

# Louise Glück's Irenic Poems, "Crater Lake" and "Averno"

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## Biography

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## Abstract

Several Louise Glück poems evoke discussion regarding the theme of peace. Glück's use of ancient mythology in *Averno* relates topics also found in the Homeric "Hymn to Demeter" and Aristophanes' *Peace* that frame the post-9/11 world of the new-millennium wars. The goddesses Demeter, Persephone, Kôré, and Eirênê are anthropomorphic manifestations that antagonize ancient debates surrounding the conversations of violence and war. Glück voices existential situations evocative of the goddesses in "Crater Lake" and "Averno" that represent hardships for women in a postmodern, posthuman, silent world.

## Résumé

Plusieurs poèmes de Louise Glück ont trait au thème de la paix. Avec l'utilisation de la mythologie archaïque dans *Averno*, Glück développe des thèmes que l'on retrouve dans « Hymne à Demeter » et « La Paix » d'Aristophane; ils décrivent l'univers post-11 septembre 2001 des guerres du nouveau millénaire. Les déesses Déméter, Perséphone, Coré et Eiréné sont des représentations anthropomorphiques de débats anciens sur les rapports de la violence et de la guerre. Glück donne voix aux situations vécues par les déesses dans « *Crater Lake* » et « *Averno* », pour représenter les épreuves des femmes dans un monde post-moderne, post-humain, muet.

## Keywords

Louise Glück, *Averno* (2006) Homeric, Aristophanes, *Peace* (421 B.C.), war and gender, Demeter, Persephone, Kôré, Eirênê, Zeus, Polemos, Peloponnesian War.

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## Introduction Kôré

In her 2006 poetry collection, *Averno*, American poet Louise Glück— two-time poet laureate of the United States, Yale Professor of creative writing, and Pulitzer Prize winner for *The Wild Iris*—looks at the destroyed world one year after 9/11, when America went to war. Glück's poems "Crater Lake" and "Averno" relate the tragic circumstances for the mythological, Greek, agrarian goddesses—Demeter, autumn, the earth and "bringer of seasons,"<sup>1</sup> Kôré, summer, the murdered maiden daughter, now Persephone, promulgator of winter, and Eirênê, peace and spring—in order to discuss the give and take of war, violence, and elusive peace. These themes are initiated in bits of Glück's early poetry and continue in the complexities of *Averno*.

In this study, aspects of the poems "Averno" and "Crater Lake" are related to *The Homeric Hymns* "Hymn to Demeter" as well as Aristophanes' satiric play *Peace*. Glück's poetic persona voices a unique postmodern existential lens, in order to view a depressed, new-millennium political and environmental world after destruction, chaos, and war, needing peace, and finding the goddesses who represent earthly peace literally entombed in sorrow. The banished Demeter hides in an Eleusian cave, as her pleas to Zeus are unanswered; Persephone is trapped in the underworld by Hades, and Eirênê is buried in a pit by Polemos, War. Metaphorically, the message is that males support war via war-mongering politicians and their politics, while females represent peace, as caretakers of the earth and agriculture. The agrarian farmers, ultimately, speak up, sacrifice, and act for the common man in tune with nature, as they, literally, save Peace from the pit and cause the release of Persephone. Meanwhile the persona, poet, the creator sees herself as responsible for this complex, negative reality, the inversion of her purpose, here creating death and destruction via her disappearance and obsession with the pit. Jean-Paul Sartre—"The Hole" from *Existentialism and Human Emotions*—discusses such entrapments; thus the goddesses' entombment becomes counter to the purpose of filling an empty space with potential, as the creators invert existence, and, instead, create a tomb, a death-space, filling the hole turns nothingness into something, in nurturing (housing) destruction (Sartre 84).

