

THE POETICS OF RENUNCIATION: RE-READING SUBJECTIVITY, *FANA*, AND *AL-INSAN AL-KAMIL* IN LOUISE GLÜCK'S *THE WILD IRIS*

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Abstract

The postmodern western world is characterized by materialism and secularism and there is skepticism for divine realities. However, Louise Glück, the Nobel Prize winner American poet breaks the ordinary boundaries of the material world and seeks a connection with the divine. The essay delves into the spiritual and metaphysical concepts of Fana and Al-Insan al-Kamil given by Ibn-e-Arabi (1165-1240), a great Muslim theologian, philosopher and mystic from Spain. The essay argues that the poetic voice or poetic persona in *The Wild Iris* is an adept who starts its journey of attainment in the natural world, gets close to the station of Fana which is a prerequisite of the Perfect Human. The study finds that despite all digression of the material world and echoes of the existential crisis the poetic persona manages to clear the mirror of heart and manifests the divine attributes which are complex for an ear and an eye that is impure and dusty. The study interprets *The Wild Iris* through the lens of Fana and the Perfect Human and contributes a new and unique dimension to her poetry.

1. INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Louise Glück's stark, unadorned poetry is a crucial part of the trajectory of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century American poetry. Glück, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2020, has long been admired by Anglo-American critics for her "renunciatory style": a style that is sparing of language, the syntax is minimalist, there is little variation in emotional range, and sentimental ornamentation is avoided. In her early, formally compact works, such as *The House on Marshland* (1975); through her mid-career achievements, such as *Averno* (2006) and *The Wild Iris* (1992); and in her latest, Glück's speakers are always in a state

of dire climate: constantly challenged by transience, familial disjunction, physical mortality, and the ghostly, unachievable presence of an absolute. Louise Glück explores spiritual longing through a tense dialogue between earthly limitations and the immutable absolute. Her work utilizes ascetic practices and apocalyptic imagery to navigate the silence of the divine and the human search for meaning.

She is widely known for her depth of spirituality and mysticism which is characterized by an incessant tension between the earthly and the otherworldly desire to get close to the divine and absolute (Davis 59; Usman, Nawaz, & Siddique, 456). She frequently mentions the force of

spirituality which often “fights” against the distractions which can lead her astray from the right track, it is her inclination towards the eternal which constantly seeks bring her close to the temporal boundaries. She vehemently expresses these experiences in her poems (Davis, 57). Her quest for the divine is not merely a passive expression of religion rather it is a conscious effort of exploration of the traditional notion of God (Zazula 151). Her mysticism manifests as a form of clairvoyance, where the poet acts as a receptacle for the ineffable, transforming herself through her writing from a distant observer to a profoundly human and earthly voice (Glück, 69).

Her collection of poems *The Wild Iris* stands out as an apex of her dialogic inclination which presents a “tialogo”; divine force, nature, and her poetic voice. thus nature, leads to her poetic internal voice to the divine (Davis 53; Ганин 140). The quest of the poetic voice is through the natural world in *The Wild Iris*. The central debate is eternal life or some level of resurrection which is beyond the realm of human beings. However, it is nature which serves as a stage to yearn for meanings, although, there is no response from the side of God. He remains silent. Therefore, Matins and Vespers are the poems which function as prayers of the poetic persona, these are addressed to God (Davis, 56; Am, 106). In the ongoing debate in the book, the natural world; flowers, plants, animals, and insects act as witness or arbiter, they hear and overhear the debate between man and God (Ганин, 2023). In this level of subjectivity in the poetic persona of her poems there is a kind of postmodern spirituality. Through the experiences of doubt and emptiness the poetic voice draws its own conclusions (Gordon 89).

Apart from spirituality, existential underpinnings are also quite obvious in her poetry. Themes of isolation, pursuit of the significance, and loss are so common and central to her verse (Gopal and Rajinder 23). Qarni suggests that in *The Wild Iris* there is a symbol of "degradation of identity" and the poetic voice seems to be struggling with loss of emptiness. It is characterized as an “abject

self” (Qarni 1692). Moreover, there are universal concerns such as loneliness, emptiness, search for meanings, and the divine which can be attributed through memories.

