

# On the Narrativity and Dialogue Mode in Louise Glück's Poetry

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**Abstract** A crucial heterogeneous feature of Louise Glück's poems is the polyphonic narrative. This poetic discourse narrative strategy is embodied in the following three aspects: firstly, through the role setting and interpretive variation of the images of Western classical texts, it constructs the multiple interpretive tension of ancient and modern dialogues; secondly, through the dissemination, extension, communication, and integration of individual life experiences in the perspective of the other, it constructs the interactive subject field of subject-object dialogues; thirdly, through the penetration and interpretive resonance of private space in the public sphere, it constructs the temporal and spatial dialogues of universal meaning. These three aspects enable Glück's poems to realize the dialectical unities of individuality and universality, singularity and plurality, and synchronicity and desynchronicity, forming an intertextual structural system of polyphonic narratives and a paradigm for the formation of world literary classics.

**Key words** Louise Glück; poetic composition; narrativity; dialogue mode

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In literary studies, the narrative nature of lyric poetry is often neglected and hardly receives attention. It seems that narratology is only the exclusive privilege of narrative literature such as the novel. However, with his unique lyric poetry, Nobel Prize-winning poet Glück has fully demonstrated that lyric poetry is not only narrative but also dialogic. Thus, the narrativity and dialogue mode constitute an important artistic quality of Glück's lyric poetry.

In 2020, the American poetess Glück was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature and recognized for "her unmistakable poetic voice that with austere beauty makes individual existence universal" (Flood, 2020). This assertion argues that Glück's poetry achieves cross-pollination from the private space to the public sphere and provides artistic reflections on issues of universal humanity. It is worth exploring further: how does Glück's poetry move from individual narratives to universal meanings? From the perspective of poetic studies, one of the important strategies is to adopt polyphonic narrative and dialogue mode to write, which is reflected in the three aspects of dialogues, i.e. the ancient and modern dialogue, the subject and object dialogue and the temporal and spatial dialogue, and these three aspects enable Glück's poems to move from individual to universal, from single to multiple, and from ephemeral to common time, forming a polyphonic narrative structure system of intertextual dialogue.

### **I. A Dialogue between the Ancient and the Modern across Time and Space**

Polyphonic dialogue is a literary and artistic expressive technique refined by Bakhtin in his interpretation of Dostoevsky's works. This technique is in response to the tendency of singularity, centrality, and subjectivity in the narrative of the text. Rather than an omniscient narrative, it gives the text a free space for dialogue and constitutes a composite, dialogic, and intermingled aesthetic experience of harmony and difference, noting that "the utterly incompatible elements comprising Dostoevsky's material are distributed among several worlds and several autonomous consciousnesses; they are presented not within a single field of vision but within several fields of vision, each full and of equal worth; and it is not the material directly but these worlds, their consciousnesses with their individual fields of vision that combine in a higher unity, a unity, so to speak, of the second order, the unity of a polyphonic novel" (Bakhtin 16). This formulation accurately describes the theoretical mechanism of the polyphonic narrative and dialogue model. In a nutshell, he mainly emphasizes the construction of differentiated, pluralistic, and egalitarian narrative perspectives in the text as a higher level of unity of thought. This theoretical mechanism is still applicable to poetry writing.

As we know, in ancient China, poetry and literary creation are characterized by “poetry expresses aspiration,” “poetry is related to emotions,” “literature carries morality,” and “literature is based on spirit.” This is also true in the West, especially in romantic poetry such as the Lake Poets. They believed that poetry is the natural expression of feelings and that poetry has a definite ideological theme and a deep emotional quality. However, the polyphonic narrative theory does not think this way, as it dismantles the essential elements of determinism, depth, and centrality. This narrative strategy is applied to Glück’s poetry, which mainly refers to the dismantling of the narrator’s centrality in the text, the denial of discursive authority, the resistance to depth structure, and the release of the plurality of different voices through characterization, forming a resonant structure between the subject and object, the internal and external, and time and space. These constitute an important feature of Glück’s poetic creation.