In "Averno," Glück's perspective relates "the pit of disappearance" (64) left on 9/11 in lower Manhattan after the Twin Towers fell—in order to observe war and violence looking into the hole, questioning the emptiness, the absence, and never naming the solution as a divine figure. The horrible irony is that fanatical followers of the divine create horror and destruction, leaving a pit/hole in the earth, which represents the removal of a peaceful existence. For Glück, the poet exists to tell and recount the story, as "Echoes" from *Averno* relates:

I remember peace of a kind  
I never knew again.  
Somewhat later, I took it upon myself  
to become an artist,  
to give voice to these impressions. (29)

If Glück is the existential writer/creator her thoughts, actions, and writing, create existence, and, her fear makes her the arbiter of destruction and not the hopeful, restrained poetic witness, who is able to live in peace.

## War and Peace

*Averno* relates Glück's human dilemma—in existential creation one holds the power to create both good and evil, war and peace. She is helpless in knowing how to recreate an elusive past peace. Looking toward the pit, she removes herself to a liminal space, where she hopes that absence is ideal, leaving the pit unfilled; therefore, a place of non-existence and peace. This 'neutral position,' however, is not the afterlife. She is not dead, and her disconnection does not end human life, which continues in the eternal cycle of nature. The pit is the story, the human story that continues in violence, the collective human experience of horror. Her hopeful position of clean, neutral observation fails. Dorothea Olkowski—"Prologue: The Origin of Time, The Origin of Philosophy" in *Time in Feminist Phenomenology*—discusses the use of such disappearances that "provides many feminist philosophers with an account of temporality that proceeds by uncovering forgotten lived experiences and articulating the narratives describing those experiences, insofar as the latter give meaning to human reality" (18). Thus, Glück's withdrawal is used as a pause in time to understand the real. Glück relates to other such places of absence.

In "Persephone the Wanderer 2" from *Averno* this hole is filled by the creator, Demeter, who sits in her Eleusian cave, filling the space with her depression at the betrayal by Zeus and the loss of her daughter. This suffering transforms into a passive anger that destroys the earth, and, thus, humans:

We begin to see here  
the deep violence of the earth  
  
whose hostility suggests  
she has no wish  
to continue as a source of life. (74)

Demeter like Glück stops as the creator with no solution—beyond withdrawal, observation, isolation, and silence—in order to halt the existential-creative process that perpetuates the collective misery. Olkowski references Vaterling in that the creators await a rebirth described as "the temporal, existential condition of natality [that] refers both to physical birth and also to the birth of political speech and action" (19). While awaiting such a rebirth, the women, instead, become the destroyers and their reactive destruction equals a political action as the voice for women.

Counter to roles as creators, these ideas draw forward the collective unconscious that generates negative images, creates war, lives with the consequences of violence, and is useless in finding peace. From "Averno," the position is impotent silence, still searching:

We grew silent, hypnotized by the snow  
as though a kind of turbulence  
that had been hidden before  
was becoming visible, (66)

The hypnosis is via the snow, the literal snow of Persephone's winter with the visible

being the incommensurable the author veils herself from in order to survive, and the story she yearns to share, hoping to stop destruction. Yet, in the inverted world, telling equals destruction. She remains the traumatized witness, in “Fugue”:

Why can't I cry out  
I should be writing *my hand is bleeding*,  
feeling pain and terror—what  
I felt in the dream, as a casualty of war. (15)

How is she the casualty of war? Because the dream is the reality of the horror and pain she creates, joins, and disconnects from. Glück intrigues the reader to question what kinds of humans create such a quandary of misery.

### **Posthuman**

I argue that Glück's detached dreamers, these humans, are the product of the postmodern, posthuman society that Andrei Codrescu identifies in *The Posthuman Dada Guide*, where posthumans are lost in a world of excess, the postmodern buzz of media, and the electronic, technological universe. Whereas, the goddesses are victims of male gods; Glück sees the world of “snow” the world of static, the white noise of the new millennium. These twenty-first century posthumans are helpless, overloaded, and traumatized. They withdraw further into the new machine age of technology, useless in solutions to violence, as politicians claim to search for peace while promulgating and funding war.