Her poetry is reflection of all these concerns (Priyadarshni and Pradhan 115). The exploration of the self in her poems is a reflection of her unending desire and quest for the meaning; it is both philosophical and reflective. It is poetic journey of the seeker to seek meanings through individual struggle (Ганин 1180). Her search for life and meaning is chiefly in the natural world where lilies, clovers, poppies, and many more seem to be talking to the poetic voice. These can be identified as markers of “frustrated idealism” (Sharma and P. Sharma 30). However, these monologues in the natural world are expressions of sufferings and existential pangs (Am 108). The *Wilde Iris* is an attempt to bring the divine and the earthly close to each other. It is an attempt of man realize God (Choudhari and Dr. R. S. Chouhan 1180). In these “Vespers” the poetic voice reveals a complicated interplay of conviction and doubt, the speaker is in quest of explanations for discontent (Am 104). *The Wild Iris* is bedrock legacy of Louise Glück. There are multiple voices in the poems which employ metaphors of nature and diverse experiences. The poet meditates on the significance of life or the existential questions (Xu 106). The collection’s exploration of suffering, rebirth, and the ethical necessity of connecting with the natural world continues to resonate with contemporary critics, providing a “remedy” and a “witness” to the complexities of modern existence (Aiadi 46).

Her poetry deals with the elements of via negative which is attributed to asceticism as a rigorous exercise which resorts upon formal sobriety and peace. Her asceticism moves on three distinct trajectories. This asceticism follows three main trajectories that define its spiritual evolution: practice of self-denial is the one which leads to achieve independence by sacrifice of the self. The next is the art of reduction, it is her experience which reduces illusions to realization. The last is

rekindled openness which a force of transformation of character through opening the path of experiencing the self and its essence (Baker 135). The yearning for the absolute in Glück's poetry is articulated through an apocalyptic vision that seeks the immutable within a world subject to change and death. This apocalyptic impulse does not necessarily refer to the end of the world, but rather to a state of "not yet" that characterizes moments of transition, such as twilight, where natural light fades and reality becomes more permeable to the eternal

Some studies link this quest to the concept of "more life," where the poetic subject positions itself as an excessive entity that resists the laws of nature and death, seeking a meaning that transcends finitude (Bartczak 128).

Over the years, European literary criticism has been interested in interpreting the sublimation of the psychological and philosophical motivations behind Glück's extreme minimalism. The one-sidedness of this powerful monoculture has firmly located her work in the secular, western paradigms. The first is the psychoanalytic and trauma approaches that see her understated language as a text symptom of psychological wounding, anorexia or unresolved grief (Hadjiyiannis 45). Yet another dominant critical strand places Glück in the existential alienation tradition of western modernism, in which her cold, disillusioned voice is akin to that of Emily Dickinson or the bleak landscapes of T. S. Eliot (Levertov 112). In this conventional secular context, Glück's ubiquitous use of "the void," "coldness of heart," and "emptiness" in her poetry is almost always treated as a tragic psychological or cultural sickness: a mid-century American alienation or modern existential despair.

Fana (annihilation of the self), in the mysticism of Arabi is a state of transformation of spiritual self-realization. It is described as "annihilation in God" (*fana fillah*). It is one of the highest levels of attainment in Sufism (Putra and A. Widodo 156). *Fana* is a stage in the journey of the adept to shed his earthly self by removing all the impurities

spiritual and physical. It allows the seeker to reach a point where they are beyond the boundaries of physical laws. The experience is characterized by indescribable states of being, often referred to as mystical allusions to the divine (Soleh, 180). The ordinary existence of the individual transcends through this process which enables them to align their essence with divine.

One of the foundational concepts of Arabi is the idea of Perfect Human (The *Insan al-Kamil*). It is at the core of his mystical thought. (Takeshita 99). The perfect human serves as a mirror which exhibits all the attributes of God; hence, it is the ultimate realization of the final point. The universe is a macrocosm, and the figure of the perfect man is the microcosm (Hassan 167). The perfect man is characterized by Divine manifestation because they are the locus of His names and attributes. They are also intermediary as the flow of divine grace moves through them to the creation of God. Moreover, they are (*khalifatullah*) the vicegerent of God (Gerevi, Fahrî Resûl 236).

