UNIVERSIDAD DE GRANADA

Departamento de Filologías Inglesa y Alemana

Louise Glück, 2020 Nobel Prize in Literature

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Louise Glück Nobel Prize in LiteraturePoetry



The poet Louise Glück has become the first American woman to win the Nobel prize for literature in 27 years, cited for “her unmistakable poetic voice that with austere beauty makes individual existence universal”. Glück is the 16th woman to win the Nobel, and the first American woman since Toni Morrison took the prize in 1993.

The chair of the Nobel prize committee, Anders Olsson hailed Glück’s “candid and uncompromising” voice, which is “full of humour and biting wit”. Her 12 collections of poetry, including her most recent Faithful and Virtuous Night, the Pulitzer-winning The Wild Iris, and the “masterly” Averno, are “characterised by a striving for clarity”, he added, comparing her to Emily Dickinson with her “severity and unwillingness to accept simple tenets of faith”.

“In her poems, the self listens for what is left of its dreams and delusions, and nobody can be harder than she in confronting the illusions of the self,” Olsson said. “But even if Glück would never deny the significance of the autobiographical background, she is not to be regarded as a confessional poet.”

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The Red Poppy

Louise Glück, 1943

The great thing
is not having
a mind. Feelings:
oh, I have those; they
govern me. I have
a lord in heaven
called the sun, and open
for him, showing him
the fire of my own heart, fire
like his presence.
What could such glory be
if not a heart? Oh my brothers and sisters,
were you like me once, long ago,
before you were human? Did you
permit yourselves
to open once, who would never
open again? Because in truth
I am speaking now
the way you do. I speak
because I am shattered.

The Wild Iris

by **Louise Gluck**

At the end of my suffering
there was a door.

Hear me out: that which you call death
I remember.

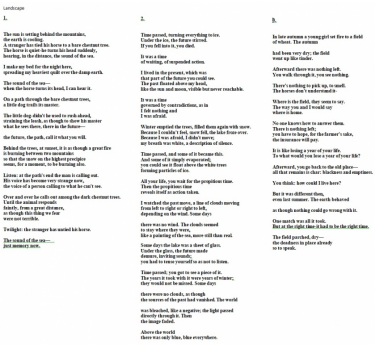
Overhead, noises, branches of the pine shifting.
Then nothing. The weak sun
flickered over the dry surface.

It is terrible to survive
as consciousness
buried in the dark earth.

Then it was over: that which you fear, being
a soul and unable
to speak, ending abruptly, the stiff earth
bending a little. And what I took to be
birds darting in low shrubs.

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:

from the center of my life came
a great fountain, deep blue
shadows on azure seawater.



Landscape

I.

The sun is setting behind the mountains,
the earth is cooling.
A stranger has tied his horse to a bare chestnut tree.
The horse is quiet: he turns his head suddenly,
hearing, in the distance, the sound of the sea.

I make my bed for the night here,
spreading my heaviest quilt over the damp earth.

The sound of the sea—
when the horse turns its head, I can hear it.

On a path through the bare chestnut trees,
a little dog trots in unison.

The little dog didn't he used to rush ahead,
straining the leash, as though to show his master
what he saw there, there in the future—

the future, the path, call it what you will.

Behind the trees, at sunset, it is as though a great fire
is burning between two mountains:
so that the snow on the highest precipice
seems, for a moment, to be burning also.

Listen: at the path's end the man is calling out.
The sea wind scatters his words, but
the voice of a person calling to what he can't see.

Over and over he calls out among the dark chestnut trees.
Until the animal responds
with a low whinny, a few shivers,
as though this thing to fear
were not terrible.

Twilight: the stranger has united his horse.

The sound of the sea—
just memory now.

2.

Time passed, turning everything to ice.
The past closed, the future shrivel.
If you fell here it, you died.

It was a time
of waiting, of suspended action.

I lived in the present, which was
that part of the future you could see.
The past floated above my head,
like the sea and moon, visible but never reachable.

It was a time
governed by contradiction, as in
I was starving and
I was afraid.

Winter emptied the trees, filled them again with snow.
Because I couldn't feel, snow fell, the lake froze over.
Then I was cold, I felt the cold, and
my breath was white, a description of silence.

Time passed, and some of it became this.
And some of it simply evaporated,
like the white of my breath in the white trees
forming particles of ice.

All your life, you wait for the propitious time.
Then the propitious time
reveals itself as action taken.

I watched the gust move, a line of clouds moving
like a pulsing of the sea, more still than real.

Some days the lake was a sheet of glass.
Today, when the surface moved,
it moved, heavily,
you had to rouse yourself so as not to listen.

Time passed; you got to see a piece of it.
Like the gust, like the clouds, like a mirage of winter;
they would not be noticed. Some days

there were no clouds, as though
the sources of the past had vanished. The world

was bleached, like a negative; the light passed
directly through it. Then
the image faded.

Above the world
there was only blue, blue everywhere.

3.

In late autumn a young girl set fire to a field
of wheat. The autumn

had been very dry; the field
went up like tinder.

Afterward there was nothing left.
You walk through it, you see nothing.

There's nothing to pick up, to smell.
The horses don't understand it.

Where is the field, they seem to say.
The way you and I would say
where is home.

No one knows how to answer them.
There is nothing left;
you have to begin, for the farmer's sake,
the innocence will pay.

It is like losing a year of your life.
To what would you lose a year of your life?

Afterward, you go back to the old place—
all that remains is clear: blackness and emptiness.

You think: how could I live here?

But it was different then,
even last summer. The earth bolstered

as though nothing could go wrong with it.

One match was all it took.
But at the right time it had to be the right time.

The field parched, dry—
the shadows in place already
so to speak.

You exist as the stars exist,
participating in their stillness, their immensity.

Then you're in the world again.
At night, on a cold hill,
taking the telescope apart.

You realize afterward
not that the image is false
but the relation is false.

You see again how far away
each thing is from every other thing.

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