In the poem “Telescope” from *Averno* Glück's overwrought posthuman views the world as the detached observer, looking into the world via the object, the telescope: “You've stopped being here in the world./You're in a different place,/ a place where human life has no meaning/.../taking the telescope apart./You realize afterward/not that the image is false/but the relation is false” (71). This posthuman use of the object, the detachment of using technology in which to view the world, is an abstraction, another machine. This mimetic reflection of the world creates a creative rendition of reality, a fictive real that facilitates the ability to view such difficult realities via “the reality of a second world” (Olkowski 28). The detached posthumans exist in the chaotic twenty-first century that equals a new, nameless period, born from the prefixed post-world Glück typically floats above as a specter, spirit, soul.

In “Averno” Glück reflects on the liminal space she assigns herself in absence, the hole, and questions her purpose:

A disaster like this  
leaves no mark on the earth.  
And people like that—they think it gives them  
a fresh start.

I stood a long time, staring at nothing.  
.  
.  
.  
.  
.  
Once the earth decides to have no memory  
time seems in a way meaningless. (62)

The disaster involves the multiple stories for Glück, Demeter, and Eirênê, the place of loss and disappearance for the women. In “Averno” the storyline also tells of a farmer whose fields are destroyed by an unknown arsonist, perhaps a woman or girl who disappears. Averno, the Roman’s mythic entrance to the underworld, the hole, the pit, the place of the earth’s memory after 9/11, the pit of no survivors, is now filled with the unimaginable imaginings of horror, death, and destruction that the posthuman observer tries to forget with no memory, without time.

The persona of the poem voices her obligations in a place of no meaning:

...make a will; they’re worried the government  
will take everything.

They should come with me sometime  
to look at this field under the cover of snow.  
The whole thing is written out there. (62-63)

Glück relates that humans worry that the government takes everything (via taxes after death) and with our funds goes to war. Even a naïve hope in the pastoral is destroyed. Politicians, capitalism, and the greed of corporate power, result in human angst. The pit is the story that violent, frail, and destructive humans move away from. The field, the place of destruction and annihilated evokes human hopelessness, helplessness, which thus initializes their disappearance into the postmodern, posthuman world of the schizoid-electronic, techno-condition, or becoming pacified via a medicated, chemical life that is void of memory.

Glück sees the absurd quandary that the earth is being destroyed by chemicals and wars and says, as the mother and earth, the poet and Demeter, there is “Nothing: I have nothing to give them [her children; humans]” (63). Chemicals will obliterate humans and the earth, and, ironically, for the frail postmodern, posthuman the solution is more chemicals to alleviate depression.

### **Mist**

Nature and the creator are helpless; however, this is the sad world humans create using evil, the world that Glück attempts to defy in “Averno”: “I know what they say when I’m out of the room. /Should I be seeing someone, should I be taking/one of the new drugs for the depression” (60). The persona announces her depression and then continues to explain why the artist, the creator is depressed and withdrawn in the destroyed world, a world she covered up after trauma, a world she withdrew from. The irony being that humans take drugs to avoid depression after witnessing the unimaginable horrors that humans create, avoiding the pit, the cave, and the story.

An earlier Glück poem, “Pictures of the People in the War” from *Firstborn* (1968) voices the disassociated human, who once turned and looked at the horrors of war, which she covered in mist, a world of war that Glück veiled herself from:

Later I’ll pull down the shade

I would first off share  
My vision of the thing.

These pictures of the people in the war  
...their hands were opening to me like  
Language; tanks and dwelling meanwhile misty in the rear. (23)

Glück's reality is bare and horrifying, so she pulls down the shade, eradicating the truth in mist, protecting the witness, stopping the creator and the author from telling and thus continuing the story, covering reality. This mist is the denial and detachment she used to hide from horror. Depression comes when the mist clears and reality is still horrible.

In "Averno" the scrim from the theatrical stage rises: "*The mist has cleared—/It's like some new life: you have no stake in the outcome;/you know the outcome./.../To raise the veil./To see what you're saying goodbye to*" (61). Glück hid from the horror of war—in the mist cast by the creator, the creative writer. She tries to turn her work from the wasteland created by humans. The voice of the twenty-first-century persona now lifts the veil and sees horror and hope, war and peace, evil and good, the troubling dichotomies that still exist.