Glück’s poetry did not start out with this feature but presents itself as a process of constant development and variation. In 1968, she published her first collection of poems *Firstborn*. Most of the poems in this collection are mainly parodies of T. S. Eliot and Yeats, and they focus on family ethics and human care, with some naturalistic themes and parodies of literary classics and historical figures.

In the 1990s, Glück’s style underwent some transformation. For example, in her 1992 poetry collection *Wild Iris*, which shifted from the early stage of imitation to the stage of self-innovation, although she still drew from Western literary classics, the traces of imitation faded and more traces of creative transformation and innovative interpretation were injected. In 1996, she published *Meadowlands*, a collection of poems that continued the religious sentiment of *Wild Iris*, but with a unique twist. “Glück’s poetry is so off-beat that the masks of lyricism and the underpinnings of tendency change frequently, while at the same time being passionate, and the bleak appearance of her poetry conceals the poetic beauty of a sunken world” (Liu Xiangyang 275).

Her poetical works became more mature after 2000, such as *The Seven Ages* (2001) and *Averno* (2006). These two poetry collections also focus on individualized life experiences, but they also focus on characterizing poetic imagery, transforming inanimate objects into living imagery, and then constructing a subtle sense of balance between the narrator’s subjective experience and the experience of the other, conveying universal reflections about the world, with a more obvious style of polyphonic narrative and dialogic mode.

In order to form a polyphonic narrative field between individual emotional experiences and universal values and meanings, an important strategy adopted by

Glück is to build a pluralistic voice across time and space by transforming the role and imagery of classical images in Western literature and then generating dialogue and hybridization between the ancient and modern imagery genealogies. "Glück often draws on classical Western mythology or natural imagery that he has been familiar with since childhood to reflect on his personal experiences and modern life" (Zhong Jie 6). These classical and natural imageries are combined with Glück's own life experiences, and they are integrated, misinterpreted, and juxtaposed, thus innovatively discovering more poetic meanings and forming an intertextual theory or intertextual experiences. It is based on such a theoretical perspective that Glück, on the whole, is more interested in the modern interpretation of classical imagery of Western literature, which exudes different voices in poetry and forms a dialogue and polyphonic narrative between the ancient and the modern. For example, in the poem "Firstborn," she offers a dialogic interpretation of Shakespeare's literary classics:

The weeks go by. I shelve them,  
 They are all the same, like peeled soup cans  
 Beans sour in their pot. I watch the lone onion  
 Floating like Ophelia, caked with grease:  
 You listless, fidget with the spoon.  
 What now? You miss my care? Your yard ripens. ( Glück, *Firstborn* 34)

From the overall context of this poem, it mainly adopts some daily life imagery symbols to narrate, such as "beans," "soup cans," "pot," "onion," "spoon," etc., which are close to life and nature, with a soothing rhythm. However, in the poem's normalized narrative, the image of Ophelia is suddenly embedded: "Floating like Ophelia, caked with grease." This line compares food to a woman's floating corpse, so, soothing becomes depressing, aesthetics turns into ugliness, and there is a precipitous fall in psychological experience, which suddenly makes the poetic text present a stronger sense of dissonance.

We know that Ophelia is the classic image of a woman in Shakespeare's Hamlet. She and Hamlet fall in love, but her father is stabbed to death by Hamlet, and in the sharp contradiction of her feelings between her father and her lover, and in the mad repression of being misunderstood by others, she is depressed, which eventually leads to insanity and falls into the water and drowns, and her body floats on the water. Glück's use of this classic imagery for dialogue between the past and the present, interspersed with time and space, suggests that the poetess' real intention is not to describe the lightness of these everyday words, but to use this

classic tragic imagery to present the fatalistic oppression of men on women and the tragic effect of a kind of mind-controlling desire to bring about a tragic fate.

Nourished by the Western literary classics, Glück's poetry embodies a unique concern for ancient Greek mythology, in addition to her appropriation of the classics of Shakespeare and other writers. As Professor Anders Olsson said in the presentation speech, "In several of her books, Glück speaks through mythical figures such as Dido, Persephone or Eurydice. They are masks transcribing private intimacies into something as universal as it is ambiguous" (Olson "Award ceremony speech").

