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A Sharply Worded Silence

Silence as the Revelatory Link Between Past and Future in *Faithful and Virtuous Night*

Noah Hickman

In 1994, Louise Glück wrote in her essay titled “Disruption, Hesitation, Silence” that she is “attracted to ellipsis, to the unsaid, to suggestion, to eloquent, deliberate silence.” She continued, “[t]he unsaid, for me, exerts great power: often I wish an entire poem could be made in this vocabulary” (74). That “great power” reflects on her whole body of poetry, now fourteen collections with the recent publication of *Winter Recipes from the Collective* (2021), but in none of her collections does the concept of silence factor more explicitly than in her National Book Award winning title *Faithful and Virtuous Night* (2014). Given her relative celebrity following her win of the 2020 Nobel Prize in Literature, a healthy body of criticism exists for this collection specifically despite being less than ten years old, mostly in the form of book reviews. Outside of simply citing Glück’s deference toward silence, however, no rigorous studies have been published qualifying Glück’s particular use of silence nor its internal significance to the collection, surprising given how silence factors as an essential concept for not just *Faithful and Virtuous Night* but all her poetry. The closest any writer has come to making a claim regarding the function of silence in *Faithful and Virtuous Night* appeared in Annalisa Quinn’s review

of the collection for NPR when she observed that “[t]here is something very like the white canvas in Glück’s new collection—words, though obviously chosen with extraordinary care, somehow add up to a blankness . . . [the collection is] so restrained, so carefully empty while still giving the illusion of depth (time, perception, movement, distance!)” (“The Ecstatic Blankness”). This reading goes beyond merely identifying the presence of capital-S *silence* by locating this alleged “blankness” in the historied diction of the poems, comprised wholly of words with simple denotations and long discourses; but Quinn’s analysis stops there. This paper aspires to fill that critical gap by interrogating the function of silence in the collection rather than simply its location or the method by which Glück conjures silence into her poems. I argue that silence functions first as a revelation, a retroactive state that identifies the past as the past. I then argue that Glück complicates this definition of silence by qualifying it not simply as the absence of sound or speech but as the abundance of it, the potential for future speech, and therefore silence marks the passage of life in a cycle from speech to silence to speech again. My argument concludes by noting how Glück relies on silence to thus unify the past and future and how, for Glück’s speakers, silence prompts “anticipatory nostalgia,” the feeling of nostalgia for a time not yet past, ultimately suggesting that the speakers of Glück’s poems retain the power to conjure their own futures from the formless body of silence, a trend in *Faithful and Virtuous Night* that draws out a similar thematic pattern in Glück’s previous (and likely future) collections.

Understanding Glück’s silence in *Faithful and Virtuous Night* begins first with understanding Glück’s argument that revelation operates retroactively. This notion arises in the final lines of the first poem in the collection, “Parable,” the speaker explaining that “those who believed we should have a purpose / believed this was the purpose, and those who felt we must remain free / in order to encounter truth felt it had been revealed” (Glück 4). The “truth” to which the speaker refers contains the realization by the central band of aspiring travelers that the passage of time constitutes a successful journey regardless of their failure to depart, and even with the group perpetually “at that first stage, still / preparing to begin a journey,” the seasons pass and bodies age, and they “[change] nevertheless” (3). Fierce debate among the travelers persists through the poem regarding whether they “should have a purpose” and if that purpose should be material or otherwise, one faction insisting that the material world contained truth and that “by concentrating”

on such a world they “might see it [truth] / glimmering among the stones, and not / pass blindly by” (3). Revelation functions in the poem as a retroactive interpretation of the travelers’ experience (their knowledge gained *a posteriori*) and the group contents themselves with such revelation, it being “in a strange way miraculous” even at the end of the journey (4). Their satisfaction with this kind of revelation implies their desire for truth for its own sake, the utility of the truth being their new capacity to reflect on the past fondly and the ability to declare their “journey” a success. Truth is not propositional; truth is experiential. This same relationship between revelation and the past appears in “Theory of Memory” when the fortune-teller remarks to the speaker that “[g]reat things . . . are ahead of you, or perhaps / behind you . . . [a]nd yet . . . what is the difference” (18). The fortune-teller argues an infinity of theses on the relationship between past and truth in this question, but—foremost among them—she argues that no meaningful difference exists between a great thing in the past and a great thing in the future because such an event can only be labeled as such retroactively; even wonderful events yet to occur only become recognizable as such after they have moved into the past. This matches the temporal vision described by Walter Benjamin in “Theses on the Philosophy of History”:

