature of trauma narratives. Caruth's theory sets forth to highlight the ways by which trauma disrupts conventional methods of storytelling and asks for a reevaluation of the relationship between language, memory and traumatic events.

The main principles that Caruth Trauma brought about in her theory are:

1- **Dissociation and Return of Traumatic Memory:** For Caruth traumatic events escape consciousness causing dissociation or splitting off between psyche and traumatic memory which function as a defense mechanism that helps to protect the brain from the overwhelming event and consequently will result in uncontrolled and repetitive reappearance of the traumatic event. The traumatized individuals are going to unexpectedly re-experience their past traumas in a cyclic manner as dissociative fragments and thus will witness to a sense of loss in time and self.

2- **Narrative Belatedness:** Another key concept in the theory is the notion of 'delayed action'. Caruth argues that traumatic experiences often manifest through delayed or belated responses. Such belatedness often haunts the traumatized individuals and later resurfaces in an unexpected and disruptive manner. The belated responses results in belated recognition or understanding of the traumatic event.

3- **Inexpressibility:** Caruth asserts that traumatic events are beyond the ordinary language ability of expression because of their extremely overwhelming nature. In an attempt to partially articulate their traumatic experience the traumatized may resort to indirect and fragmented methods of expression as nightmares, flashbacks, and repetitive behavior.

4- **Trauma is repetitive in nature:** Caruth holds that trauma has a repetitive capacity i.e. it often returns and haunts the survivor in various forms such as daily reenactment, flashbacks, nightmares, and intrusive symptoms. Through flashbacks, trauma resurfaces in the consciousness of the survivor in the form of intrusive and distressing memories which are triggered by stimuli that bears resemblance to the original traumatic experience.

5- **Another important concept in Caruth's Trauma Theory is the idea of "survivor testimony."** Caruth argues that the act of bearing witness to trauma is a crucial step in the healing process, and that it can help to break down the isolation and silence that often accompany traumatic experiences. Survivor testimony can take many forms, including personal narratives, memoirs, and fictional representations.

6- Artistic expression and representation play a crucial role in trauma theory as they provide a means for individuals who have experienced trauma to process and convey their experiences. Through this theory, artists and writers can use their creative work as a platform to help trauma survivors confront their pain and establish connections with others who share similar experiences. These figures are metaphorical representation of not only the poet herself but women in general. Metaphor is an important rhetoric device that is used to express implied meanings, intentions, and ideas (Mohammed and Salih, 2023: p. 45).

7- The assertion on the historical power of trauma is another principle of Caruth's theory. Here, she argues that violent, aggressive, painful events have the power to exert a lasting influence on individuals and communities alike. In this context she argues that 'the historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all'(Caruth, 1995.17). They implicate, consciously or unconsciously, the individual's memory, sense of identity, and outer world understanding by their unresolved nature which resurfaces involuntarily as fragmented memories marking the individual's inability to entirely remember them or forget them. Past traumatic events can both shape and disrupt not only an individual's sense of identity, memory real world understanding but also on a collective level.

Moreover, Peter A. Levine argues that trauma "can alter the persons' normal biological, psychological, and social equilibrium" to the extent that the "memory of one particular [traumatic] event comes to taint, and dominate, all other experiences" thus shattering the conscious appreciation of the present moment (Levine, xx). In her comment on the post traumatic quality of the event Judith L. Herman explains that even after the dangerous moment is long past "traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present. [Their inability to return to the ordinary] course of their lives, [is because] trauma repeatedly interrupts. It is as if time stops at the moment of trauma" (Herman 37).

Herman has delicately sums up the main significant points of the theory stating that: it concerns itself with speech intermittence or absence, lasting muteness or obliquity of speech and euphemistic modes, the 'ghosting' or haunting role of accidents, the link between voice and identity, the difficulty of interpretation, the testimonial nature of literature that gives a representation of the experience (Herman: p.18)

A Life Sketch: Louise Glück is highly celebrated as an accomplished female poet who has received through her career numerous prestigious recognitions and awards, such as Bollingen Prize, Pulitzer Prize, Lannan Literary Award for Poetry, National Book Critics' Circle Award, Wallace Stevens Award, and William Carlos Williams Award. She was selected as Poet Laureate of the U.S. from 2003 to 2004 later she was chosen as Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. In addition, she is currently a Fellow of

the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and held the position of judge for the Yale Series of Younger Poets for two-terms.

