

The System of Symbolic-Mythological Images in Louise Glück's Poetry Collection *Averno*: An Archetypal-Semantic Analysis

NURIDDINOVA FOTIMA ILHOMJON QIZI
University of Business and Science, Uzbekistan

ABSTRACT

This article examines the way mythological imagery forms a coherent symbolic system in Louise Glück's poetry collection Averno (2006). The study aims to demonstrate that images such as migrating birds, the spring – autumn opposition, the moon and the earth, Persephone, Demeter, Hades, Lake Averno, echo and the telescope do not function as isolated allusions but as interrelated components of a unified mythological-symbolic system. The theoretical framework draws on Northrop Frye's archetypal criticism, Ernst Cassirer's theory of symbolic thought, Mircea Eliade's concept of the sacred and the profane, Philip Wheelwright's theory of metaphor, and Carl Jung's notion of the archetype. The analysis shows that Glück reworks classical myth not to retell it but to articulate the contemporary subject's experience of memory, identity, loss and existence. The article concludes that in Glück's poetics mythological meaning is not fixed but continuously reconstructed within the text.

Keywords: Mythological image, archetype, symbolic-mythological system, Louise Glück, *Averno*, Persephone, Hades, archetypal criticism, contemporary American poetry, intertextuality

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary world poetry, the use of mythological images has ceased to be a means of merely repeating or embellishing

traditional plots and has become an active mechanism for creating new artistic and philosophical meaning. Myth is no longer regarded as a finished narrative but as an open semantic model that poets rework and adapt to the inner experience of the contemporary individual. The work of the American poet and Nobel Prize laureate Louise Glück is a vivid example of this tendency. Her poetry collection *Averno*, published in 2006, fuses the images of Persephone, Demeter, and Hades from ancient Greek mythology with the contemporary lyrical subject's experiences of memory, loss, identity, and existence; mythological images such as Lake Averno become interlinked with nature, the seasons, migratory birds, the moon, echo, and other poetic symbols, forming a single system of symbolic-mythological images.

According to Northrop Frye's theory of archetypal criticism, mythological images in a literary text are archetypal structures that express the collective experience of humanity [1: 88]. Ernst Cassirer, for his part, interprets myth as the earliest form of symbolic thought, emphasizing that mythological images embody the human model for comprehending the world. These theoretical perspectives serve as the methodological basis for analyzing the system of symbolic-mythological images in the poetry collection *Averno*.

Glück's poetic mastery is not limited to reinterpreting individual mythological images alone. She brings these images into semantic relation with one another, creating a unified poetic system that expresses universal concepts such as life and death, memory and forgetting, loss and rebirth. For this reason, this section analyzes, on the basis of poetic examples, the semantic function of the symbolic-mythological images in the collection *Averno*, their interrelation, and their place in contemporary poetic thought.

The relevance of the topic lies in the fact that although foreign literary scholarship on the *Averno* collection contains a number of observations concerning individual images (mainly the myth of Persephone), the way in which the collection's images of nature (migratory birds, the seasons, the moon, the lake), of sound and silence (echo), and of perception (the

telescope) merge with the mythological characters into a single semantic network has not been sufficiently examined as a distinct subject of research. For this reason, this article considers all the main symbolic images in the collection not in isolation from one another but as an interconnected, unified system.

The aim of the research is to determine the semantic nature of the symbolic-mythological images in the collection *Averno*, their interrelation, and the function of this system in contemporary poetic thought. To achieve this aim, the following tasks were set: 1) to identify the semantic layers of the natural and mythological images in the collection; 2) to substantiate their interpretation within the context of theoretical literary scholarship (archetypal criticism, the theory of symbolic thought); 3) to establish the compositional and semantic interrelation among the individual images; 4) to show what philosophical conclusion this system leads to by the end of the collection.

The scholarly novelty of the research lies in the fact that, for the first time in Uzbek literary studies, the collection *Averno* is analyzed as a unified symbolic-mythological system, with semantic consistency traced from the images of nature through to the mythological characters.

MATERIALS AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The direct material of the research consists of the poems 'The Night Migrations,' 'October,' 'Persephone the Wanderer,' 'Crater Lake,' 'Echoes,' 'A Myth of Innocence,' 'A Myth of Devotion,' the eponymous poem 'Averno,' and 'Telescope,' taken from Louise Glück's poetry collection *Averno* (2006). The analysis employed comparative-typological, structural-semantic, and archetypal-mythological methods.