Here the background, the mist of war, is finally lifted, in order to observe the post-apocalyptic world after 9/11, during the new millennium wars. She enters a mode of existential solipsism where the voice is ironic, free of personal angst, yet aware of depression and isolation, sarcastic in the trite answer of the believers that one exists until one's soul vanishes. And with that loss of soul or spirit or interaction with humans, one continues—an essence after existence, a disembodied *Das Man*:

The old people, they think—  
this is what they always do:  
talk about things no one can see  
to cover up all the brain cells they're losing.  
They wink at each other;  
listen to the old one, talking about the spirit  
because he can't remember anymore the word for chair. ("Averno" 60)

Glück engages the concrete, the chair, to draw her back to a tangible object, outside of herself, yet false. The posthuman, disembodied witness removes the veil, the technological version of reality, and the telescopic limitations to view objects that no longer seem to exist. The quandary is if the world is free of a divine mover, existence before essence, and man exists before purpose, then man's essence/purpose is to be defined by the existential creator, Glück. Similarly, S. Douglas Olson, in the introduction to *Peace* by Aristophanes relates these ancient dilemmas, relative to *Peace* and the Peloponnesian Wars, and states that "G-d has receded so far as to inspire doubts about his [sic] real existence, and for the improvement of [the world for] which we alone seem to be responsible" (xlii).

## Myths

From her position, Glück deduces her responsibility in a godless world and views the intrusion of the collective. She finds humans misusing divinity and the world “morality” in the measures and controls of religion and mythologies, as a means of continuing atrocities in the name of God. Glück sees the evil purpose and implies the hypocrisy and uselessness of rulers and fictive divinity: “Think of it: sixty years sitting in chairs...” (61). The metaphoric usefulness of the chair, the enthroned and their power, is forgotten. Leadership is absent in the pursuit of good or in the containment of evil. The creator-Glück in her sixty years questions her purpose and power to create change.

She uses this idea of an absent, enthroned higher power or ruler. She finds any hope for balance between good and evil teeters between the opposing forces of the same center and dictates. Glück sees that bartering with an absent (or non-existent) divinity—as Demeter must do with the murdering abductor Hades, and her brother/husband/Persephone’s father, the silent Zeus—for the return of her child Kôré, now the dead Persephone. Demeter questions if she is the victim now segregated into the cave or if she is using passive resistance in her war, by removing herself to a cave, as she quietly disassociates after violence, trauma, and depression. Both positions end with the same result, the earth withers and her quiet war destroys human life. Glück, the author, creator, witness, also, withdraws to halt existence:

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

What it means is nothing is safe.” (“Averno” 64)

As the author and goddesses wander in the liminal as “souls,” humans are terrified of nature and the violence attributed to the allusive divine. However, Glück relates that the space between the otherworldly, perhaps the divine space of liminality for the creators, is the pit of “Averno,” the Roman’s mythic entrance to the underworld from where Kôré disappears, and “Crater Lake,” where Peace/Eirênê is buried, the Lake of Averno.

In the “Hymn to Demeter” from *The Homeric Hymns*, Kôré Demeter’s young daughter plays in a springtime field. She sees the narcissus flower that has been put there as a temptation from Hades, her paternal uncle, god of the underworld, and brother to Zeus, who has approved the child’s death. Kôré plucks the flower and from its wound the earth splits open and the child falls into the waiting arms of Hades. She is taken to Hell, raped and killed, and transforms into the living dead Persephone. Meanwhile, Demeter flies around the earth in desperation and panic looking for her dead child. In her pleas to Zeus, she finds silence from the heavens. Hecate, the wizened-elder guide to Hell, tells Demeter the true story. Again, Demeter begs Zeus to recant. She finds silence. She moves to Eleusis to care for the child Demophoon and, nightly, she burns away his mortality in fire to keep his soul immortalized. Demeter is the traumatized mother trying to immortalize a mortal child. She is discovered and withdraws to the cave. Her immense depression joins her shame and rage that are translated onto the earth and cause the death of agriculture, filling a Sartrean hole where enwombing equals death. Her tears poison the earth. In the Homeric “Hymn to Demeter” Demeter “made a most terrible and cruel year/for human beings on the deeply

nourishing earth./The earth did not send up seed” (18); the earth “fruitful no longer, lying fallow/and leafless everywhere, the white barley/buried by Demeter’s design” (24).