Regarding this feature of Glück's poetry, Daniel Morris also points out that Glück "creates personal narratives of public significance, using the masks of legendary characters from the Bible (Moses), from history (Joan of Arc), from myths of the origins of poetry as based in loss (Orpheus and Eurydice), and from fairy tales (Gretel)" (Morris 3). This should be one of the most characteristic and valuable dimensions of Glück's poetry, in other words, she does not express her thoughts directly like the romantic poets such as Shelley and Byron, but speaks in her poems by cleverly borrowing figures from the Western classics, giving voice to different voices, presenting a private language as a multiplicity of discourses, and thus presenting different voice systems in her poems, and forming a kind of polyphonic narrative and the ancient-modern dialogue mode.

For example, Glück is fascinated by Persephone, the goddess and queen of the underworld in ancient Greek mythology, the daughter of Zeus and Demeter, the goddess of agriculture, but later stolen by Hades, the king of the underworld, although her mother Demeter kept rescuing and searching for her, however, without success. Her father, Zeus, sent Hermes to rescue her, but before Hermes arrived, Persephone accidentally ate four pomegranate seeds, forcing her to stay in the underworld for four months of the year and to spend the rest of the time with her mother, thus bringing winter to earth. Rembrandt also borrowed this literary motif for his famous painting "The Plundering of Persephone" in 1631. In Glück's collection *Averno*, there are four poems related to the theme of Persephone, including "A Myth of Innocence," "A Myth of Devotion," and "Persephone the Wanderer." In Greek mythology, Persephone appears as the imagery of the wanderer and the victim, but Glück tries to convey in her poems a polyphonic paradox of the victim and the fallen, of the classical imagery and the modern imagery. We can look at the following lines from her poem "A Myth of Devotion":

Guilt? Terror? The fear of love?

These things he couldn't imagine;  
 no lover ever imagines them.  
 He dreams, he wonders what to call this place.  
 First he thinks: The New Hell. Then: The Garden.  
 In the end, he decides to name it  
 Persephone's Girlhood. (Glück, *Poems 1962-2012* 540)

It is difficult to make a relatively reasonable interpretation of this poem without being familiar with Persephone's mythological context and its origins. Instead of pure lyricism, Glück borrows mythological imagery to launch a reflective narrative in the poem. In the beginning, she described Hades, the king of the underworld, who had taken away Persephone. To make her adapt to the darkness of the underworld, Hades made a replica of the earth for her, with everything the same, the grass, the moon, the bed, the stars, and the sunlight. Nevertheless, when Hades saw this duplicated world, he still had a lot of knots in his heart, presenting a compound spiritual dialogue with multiple voices, just as described in the few lines listed in the poem: Guilt? Terror? The fear of love? He first named this fictional world the new hell, and then he thought it was inappropriate, and named it the Garden, which still seemed inappropriate. Finally, he decided to name it Persephone's Girlhood. It should be noted that the change of the name here also shows the complex evolution of his inner thoughts.

As a matter of fact, what he has fictionally created is indeed a new world different from hell, so it is not wrong to name it as the new hell, but the new hell is still hell after all, so it is described as a garden, which is more in line with Persephone's feminine aesthetic characteristics. Finally, to make it bear the symbolic imprint of the heroine, it was directly named Persephone's Girlhood. This process of dynamic variation shows Glück's ambivalence towards marriage, love, and life. She herself was divorced and her marriage did not bring her happiness, but for this painful emotional experience, Glück borrows the language of Persephone and Hades to state it, especially the happiness and guilt after Hades stole Persephone, and for these emotional experiences, the poetess uses polyphony to reflect the strong senses of substitution, virtualization, and dialogues.

In addition to using classical ancient Greek imagery and Shakespeare's works to structure the dialogue, Glück also looks to other modern Western literary classics for discursive resources, especially the literary works of poets such as T. S. Eliot. "Aside from the world of classical myth, Glück's principal literary reservoir is the rich heritage of English-language poetry. It can be what she has

called the ‘inward listening’ in John Keats, the solitary, demanding voice of Emily Dickinson, or the tone of urgency in T. S. Eliot. She is drawn to the intimate voice that invites participation” (Olsson “Award ceremony speech”). Glück personifies Keats’ introverted voice, Dickinson’s solitary voice, and T. S. Eliot’s urgent voice, and these voices present not in a monolithic form but characterized and anthropomorphized in the poems, thus generating polyphonic narrative patterns from the textual discourse of the Western literary canon.