The theoretical-methodological basis of the research is formed by several strands. First, according to Northrop Frye's concept of archetypal criticism, the mythological images in a literary text are regarded as stable structures that express the collective artistic experience of humanity [1: 383]. Second, Ernst Cassirer's theory of symbolic thought makes it possible to

interpret myth as a form of human perception of the world – that is, as a model of thought in which the boundary between reality and imagination is not rigid [2: 271; 3: 103]. Third, Mircea Eliade's concept of the sacred and the profane serves to explain the mechanism by which an everyday natural phenomenon acquires existential-sacred meaning through lyrical contemplation [4: 256]. Fourth, the concept of "diaphora" in Philip Wheelwright's theory of metaphor – the creation of new meaning through the unexpected combination of concepts belonging to distant semantic fields – is applied to analyze the complex metaphors in the collection [5: 201]. Fifth, Gaston Bachelard's psychoanalysis of poetic elements serves as a basis for uncovering the symbolic dual polarity of natural elements such as fire and water, while Carl Jung's theory of the archetype and the collective unconscious serves as a basis for interpreting the deep psychological layers of the water image [6: 115; 7: 451].

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

1. *The image of migratory birds: The opening leitmotif of the collection*

The first and, structurally, one of the most significant symbolic images in the collection is the nocturnal flight of migratory birds. 'The Night Migrations,' the poem that opens the collection, presents this image as follows:

This is the moment when you see again
the red berries of the mountain ash
and in the dark sky
the birds' night migrations.
It grieves me to think
the dead won't see them —
these things we depend on,
they disappear.

[8: 82]

In these lines, the image of the migratory birds unites three semantic layers. On the first layer, it expresses the natural process of migration characteristic of autumn. On the second layer, the line "these things we depend on, they disappear"

signifies the transience of all existence and the inevitability of loss. The third layer, in the lines "It grieves me to think/ the dead won't see them," expresses the human being's spiritual anguish in the face of death and experiences connected with memory.

The interrelation of these semantic layers is illuminated more deeply through Mircea Eliade's views on the sacred and the profane. From the standpoint of Eliade's concept of the sacred and the profane, the natural migration of birds, as an everyday occurrence, belongs to the profane world, whereas the lyrical subject's contemplation of life, death, and memory through this scene endows it with existential and sacred meaning — that is, an ordinary natural phenomenon is transformed into a poetic image bearing symbolic-philosophical meaning. It is no accident that Glück opens the collection with precisely this poem. As the leading leitmotif that initiates the collection's symbolic-mythological system, the nocturnal flight of the migratory birds expresses the boundary between life and death, seeing and losing, existence and disappearance. In this respect, this image forms the semantic center of the main poetic ideas developed in the subsequent poems.

From the standpoint of Eliade's concept of the sacred and the profane, the migration of the birds is, in itself, a profane — everyday — natural phenomenon; however, the lyrical subject's viewing of it through the prism of life and death fills this scene with existential-sacred meaning [4: 256]. It is no accident that Glück opens the collection with precisely this poem: the image of the migratory birds marks the starting point of the life-death, seeing-losing opposition that is developed throughout all the subsequent poems.

2. *The opposition of the seasons: The symbolic system of spring and autumn*

The second important symbolic image in the collection is connected with the seasons, in particular the opposition of spring and autumn. Louise Glück interprets these seasons not as ordinary natural phenomena but as a symbolic system expressing the spiritual and existential states of human life. In the fourth part of the poem 'October,' this opposition is expressed in the following lines:

This is the light of autumn, not the light of spring.
 The light of autumn: you will not be spared.
 The songs have changed; the unspeakable
 has entered them.
 This is the light of autumn, not the light that says
 I am reborn.

[8]

In these lines, the contrast between autumn and spring acquires a broader semantic meaning than the mere alternation of natural seasons. The line "This is the light of autumn, not the light of spring" interprets autumn not as a simple counterpart to spring but as a spiritual state in which the possibility of renewal is limited. The subsequent phrase "you will not be spared" endows the image of autumn with the meaning of inevitability and a law of existence that does not submit to human will. The lines "The songs have changed; the unspeakable has entered them" transform autumn into a symbol not merely of a change in nature but of a suffering and a spiritual experience, difficult to express, that has entered human consciousness. Finally, in the closing lines "not the light that says/ I am reborn," where spring ordinarily appears as a metaphor for awakening and rebirth, autumn instead expresses an existential state that denies such hope.

In the poem 'October,' the opposition of spring and autumn is not confined to depicting the natural alternation of seasons. Through these symbols, Glück expresses ideas about loss, inevitability, and rebirth in human life on the basis of a poetic contrast. In this way, the image of the seasons becomes one of the central semantic models denoting time, memory, and existence within the symbolic-mythological system of the poetry collection *Averno*.

