

Speaker's manuscript – Literature Prize 2020 Louise Glück

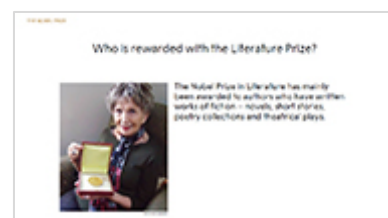
The Nobel Prize in Literature

- The Nobel Prize in Literature is one of the five prizes founded by Alfred Nobel and awarded on 10 December every year.
- Before Nobel died on 10 December 1896, he wrote in his will that the largest part of his fortune should be used to fund a prize to those who "have conferred the greatest benefit to humankind".
- One of the five prizes should go "the person who shall have produced in the field of literature the most outstanding work in an ideal direction".



Who is rewarded with the Literature Prize?

- The Nobel Prize in Literature has mainly been awarded to authors who have written works of fiction – such as novels, short stories, poetry collections and theatrical plays.
- The Literature Prize has also been awarded to authors in other literary genres.
- In 2016 the Prize went to a musician and songwriter, when Bob Dylan became the Laureate in Literature.
- Examples of authors who have received the Prize are Selma Lagerlöf (1909), Ernest Hemingway (1954), Wole Soyinka (1986), Alice Munro (2013) and Tomas Tranströmer (2011).



2020 Literature Prize

- Louise Glück is considered by many to be one of the most important poets in American Literature today.
- She also teaches poetry at Yale University in Connecticut, USA.
- She has published twelve collections of poetry and some volumes of essays on poetry.
- Glück has been honoured with several prestigious awards, including the Pulitzer Prize (1993), the National Book Award (2014) and, most recently, the Tomas Tranströmer Prize (2020). In 2015, she was awarded the National Humanities Medal by then President of the United States Barack Obama.



2020 Literature Laureate

- Louise Glück was born in 1943 in New York and grew up on Long Island.
- Her grandparents were Hungarian Jews who emigrated to the United States.
- She studied at Sarah Lawrence College and Columbia University.
- She made her debut in 1968 with the poetry collection *Firstborn*. These poems feature several different personas that come across as angry or hostile. This tone bothered some critics, while others praised her measured language and imaginative use of rhyme and metre.
- But it was not until the 1980s and 90s that Glück's work began to reach a broader audience.
- Today we'll be looking at two of her poetry collections, *The Wild Iris* and *Averno*.



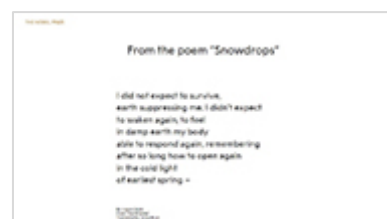
The Wild Iris

- *The Wild Iris* was published in 1992. For this book, Glück was awarded the 1993 Pulitzer Prize.
- The poems in the collection are set in a garden. It is a work in three parts in which three different voices are heard: the garden's flowers as they speak to a gardener and poet, the gardener/poet herself, and finally an omniscient deity.
- In *The Wild Iris*, Glück shows that her poems are about not only sadness but also renewal and rebirth. In the poem "Snowdrops", she describes the miraculous return of life after winter.
- Now let's listen to a portion of this poem, "Snowdrops", from the collection *The Wild Iris*.



From the poem "Snowdrops"

- I did not expect to survive,
earth suppressing me. I didn't expect
to waken again, to feel
in damp earth my body
able to respond again, remembering
after so long how to open again
in the cold light
of earliest spring –



Averno

- Averno is the name of a crater west of Naples, Italy that was believed by the ancient Romans to be the entrance to the underworld.
- This collection of poems is based on the myth of the origin of the seasons. Hades, the god of the dead and the underworld, abducted Persephone and carried her away to the underworld. Although Persephone was eventually allowed to return to her mother Demeter, the goddess of fertility, she was forced to return to Hades for a part of each year. Winter comes as Demeter mourns her daughter's absence and lets the earth become desolate during their time apart.
- By alternating between the story of Persephone and the life that modern women live today, these poems make the myth relevant again.
- Glück returns often to the ancient myths, which she uses to link together the personal with universal topics such as falling in love.
- Now let's listen to part of a poem from this collection called "October".



From the poem "October"

- The light has changed;
middle C is tuned darker now.
And the songs of morning sound over-rehearsed.
—
This is the light of autumn, not the light of spring.
The light of autumn: you will not be spared



Straightforward and deep at the same time

- Louise Glück is revered for her linguistic precision and for how she engages with exquisite sensitivity in timeless topics such as isolation, family relationships, divorce and the development of the soul in confronting death.
- Her poetic voice is often straightforward, close to everyday language, but repetition and rhythmic precision keep it from ever being commonplace.
- There are often moments of humour and biting wit in her poems.
- Many readers find that Glück's poetry is on one level easy to read, but that it holds great depth as well.
- When asked which of her books one should start with if interested in getting to know her work, Louise Glück recommends *Averno*.