For example, in “Ode to a Nightingale,” Keats repeatedly emphasizes that he fell in love with the darkness and the silence of death in listening. This “inward listening” is evident in Glück’s poetry, for example, in her poem “For My Mother.” The whole poem is not about how she loves her mother, but about the painful experience of listening inwardly and waiting alone in the darkness, and the voice of a struggling mind:

It was better when we were  
together in one body.  
Thirty years. Screened  
through the green glass  
of your eye, moonlight  
filtered into my bones  
as we lay  
in the big bed, in the dark,  
waiting for my father. (Glück, *Poems 1962-2012* 74)

These lines show that what Glück misses about her mother is not how her mother cared for her and protected her, but rather focuses on describing the time when she was undifferentiated in her mother’s womb, vocal resonance and inward listening of mother and daughter that goes straight to the heart. In addition, she describes the moonlight seeping into the bones as they lie in the big bed, waiting for their father in the darkness. The silence of the moment is better than the sound, the listening in the dark, the waiting in the dark, the self-soothing, and the lonely pain in the dark, are all evident in these lines. She does not try to show anyone, but returns from others to her own heart, from light to darkness, constructing an inner structure of listening and dialogue, as Bakhtin says: “Every experience, every thought of a character is internally dialogic, adorned with polemic, filled with struggle, or is, on the contrary, open to inspiration from outside itself — but it is not in any case concentrated simply on its own object; it is accompanied by a continual sideways

glance at another person. It could be said that Dostoevsky offers, in artistic form, something like a sociology of consciousness — to be sure, only on the level of coexistence” (Bakhtin 32). This is an important feature of Glück's use of classic literary images and artistic techniques in her poetic works.

## II. A Multi-Directional Composite Dialogue

In addition to the dialogue between the ancient and the modern, another polyphonic mode adopted by Glück is the dialogue between the subject and the object, projecting the individualized life experience of the narrating subject into the object imagery and generating a co-existence of the subject and the object. From the existing research materials, some scholars consider Glück a confessional poet. However, it is worth noting that Glück is not strictly a confessional poet in terms of specific poetic texts. Glück made a bold innovation in poetic techniques, and she got rid of the one-dimensional autobiographical monologue. “In Glück's poems, the polyphonic speech acts and their internal multidimensional interactions (rather than the traditional one-dimensional autobiography of the Confessional school) are always crucial in the construction of individual identity” (Bao Huiyi 58). Confessions are one-dimensional central narratives, but Glück is indeed a multi-directional composite narrative, as Olsen argues, “In her writing two contentious truths can share the last word” (Olsson “Award ceremony speech”). This feature forms a logical echo with the content of the analysis in the first part. Specifically, the first part analyzes the dialogue mode of the ancient classics in modern interpretation, and this part focuses on the analysis of the dialogue mode of subjective experience from the perspective of Others.

Then, how does the poet's subjective life experience become a kind of co-existing experience in which the subject and the object intermingle? First of all, we have to sort out the specific connotation and basic characteristics of Glück's subjective life experience. In terms of creative themes, there are differences in themes and approaches in each stage of Glück's poetic creation, but most of them focus on three common life emotional experiences, namely, “loneliness,” “pain,” and “death.” Such life experiences of disillusionment, brokenness, and despair originate from her post-modern spiritual interpretation of Eliot's “The Waste Land” and from the continuation of the inherited sense of loneliness in Dickinson's poetry. Then, how do these three individual life experiences diffuse into a universal value? Or how do they pass through the poet's textual space and enter a resonant space? It is through polyphonic dialogic narration, a technique that Glück uses to the fullest extent, bringing the language of others into the scope of her own language without



breaking the boundaries of this scope. Because of this, the narrative subject in her poems is often characterized by indeterminacy, drift, and variability, and the subject and object also present a dialogic domain. We can look at these interesting lines from “Echoes”:

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.  
 .....  
 if your soul died, whose life  
 are you living and  
 when did you become that person? (Glück, *Poems 1962-2012* 515-516.)