Fana and the *Insan al-Kamil* are integrated with each other and *fana* is just one of the prerequisite and realization of *Insan al-Kamil*. The station of *Insan al-Kamil* is inherently attached to the *fana*. It is the annihilation of the self which ensures perfection or these pinnacles of existence. When this station is achieved the adept takes the role of a vessel which holds and reflect the attributes of God and in the world such individual manifests the qualities of God. Therefore, the Perfect Human is one who successfully navigates the path of *fana* and emerges as a balanced ontological link between the cosmos and the Creator. It is central connection to Arabi's view of the Perfect Human (Putra and A. Widodo 150; Gerevi, Fahrî Resûl 232).

But if Glück is only understood in this secularized, western context, it is a serious epistemological handicap. Traditional Anglo-American criticism pathologizes her stylistic detachment, so that a highly controlling and transformative aesthetics becomes a simple form of trauma or emotional

numbness. This is an important missing context, which does not take into account that the self-denying and its equivalent, the deliberate voluntary encounter with absolute silence, and the embrace of a severe and austere economy, are indeed cross-cultural phenomenological experiences. In different Eastern mystical traditions, the same processes are known, not as psychological aberrations or existential failures, but as very disciplined, spiritual techniques for attaining ultimate perception in the metaphysical realm.

This research-essay proposes an alternative, transhistorical, cross-cultural intervention by reading Louise Glück through the construction of the metaphysical house of the Andalusian philosopher and mystic Muhyiddin ibn al-Arabi (1165-1240 CE). In the heart of Akbarian ontology is a deep dialectic around human subjectivity; Fana (annihilation of the egoic self) is the prerequisite condition for Baqa (subsistence in ultimate reality). The human soul is in fact structurally predestined to exist as a cosmic mirror, or a mirror of the cosmos, which reflects the unconditioned light of the Divine Absolute (*Wujud*) – such is the view of Ibn al-Arabi. But this mirror is permanently smudged by the "dust" of the individual's ego, desires and subjective attachments to the fleeting, worldly forms (*Asma*). To become ontologically clear, the subject must painfully let go of himself and systematically destroy the illusion of personal identity to uncover the enormous silence that lies beneath all the phenomena of the world.

This study radically re-contextualizes Glück's poetics of renunciation by reading her *The Wild Iris* through the lenses of Ibn al-Arabi's teachings on *Fana*, *Baqa* and *Al-Insan al-Kamil* (the Perfect Human). It suggests that her systematic removal of autobiographical elements and her cold and detached use of language are both structurally and spiritually similar to the Akbarian "purging" of the egoic self. An Akbarian reading reveals a sacred space intentionally emptied for metaphysical perception while a Western critic would find a

tragic void that is the result of traumatic experience. As a result, the special comparative bridge is created, showing that Glück's poetic voice is so universal and haunting in its authority because it is a secularized, modern version of the classic mystical ascent via self-annihilation.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

To build a solid theoretical link between 13th century Islamic metaphysics and modern American poetry, it is necessary to outline the fundamental principles of Akbarian ontology and prove its relevance to aesthetics of texts. In essence, the philosophy of Ibn al-Arabi is not dualistic, but is based on the belief of *Wahdat al-Wujud* (the Unity of Being). This is the philosophy that holds that there is only one Reality (*Wujud*), the Reality of the Divine Essence (*al-Batin*). The physical universe and all the individual elements in it are infinitely changing outward expressions (*al-Zahir*) of this one underlying Essence (Chittick 501).

One of the important aspects of this cosmology is *Tajdid al-Khalq*, the concept of "recurrence of creation" or its perpetual renewal. Based on this, Ibn al-Arabi states that the universe is not created once and then allowed to exist; rather, every single moment, the Divine is destroying and creating it. The sense of continuity of material is only an illusion because of the speed at which these moments are captured in the cosmos, just like the speed at which all the different frames are shown to create the illusion of a moving image. For the human soul, this means that there is no ontological stasis. Human ego, however, desperately needs to be permanent, stable and possessive. It tries to fix its provisional identity by binding itself to such earthly edifices as family, historical status, physical youth and linguistic designation. In Akbarian thought, these constructs are called the veil of *Asma* (Names). While any human being lives in this illusion of localization of his own identity, he cannot see the Unity of Being (Almirzanah 4). The spiritual traveller has to go through a conscious process of self-emptying, as a direct counterpart to the

thematic and stylistic development in Glück's poetry. This framework is based on three interdependent concepts:

I. The Mirror and the Void

One of the most common metaphors used by Ibn al-Arabi is the mirror, with which he illustrates the interaction between man and the Absolute. The universe was formed to see the attributes of the Divine in manifest form so that He could see His own qualities in the manifested world. But at the very beginning of the universe, the universe was like an unpolished mirror; dark, opaque, unfit to reflect. The man was made for the purpose of being that mirror's very polishing.