A Klee painting named “Angelus Novus” shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (257–58)

While the speakers in Glück’s poems look rearward with more optimism than Benjamin’s angel, their temporal system matches his: the speakers move inevitably into the future while able to look only into the past as new revelation—new catastrophe—mounts at their feet. The catastrophes of the future factor into the whole picture only as they can be interpreted as such

while passing into the past. The angel recognizes the temporal space into which he plunges must be the future, and can therefore distinguish his vista as the past, but only differentiates the two by necessity, by virtue of explaining his own infinite fall backward into such a space. In this sense the speakers in the above poem differ from the angel in the drama of the plunge—both parties travel ceaselessly into the future, but a storm sweeps the angel into the future while one of Glück's speakers stops for fortune telling and the other debates the teleology of their journey, neither imminently concerned with the peril of the march of time and neither guaranteed to recognize the past as such without some marker to help.

For Glück's speakers, silence operates as that marker; silence indicates that something has ended, that some speech (or event) concludes, and in its wake the now-finished thing leaves a lacuna of noise. In the eponymous poem "Faithful and Virtuous Night," such silence occurs to mark the first departure of the child speaker's older brother to school, leaving him "suddenly . . . alone" after a shared life together (10). The departure occurs not in the *going* to school but in the transformation that occurs in the brother after graduating to this stage of childhood, the speaker noting "[h]ow old he seemed, older than this morning. . . . You have no idea how shocking it is," the speaker continues, "to a small child when / something continuous stops," referring, supposedly, to "the sounds . . . of the sewing room" which then "[v]anished . . . silence was everywhere" (13). The sound of the sewing room appears as a type of the previously guaranteed presence of the older brother, a domestic condition which becomes a rote constant, a background noise within a state of being so basic and essential that its abrupt absence deafens the whole system. This departure precedes the temporary muteness of the speaker, one silence (or absence) begetting another as the presence of one had come to condition the other. The speaker describes the moment of this new muteness: "Something was there where there had been nothing . . . / [o]r should I say, nothing was there" (14). The speaker's silence signifies the collapse of a paradigm, the retreat of which reveals a kind of something that he previously assumed to be nothing, a prefigured state of being even more atomic and essential than the one into which the speaker had been born, one obscured by routines and patterns. "Darkness overswept the land," and the speaker must now find a way to operate within this new system, to speak according to the new contract. He recognizes this task and wonders "[i]f I could speak, what would I have said? / I think I would have said / goodbye,

because in some sense / it *was* goodbye" (14). The absence of his brother (a kind of silence) and his own vocal silence mark to the speaker the end of an era, a way of being, which the speaker had previously assumed to be the only way of being. The inauguration of silence enables the speaker to retroactively understand the limits of the paradigm by marking its end (its goodbye), at which point he "found the darkness [the absence, the silence] comforting," and "[t]he next day, [he] could speak again" having relinquished his old frame of negotiation for this new, more broadly encapsulated system (14–15).

The eradication of a system thus conjures silence in its wake, like "a curtain rising on a vista"; silence "take[s] us, as it were, back to the beginning of things," before God spoke organization into the world (Glück 27; Picard 5). Like in "Faithful and Virtuous Night," silence indicates such a collapse in "Afterword" as the speaker (the boy from "Faithful and Virtuous Night" now become a painter) deconstructs notions of "fate [and] destiny" (30). The painter acknowledges his reliance on these two concepts as excuses to "explain [his] failures" and subsequently becomes disenchanted with the ideological pair which "now seem[ed] to [him] / local symmetries, metonymic / baubles within immense confusion." As the organizational locus of fate and destiny disintegrate, the painter describes the epiphanic vision which had been previously obscured: "Chaos was what I saw." As in "Faithful and Virtuous Night," the termination of the contract (the system) leads to a transitional period of muteness, an imposed silence or incapacity to communicate within the terms of the new, revealed system. In the case of the painter, his "brush froze—[he] could not paint it" ("it" referring to the sight of newly revealed "chaos") and the painter explicitly describes the arrest of his paintbrush in terms of this imposed silence: "darkness, silence: that was the feeling" (30). Once again, just as in "Faithful and Virtuous Night" the speaker regains the ability to speak (or, in this case, paint) after renegotiating his place within the newly revealed system of being, the painter recognizing that "blankness . . . has been both my subject and my medium," the canvas remaining deliberately white to signify the new mode into which the painter and art have lapsed, one defined by infinite "clarity" and impermanence in which the speaker's "voice is sand scattered in wind" (32–33). Max Picard describes this punctuative operation of silence as "time [being] accompanied by silence, determined by silence . . . the sound of measurable time, the rhythmic beat of time, is drowned by the silence" (107). Silence operates in "Afterword" identically to "Faithful and Virtuous Night" as the physical sign