The opposition of spring and autumn in the poem 'October' is not confined merely to the contrast of the seasons. This opposition becomes further complicated through certain poetic images, bringing forth meanings of renewal and anguish that are mutually opposed yet inseparably linked. This kind of semantic shift is clearly manifested in the metaphor "balm after violence" in the second part of the poem 'October.' Philip Wheelwright's concepts of "epiphor" and "diaphora" serve as the

methodological basis for explaining the poetic essence of this metaphor. According to the scholar, diaphora is a metaphorical structure that brings forth new semantic meaning through the unexpected connection of concepts that are semantically distant from one another [5]. In the second part of the poem "October," Glück creates precisely such a diaphoric relationship between spring and violence:

Summer after summer has ended,
 balm after violence:
 it does me no good
 to be good to me now;
 violence has changed me. [8: 82]

In the phrase "balm after violence," the contrast between balm and violence disrupts the traditional model of spring-as-renewal. Here, balm is not a means of healing a wound but is transformed into a symbol of consolation that arrives belatedly, after violence. This is why the lyrical subject states, "it does me no good to be good to me now." That is to say, although the possibility of healing exists, the spiritual wound has already transformed the self.

In our view, through this diaphoric metaphor Glück reinterprets the traditional image of spring as renewal, revealing the complex and contradictory nature of recovery after spiritual anguish; the image of spring, too, appears in the symbolic-mythological system of the *Averno* collection as one of the inseparable semantic poles of loss and renewal.

In the sixth part of the poem 'October,' the relationship between the images of the moon and the earth reveals another important semantic layer in the collection's symbolic-mythological system. These images appear not on the basis of opposition but as a poetic unity that complements one another:

The brightness of the day becomes
 the brightness of the night;
 the fire becomes the mirror.
 My friend the earth is bitter; I think
 sunlight has failed her.
 Lie still and watch:

they give nothing but ask nothing.
 From within the earth's
 bitter disgrace, coldness and barrenness
 my friend the moon rises:
 she is beautiful tonight, but when is she not beautiful? [8: 82]

In these lines, the images of day and night, fire and mirror, earth and moon form a mutually transforming symbolic system. In particular, the metaphor "the fire becomes the mirror" expresses the transformation of fire from an external force into a means of inner contemplation. According to Gaston Bachelard's psychoanalysis of fire, fire is one of the poetic elements that simultaneously embodies a creative and a destructive force. From this standpoint, the fire in the poem, while remaining a source of light, is also transformed into a symbolic mirror that serves the lyrical subject's understanding of his own inner world. The image of the moon, in turn, performs a distinct semantic function within this symbolic system. In the line "My friend the moon rises," the moon is depicted as an image of hope rising from the cold, barren bosom of the earth. The closing rhetorical question, "she is beautiful tonight, but when is she not beautiful?" signifies that the moon's beauty is not confined to a particular time or season but manifests itself as a constant aesthetic and spiritual value. In our view, this image directly recalls the myth of Persephone. Just as Persephone preserves her essential nature even after descending into the underworld, the moon, too, rises out of coldness and darkness, expressing the constancy of beauty and hope. In this way, Glück takes the image of the moon beyond the bounds of the classical mythological symbol and transforms it into a contemporary poetic emblem expressing the human being's spiritual endurance and inner light.

3. *Persephone and demeter: A psychological reinterpretation of the classical myth*

In the poem 'Persephone the Wanderer,' mythological content is disclosed directly through the images of Persephone and Demeter. In the first version of the poem, Demeter's punishing of the earth after losing her daughter is linked to an unconscious cruelty in human nature – a phenomenon the poet calls "negative

creation" [8: 82]. Here, the classical myth's motif of maternal wrath is enriched with a contemporary psychological interpretation: the barrenness of the earth is not a simple punishment but the poetic expression of a new spiritual state formed as a result of loss. In the first version of the poem, this relationship is reflected in the following lines:

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. [8: 82]

In these lines, Glück enriches the classical myth of Persephone with a contemporary psychological and moral interpretation. Whereas in the mythological narrative Demeter's wrath toward the earth is interpreted as the consequence of the tragedy of losing her daughter, in the poem this event is linked to an unconscious aggression in human nature. In particular, the concept of "negative creation" produces an important semantic turn. Here, creation signifies not the building of life but the emergence of a new spiritual state through loss and suffering. Thus, Demeter's rendering the earth barren is not a simple punishment but the poetic expression of a new state of existence formed as a result of loss.

The symbolic-semantic content of the image of Persephone deepens further as the poem proceeds. The lyrical protagonist sums up her own fate in the following line:

she has been a prisoner since she has been a daughter.