However, when the individual human consciousness is "rusted" by the "rust" of personal ego, selfish desires and subjective attachments, the mirror is still black. The human must empty himself from any personal qualities and subjective illusions in order to become an effective reflective surface. In this research we propose to view Glück's famous austerity and minimalism of her poetic style as an aesthetic analogue to this kind of metaphysical polishing: Glück's flat, unadorned lines serve to put the mirror of language up to the test by actively clearing it of sentimental and autobiographical debris.

II. The Dialectic of *Fana* (Annihilation) and *Baqa* (Subsistence)

There is a terrible threshold that one has to cross, that of *Fana*, to pass from being in the ego to being in the absolute perception. *Fana* means the passing away of the individual egoic identity both literally and psychologically. This is an intensely spiritual one of suffering, of being completely cut off from others, of the mundane, everyday human expression being completely silenced, a state known as *al-Samt*. To the naive spectator, *Fana* appears to be a sad and fatal condition. However, in Akbarian metaphysics, *Fana* is immediately and inevitably followed by *Baqa*, or subsistence. After the annihilation of the personal "I" and the illusion of selfhood is totally destroyed, the

traveller does not disappear into absolute nothingness, but lives in and through the Divine Reality. Their consciousness is filled with universal life force, and they live and speak out of the universal, unconditioned and eternal truth.

III. The Realization of *Al-Insan al-Kamil* (The Perfect Human)

The ultimate goal of this mystical course is to attain the station of *Al-Insan al-Kamil*. The Perfect Human is the one who has fully transcended *Fana* and dispelled all individualistic illusions and ripped off the curtain of *Asma*. Once they have come out of themselves, they become a transparent place of manifestation (*Maẓhar*). The tongue of the *Insan al-Kamil* is no longer an individual man's tongue; once the *Insan al-Kamil* speaks, it is the Absolute which speaks through its medium, outlining Its own hidden realities.

In this essay I will provide a rigorous comparative methodology through which I will attempt to define Glück's "poetics of renunciation" as a secularized version of this ancient ontological path, using the three-part framework: agony of the egoic self (*Asma*), ascetic purging (*Fana*), and cosmic authority (*Baqa* and *Al-Insan al-Kamil*).

3. The Methodology of Comparative Poetics

In order to make a real and cross-cultural reading that will not be reduced to a superficial thematic comparison, between medieval Islamic mysticism and contemporary American poetry, the study proposes a special methodology, which can be called Comparative Ontological Poetics. It assumes that the deep aesthetic forms can be structurally and phenomenologically similar in widely divergent historical periods and regions, even if there is no historical contact or similar religious vocabulary.

In this case, the poem's own words are considered *Barzakh*. *Barzakh* is the intermediate space, isthmus; the zone that lies between two different worlds of reality, the world of purely spiritual, abstract ideas and the material, physical and sensory world. The *Barzakh* has a double face: it is

neither nor, but precisely the point at which the abstract becomes tangible. This approach aims to examine Glück's particular language—her syntax, line breaks and structural economy—as the tangible manifestation of her abstract and mystical experiences of self-emptying, and thus as a kind of literary *Barzakh*.

In addition, this approach challenges the Eurocentric and conventional authority of literary criticism. Typical comparative practice tends to apply Western critical theories (psychoanalysis or other theories) to non-Western texts, assuming thereby that there are commonalities between both, that the Western theory can be used on the non-Western text, and that the non-Western culture production can be treated as raw material to be analyzed. This study explicitly turns this trend around. Having used an explanation model with an 13th century Eastern metaphysical approach, we have shown the elasticity, the universal and the transhistorical value of an explanation model that allows us to shed light on the depths of modern secular literature through the lens of Akbarian ontology.