of the end of an era of existence, a silence which only ends after relinquishing the old system for the new, the new system having been previously obscured by the old and revealed alongside the limits of the former system.

Silence, as such, signals the passage from one era to the next, marking the past as the past, a passage which Glück argues occurs in a cycle. This circular dynamic and the function of silence to reveal the circle make up the tension of "A Sharply Worded Silence." "We sat in silence," begins the speaker, prefiguring the moment of the speech of the old woman in Contessa's Gardens as emerging out of silence. The old woman speaks a story which the speaker describes as "pointless" and "interrupted at every stage with trance-like pauses / and prolonged intermissions, so that by this time night had started." The old woman then speaks again abruptly, "[m]y sincere apologies, she said. / I had mistaken you for one of my friends. / And she gestured toward the statues we sat among." The speaker "return[s] to this incident" over the passage of years, enacting cycles of departure and return, patterns of silence and speech, cycles that the old woman opaquely alludes to in her story ("I never lost my taste for circular voyages"). The speaker becomes "convinced" that the old woman's story "contained some secret," and ultimately concludes that "whatever message there might have been / was not contained in speech." The "message," rather, refers to the initiating moment of speech, the perennial return to sound after a revelatory period of silence, significant absences of sound like those of the speaker's mother, "her sharply worded silences cautioning me and chastising me" as they suggest future dangers in the inevitable recurrence of noise. Silence, the speaker concludes, guarantees the arrival of future speech (or future eras of speech) though "when this would happen and where [she] had no idea." The arrival of speech is significant less to silence than to the assurance of such an arrival, as silence is conditioned not only on the absence of speech but the potential for a return of speech (19–21).

For Glück, therefore, the absence of speech only describes half of the character of silence: the notion of silence also invokes an abundance of speech and sound, things yet unsaid or noises ongoing or eras yet to come. In "Cornwall" the speaker describes the ambience of the country as "[n]ight and day distinguished by rotating birdcalls, / the busy murmurs and rustlings merging into / something akin to silence" (27). The speaker names the polyphony as a cousin to silence, not silence itself, as the speaker recognizes patterns and iterability among the mixture of noise. The speaker implies

that the “merging” almost arrives at the total homogeneity required by true silence and, therefore, that the notion of silence includes an abundance of indiscernible sound and language out of which emerge individual, organized instances of speech and noise. The speaker metaphorizes this body of sound as “[f]og” that “swirled over the lit bulbs. / I suppose that is where it was visible; / elsewhere, it was simply the way things were, blurred where they had been sharp” (29). The speaker distinguishes these loci of fog as iterations out of a mass of fog which permeates and conditions the whole scene: the fog stands in for silence, both identifiable in their essence as having weight but with no shape, no iteration until pulled from the mass into visible being by the light, by a locutor. The speaker qualifies this homogenous body of fog as a temporal realm, remarking “[a]head, as I have said, was silence” (29). The potentiality of the fog (or the silence) relegates the power of the mass to the future, its weight generated by what might yet emerge from the veil, from the mist. In “Visitors from Abroad,” the fourth canto begins “[o]utside the street was silent. / The [p]hone receiver lay on its side among the tangled sheets; / its peevish throbbing had ceased some hours before” (23). The conspicuous cessation of noise from the phone receiver impregnates the stillness of the scene with the threat of its former noise (one the phone retains the capacity to make) and the suggestion that it will yet again conduct speech and conversation through its microphone, its current muteness (as with the speakers described earlier) conditioned only on its former and future locution. Like the fog in “Cornwall,” the language and power of the phone lies in the future, identifiable as noise and sound but yet undifferentiated (with the potential to differentiate from the whole at any moment, as in “A Sharply Worded Silence”).