These lines are clearly about the recognition of the problem of life and death. Descartes once said “I think, therefore I am,” but the focus of Glück’s poetics is not “I think,” but “I” is diluted, and her focuses on describing the paradoxical existence between soul, death, and body, as well as the spread of the subject’s life experience. The poem reads, “Once I could imagine my soul / I could imagine my death./ When I imagined my death / my soul died.” From these lines a series of cognitive reflections focusing on the subject can be triggered: Who am I? What is my soul? How do I know my death? Why does my soul die when I imagine my death? These questions are dissolving the subject’s authority and deny her cognitive capacity. Moreover, the later verses listed in the text reflect on and question these earlier ones: “if your soul died, whose life / are you living and / when did you become that person?” According to Glück, death is the death of the soul, not the death of the body. Once the soul dies, life ceases to live.

However, she does not always know this clearly (“Why I do not know”), which is a unique poetic experience of the co-existence of life. In the poem, Glück dissolves the centrality of the subject narrator, denies the authority of the discourse of rational consciousness, and allows the plurality of different voices to be released through the argument of the categories of body, soul, death, and existence, forming a resonant structure between the subject and the object, the internal and the external,

and time and space. Moreover, through the polyphonic narrative of spirit and flesh, life and death, it switches from the “unidimensional subject” to the communal experience of the “interactive subject,” as Husserl says: “The commonality experienced in the common experience is not but to the unity of the common life of the interacting subject, which in its phenomenological purity links all these spheres together (the reduction of the interacting subjectivity)” (Husserl 184). Using polyphonic narrative and dialogical modes to dissolve the dichotomies between the categories of subject and object, center and periphery, phenomenon and essence, Glück no longer splits and alienates subject and object from a philosophical epistemological perspective, but uses intentionality to form a logical connection between the two, constructing an experience of interactive subject consciousness with phenomenological reduction and essential intuition.

In this sense, Glück's poems are constructed from the perspective of life philosophy as a field of emotional experience between the narrator and the interpreter, so we cannot grasp Glück's poems only from the one-way dimension of time or space, subject or object, but should interpret them from the two directions of spatialized time and temporalized space. For this issue, we can use a few lines from Glück's “The Chicago Train” to argue further:

Across from me the whole ride  
 Hardly stirred: just Mister with his barren  
 Skull across the arm-rest while the kid  
 Got his head between his mama's legs and slept. The poison  
 That replaces air took over.  
 And they sat—as though paralysis preceding death  
 Had nailed them there. The track bent south.  
 I saw her pulsing crotch... the lice rooted in that baby's hair. (Glück, *Firstborn* 5)

These few lines simply outline a few images on the train, but these images show a polyphonic philosophy and a life philosophy of a dialogue between subject and object. Obviously, the train is in motion, but the train is relatively still. The scenery outside the window is beautiful, but the people on the train are a scene of death and ugliness. In her poem, Glück describes such poetic moments: throughout the journey, they are almost motionless, and the child is asleep with his head buried between his mother's legs. Poison replaced the air. They sat there, pinned as if paralyzed before death. The track bent southward, the mother's crotch was pulsing, the lice rooted in the baby's hair... According to everyday experience, this is a

harmonious and peaceful family, but in Glück's vision, there is nothing peaceful and happy about it, but presents some eerie scenes, she uses "barren skull," "the poison," "paralysis preceding death," and "the lice" to write about this family, which convey the message of death and disgust. This is not a factual object, but a subjective object, not a time of movement, but a time of stillness. Glück described the time of subjectivity, as well as the subject's life experience and aesthetic perspective.

The main reason why Glück's poetry has become a contemporary Western literary canon is this system of interactive subjects in the poetic texts, which then generates a unique philosophy of life poetry. Instead of spatializing the object, she focuses on temporalizing the world from the perspective of life philosophy, as Bergson says: "Movement is no longer grasped from outside, but somehow, in "me," within it, grasped within itself" (Bergson 160). Both inward listening and inward grasping, Glück knows the world from her own intrinsic life experience, but she diffuses this experience from the perspective of the periods, pushing it to the common existence at the level of universal humanity. This is a process in which subject and object intertwine, and a process in which individual life experience resonates with the emotions of others.