We analyze by reading closely a series of poems from Glück's Pulitzer Prize-winning collection, *The Wild Iris* (1992). The structure of this collection is particularly appropriate for such a method since it explicitly reflects the dialogic and triadic form of Akbarian cosmology. The collection is based on the principle of three distinct choral voices:

- **The Human Voice:** Expressed primarily in the poems entitled *Matins* and *Vespers*, which express the egotistical soul's attachment to earth, its sense of alienation, and its cry to a "God" that it cannot find.
- **The Natural Voice:** Expressed through various flowers (the *Iris*, the *Lily*, the *Lamium*), all of which represents states of consciousness which have passed through the death of winter and speak from a position of post-mortal post-egoic wisdom.
- **The Divine Voice:** Poems that are named after weather anomalies or marks of the season (e.g., *End of Summer*, or *Early Darkness*, or *Clear*

Morning), which are the absolute, unconditioned point of view of the Source.

This methodology begins with the macro-level of cosmological ideas and then goes on to the micro-level of textual interpretation, using evidence in a rigorous manner and following international comparative literature research standards to the highest degree.

4. Data Analysis and Close Textual Readings

Section A: The Agony of the Egoic Self: Transience, Illusion, and the Veil of *Asma*

The spiritual journey towards *Fana* in *The Wild Iris* begins with the intense suffering of the human speaker, a suffering that has been frequently discussed in the traditional western criticism in terms of psychological trauma or existential abandonment (Hadjiyiannis 88). But under close textual scrutiny from an Akbarian perspective, it can be seen that this suffering is directly consequent to the soul's enslavement within the context of a localized, separate identity showing itself in the ephemeral material forms of the world, through what Akbari calls *Asma* (Names). In Glück's "Matins" / "Vespers" series, the human voice is a classic indication of the egoic soul (*al-Nafs*), forever misidentifying the fleeting and manifested aspects of reality (*al-Zahir*) with the true and unchanging Essence (*al-Batin*).

The spiritual agony and the epistemological error are vividly experienced in "Vespers: Parousia." As he gazes out upon a garden in flux, the speaker speaks to a God who is remote, elusive, whom he can never reach, a God whom he longs for and greatly resents:

Love in the world—where is it?

In the Source, where it has always been?

But it is the nature of the Source
to give, not to belong. (Glück 37)

The speaker's spiritual blindness is clearly revealed in the first question, "Love in the world—where is it? The speaker is looking for love as a localised, tangible entity in the material world, hoping for the absolute to be materialised that would satisfy his/her personal emotional needs.

The next "it is the nature of the Source / to give, not to belong" is a poetic rendition of Akbarian cosmology, stunning. According to the notion of *Nafas al-Rahman* (the Breath of the All-Merciful), which is central to Ibn al-Arabi's thought, the cosmos is not a one-time historical creation but an ongoing eternal creation, an overflowing of the divine. Out of its inherent mercy, the absolute eternally creates all the manifest forms to bring out of its loneliness its own potential. But as the Source is not conditioned and infinite, it could not be "belonging" to any one, isolated aspect of creation. The meaning of "belong" is limitation, boundary and containment which are essentially not qualities of pure *Wujud*.

Glück's speaker's pain is therefore all his own: the tragic result of an ego that insists on a personal, local god. This particular spiritual delusion is what is referred to in the *Fusus al-Hikam*, by Ibn al-Arabi: The conditional nature of the creation obscures from it the Unity of Being. When the forms change, man assumes that they have got independent existence and laments their disappearance; but his ignorance is that the Form-Giver is always there behind the names.

This is because the speaker does not have the illusion of independent existence, but in the process of the constant destruction and renewal of manifest forms (*Tajdid al-Khalq*), only the tragedy is felt without a moderating force. This mode of operation is developed further in "Vespers: Advent", in which the speaker makes explicit the sense of God as a constant state of violence: The speaker's spiritual blindness is clearly revealed in the first question, "Love in the world—where is it? The speaker is looking for love as a localised, tangible entity in the material world, hoping for the absolute to be materialised that would satisfy his/her personal emotional needs.

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What is my heart to you
that you must break it over and over
like a piece of dry earth?