Glück was born in New York in 1943. She spent her early childhood on Long Island with her parents and younger sister. She exhibited a real inclination to writing from her early years. She was strongly motivated by her ambition to pursue a future career as a writer. Her adolescence, however, was marked by a severe struggle with anorexia, which led to a long period of psychoanalytic treatment and was. Exceedingly marked by trauma, this period was reflected and became a fertile ground for her career as a poet. (Paretti, 2002, p. 148)

Remarkably austere, her poetry is the revelation of a constant tide and ebb of belated reactions towards past tragic and painful events that have overshadowed her life such as the death of her elder sister and her suffering from anorexia. One can easily sense that feelings of anguish, pain, suffering, and psychological struggles frame almost all of her works. 'Wounds—the death of a firstborn child, anorexia, failed relationships, sibling rivalry, a parent's death, divorce—form the foundation from which Glück's poetry arises', (Paretti, 2002, p. 149) Her works describe the struggle women has to endure to find a voice of their own and guard their inner self and identity. Though her poetry is deeply personal in its subjects and explores private traumatic events, yet it is emotionally distant and restrained to the extent that they thrust us into their traumatic and stressful atmosphere entangling us to their multidimensional horizons of life.

Throughout her career as a poet, Glück received mentorship and guidance from distinguished poetic figures, as Stanley Kunitz and Leonie Adams. She is an abundant poet who produced an extensive body of twelve poetic works including her first poetry collection which was successful and placed her among the young women contemporary poets "Firstborn" (1968), "The House on Marshland" (1975), "Descending Figure" 1980, "The Triumph of Achilles" (1984), "Ararat" (1990) and "The Wild Iris" (1992) which won the Pulitzer Prize, "Meadowlands" 1996, "Vita Nova" (1999), The Seven Ages (2006), and "Virtuous Night" (2014). She ventured as well in the realm of writing essays when she published her book "Proofs and Theories" (1994).

In addition to her accomplishments in the literary world, Glück contributions in the field of education are significant. She has lectured and taught at numerous prestigious institutions such as Harvard, UCLA, Brandeis, Goddard College, Yale, Williams College, and Boston University. Her dedication towards mentorship and teaching has been acknowledged and recognized, helping her to become a figure of high value in guiding and nurturing emerging poets.

Louise Glück's prominences as an accomplished poet in addition to her long list of remarkable accolades have profoundly impacted both the literary world and the new generation of aspiring poets. Moreover, her personal journey, which is marked by early psychological and health struggles and her subsequent literary achievements, accentuates her dedication towards poetry as art as well as her commitment to guiding and nurturing the talents of future poets.

3. WOMEN IN TRAUMA: FEMALE CHARACTER IN Glück POETRY

One of the prevailing traits of Louise Glück is the re-representation of trauma through the repetitive use of the same female characters in all of her published poetic volumes which echoes the repetitive quality of trauma though it is involuntarily. Such method of repetitive representation of these characters will certainly incite, readers and researchers alike, to ask important questions which are: are they, whether private or general, replicas or surrogates behind which Glück hides to express her traumatic experiences? Or are they chosen deliberately by the poet to criticize and point out the follies against women in fields such as: religion, mythology, history, policy, sociology, media, and language? Addressing these questions might not be possible unless the poet directly answers them.

Surveying the poetic output Glück has brought into our hands since 1960 until now helps to formulate a comprehensive understanding of the way she approaches trauma. Glück approaches trauma differently. For her trauma is no more past, it is an ongoing process. A process she experiences everyday though with different replicas female characters which the poet chooses to address trauma from different perspective let it be religion, history, mythology, sociology, or other fields of expression. What these poems put at stake is the 'possibility of reconciliation or self-recovery after an encounter with loss and a questioning of existence'.(Mun, 2010, p.10). More references to mythological, religious, and folklore figures appear because they help to 'evoke a present-day, socio-cultural reality (such as when she associates the mythic figure Persephone with "modern girls" and depicts her as a drug-taking) (Mun 2010). These associations are thus apparent and reveal the ongoing cycle of traumatizing women.