Why is the dialogue needed? Because of the fear of being alone. Why do we need an interactive dialogue between the subject and the object? Because the pain of loneliness is unspeakable or unspeakable. From the individual's experience of pain, Glück dialogues with the pain of the other. Pain is my pain and the pain of others. Glück's pain is different from the pain of confession, but a kind of existential pain that transcends the individual. Although her poetic creation for more than half a century has been influenced by various trends such as Romanticism, Realism, Modernism, and Postmodernism, she has innovated her own heterogeneous characteristics. "Although Glück's poetics of life benefited greatly from the various literary trends that preceded her, she did not 'merge' with them, but rather go hand in hand with 'aesthetics' and 'truth' giving the philosophical aesthetics of life in her poetry its aesthetic value and universal significance" (Hu Tiesheng 182).

It is because Glück writes in her poems about the experience of suffering from the perspective of the life philosophy that spatializes time and temporalizes space that it has a polyphonic structure of polyphonic dialogue and makes the consciousness of life a universal consciousness. On the other hand, Glück's symbolic writing of pain, loneliness, and death is not a straightforward description but focuses on contradictions and conflicts, as well as the glory of humanity and the sublime spirit. "Glück's poetry has the paradox of simplicity and profundity, but in her silence there is a talent for difficulty and subtlety. Her poetry is adept at

describing emotions that are internally conflicting and struggling, emotions that are not readily acknowledged as an existence, but Glück grapples with and manages to overcome through her poetry”(Liu Wen 38). Concerning this characteristic, let's look at a few lines from her poem “A Village Life”:

When I was a bird, I believed I would be a man.  
That's the flute. And the horn answers,  
when I was a man, I cried out to be a bird.  
Then the music vanishes. And the secret it confides in me  
vanishes also. (Glück, *A Village Life* 68)

Village life is supposed to be quiet, but Glück finds her restlessness in the quietness. In the poem, the subject identity of the narrator is constantly mutating, as well as constantly denying and contradicting. Glück first writes, “When I was a bird, I believed I would be a man.” This suggests that “I,” as the narrator, do not have a stable and self-congratulatory identity, but rather a conviction that “I” would become a man, which is illogical. Both the man and the bird are not in the speaker's natural state but have the potential to mutate into a subject of the other. Immediately afterward, however, Glück narrates, “When I was a man, I cried out to be a bird.” It can be seen that a man is not the symbol of the subject that the narrator “I” expects, and once she becomes a man, she again clamors to be a bird. Just as Qian Zhongshu described marriage, it is a besieged city where those inside want to come out and those outside want to enter. Life is always trying to live elsewhere, always standing on this mountain and looking at that high mountain. One can never be satisfied with the status quo, not satisfied with the limits of one's ability. Me of the past, me of the present, and me of the future have both differentiation and integration. Therefore, the village life depicted by Glück is not peaceful. She describes the kind of dialogical world in which the subject and the object are intermingled, where there is stillness in movement, change in stillness, the flow of the subject, and variation of the object.

### III. An Explicit and Implicit Dialogue between Private and Public Spheres

The previous parts of the paper analyzed two types of polyphonic dialogues in Glück's poetry, the ancient and the modern, the subject, and the guest. Then, the third type, i.e. the explicit and implicit polyphonic dialogue, is the interpretation and transmission of personal private space in the public sphere. It is an accepted fact that Glück's poetry tends to present the structure of her personal private spaces.

However, these private spaces are different from the painful catharsis of the sick, but they provoke a common pain in the reader: “An important characteristic of Glück’s poetry is that she transforms her personal experience into poetic art, in other words, her poetry is very private and yet very much loved by the public. But on the other hand, this privateness is in no way biographical, and this is what Glück repeatedly emphasizes” (Liu Xiangyang 271). Why does Glück repeatedly emphasize this point? Why is the privateness of Glück’s poetry again not biographical? Why is this intimate element so beloved by the public? One important reason is that in her creative process, Glück’s intention is not to express purely personal emotions and construct private spaces, but fundamentally to construct a polyphonic writing mode and spatial field between the private and public spaces, as she believes: “The poems to which I have, all my life, been most ardently drawn are poems of the kind I have described, poems of intimate selection or collusion, poems to which the listener or reader makes an essential contribution, as recipient of a confidence or an outcry, sometimes as co-conspirator” (Glück, “Nobel Lecture”).