You have no use for my small life,
my small, specific griefs. (Glück 51)

In the context of secular modernist criticism, this passage is often cited as a classic example of existential alienation, and an impassive God and a suffering human subject (Levertov 145). However, an Akbarian reading turns this view on its head. It's not a divine sadism that has the heart "breaking over and over," but an ontological corrective. The heart of the speaker is likened to "a piece of dry earth"—a wonderful metaphor for a crusty, calcified ego that has created a hard-walled cocoon where it lives as its own little identities. So long as the earth is dry, it cannot be broken through by the rain of absolute spirit, nor can it give birth to

life. The heart needs to be broken, shattered and pulverized.

The divine voice has "no use" for the speaker's "small, specific griefs," because they are all based on a linguistic and psychological illusion: the illusion of the personal "I. The absolute cannot say no to the ego's separate identity as doing so would strengthen the very veil through which the soul is darkened. The small life is shattered before it can be effaced – the first requirement to *Fana* is that the small life, the false self, must be reduced to the ultimate of its means, so that it can submit to total effacement.

Section B: The Mechanics of Textual Asceticism: The Process of *Fana* and *Zuhd*

When the individual consciousness realizes that it cannot continue to maintain this false sense of identity as "ego", it crosses the terrifying gate of *Fana* (annihilation). In the aesthetic aspect of this change, we describe the poetic practice as Textual Asceticism, a very disciplined poetic approach that reflects the spiritual condition of Ascetic renunciation or *Zuhd*. In the ritual of *Zuhd*, the mystic cleanses his life of all unnecessary ties to the world and illusions of the senses. At the text level, Glück carries out just such a purging of the sentence. Her lyric flatness, her minimalist syntax, her severe economy of expression, her absolute avoidance of decorative adjectives or sentimental narratives: all are her signature style, in which she starves the egoic voice in language. She takes the poem down to its bare bones, leaving a textual void that mirrors *Fana's* psychological void.

This mechanics of textual asceticism is most perfectly realized in the collection's titular poem "The Wild Iris", which traces the path of movement through the darkness and quietness of the soil, the self-effacement. The poem begins with an immediate, arresting encounter with the memory of this erasure of structure:

At the end of my suffering
there was a door.

Hear me out: that which you call death,
I remember it. (Glück 1)

In traditional western reading, the lines are given more weight in a literal or psychoanalytical sense, either as a meditation on post-mortal consciousness based on classical myths such as the myth of Persephone or a metaphor for coming out of a severe depressive episode (Hadjiyiannis 102). But on an Akbarian level this is a deep statement of a living spiritual method. The speaker recalls the word "death" as *Fana* is an experiential and psychological death of the subjective self, while the physical body lives. This is the very embodiment of the oft-quoted prophetic saying which is celebrated in Sufi literature, *mutu qabla an tamutu* ("Die before you die"). Ibn al-Arabi describes this threshold in detail in his masterwork *Al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya*, in which he says:

The real traveller on the road must go through a gate of complete effacement, the effacement of his own attributes into the attributes of the Real. To those who are not aware, this condition looks like annihilation, an absolute death and silence; but to the knowers, it is the only door to open out from the door of conditional existence (Vol. 3, p. 112). This gate of total effacement is indeed the "door" at the end of suffering, "the day of your arrival" at which you will be struck with the wonder of your own life. The only way that the suffering of the human subject ceases is when the entity that was suffering—the autobiographical ego—is totally annihilated. Glück then goes on to explain in detail how this empties itself, likening it to a flower bulb planted in the ground, which, horrifyingly, will sink to absolute subjective nothingness.

Then it was over: that which you fear, being
a soul and unable
to speak, ending abruptly, the stiff earth
yielding a little. (Glück 1)

The critics have often interpreted the state of "being a soul and unable / to speak" as a result of creative block, linguistic stumbling or of a marginalized female subject being silenced in the patriarchy (Levertov 158).

However, the speechlessness, in the context of Akbarian mysticism, is discovered to be a very high spiritual state. It is the station of *al-Samt*, the

intentional, sacred silence of the mundane human speech that the traveller crosses completely from the rational and binary classification of the linguistic mind to the absolute and the unconditioned. The "stiff earth yielding a little," symbolises the softening of the stony shell of the human ego both physically and psychologically. While the ego is still "stiff" it insists on its boundaries, its separateness, it is very much "alone" in its own world and gearing itself against the rest of life. This earth itself surrender is the ontological fracture of those boundaries.