This relationship between silence and the future mingles the past function of silence (to reveal) with the prescient function of silence (to suggest the future). Recalling Glück’s cyclical ontology present in “A Sharply Worded Silence” and the speaker’s return to interrogate the silence of Contessa’s Garden, Glück suggests a unity between silences, that the *same silence* intervenes between each ontological era, the same homogeneity of possibility, suggesting a hierarchy in which silence always encapsulates history, that “[s]ilence contains everything within itself . . . [i]t is not waiting for anything . . . [i]t does not develop or increase in time, but time increases in silence . . . as though silence were the soil in which time grows to fullness” (Picard 2). To recall another poem, this new understanding of silence complicates the

fortune-teller's cryptic, ponderous dictum that "great things are ahead of you, or perhaps / behind you . . . [a]nd yet . . . what is the difference" (18). The fortune-teller suggests that the "great thing" that recurs does not describe some climactic achievement or boon but the reappearance of silence at the termination and inauguration of eras (silence being, according to the hierarchy of silence and history, the greatest thing). The fortune-teller could also describe a version of Nietzsche's "eternal recurrence," that "[t]his life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it," though this version of recurrence mismatches with Glück's (194). Glück argues that even if "there are infinite endings / . . . once one begins, / there are only endings" (17). The recurrence of silence and the passing away of eras, for Glück, doesn't eradicate variability or progress; instead, it suggests a succession of meaningful endings rather than simply the passage of identical beginnings and, therefore, empty ends.

In other words, recurrence marked by silence forms a forward-moving spiral rather than a truly infinite circle, and—therefore—rather than a simple reiteration of a Nietzschean eternal recurrence, Glück's speakers describe a recurrence with clear similarities to past cycles while still accommodating for evolution and progress. Returning to "Parable," the poem describes a version of this "spiral" ontological model: the speaker notes that, after a prolonged era of argument, "periodically we would seem / to have achieved an agreement" marked by harmony and the cessation of vocal discord (a silence), "but always that moment passed . . . so / (after many years) we were still at that first stage . . . but we were changed nevertheless," recurrence and progress not mutually exclusive under this model of being. The arguing ceases and gives way to a brief silence, marking the end of the era of argument, only to give way to a *new* era of argument which reminisces of the former argument but progresses to, ostensibly, a new topic of contention. The poem, as I quoted earlier, indicates that the teleology of the spiral manifests itself in "how [the travelers] have aged, traveling / from day to night only, neither forward nor sideward," that "those who believed we should have a purpose / believed this was the purpose" (4). Organizing a life around the inevitable temporal progression of a life, of aging, gestures toward death as, perhaps, the summative finality of a life.

The collection resists this idea, however, mixing death into the taxonomy of silence, simply another dropped curtain in the passage to a subsequent

era of existence. For example, "Aboriginal Landscape" opens with the speaker's dead mother speaking, having triumphed over the silence of death now with a locution reserved for some beyond-state; whether such comes as literal speech or an imagined speech on the part of the speaker, the dead speaks, nevertheless. Elsewhere, in "Afterword," the poem concludes with a nameless spirit asking, "*shall I be raised from death,*" their capacity for speech clearly unimpeded by the brief silence of dying (33). Glück expands this resistance to death as a true end to speech in "The Open Window" in which the speaker describes an old writer who "had formed the habit of writing the words THE END on / a piece of paper . . . after which he would gather a stack of pages" eventually laying "on the cold / floor of the study watching the wind stirring the pages, mixing the written / and unwritten, the end among them." In so doing, the old writer effectively nullifies "THE END" as being a true end, each page signifying its own event in a stack of such pages including but not halted by the occurrence of "THE END" (44). Death, in other words, happens to different people at different times, but the occurrence of death does not impede the occurrence of the subsequent eras (pages, as metaphorized in "Afterword") of a given life. Death simply appears as one of the many inevitable faces of silence.