Her poetry is not a private monologue that speaks for itself; she expects the interpreter not only to listen to one voice emanating from her poetic texts but also to “conspire” with the author’s words, to make a different voice together. It is the spiraling interlayer dialogue between the author, the narrator, and the interpreter that creates a polyphonic form in which multiple voices live together in harmony and disparity. It is precisely this feature that has enabled Glück’s poetry to transform the structure of the private space of the individual into the public sphere and has made her poetry a classic of world literature.

First, let’s analyze how Glück’s personal implicit space engages in a spatiotemporal co-temporal dialogue with the public spatial realm. According to Henry Cole, “In her poems, life seems continually to be mirrored in the passing of the seasons. The self (or should I say the soul?) awakens inside a body, like a flowering plum tree, which will fade as autumn comes” (Cole 97). In Glück’s poetry, the sense of individual life becomes animated and ethereal in time and space, and also in an inner dialogue with the world. Let’s check a few lines of her poem “Averno” how this polyphonic experience is demonstrated:

I stood a long time, staring at nothing.  
 After a bit, I noticed how dark it was, how cold.  
 A long time—I have no idea how long.  
 Once the earth decides to have no memory  
 time seems in a way meaningless. (Glück, *Poems 1962-2012* 543)

In these lines, Glück brilliantly describes the effect of the dislocation and juxtaposition of individual space and the public sphere. What is the world? What is the meaning of the world? These questions depend not only on the “self-view” of the world but also on the “gaze” of the individual. As the narrator, “I” see nothing at first, but only later do “I” notice that it is dark and cold, and the most crucial and interesting thing is the last sentence, where the word “earth” is personified, and it has its memory. Once it decides that it has no memory, then time is meaningless. In the scientific sense, time is in absolute motion, and its meaning lies in the continuous existence of “the passing of time.” But in Glück’s poem, time may or may not have meaning, depending not on time itself, but on the “I” as a subject or the “earth” to which the subject is given meaning. We can subjectively choose to forget, but the fact is undeniable.

Time, therefore, is the extension of life, a continuous experience of being, as Bergson says: “Time is what prevents everything from being given suddenly and in one moment. It delays, or it is itself the retardement” (Bergson 94). It can be seen that in Glück’s poetry, time is not presented as an object in absolute terms, but is now a momentary fragment, and its meaning depends on the fluidity of the subject’s consciousness, so the classic value of Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* lies in the “anti-temporal” phenomenon presented by the stream of consciousness in private space. On the one hand, Glück writes about the private space and the individual experience, but on the other hand, she writes about the indivisibility of the consciousness of life, as well as the spatiotemporal co-temporality of human beings when they face death. Therefore, the temporal co-temporality spreads the individual private space as a virtual symbolic space and discovers the potential reference from the infinite energy.

Second, Glück’s poetry strives for a pluralistic resonance in the public sphere, but rejects the manifestation of an authoritarian, arbitrary, singular, absolute, and collective voice, saying, “In art of the kind to which I was drawn, the voice or judgment of the collective is dangerous. The precariousness of intimate speech adds to its power and the power of the reader, through whose agency the voice is encouraged in its urgent plea or confidence” (Glück, “Nobel Lecture”). Both the intimate space of the narrator and the interpretative space of the interpreter give Glück’s poetry its depth and weight. On this issue, there is a consensus in the academic community; for example, it has been pointed out that *Wild Iris* writes in three different voices in the poetic texts: “Glück’s poetry collection *Wild Iris* is told in three voices, the voice of a flower speaking to man, the voice of man speaking

to God, and the voice of God speaking to man, expressing the poet's ambivalent feelings about religion and death; the poems confronts the horror, hardship and pain of life, and reflects her feelings of helplessness, betrayal and loss with gloomy natural imagery" (Liu Wen 38). In addition, the poem "The Garden" is also characterized by a very typical polyphonic polyphony: "These voices questioning, inquiring, and competing with each other converge into a kind of Bakhtinian polyphonic lyricism, making the earthly garden carefully cultivated by the poet's gardener an arena of words: the garden is a breeding ground for words, and a theater where the confrontation of words is staged (but not refereed). The garden is a breeding ground for words and a theater where the confrontation of words is staged" (Bao Huiyi 56). These assertions hit the nail on the head of Glück's poetry.