This paring back is evident in the bare economy of its structure: no softening adjectives or elaborate metaphors to smooth out this transition. There is as much bare language as bare soil described. This ascetic process is further examined in the poem "Lamium," as the speaker intentionally chooses to be in a cold and marginal obscurity in order to reject the bright, sensational, and egoic world of validation:

This is how you live when you have a cold heart.
As I do: in rows, in the shade of the pine trees,
protected from the sun,
desiring light over heat. (Glück 22)

In traditional psychological criticism, a "cold heart" is diagnosed as an emotional defence mechanism against trauma or an inability to achieve intimacy (Hadjiyiannis 115). Within the framework of Akbarian *Zuhd*, however, this coldness is a profound re-conceptualization of spiritual detachment. The "heat" that the speaker explicitly rejects represents the burning, volatile desires of the *Nafs* (the lower egoistic soul)—the constant, frantic craving for emotional warmth, personal recognition, and sensory stimulation. By preferring "light over heat," the speaker chooses the cold, clear, unclouded illumination of pure intellect and absolute reality over the warm, deceptive, and short-lived illusions of personal sentimentality. The shade of the pine trees becomes a monastic, ascetic retreat—a *Khalwa* (spiritual seclusion) where the speaker can systematically decouple their consciousness from the demands of the personality. Glück's aesthetic

choice to write from a place of "coldness" is therefore not a failure of feeling, but a highly disciplined refusal to allow the emotional clutter of the ego to distort the clear transmission of reality. The text must be stripped of its heat so that its light can become absolute.

Section C: The Emergence of the Cosmic Voice: The Realization of *Baqā* and *Al-Insan al-Kamil*

The last paradox of Akbarian metaphysics is that the soul never arrives at *Fana*, for *Fana* is always followed by the soul's *Baqā* (subsistence) because it is structurally and inevitably so. When this individual consciousness has been completely and effectively abandoned, there is a dramatic change in ontology: the emptiness is instantly replaced by the presence of ultimate Reality. The traveller experiences this death, but lives on and expresses himself or herself through the Absolute. The person is not absorbed into the void: he is now a mirror as clear as crystal.

If the poet is successful in this transition in the literary text, then the poet's voice is subjected to a dramatic structure change. It totally moves away from the limited and hurt place of the autobiographical "I" and rises to the status of *Al-Insan al-Kamil* (the Perfect Human) and speaks in a cosmic manner, omniscient and deiform, that transcends all of nature, myth and the divine. The shift from *Fana* to *Baqā* is seen clearly in the last stanzas of *The Wild Iris*. As soon as the speaker re-emerges from the silent state of the earth the voice is released with a sudden, overwhelming force, beyond the framework of the individual biological system:

You who do not remember
passage from the other world
I tell you I could speak again: whatever
returns from oblivion returns
to find a voice: (Glück 1)

The phrase "I tell you I could speak again" marks the precise moment of *Baqā*. This new speech is fundamentally different in kind from the human speech that was silenced in the earth. The original, personal voice died completely in the "oblivion" of

Fana; the voice that returns belongs to a consciousness that has realized its radical non-separation from the Source.

This transition directly embodies Ibn al-Arabi's famous explanation of the Hadith of the supererogatory works (*Hadith al-Nawafil*), which he details extensively in the *Fusus al-Hikam*:

When the servant approaches the Divine through voluntary acts of devotion and self-emptying, the Divine loves him. And when He loves him, He becomes the hearing with which he hears, the sight with which he sees, the hand with which he strikes, and the tongue with which he speaks. The mystic no longer speaks from his own whim; his tongue becomes an instrument through which the Absolute articulates Its own hidden treasures (122). Glück's speaker becomes this exact tongue for the Absolute. The "oblivion" from which she returns is the total dissolution of the subjective mind. The final lines of the poem describe this newly realized state of ontological abundance, using a striking cosmic image that shatters the minimalist confines of the earlier stanzas:

... from the center of my life a great fountain rushed, shadows

of the deepest blue on azure seawater. (Glück 1)

The change from the hidden, unspoken bulb to the "great fountain" is a creative and ontological expression of *Wujud* (Being). For Akbarian, creation is an ongoing and dynamic overflow of light. Glück's speaker's voice is grounded in the universal life force that breathes life into everything, and by situating the source of this universal fountain not in the head or the personal memory, but in the "centre of my life," the poet is able to place herself in this current, common, and natural world.