Instead of looking to death as a central existential event, Glück's collection speaks of the progression of the spiral as self-justified. The progression from silence to speech to silence suffices the speaker of "Parable" as a satisfactory description for the propelling force of existence, the force behind the unimpeachable passage of time remaining mysterious and, ultimately, irrelevant. This does not mean that the ontological model articulated in "Parable" forgets death entirely. Death explicitly factors into the journey of "Parable," the speaker describing the occurrence of "flooding sometimes, also avalanches, in which / some of us were lost" (3). The speaker, however, treats such loss of life as incidental to the true "purpose" of the journey: the transformations enacted in the passage of time (4). These transformations, progressions from speech to silence and back to speech, align with predictable stages of human evolution: from innocence to experience ("Faithful and Virtuous Night"), into and out of love ("A Sharply Worded Silence"), ability to disability ("Approach of the Horizon"), life to death ("A Summer Garden"), etc. Eventually, these transformations (similar enough among persons) become predictable, and an acceleration of individual ontological periods occurs, a phenomenon called "anticipatory

nostalgia" by contemporary psychologists (Zhou 1; Batcho 75). Anticipatory nostalgia refers to "missing the present prematurely before it has become past," distinct from "anticipated nostalgia," which describes "the prediction or expectation that one will feel nostalgic for an aspect of the present in the future" (Zhou 2).

Anticipatory nostalgia preemptively instigates what Svetlana Boym calls "restorative nostalgia," or "the anxiety about . . . historical incongruities between past and present [which leads to] question[s about] the wholeness" of present (or future) experience (45). For example, the speaker of "An Adventure" exports the silence of their dream into wakeful anxiety anticipating the daytime iteration of the same silence. The fourth canto begins, "I attained the precipice," the dreamed progression of the adventure halted by a physical dropping off, a prohibition of the expression of movement (Glück 6). The speaker, despite the precarity and eventual physical improbability, continues on, "so that I found myself riding steadily through the air" abandoning tether to the earth and physically decontextualizing themselves. "All around," observes the speaker, "the dead were cheering me on, the joy of finding them / obliterated by the task of responding to them," the speaker enveloped by a homogeneity of the dead (very much speaking despite being dead, as I previously argued regarding the irrelevance of death to the potential for speech according to Glück), a space of personal silence in which the scope of the speaker's voice becomes so miniscule that they may as well be unable to speak. When the speaker wakes, they assure themselves that "we had escaped from death," but quickly doubts the certainty of this, wondering in the final line "or was this the view from the precipice" (6). The speaker carries with them the anxiety of the dream, the possibility of the silence of the dream occurring in wakeful life prompting them to preempt and anticipate an imminent transition back into silence. The speaker's worries regarding the potential for a sudden transition into silence disrupts their ability to divide between dream and wakefulness, feeling as if the silence of the dream has occurred and reflexively feeling nostalgia for the passage of an era yet not past. The speaker may as well have passed into silence, as their abilities to exist according to the normal order of their life seize up, effectively imitating the discomfort of silence that originally prompted such anxiety and inadvertently adopting the "greater tendency to sadness and worry" associated with anticipatory nostalgia (Zhou 2). The speaker in "Faithful and Virtuous Night" observes this behavior within themselves and

others generally, explaining, "It had occurred to me that all human beings are divided / into those who wish to move forward / and those who wish to go back. / Or you could say, those who wish to keep moving / and those who want to be stopped in their tracks / as by the blazing sword" (15). The speaker argues that those belonging to the group who claim to wish to "go back" recognize they will always encounter the angel just at their heels, but they defer to the familiar prohibition of the past over the unknown, sudden angel of silence that awaits them again and again in the future. Their true goal lies in dulling the shock of "the precipice" rather than somehow returning to the past by acting as if their presently inhabited moment has already passed, pining for the return of the season of life in which they remain.

The function of anticipatory nostalgia to preemptively instigate restorative nostalgia embodies an anxiety about and desire to resolve the incongruity between the present and the future, between the possible imminence of silence (and the potential for discomfort that accompanies silence) and the imagined wellness of passing into the new era beyond such silence. The eponymous "Melancholy Assistant" acts under the influence of this nostalgia when he approaches the speaker to preemptively quit his job as he "[had] become useless to [the speaker]," and "[the speaker] must" therefore "turn [him] out" (45). The assistant defers so fully to his worry that his employer will fire him on account of some insufficiency that he preemptively fires himself before his boss has the chance to do so. By firing himself, the assistant hopes to more quickly usher in the stability of a new era that follows a moment of such silence. In short, the assistant feels nostalgia for a moment not yet vanished, "simulating some remembered emotion / which now attached itself to this occasion," and so he plots to accelerate the approach of silence to mitigate his longing or to find a moment like the one he currently inhabits but cannot enjoy as he worries for its departure. The speaker, bewildered, assumes that the assistant feels he genuinely cannot complete his regimen of duties and offers to renegotiate the terms of their contract, to redefine the task of the assistant to be simply that he "must weep for [the speaker]" in order to retain the assistant's services (45). He even goes as far as to enumerate his woes so that the assistant simply must decide such afflictions merit weeping. To this, the assistant declares abruptly "Master . . . you have given / meaning to my suffering" and "[h]is face was radiant . . . [h]is tears glistened / red and gold in the firelight. / Then he was gone" (46). Thus the speaker of the poem inadvertently completes the nostalgic gesture