This line marks an important turning point in the symbolic-semantic interpretation of the image of Persephone. It asserts that imprisonment begins not with the descent into the underworld

but with the social relations bound up with the status of being a daughter. In this way, Glück enriches the classical myth's motif of captivity with psychological and social meaning, shifting it to the question of the freedom of the female subject. As a result, Persephone's descent into the underworld is interpreted not as a physical event but as the symbolic continuation of an existing social order.

4. *Body and soul: The ontological conflict of 'Crater Lake'*

Whereas in 'Persephone the Wanderer' the question of human freedom and identity is interpreted through a mythological image, in 'Crater Lake' this problem becomes further generalized, rising to the level of an ontological conflict between body and soul, life and death. In this respect, the poem 'Crater Lake' expands the symbolic-mythological meaning of Lake Averno, expressing it in the following lines:

There was a war between good and evil.
 We decided to call the body good.
 That made death evil.
 It turned the soul
 against death completely.
 Like a foot soldier wanting
 to serve a great warrior, the soul
 wanted to side with the body.
 Where does the voice come from
 that says suppose the war
 is evil, that says
 suppose the body did this to us,
 made us afraid of love –

[8]

The lines "We decided to call the body good. That made death evil" express the central philosophical idea of the poem. Glück interprets good and evil not as absolute concepts but as criteria of judgment shaped by human thought. In particular, the phrase "We decided" signifies that the boundary between good and evil is not natural but a conditional construct established by human beings. The question at the close of the poem, "suppose the body did this to us, made us afraid of love," in turn prompts a

reconsideration of the traditional opposition between body and soul. Here the idea is advanced that the source of fear may not be death itself but the human being's own physical existence. As a result, body and soul are interpreted not as opposites but as complexly interrelated forms of existence.

In 'Crater Lake' the problem rises to a universal, ontological level. The poem depicts the body as having been designated "good" and death, for that reason, as "evil," so that the soul turns against death and sides with the body; at the close of the poem, however, the question is raised that the true source of fear may not be death but the human being's own physical existence [8: 82]. Here Glück presents the boundary between good and evil not as natural but as a conditional construct set by human thought. As a result, body and soul appear not as opposites but as complexly interrelated forms of existence.

Furthermore, the poem's treatment of the body and soul is closely connected with Glück's broader meditation on the meaning of human existence. The body is initially presented as a positive and desirable form of existence because it represents life, physical presence, and the possibility of experiencing the world. However, this positive identification simultaneously creates a negative perception of death. Once the body is accepted as "good," death inevitably becomes its opposite, and the soul is consequently placed in a position of conflict with mortality. This opposition creates an internal war within the human being, since the soul, although traditionally associated with transcendence and immortality, becomes attached to the body and attempts to protect it from death. Thus, the poem questions the assumption that the soul naturally seeks to escape the physical world. Instead, Glück presents the soul as emotionally and existentially dependent on the body.

The metaphor of war is particularly significant in this context. The statement "There was a war between good and evil" transforms the internal conflict between body, soul, life, and death into a universal struggle. However, Glück immediately destabilizes the conventional meaning of this opposition by explaining that "We decided to call the body good." The use of the collective pronoun "we" suggests a shared human

consciousness and emphasizes that such categories are produced through interpretation rather than existing independently. In this sense, the poem does not simply describe a struggle between two objective forces; rather, it investigates how human beings construct oppositions in order to understand their existence. Good and evil, therefore, become interpretative categories through which humanity attempts to organize the uncertainty of life and death.

5. *Soul, echo, and silence: Self-recognition in the poem 'Echoes'*

In the first part of the poem 'Echoes,' the lyrical subject states that once she could imagine her soul, she could also imagine her death, but that at the very moment of this imagining her soul "died," while her body – for reasons unknown to her – continued to live [8: 82]. According to Ernst Cassirer's concept of symbolic thought, in mythological consciousness the boundary between imagination and reality is not rigid [3: 103]; hence, for the lyrical subject, the very act of imagining death becomes a spiritual reality. The "persistence" of the body expresses biological life, while the "death" of the soul expresses a rupture and a crisis of identity within the human being's inner world:

Once I could imagine my soul
 I could imagine my death.
 When I imagined my death
 my soul died. This
 I remember clearly.
 My body persisted.
 Not thrived, but persisted.
 Why I do not know. [8: 82]