Lee Upton in her *The Muse of Abandonment*, writes that "the self in Glück is placed in relation to a larger mythological backdrop but is not overwhelmed by this competing narrative. [It] is used to dignify the self, particularly the female self, which might otherwise be domesticated or trivialized."(Upton,) This is apparent from the very first volume Glück published, traumatized female characters are put under spotlight. Glück always uses names of famous female figures as titles for her poems as she exposes and explores their traumas. In her volume *First Porn* (1960) she uses 'Abishag' the female figure in the Bible to be a representative of female trauma in religion. Morris calls this type of poems, which discuss religious subjects, 'bible poems. He further contends that these poems which "offer nervous reflections on [female] status, power, morality [and] desire" (Morris. 2006 p.66) question and reconsider the relation between the female characters with dominant male characters.

Abishag is a biblical figure that Glück chooses to showcase the overlooked traumatized women in a religious context. In this sense, the poet undermines religion which she sees as an apparatus that silences the voice of women and underrates their role in society. It represses women and facilitates their subjugation. The poem falls into two parts which tells the story of Abishag who was chosen, without consent, to entertain and take care of King David at his old age because he asked for a young woman to keep his bosom warm. Despite the fact that this relationship doesn't include a sexual relation between her and King David, Abishag was coerced to take on this relationship. Glück here intensifies Abishag's traumatic experience by juxtaposing youth and potency, represented by the young woman, with old age and impotency, represented by King David. Clearly the poem

alludes to Tennyson's 'Tithonus' where old age and immortal youth are juxtaposed to immortal old age which intensifies Tithonus's experience.

Through the use of austere diction and serious tone of the poem Glück reflects on the private nature of Abishag's traumatic dilemma which is clearly overlooked. Using Abishag's voice the poet sets forth in narrating Abishag's experience emphasizing its emotional and mental sides. The following part of the poem clarifies her traumatic dilemma:

When I see myself
it is still as I was then,
.....
though the face
was featureless
of which they did not say
She has the look of one who seeks
some greater and destroying passion:
They took me as I was.
Not one among the kinsmen touched me,
not one among the slaves.
No one will touch me now.

In these lines Abishag involuntarily remembers her hopeless situation. A situation that the character is entirely overwhelmed by that is she has lost her sense of time as it clearly appears in the use of present simple and past simple in the first two lines. It is worth noting that the difference between I see myself it is as I was then is quite shocking that Abishag, who was thrust into such nonconsensual intimacy with a powerful yet old figure, painfully experienced.

The poem succeeds in precisely exhibiting the concubinary nature of women's status in this religious oriented society which in turn stands as both a symbol and an example of this fixed and unchanging view of women in a religious context. Morris highlights Glück's fascination with the myth-like narration and subjectively describes the status of "how a woman known primarily as a royal concubine and nursemaid to the aging King David was not adequately imagined as a human being with a significant voice, vision, subjectivity and desires of her own (Morris, 2006)". In this sense, women are depicted as being deprived of the right of expressing themselves and of forming any sense of independency amid a patriarchal oriented society. This results in a state of dissociation from the self where the character is overwhelmed by a sense of vulnerability dominating her sense of time and place.

The word featureless works as a tool that prepares the reader psychologically to interact with the speaker's experience at a personal level. It denotes that Abishag's prominent female qualities are wiped away so easily by her family and community. She then admits that her femininity despite being described as destroying has faded because she is fulfilling her father's desire not her own. She now laments her youth and femininity that have been robbed from her for no one among the kinsmen touched her nor among the slaves and now at her old age no one will touch her. The beautiful female Abishag once was will never be and thus trauma is crystalized by her bitter awareness that her youth

was stolen from her by people she held nearest and dearest. Her recognition that she has been long looked at as a property that can be given or sold highlights the sense of traumatic bitterness.

Another apparent traumatic symptom the poem exhibits is narration belatedness. Abishag here is narrating her experience long after the time of its occurrence. The narrator who is bewildered at the present moment is looking back at her situation where she was unable to express and decide for herself because her father exerted a continuous suffocating pressure on her that she had no other alternative but to yield to his wishes and to fulfil his desires. She consequently had to forget all about her simple dreams and ambitions.