The speaker is able to clear the mirror of the dust of personal ego. She has reached the status of *Al-Insan al-Kamil*—the human being who has become a perfectly polished place of manifestation (*Mazhar*), a sphere of the multi-dimensional shadows of the "deepest blue on azure seawater" (Almirzanah 7). The voice no longer sounds lonely and alienated, it is now cosmic. This trend towards

cosmicity grows even more pronounced in the later poems of the book, like "The Silver Lily" in which the speaker speaks entirely on the level of a detached post-mortal knowingness, looking down upon the frantic fear-fuelled attachments of ordinary human beings:

We have come to the end of the garden.

The earth is cold now, and hard.

It doesn't matter to us anymore

whether the light stays or goes. (Glück 62)

The "We" of the collective refers to a complete change from the individualistic "I" of her early confessional poems. The speaker has become part of a greater, more collective, ontological reality: the consciousness of the garden itself, or the absolute presence that is the undercurrent of it. The line "it doesn't matter to us anymore / whether the light stays or goes" is a poetic expression of the ultimate state of the Akbarian mystical path, *Rida* (divine contentment), in which the soul has no interest at all in the opposites of pleasure/displeasure, presence/absence, life/death. When a person has already passed away from the false self through *Fana*, she does not have to deal with the fear of transience. The presence of light or dark makes no difference to a consciousness that is aware that light and darkness are just alternate reflections in the same Eternal Mirror of Being.

In this Akbarian re-reading, the cutting-off of oneself that Western critics have so often defined as emotional deadness turns out to be the tranquil, unchanging tranquillity of the perfected soul. But it is this dying of the personal ego, this sacrifice of self, that gives Glück a power to prophesy, to threaten, to utter terror.

5. Conclusion and Epistemological Implications

Louise Glück's contemporary American poetry and Muhyiddin ibn al-Arabi's ontology of the 13th century Akbari present a critical conjunction of two works that is both transformative and profound in the field of comparative literature. This study has taken the effort to think outside the Eurocentric, secularist context to free Glück's

characteristic "renunciatory style" from the reductive diagnoses of psychological pathology, chronic depression, or modernist disillusionment. Instead of the "impassable gap" of traditional Anglo-American criticism, which is an ineluctable and traumatic gap, Akbarian metaphysics reveals a very highly structured, sacred space that is a space that is created to make room for ultimate ontological perception.

This essay has shown how Glück's structural and stylistic decisions function as a precise literary enactment of the classic mystical ascent in *The Wild Iris* through a careful textual analysis. The spiritual journey moves in a progressive manner from one to three stages, which correspond to the fundamental structure of Akbarian cosmology. The implications of this research go far beyond a re-interpretation of the work of any one poet. First, it is an intervention that fundamentally questions the secular bias of modern western literary theory which pathologizes intense feelings of self-effacement and detachment. This study shows that these aesthetic structures are highly similar, analogous to the sacred methodologies of Eastern mysticism, thus legitimizing the phenomenological experience of renunciation as a way to higher knowledge and not a psychological failure.

Secondly, this study represents a revolutionary, non-hierarchical model of the practice of Comparative Ontological Poetics. This research explicitly inverts the Eurocentric power structure of comparative literature by being able to apply a 13th-century Islamic metaphysical system to read a highly celebrated contemporary Western Nobel Laureate. It shows how ancient Akbarian ontology is not a historically located, dead relique of the medieval East, but a very flexible, living and universal philosophy with a refined explanatory power to understand the deep structure of modern, secular Western art.

Finally, this cross-cultural synthesis shows an ever-present and transhistorical truth about the – necessary – connection between language, creativity and human consciousness. Both the

medieval Andalusian mystic and the modern American poet are in accord with the most precise of laws: the localized, autobiographical ego is the biggest obstacle to one's understanding of the ultimate reality. In order to become a voice of universal and perpetual authority, the individual must go through the agonising process of emptying himself. The human subjectivity must be totally destroyed, the personal "I" must be reduced to a hard ground, the mirror of the self must be completely cleansed before the tongue can become a transparent medium for the torrential stream of the absolute.

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