"When I imagined my death my soul died" – this paradox is the most direct expression of the archetype of the soul in the collection *Averno*. The soul dies through the imagining of death, while the body persists. According to Ernst Cassirer's concept of symbolic thought, in mythological consciousness the boundary between imagination and reality is not rigidly drawn. From this standpoint, for the lyrical subject, imagining death has a direct effect on her spiritual reality [3: 103]. Glück's lyrical subject

perceives reality precisely according to this kind of mythological model of thought: the imagining of death becomes a spiritual experience and manifests itself as a symbolic truth in the line "my soul died." In our view, in the poem "Echoes" the soul is interpreted not as the opposite of biological existence but as a symbolic phenomenon inseparably bound up with memory and consciousness. For this reason, the body's state of having "persisted" signifies the continuation of life, while the "death" of the soul becomes the poetic expression of a rupture and a crisis of identity within the human being's inner world.

In the third part of the poem 'Echoes,' the image of echo becomes the symbolic expression of the process of human self-recognition. In the following lines, the lyrical protagonist expresses her reflection on inner silence and selfhood:

the long silence, like the silence in the valley
before the mountains send back
your own voice changed to the voice of nature.
This silence is my companion now.
I ask: of what did my soul die?
and the silence answers
if your soul died, whose life
are you living and
when did you become that person?

[8: 82]

The line "Your own voice changed to the voice of nature" expresses one of the poem's central symbolic images. Here, echo appears not as a simple repetition of the human voice but as its altered form, one that has taken on new meaning. As a result, the human being hears her own voice again, but it now carries new meaning, fused with the voice of nature. In this way, echo becomes a poetic symbol expressing the lyrical subject's self-recognition and inner transformation. At the close of the poem, the silence's answering the lyrical protagonist with a question carries particular semantic weight. The answer does not offer a ready-made truth; instead, through the question "whose life are you living?" it once again casts personal identity into doubt. Here, silence is not emptiness but appears as an active form of inner thought. In the poem 'Echoes,' the images of echo and silence become the symbolic expression of the human being's

inner transformation and the process of self-recognition. "Echo" does not simply repeat the voice but returns it bearing new meaning. In this respect, the poem 'Echoes' stands as one of the important poetic texts illuminating the interrelation of memory, soul, and identity within the symbolic-mythological system of the poetry collection *Averno*.

It should be noted that whereas in 'Echoes' the inner transformation of selfhood is expressed through soul and memory, in 'A Myth of Innocence' this process is deepened further through the social and psychological status of the image of Persephone. In the poem, Persephone is depicted as a figure who has still not been freed from her status as a daughter:

She sees
the same person, the horrible mantle
of daughterliness still clinging to her. [8: 82]

The line "the horrible mantle of daughterliness" is one of the poem's most important symbolic images. The word "mantle" signifies not only an outer garment but also the status and social role imposed upon a person. For this reason, daughterhood here is interpreted not as a biological or familial state but as a social burden inseparable from Persephone's very identity. The phrase "still clinging to her" shows that this status has not disappeared with the passage of time but has, on the contrary, become absorbed into her personal identity.

In the closing part of the poem 'A Myth of Innocence,' attention shifts from the image of Persephone to the image of Hades. The poet attempts to express him not through a single definition but through various names:

All the different nouns –
she says them in rotation.
Death, husband, god, stranger. [8: 82]

The series *Death, Husband, God, Stranger* reveals the multilayered symbolic-semantic nature of the image of Hades. Each noun expresses a distinct facet of him: "death" – a symbol of ending and finality; "husband" – a social and marital status;

"god" – divine authority; and "stranger" – a sense of alienness and incomprehensibility for Persephone. At the same time, none of these names can fully characterize the image of Hades. He is not a character with a single fixed meaning but appears as a complex mythological image at the intersection of various semantic layers.

In the third part of the poem, the image of echo, through silence, returns an answer to the lyrical protagonist in the form of a question: if the soul has died, whose life is she now living, and when did this state come about [8: 82]. Here, echo is not a simple repetition of the voice but its altered form, bearing new meaning – which is why the poem 'Echoes' becomes an important poetic text expressing the interrelation of memory, soul, and identity.

6. *The multilayered nature of the image of Hades*

Whereas in 'A Myth of Innocence' the image of Hades is expressed through various semantic roles, in 'A Myth of Devotion' his conception of love comes to the center. The poet interprets the underworld not as a realm of love but as an expression of the complex relationship between freedom and possession. This is manifested in the following lines:

when Hades decided he loved this girl
he built for her a duplicate of earth,
everything the same, down to the meadow,
but with a bed added. [8: 82]

The lines "A duplicate of earth, everything the same, but with a bed added" reveal the paradoxical nature of the realm Hades has created. The underworld is depicted as an almost perfect replica of the Earth, yet the addition of the image of the "bed" alters the very essence of this realm. Here, the bed appears not only as a symbol of intimacy but also of possession and control. Although the world Hades has created outwardly resembles the Earth, its inner essence is defined by a restriction of freedom.

you're dead, nothing can hurt you
which seems to him
a more promising beginning, more true. [8: 82]

The closing lines "you're dead, nothing can hurt you" reveal Hades's conception of love. He interprets the declaration of love not through romantic feeling but as an existence free of pain and fear. For this reason, death here is not merely a biological ending but is also transformed into a symbolic form of release from suffering.