'Nothing' which is Abishag's short answer to her father's question "How much have I ever asked of you[?]" carries ramifications of deep ironic indication as she is going to sacrifice her life to answer it. Thus the vast scale of personal loss provides a more profound answer for the father's question as it appears in the second part of the poem in which the role of Abishag is utterly passive.

Being subjected to a protracted traumatic experience Abishag exhibits another traumatic symptom namely the recurrence of the experience along with its historical context as it is clearly reflected in the second part of the poem. Abishag says:

In the recurring dream my father
stands at the doorway in his black cassock
telling me to choose among my suitors,

In these lines, she seems to be haunted by the experience despite the fact that it is over long ago. It involuntarily comes back in the shape of a dream that she cannot control or get rid of. Her father is still the main player of actions as she passively plays a minor role in this dramatic dense situation. To make her father content, she is forced to make a choice and pick up a suitor though the choice means death to her. Despite being the narrator of the poem one must notice that Abishag is only retelling what her father and the other men were telling her. At the time this happened to her she was unable to express herself and thus language failed her.

In this poem Glück succeeds to "juxtapose mythic references with personal stories... as it allows her to speak about mythic and private in a manner that aligns the two worlds" (From Arrarat to Averno) Additionally, it is safe to say that Abishag's narration of her traumatic experience which is private nature echoes the poet's voice as she attempts to express her own trauma. However, what the poet strives to achieve is to go beyond the use of Abishag and the other mythical figures not only to universalize her personal anguish and agony but to help participate in interpreting her poems.

Demeter and Persephone are the other mythical female characters whose story is a fertile ground which Glück uses as a subject matter for many of her poems. These two figures recurred, directly or indirectly, in a number of poems which are published in different volumes especially in her 2006 Averno whose title alludes to the story of Persephone as it refers to the gate of the underworld. In addition, October which is the second poem in this

volume refers directly to the tragic story of Persephone because October is the month which heralds the coming of winter by changing from warm to cold. (Azcuay, 2011, p. 33) A stark characteristic of the poems that tell the story of Demeter and Persephone is the use of prosopopoeia where an absent or dead person is made to speak. Prosopopoeia, is defined as a technique 'in which either an inanimate object or an abstract concept is spoken of as though it were endowed with life or with human attributes or feelings' (Abrams. p.99). Through this device, the poet is able to present these two characters in a realistic and contemporary temperament.

Their story in *Persephone The Wanderer*, which is a poem of two parts, exemplifies the actual permanent incarnation of women's position in life historically and socially. The nature of female trauma is viewed through such mythical characters as cyclical and repetitive showcasing the poet's philosophical concepts about the cyclical nature of human life and history. Consequently, any possible change for this protracted status will certainly need enforcing and inflicting change in the deep imbedded and dominating ideology the society follows which is the goal the poet attempts to achieve via her poetry.

The poem's story is narrated through an omniscient point of view where the speaker who is the poet herself places the reader in this very elusive liminal position allowing him/her to reflect upon this bewildering yet tragic and traumatic situation of the mother Demeter and her daughter Persephone. The poem reads:

In the first version, Persephone
is taken from her mother
and the goddess of the earth
punishes the earth—this is
consistent with what we know of human behavior,

that human beings take profound satisfaction
in doing harm, particularly
unconscious harm:

we may call this
negative creation.

Persephone's initial
sojourn in hell continues to be
pawed over by scholars who dispute
the sensations of the virgin:

did she cooperate in her rape,
or was she drugged, violated against her will,
as happens so often now to modern girls.

As is well known, the return of the beloved
does not correct
the loss of the beloved: Persephone

returns home
stained with red juice like
a character in Hawthorne—

In these lines voice of Persephone is almost absent and is fused or blended with the voice of the speaker (the poet) to suggest not only the little girl's inability to express this overwhelming traumatic event of being abducted and raped by the god of the underworld but also the speaker's bewilderment and shock for the normalization of the child's traumatic ordeal as it being discussed by history scholars who appear debating the matter.