The cries of the dying and the stench of the dead fill heaven with horror and anguish that parallel the mother’s inconsolable grief: “So she would have destroyed utterly/the mortal race of human beings, starving them/to death, and deprived those who live on Olympus/...gifts and sacrifices (18). After the loss of sacrifices to honor him, Zeus finally sends Hermes to negotiate for Persephone’s release. Hades agrees, and then tempts Persephone to eat a pomegranate; she consumes three small seeds. The rule from the Underworld is that anything consumed in death ties one to that place; therefore, she must return to Hades for three months a year, winter, which denotes the season of Demeter’s loss and sorrow, and causes nature’s seasonal demise.

The goddess’s obliteration of earthly life is adapted in “Averno,” where a nameless girl provides several scenarios, as she is implicated as an arsonist who burns a field as well as the victim who disappears. This parallels the mother and destroyer Demeter and the lost daughter, Kôré, as well as the dread Persephone, who decides death or resurrection for humans in the underworld:

Afterward, the girl was gone.  
Maybe she didn’t exist,  
.  
.  
.  
.  
So we have to believe in the girl,  
in what she did. Otherwise  
it’s just forces we don’t understand  
ruling the earth. (64)

This also implicates the male gods, the absent, silent forces of arbitrary rules using power for illicit gain, while also retaining the possibility of no divinity and no forces beyond such fictions, the useless chair. Glück also relates the question of existence and the non-existence of the girl, the story, to the transitory nature of good and evil, war and peace, in the greater and the specific. She uses the disappearances of the girl to highlight the plight of women. The disappearance of two girls in the present represents a similar parallel in the continuing vulnerability of women facing the brutal options of non-existence, as in Kôré’s death.

This return to the brutal scene is too horrible to observe and to understand because the purpose is evil: the scene covered by the mist, the veil over the war, the subjective aspects of life or death, and the choices in how such scenarios are interpreted.

Next, Glück observes two girls on a train:

They write their names in mist on a train window.  
I want to say, you’re good girls,  
trying to leave your names behind. (64-65).

The girls’ names written on the window are extracted from the mist like the veil lifted to show reality, existence and non-existence, life then death, disappearance from the earth, the inversion of the female purpose of creation and life. Here, women disappear, and these disappearances evoke questions of existence. Do the girls exist or are they used like the women of mythology, as an axiom? The moral would then be that humans are



temporary, and existence is like the mist on the window. One might as well be a soul outside of reality, the disconnected, drugged posthuman, the non-reactive existential creator without purpose. The reality is the space of Averno, where even the passive witness plays a role in creation.

Glück envisions Averno, the crater, the pit of 9/11 as the place having no memory, no mark, a place where temporality vanishes, and the only future is one being written in the field or on the transient mist, the place of absence. This relates to the literal situation for the anthropomorphic goddess Peace/Eirênê, in Aristophanes' comedy *Peace*. The helpless humans stand by, searching for the lost entity, Peace, who the god Polemos/War has buried alive in a pit and covered with rocks. Glück's "Crater Lake" finds such a conflict as representative of good and evil:

There was a war between good and evil.  
We decided to call the body good.

That made death evil.  
It turned the soul  
against death completely. (28)

War, the aggressive, male, causative agent of death, is an agent for evil, while Eirene, the female passive subject is the body and peace. An antagonistic relationship exists between the two, as Glück sees the poet as the self, the soul, creator and architect of the conflict, now choosing sides with good:

Where does the voice come from  
that says suppose the war  
is evil, that says

suppose the body did this to us,  
made us afraid to love. (28)