In the poem 'A Myth of Devotion,' love and death are interpreted not as opposing concepts but as poetic categories that complement one another. Glück elevates the image of Hades not as the aggressive ruler of the underworld found in classical mythology but to the level of a symbolic image embodying the complex conflict among love, possession, and protection. In this way, in the poetry collection *Averno* the underworld becomes not merely a realm of death but a poetic space that serves to comprehend the philosophical essence of human relationships. For example, whereas the poem 'A Myth of Devotion' analyzes the complex relationship between love and death, the collection's central poem, 'Averno,' generalizes this question from the standpoint of human spiritual existence. The lyrical subject interprets life and death not as biological phenomena but as a process bound up with spiritual states:

You die when your spirit dies.
 Otherwise, you live.
 You may not do a good job of it, but you go on –
 something you have no choice about. [8: 82]

The lines "You die when your spirit dies. Otherwise, you live" express the poem's central philosophical idea. Here, biological existence and spiritual existence are distinguished from one another. For the poet, the true death of a human being is not the decay of the body but the loss of the soul's capacity to live. For this reason, the subsequent lines, "you may not do a good job of it, but you go on," interpret life not merely as physical continuity but as a form of existence carried on amid inner emptiness.

In 'A Myth of Devotion,' Hades's conception of love comes to the center: for the girl he loves, he builds an exact replica of the earth, with only one detail added – a bed [8: 82]. This detail signifies possession and control rather than intimacy. At the close

of the poem, Hades interprets the state of death as a safer beginning, free of pain [8: 82]; hence, in the collection, death appears not only as a biological ending but also as a symbolic form of release from suffering. In this way, Glück moves Hades beyond the image of the aggressive ruler found in classical mythology, transforming him into a symbolic figure embodying the conflict among love, possession, and protection.

7. The eponymous poem Averno: A philosophy of spiritual existence

In the collection's central poem, life and death are distinguished not on a biological but on a spiritual basis: true death occurs only when the human soul dies; otherwise, the person – for better or worse – continues to live [8: 82]. Here, the primary criterion for Glück is not physical continuity but the soul's capacity to live. In this way, within the collection's symbolic-mythological system, the life-death opposition is shifted from a biological criterion to a spiritual-existential one.

Whereas in the earlier poems of the collection the relationship between soul and body, life and death, is illuminated philosophically, in the third part of the poem 'Averno' these oppositions are generalized through the symbolic space of Lake Averno. In the following lines, the lyrical subject expresses the boundary between soul, human being, and disappearance:

On one side, the soul wanders.
On the other, human beings living in fear.
In between, the pit of disappearance.

The phrase "the pit of disappearance" is one of the poem's central symbolic images. Here, "pit" signifies not only a physical depth but also the boundary between existence and nonexistence, consciousness and the unknown. The placement of the soul on one side and human beings living in fear on the other, with the "pit of disappearance" between them, produces a symbolic space expressing the danger of the human being's losing his own selfhood. The scholar Carl Jung interprets water as one of the important archetypal symbols of the collective unconscious.

From this standpoint, Lake Averno appears not as a geographic space separating life and death but as a symbolic boundary leading into the unknown, deep layers of human consciousness [7: 451]. That is, the image of "the pit of disappearance" performs a central semantic function within the symbolic-mythological system of the collection *Averno*. It expresses not a physical space leading to the underworld but a liminal state leading to the loss and renewed recognition of the self. In this way, Lake Averno moves beyond the status of a geographic object found in classical mythology and becomes an ontological and psychological symbol of contemporary human existence.

8. *The poem "Telescope": A philosophical conclusion on the limits of perception*

It should be noted that whereas in the poem 'Averno' the boundary of human existence and disappearance is expressed through a symbolic space, in 'Telescope' this question is interpreted through the process of perception and vision. In this way, within the collection's symbolic-mythological system, a transition is observed from external space to the inner experience of human consciousness. In the poem, this process is expressed in the following lines:

There is a moment after you move your eye away
 when you forget where you are
 because you've been living, it seems,
 somewhere else, in the silence of the night sky.
 You've stopped being here in the world.
 You're in a different place,
 a place where human life has no meaning.
 You're not a creature in a body.
 You exist as the stars exist,
 participating in their stillness, their immensity.
 Then you're in the world again.
 You realize afterward
 not that the image is false
 but the relation is false.
 You see again how far away
 each thing is from every other thing.