In this poem, allegory is skillfully used as a technique to connect the speaker and these two mythical figures. This allows the poet to utilize the interplay of the private and mythical to express trauma in a more general sense. Glück now connects the mythical and the private "in a manner that aligns both worlds to a more even playing field: the mythic can be made to seem ordinary whilst the private is elevated to the mythic realm" (Mun: 2008, 75). Trauma in this sense has acquired another dimension it is no longer an experience of three females rather it is a universal one. It a feminine shared experience which has been historically normalized by patriarchal societies. Glück austere puts this in the beginning of the poem saying that normalizing this issue is "consistent with what we know of human behavior,/ that human beings take profound satisfaction in doing harm,/ particularly unconscious harm: [which can be called] ... negative creation' of a negative human behavioral phenomena which devalue women and their role in their communities (Glück, 2012). Moreover, the poet asserts the idea of generalizing Persephone's trauma saying that trauma "happens so often now to modern girls."(Glück). In this sense, Glück's cyclic vision of life can be attributed to trauma. It can be described as an endless cycle.

Through the fusion of present and past tenses in the aporetic narration of the poem, the belatedness of the traumatic experience becomes apparently clear. As a result, the reader who is part of the storytelling process loses his sense of time and place because the characters he accompanies in the reading of the story 'exist in liminal landscape' of pain, destruction and violence, that they lose any sense of real existence(Azucy; 2011, p33). Thus, the traumatic experience, shared by the reader on the one hand and the speaker and Persephone and her mother, is vaguely expressed as a result of the overwhelming event Persephone underwent.

Additionally, Glück manages to visualize the occurrence of the traumatic event to her readers by referring to the blood stained body of the victim which resembles a Hawthorian fiction character. By associating Persephone with a character from Hawthorn Glück shares the experience with her readers and takes the character of Persephone out of her historical dimension and places her in the current moment. Thus, the cycle of female trauma reoccurs in an unexpected ways reflecting the core of the nature of trauma itself.

'A Myth of Innocence' is another poem that retells the story of Persephone. However, it reintroduces it from the point of view of Persephone herself through the striking utilization of prosopopeia or apostrophic quality which enables the poet to blend her

voice with that of Persephone making her a replica of not only herself but of modern women. The poem, whose initial atmosphere is bright, begins by describing what Persephone used to do every summer by the pool where she usually looks at herself to find changes in her appearance. Persephone reveals that she was never alone because her uncle (Hades) was watching her all the time. This was why she discarded this thought by praying. The atmosphere of the poem is suddenly altered by the sudden appearance of death. Persephone's inability to express her memory of the traumatic event is conveyed through the apostrophic quality of the poem. Such quality, which is characteristic of many other poems, "evoke[s] an atemporalised space where time collapses, such that the present and the future may exist meaningfully together without incongruity" (From *arrarat to averno*; p.12). Thus the blurriness of Persephone's memory is pertinent to the overwhelming nature of the traumatic event.

Another worthy example showcasing traumatized female characters is a poem entitled "Gretel in Darkness" from Glück's 1975 volume "The House on Marshland". As it is typical for a poem by Glück, the poem reintroduces the folklore tale of Hansel and Gretel from a different standpoint. The story is narrated from a purely feminist point of view which instantly creates a strong link between Glück and Gretel because they shared similar disturbing and abnormal childhoods fostering the grim shadows of traumatic symptoms to be seen later in their behaviors. Trauma in this poem is structured on an incomplete dialogue, which is tinted by admonition, between Gretel and her brother. This dialogue exhibits the basic features of the traumatic experience namely belatedness, dissociation, and repetition. Through this dramatic dialogue, the only audible voice is that of Gretel as she appears addressing her brother Hansel whose role is passive and whose voice is inaudible through the entire poem. Reminding her brother of all the harsh circumstances they underwent together and their accomplishments, Gretel's expectation of an answer from her brother proves futile. Furthermore, the poem explores 'the temporal undecidability of traumatic experience and the fragmented quality of ... trauma [which] are paradigmatic elements of Glück's poetry'(Morris. 2006). The poem reads:

This is the world we wanted.
All who would have seen us dead
are dead. I hear the witch's cry
break in the moonlight through a sheet
of sugar:
.....
Now, far from women's arms
and memory of women, in our father's hut
we sleep, are never hungry.
Why do I not forget?
My father bars the door, bars harm
from this house, and it is years.
No one remembers. Even you, my brother,
summer afternoons you look at me as though
you meant to leave,
as though it never happened.
But I killed for you. I see armed firs,

the spires of that gleaming kiln—
Nights I turn to you to hold me
but you are not there.
Am I alone? Spies
hiss in the stillness, Hansel,
we are there still and it is real, real,
that black forest and the fire in earnest.