To demonstrate this polyphonic narrative and dialogue pattern, let us look at a few lines from Glück's "Clover":

You should know  
 that when you swagger among us  
 I hear two voices speaking,  
 one your spirit, one  
 the acts of your hands. (Glück, *Poems 1962-2012* 274)

Glück is still using penetrating language here to describe two different voices. From these lines, we can see that there is no single, authoritarian voice, but two compound voices are intertwined. One is a physical hand making sound symbols and their meanings, and one is a voice of the soul speaking. The experience of the speaker is not purely individual, but a composite experience generated through observation and communication with the object. In other words, we can only feel the symbolic experience of the physical hand in the public space, but in the dialogue space, we can see the private experience of the soul.

Moreover, Glück's poetic texts do not replace the public experience with the private experience, nor do they suppress the individual voices with the collective voices, but rather build a "spacing" between the private space and the public sphere. Julien says: "For me, the nature of distance is fundamental, and it is not as the case with difference, which is not apparent or descriptive, but productive. It creates and presents a tension between the two sides it pulls apart. To create tension is precisely what spacing must do" (Jullien 26). An important feature of spacing is the production and variation of discourse and its tensional effect, and it is this feature that allows Glück's poetry to be interpreted differently in different cultural contexts,

as we turn to Glück's "Fable":

Then I looked down and saw  
 the world I was entering, that would be my home.  
 And I turned to my companion, and I said Where are we?  
 And he replied Nirvana.  
 And I said again But the light will give us no peace. (Glück, *Poems 1962-2012*  
 492)

What parable does Glück tell? Simply put, it is the parable of Nirvana. Apparently, this was a simple conversation. She thought she was about to return to her home, but was not sure, and asked her companion, who told her it was "Nirvana." This word is used in Buddhism and Hinduism to express heaven, the world of bliss. But she was not satisfied with this answer, and she thought that the light would not bring them peace. Why does this conversation seem odd? Because the first part is a factual dialogue, and the second part is a virtual dialogue. The world she entered (The world) is her home, the home of the Earth. What her companion told her was another "blissful world," a spiritual home. There is no darkness, no pain in the blissful world, only infinite light and joy. But the narrator, who initially believes that they are entering a home, denies that the light will bring peace when she learns that it is the world of bliss, or that she does not wish to enter such a home. It can be seen that the poet is confused, painful, and complicated about the concept of "home." She wants to return to the peace of reality, and the religious sense of self-soothing does not completely satisfy this desire, so she can only return to her nature in the earthly world. Therefore, Glück constructs a house of death, a public space, and a spiritual world in addition to the individual house, the private space, and the material world. The different worlds are misplaced in dialogue and spiral negation, showing a unique artistic effect.

### **Conclusion**

Glück's poetry is recognized by a world readership because it presents a dynamic space of dialogic variation through the space of textual stasis, which Damrosch says: "The shape of the new canon can be illustrated in various ways, both within national literature and across them" (Damrosch 46). Readers in the world see Glück's poetry as bringing a universal experience of life that stems from a circular transcendental structure: a structure that allows Glück's poetry to be both independent and dialogic, with Glück's group poems forming a mode of dialogue between the private space



and the public sphere that can be effectively interpreted by readers. “Everywhere the claim of hermeneutics seems capable of being met only in the infinity of knowledge, in the thoughtful fusion of the whole of tradition with the present” (Gadamer 337). She not only constructs the dialectical unity of the traditional and the current perspectives but also the deep fusion of subject and object, private space and public space, thus manifesting the differentiated poetic elements, which also gives a universal value and significance to Glück’s poems.

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