[8: 82]

The line "Not that the image is false but the relation is false" expresses the poem's central philosophical idea. For Glück, the problem lies not in whether the thing seen is true or false but in the meaning the human being assigns to it and the manner in which she relates herself to it. The telescope shows the stars exactly as they are, yet the human being attempts to bring them closer to her own experience. The poem reveals precisely the conditional nature of this sense of closeness. This poetic resolution forms a semantic harmony with the poem 'The Night Migrations.' Whereas at the beginning of the collection the distance between human beings and nature is symbolically expressed through the migrating birds, in "Telescope" this distance is shifted to a cosmic scale. In both poems it is shown that the sense of closeness is a product of human consciousness, and that existence, in fact, is defined by an experience of distance and separation.

We find that the poem 'Telescope' is the poetic text that concludes the symbolic-mythological system of the collection *Averno*. Whereas at the beginning of the collection the human being strives to comprehend nature, by the end she comes face to face with the limits of her own perception. In this respect, 'The Night Migrations' and 'Telescope' form a symbolic frame that complements one another both compositionally and semantically – that is, whereas in the first poem movement and observation predominate, in the second observation itself becomes the object of critical reflection, and the symbolic-mythological system of the *Averno* collection concludes with a reconsideration of the relationship among human being, nature, and cosmos. Whereas in 'Telescope' the limits of human perception are interpreted philosophically, at the very close of the collection the image of "Persephone the Wanderer" is invoked once again. In this way, Glück compositionally returns the collection to its opening mythological image, concluding its symbolic-semantic content on a new philosophical level:

I think I can remember
being dead. Many times, in winter,
I approached Zeus. Tell me, I would ask him,

how can I endure the earth?
 And he would say,
 in a short time you will be here again.
 And in the time between
 you will forget everything:
 those fields of ice will be
 the meadows of Elysium.

[8: 82]

In these lines, Persephone perceives life and death not as two rigidly separated states but as an experience that flows one into the other. Zeus's answer, "you will forget everything," interprets forgetting not as a temporary loss of memory but as a condition for passing into a new stage of existence. For this reason, the images of winter and Elysium, too, become not an absolute opposition but symbolic spaces expressing different manifestations of a single existence. The second version of the poem 'Persephone the Wanderer' is the poetic conclusion that closes the symbolic-mythological system of the poetry collection *Averno*.

The oppositions consistently developed throughout the collection – life and death, memory and forgetting, being and disappearance – merge into a single philosophical system precisely in this poem. Persephone is no longer merely a heroine of classical mythology but becomes the universal symbolic image of the contemporary human being, moving constantly among different worlds, different states, and different identities.

Thus, the symbolic-semantic analysis of the mythological images in the poetry collection *Averno* shows that in Louise Glück's poetics classical mythology has been reinterpreted on the basis of contemporary artistic thought. We find that the collection's main symbolic images – migratory birds, the opposition of the seasons, Persephone, Demeter, Hades, Lake Averno, echo, the telescope, and other poetic emblems – constitute a single symbolic-mythological system, functioning in mutual semantic interconnection. Each image simultaneously embodies natural-mythological, psychological, and social-cultural layers of meaning, thereby producing a multilayered poetic meaning.

Glück does not entirely reject the traditional images of ancient mythology; rather, she enriches their semantic center with philosophical reflections on the contemporary human being's spiritual experience, the problem of identity, memory, loss, and existence. The image of Persephone is not merely a mythological heroine moving between the underworld and the surface of the earth, but becomes a universal symbolic model of the contemporary human being living amid different spaces, states, and identities. Likewise, the images of Hades, Lake Averno, echo, silence, and the telescope move beyond their classical mythological function and appear as poetic emblems expressing the inner dynamics of human consciousness, the liminal states of existence, and the mechanisms of perceiving being.

The study has shown that in Glück's poetics the meaning of mythological images is formed not as a fixed, unchanging system but as a semantic structure that is continually renewed. In the collection, mythological images serve not merely as artistic ornamentation or intertextual allusion but as the principal poetic mechanism shaping the work's conceptual content.