Good and evil are no longer abstractions and join the corporeal coming back as the anthropomorphized Good/Peace/Earth and Evil/War/Hades. The only hopeful position is that of the liminal soul, that yearns for neutrality in the disconnection from action, but wants to defend the female position of good. The soul that exists, now, is not an ideal, disembodied, neutral soul, but is a being attached to the earth as creator. Glück takes a mimetic approach looking into the world for something to replicate, in a postmodern duplication. She finds absence. Olkowski relates that such a situation is a search for identity, where "a soul must look into another soul.... This same god whose own power is nothing but mimesis is eager to acknowledge the reality of a second world, a separate and silent world of resemblance. He is ready to embrace the dark realm of an invisible mind, to let the power of shadows and darkness invade and overtake the world" (28). This is Averno, where Glück is trying to be god-like and serve the greater good, but finds nothing, only absence:

Like a foot soldier wanting  
to serve a great warrior, the soul

wanted to side with the body. (“Crater Lake” 28)

The soul is detached from the body that is corporeal, real, and earthly. Glück had excused this position in the neutrality of detachment, as the observer. Now, reconnected in “Averno” with the mist lifted, she begins the debate, much like the one set forth by Aristophanes.

In *Peace* War is a corporeal entity that is absent from the scene as he hunts the humans who design condoned, organized violence, warfare. Without the embodied Peace, Eirênê, the agrarian goddess of spring, the earth fails and despair reigns. The reigning gods of Olympus vanish and the politicians antagonize Polemos/War by continuing warfare. Olson states the importance of the play: “What matters in *Peace* is not theology but politics, and much of the play is devoted to showing how political affairs in Greece have gone disastrously wrong in recent years” (xli). In the politics of War, Peace vanishes. The Olympian gods vanish. Nature dies. The plea to Zeus comes from a common man, Trygaios, who rides a dung beetle to heaven, the irony of humans as refuse, which they will later collect in abandoned shields. Upon approaching heaven, Trygaios finds nothing. The gods have abandoned humans and Olympus because War has become too all encompassing and consuming. Zeus is silent, absent, non-existent. War charges humans with committing atrocities in his name and plots their final demise. Aristophanes clarifies that although the nemesis for Peace and earth appears to be Polemos/War, the real enemy is humankind.

Polemos is absent, as he is, literally, searching for a mortar and pestle to grind humans away like the pestilence they represent. Leo Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, explained the figurative use of War for humans: “...While the gods beautify life and reduce its terror—even war seen as the god Polemos is not as terrible as war itself—by this very fact they increase the terror of life or make men worse than they are in themselves...” (155-156).

War and destruction of human life is what happens via the absence of Peace and Nature, Eirênê and Demeter. These goddesses both relate to the seasons. Demeter the bringer of seasons, brings summer, Kôré, into existence and then draws her from the underworld and life is restored. During her absence winter and death befall humans. Eirênê is one of the three horai, the seasons, yet more precisely the bringers of order. Her sisters are Eunomia, order, and Dikê, Justice. Dikê is oftentimes seen as a means for Zeus’ violent male justice. Eirênê also evokes spring, the season of rebirth and life’s potential. These goddess are considered chthonic, leaving the underworld, here the pits, and recovering something in their return to life.

At the end of the play, the farmers free Eirênê/Peace who is drawn out of the pit. With her come the servants Opora (also representative of late-summer and autumn) and Theoria (theory, contemplation) (Aristophanes, Olson 371). The humans of politics have misused Theoria/theory—to prove that war equals prosperity.

Peace exits the pit in silence as Trygaios questions: “why are thou silent?” Hermes responds ‘and how could she speak to the spectators? She is too angry at all that they have made her suffer’” (Aristophanes, Anon. 19). Humans have misused women and this abuse is met with silence as the figures move away from the pit questioning why. Similarly, in “Averno” Glück relates such an interaction and silence:

We grew silent, hypnotized by the snow  
as though a kind of turbulence  
that had been hidden before  
was becoming visible

In our silence, we were asking  
those questions friends who trust each other  
ask out of great fatigue,  
each one hoping the other knows more

and when this isn't so, hoping  
their shared impressions will amount to insight. (66)

Glück and the goddesses join as the “we” in silence that relates to the misuse of politics to create horror. Yet with the return of the goddess to earth, as the agrarian recovers, a pastoral ideal returns, hoping that true prosperity and wealth reign.