of the assistant, redefining the task of the assistant so that the nature of the task has already been fulfilled upon its redefinition, collapsing silence and the inauguration of the subsequent era into one moment, briefly aligning present and future and achieving some transient relief from his fear of silence and instability.

Anticipatory nostalgia in Glück's speakers provides an example of how silence unifies the past and present by virtue of repetition, patterns from era to era and, as I have argued, the repeated appearance of the same disruptive, revelatory body of silence that Glück's speakers come to expect and that some speakers anticipate with anxiety. That unity of silence betrays a divinity in Glück's silence, that eras pass away but silence always remains, and out of that body of silence we pull the future into being. Glück finally argues that, though the passage of time may be uninterrupted and irresistible and though silence recurs to mark the end of epochs and seasons, people retain the power to pull what they will out of the shapeless mass of silence. The speaker of "A Sharply Worded Silence" expects to find again "at some point, / a door with a glittering knob, / but when this would happen and where I had no idea," but, the speaker strongly implies, it *will* happen (21). The speaker of "Afterword" hears "the spirit" ask "*shall I be raised from death,*" and the speaker looks upon the landscape and reads that "the sun says yes" and so it shall be, the resurrection of this nameless soul assured (33). The painter in "The White Series" settles into domestic life with his brother, finds new significance in his context, "beg[ins] to paint again," and generates art of a new caliber, a new vision, silence giving way to objects infused with meaning as determined by the painter, by the locutor (55). Even misguided or ignorant plots, like that of the melancholy assistant to retain a specific kind of security after silence, find success by exerting will over the passage of silence into substance (45–46). The collection's final poem, "The Couple in the Park," articulates this idea as the concluding thought of the work. In one hypothetical, the man touches the hand of the woman, and the woman's "heart springs open like a child's music box . . . [a]nd out of the box comes / a little ballerina made of wood. I have created this, the man thinks . . . [t]his must explain the puzzling music coming from the trees" (71). The man discovers that the noise that conditions his being, the iterated sounds that once belonged to silence, are of his own making though he did not recognize it at first. And so it is with *all* the music: whether the speakers recognize it or not, all the noise originates with them, silence being a primordial well of

undifferentiated music simply waiting for a hand to pluck some chant or some tone from it, whether on purpose or by accident.

Glück's reliance on silence to identify the past and to suggest possibilities for the future follows from the fact that Glück organizes the whole collection around silence as a primordial backdrop with "its origins in the time when everything was still pure Being" (Picard 1). Silence marks the evolution of her speakers, their histories and creations. Understanding the primacy of silence to the collection heightens the reverence with which Glück deploys it and the severity of the truth gleaned from her speakers' encounters with and within it. *Faithful and Virtuous Night* revolves around the speakers' emergence from and return to silence, the speakers behaving at their most perceptive and acute when enveloped by both its absence and abundance, when it marks the end of one artifice and gives way to another. Understanding the role of silence as this original substance transforms the collection from a myriad of unmoored speakers with dead family and missed ambitions to a group of speakers learning to cobble together deliberate speech out of silence, to form their own contexts, their own futures.

Understanding the role of silence in *Faithful and Virtuous Night* should also inform how readers understand silence as it appears in Glück's other collections, the same patterns of speech-silence-speech appearing elsewhere (if with, admittedly, less frequency): the relocation and decontextualization of Persephone in *Averno*, the quality of the nameless god and evolution of supplication in *The Wild Iris*, even the vitiligo of memory in Glück's most recent collection, *Winter Recipes from the Collective*. Glück, it would seem, relies broadly on silence as a benevolent divinity: immutable, omnipresent, massive, infinite. In silence, Glück finds a unifying mythology, one characterized by deference to the will of her speakers and the capacity to change themselves and their contexts according to their desires for wellness. In silence, Glück argues for the possibility of genuine transformation, for truth, and for the promise of a return to silence for as long as it takes to find ourselves transformed.

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