CONCLUSION

The analysis conducted shows that the mythological images in Louise Glück's poetry collection *Averno* – migratory birds, the opposition of the seasons, the moon and the earth, Persephone, Demeter, Hades, Lake Averno, echo, and the telescope – are not poetic elements isolated from one another but form a unified symbolic-mythological system functioning in mutual semantic interconnection. Each image simultaneously embodies natural-mythological, psychological, and social-cultural layers of meaning, and it is precisely this simultaneity that gives the collection its characteristic multilayered poetic meaning: no single image can be read to exhaustion in isolation, since its significance is continually activated and modified by its position within the larger symbolic network.

The trajectory traced through the eight analytical sections of this article confirms this systemic logic at every stage. The

nocturnal migration of birds that opens the collection establishes, at the outset, the boundary between existence and disappearance that governs everything that follows. The opposition of spring and autumn, together with the complementary pairing of moon and earth, translates this boundary into the register of seasonal and cosmic time, showing that renewal and anguish are not sequential opposites but co-present states. The reworking of Persephone and Demeter relocates the same boundary into the sphere of the psychological and the social, where captivity is shown to originate not in the topography of the underworld but in the inherited condition of daughterhood. 'Crater Lake' then raises this material to an explicitly ontological plane, dissolving the presumed opposition between body and soul, good and evil, into a set of human-made, contingent constructions. 'Echoes' and 'A Myth of Innocence' carry the inquiry inward, into the domain of memory, voice, and self-recognition, while 'A Myth of Devotion' and the title poem 'Averno' recast Hades and the underworld as figures for love, possession, and the redefinition of death as a spiritual rather than a purely biological event. "Telescope," finally, folds the entire system back upon the act of perception itself, demonstrating that the distance the collection has traced – between the living and the dead, the human and the natural, the self and its own image – is ultimately a property of consciousness rather than of the world it observes.

Glück does not entirely reject the traditional images of ancient mythology; rather, she enriches their semantic center with philosophical reflections on the contemporary human being's spiritual experience, the problem of identity, and memory and loss. The image of Persephone is not simply a mythological heroine moving between the underworld and the surface of the earth, but becomes a universal symbolic model of the contemporary human being living amid different spaces, states, and identities. Likewise, the images of Hades, Lake Averno, echo, and the telescope move beyond their classical mythological function and become poetic emblems expressing the inner dynamics of human consciousness and the mechanisms of perceiving being. In this sense, myth in Glück's poetics functions less as a fixed body of inherited stories to be illustrated than as a

flexible interpretive grammar that the poet redeploys to articulate distinctly modern experiences of grief, isolation, and self-doubt.

The theoretical framework assembled for this study – Frye's archetypal criticism, Cassirer's theory of symbolic thought, Eliade's concept of the sacred and the profane, Wheelwright's theory of metaphor, and Jung's notion of the archetype — has proved capable of accounting for this dual movement, in which classical material is preserved in outline while its semantic content is renewed from within. Taken together, these frameworks make it possible to show that the coherence of Glück's mythological system is not merely thematic but structural: the same archetypal oppositions (light and dark, presence and disappearance, captivity and freedom) recur across natural, mythological, and perceptual images alike, binding poems that might otherwise be read as thematically separate into a single continuous meditation.

Thus, the study has demonstrated that in Glück's poetics the meaning of the mythological image is not a fixed, unchanging system but a dynamic semantic structure that is continually renewed within the text. Mythological allusion in 'Averno' functions neither as ornamental reference nor as straightforward retelling, but as the very mechanism by which the collection constructs its argument about memory, identity, and existence. This makes it possible to evaluate 'Averno' as a vivid and methodologically instructive example of mythopoetic thought in contemporary American poetry, and to regard the approach developed here – tracing a single symbolic-mythological system across formally distinct poems – as applicable beyond this collection alone.

Several directions for further research follow from these conclusions. A comparative study of the system of mythological images across Glück's other collections would make it possible to determine whether the archetypal logic identified in 'Averno' represents a stable feature of her poetics or a configuration specific to this particular book. Likewise, a comparison of Glück's poetics with the work of other contemporary mythopoetic women poets – for example, Rita Dove and Eavan Boland – could help to situate her reworking of classical myth

within the broader landscape of contemporary poetry that engages critically and creatively with inherited mythological material. Finally, the methodological synthesis proposed in this article, combining archetypal criticism with theories of symbolic thought and metaphor, may itself offer a productive model for the analysis of mythological imagery in other bodies of contemporary poetic work.

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NURIDDINOVA FOTIMA ILHOMJON QIZI

UNIVERSITY OF BUSINESS AND SCIENCE,
UZBEKISTAN.

E-MAIL: <NURIDDINOVAFOTIMA393@GMAIL.COM>