Quite interesting to notice is the title of poem which provides a direct indication of the prevalent and protracted agonizing and tormenting experience Gretel is going through. Many of the dark remnants of her past overshadow not only her present but for a certain extent her future too. Recurring and seemingly overwhelming as they are, these memories continue to inflict haunting and tormenting effects on the speaker. Authoritative in its tone, the first line alludes to a resemblance between Gretel and a battlefield survivor. Both had gone through the harsh traumatizing experience of killing for survival. Yet, Gretel's act of killing was more personal because she killed the witch to save her brother as well. Apparently, death and its shadows dominate the overall atmosphere of the poem and become the thrusting force that not only haunts Gretel but thrives her survival instinct.

The poem is exemplary in its austere and precise narration of the traumatic experience in the sense that it focuses on the internal struggle the speaker has experienced since her childhood. She is unable to get rid of the haunting memory of killing the witch in the forest and is overwhelmed by the sense of loneliness which emphasizes her traumatic experience. Gretel's sense of loneliness stems from her brother's denial and indifferent status to her suffering. The poem's narrative suggests that there is an undeniable difference between male and female traumatic memory processing because, unlike Gretel, Hansel lives normally and behaves as if nothing has happened. Moreover, not only the memory of the witch has inflicted a traumatic scar on Gretel's psychological state but also the memory of her stepmother who treated her and Hansel with meanness and hostility. Mentioned as well her spatial memory where she recalls the greenery of landscape and the kiln where the witch was burned. These memories, which significantly reshaped her character, are signaled to her consciousness by the presence of her brother which plays the role of stimuli of the traumatic memory repetition. It is here where the augmentation of Gretel's traumatic experience occurs as she recalls her disappointment with Hansel's complete indifference and denial. Here, a direct connection between the poet and Gretel can be made because both share the same traumatic childhood event though to a different extent. Eventually, Glück's mastery of traumatic narration goes alongside the Caruthian principles of dissociation and belatedness as Glück fuses between the past and the present tenses revealing to the reader that Gretel is still under the traumatic shock of living the past and the present simultaneously. Apparently, the heavy wearying burden Gretel is preoccupied with is not the traumatic event of the witch murder alone but also the fact that her family members devalued and ignored her sacrifice for them creating a sense of betrayal. Supporting this Elizabeth Dodd in her work *The Veiled Mirror and the Woman Poet*, asserts that "Like Plath and Sexton, [Glück] writes with angry bitterness about female sexual or romantic experience in a world where women remain primarily powerless." (Dodd, 1992, p.65)

Considering what was discussed above, it is worth mentioning that Glück, through her long career as a poet, has formulated a holistic vision towards the position of women in her community and reached the conclusion that women's suffering and traumatic experiences are an ongoing negative social phenomenon. What underscores her holistic view is the fact that it tackles traumatized female figures in various trajectories of expression including religion, mythology, and folklore.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, what characterizes and underscores the poetry of Louise Glück is her personal treatment of the concept of female trauma as a general negative social phenomenon. Traumatized female characters that haunt her poetry are depicted as shackled by the conventions of their communities. They often appear on her the poetic stage as overwhelmed, passive, and unable to free themselves from the aftermath of the traumatic experience. However, it is through this inability and passivity that the poet makes the sound of traumatized females shrill in the ears of readers. By altering the normal into abnormal, the familiar into unfamiliar, and the deemed acceptable into unacceptable Glück's treatment of female trauma is exceptional. She brilliantly succeeded in changing and shifting the readers' attitudes toward the long-ongoing systemic normalization of female trauma. She succeeded as well in raising awareness and consciousness not only of women but of the community in general about the threatening and grievous consequences of this prevailing yet negative phenomenon.

Undermining the normalization of female characters in fields and disciplines such as religion, history, mythology, and folklore or tradition is at the heart of Glück's poetic mission. Her poems ingeniously expose the systemized and normalized underrating and belittlement of the role women play in society. They attempt to dismantle many obsolete predominant philosophical bases these disciplines are constructed upon by showing how the hallmark female figures are inferiorly treated and valued. The indifference of these disciplines towards female trauma and suffering is exposed as well through these poems.

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