These interrelations are discussed by the ancient Greek historian Pausanias—*Guide to Greece Volume 1* (2<sup>nd</sup> century AD)—as he identified two Greek statues of the infant Wealth in the arms of the goddesses: one of “Fortune carrying the child Wealth...like a nurse or mother; ...[it was] just as clever to make the statue at Athens of Peace holding the same child” (230). This coexistence between Peace and Fortune, encourages the continuation of humans and the earth, as fortune for humans is reflected onto the gods via sacrifices and temples. This is manifested at the end of Aristophanes’ *Peace*, when Eirênê and late-summer, birth of the harvest, return to the earth’s surface from the pit. Demeter is also implied as the mother of Fortune holding the infant Wealth, her child Plutus (Pau. I, 8, 3).

In the presence of Eirênê, Peace, humans prosper. According to Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, “But those who give straight judgements [...invoke the goddess Dikê (Justice)] to strangers and to the men of the land, and go not aside from what is just, their city flourishes, and the people prosper in it: Eirênê (Peace), the nurse of children, is abroad in their land, and all seeing Zeus never decrees cruel war against them” (212 ff.). Relative to Demeter and the connection to Peace, the “Orphic Hymn 40” proclaims (trans. Taylor) “Only-begotten, much-producing queen, all flowers are thine, and fruits of lovely green. Bright Goddess, come, with summer's rich increase swelling and pregnant, leading smiling peace; come with fair concord and imperial health, and join with these a needful store of wealth.”

### **Peace and Earth**

The usefulness of peace is translated onto the earth itself, its fertility, and the cycle of life for humans. Glück’s intertextual, irenic, and eco-critical poems—“Crater Lake” and “Averno”—look at the world after terrorism, where earthly and human life are being destroyed in a world of war. The equally disturbing message is that human life and the earth continue, ignorant of horror: “A disaster like this/leaves no mark on the earth. /And people like that—they think it gives them/a fresh start” (62). The message from Glück becomes the need to release Eirênê from the “pit of disappearance” (64) to negotiate and promise peace in a destroyed world.

In the signature poem “Averno,” Glück uses the voice of a farmer whose land has been torched by arson to exemplify earthly death, the male gods, the battle with Demeter, and male loss in the war:

The farmer stares out the window.  
...  
And he thinks: *my life is over*.  
His life expressed itself in that field;  
he doesn't believe anymore in making anything  
out of earth. The earth, he thinks,  
has overpowered me. (19, 21-25)

Glück's message is that women have power, even as mothers with maternal longings and desires. Male harshness and destruction must not be condoned or contended with. War and horrors against women must end, and the power women hold must be shown. Here, in Glück's ecofeminist vision, via Demeter, men have recognition of female power and earthly survival:

The terrible moment was the spring after his work was erased,  
when he understood that the earth  
didn't know how to mourn, that it would change instead.  
And then go on existing without him. (“Averno” 5.30-33)

This female reaction is a taking back of place and power at the center of abuse, rape, and murder. In the image of war, the women recognize that oblivion and the apocalyptic landscape equal suicide, as they are forced into death after violence against them by men. Instead, the women balance the world in cycles where the world thrives and dies to show the balance and need for females, fertility, and respect to that power of creation and destruction.

### **Peace**

Ultimately, Peace is free. The humans invested in the earth's survival, for Aristophanes the farmers and agrarians, remove Peace from the pit, remove the veil that shrouds her in the mist away from the world created by politician and perpetuated by war—that entity, too, is perplexed by human idiocy. Peace comes quietly, an anthropomorphized figure from the horai, an aspect of Demeter and earth and cycles. Trygaus frees and marries Harvest, the friend of Festival and Peace. This hopefulness returns to a pastoral ideal, a past of rural life. Fire, from the destruction of war and the farmer's destroyed field, now becomes a homey aspect of domestic bliss, as the Chorus from *Peace* relates: “Aye, may we pass our lives in peace, caressing our mistresses and poking the fire?” (Anon. 14). Poking the fire can also be seen as an antagonistic term, as Aristophanes' comedic twist since humans are always baiting war, as the cycles continue, eternally.

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<sup>1</sup> Homeric “Hymn to Demeter” (7)