

**American Poets
Reading Assignment
January 19, 2021**

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/louise-gluck>

FIRST MEMORY

Long ago, I was wounded. I lived
to revenge myself
against my father, not
for what he was--
for what I was: from the beginning of time, in childhood, I thought that pain meant I was not loved.
It meant I loved.

-Louise Gluck from ARARAT

Messengers

You have only to wait, they will find you.
The geese flying low over the marsh,
glittering in black water.
They find you.

And the deer-
how beautiful they are,
as though their bodies did not impede them.
Slowly they drift into the open
through bronze panels of sunlight.

Why would they stand so still
if they were not waiting?
Almost motionless, until their cages rust, the shrubs shiver in the wind, squat and leafless.

You have only to let it happen:
that cry-release, release-like the moon
wrenched out of earth and rising
full in its circle of arrows

until they come before you
like dead things, saddled with flesh,
and you above them, wounded and dominant.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7vbSzJMGvik>

(Her reading)

Lisa selection:

Early December in Croton-on-Hudson

Spiked sun. The Hudson's
Whittled down by ice.
I hear the bone dice
Of blown gravel clicking. Bone-
pale, the recent snow
Fastens like fur to the river.
Standstill. We were leaving to deliver
Christmas presents when the tire blew
Last year. Above the dead valves pines pared Down by a storm stood, limbs bared . . .
I want you.

The Drowned Children, by Louise Glück

You see, they have no judgment.
So it is natural that they should drown, first the ice taking them in and then, all winter, their wool
scarves floating behind them as they sink until at last they are quiet.
And the pond lifts them in its manifold dark arms.

But death must come to them differently, so close to the beginning.
As though they had always been
blind and weightless. Therefore
the rest is dreamed, the lamp,
the good white cloth that covered the table, their bodies.

And yet they hear the names they used
like lures slipping over the pond:
What are you waiting for
come home, come home, lost
in the waters, blue and permanent.

The Untrustworthy Speaker, by Louise Glück

Don't listen to me; my heart's been broken.
I don't see anything objectively.

I know myself; I've learned to hear like a psychiatrist.
When I speak passionately,
that's when I'm least to be trusted.

It's very sad, really: all my life, I've been praised for my intelligence, my powers of language, of
insight.

In the end, they're wasted—
I never see myself,
standing on the front steps, holding my sister's hand.
That's why I can't account
for the bruises on her arm, where the sleeve ends.

The Untrustworthy Speaker *(continued)*

In my own mind, I'm invisible: that's why I'm dangerous.
People like me, who seem selfless,
we're the cripples, the liars;
we're the ones who should be factored out in the interest of truth.

When I'm quiet, that's when the truth emerges.
A clear sky, the clouds like white fibers.
Underneath, a little gray house, the azaleas red and bright pink.

If you want the truth, you have to close yourself to the older daughter, block her out:
when a living thing is hurt like that,
in its deepest workings,
all function is altered.

That's why I'm not to be trusted.
Because a wound to the heart
is also a wound to the mind.

Parable of the Hostages, by Louise Glück

The Greeks are sitting on the beach
wondering what to do when the war ends. No one wants to go home, back to that bony island;
everyone wants a little more of what there is in Troy, more life on the edge, that sense of every day as
being packed with surprises. But how to explain this to the ones at home to whom fighting a war is a
plausible excuse for absence, whereas exploring one's capacity for diversion is not. Well, this can be
faced later; these are men of action, ready to leave insight to the women and children.

Thinking things over in the hot sun, pleased by a new strength in their forearms, which seem more
golden than they did at home, some begin to miss their families a little, to miss their wives, to want to
see if the war has aged them. And a few grow slightly uneasy: what if war is just a male version of
dressing up, a game devised to avoid profound spiritual questions? Ah, but it wasn't only the war. The
world had begun calling them, an opera beginning with the war's loud chords and ending with the
floating aria of the sirens.

There on the beach, discussing the various timetables for getting home, no one believed it could take
ten years to get back to Ithaca; no one foresaw that decade of insoluble dilemmas—oh unanswerable
affliction of the human heart: how to divide the world's beauty into acceptable and unacceptable
loves! On the shores of Troy, how could the Greeks know they were hostages already: who once delays
the journey is already enthralled; how could they know that of their small number some would be held
forever by the dreams of pleasure, some by sleep, some by music?

*"Parable of the Hostages" by Louise Glück, from Meadowlands. Copyright © 1996 by Louise Glück. Used by permission
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Source: Meadowlands (The Ecco Press, 1996)*