

Student Worksheet – Literature Prize 2020

Louise Glück



The 2020 Nobel Laureate in Literature, American poet **Louise Glück**, has written both poetry and essays about poetry. Many readers find that Glück's poetry is easy to read but holds great depth as well. One of her poetry collections is called *The Wild Iris*. Now we'll get a chance to read and discuss one of the poems in this collection.

The poems in *The Wild Iris* 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. The collection includes several poems that are named for flowers and plants, such as "Scilla", "Clover", "Daisies" and "Violets". It is as though she were giving nature a voice to speak for itself.

The Swedish translator of this collection of poems, Jonas Brun, notes that gardens are often portrayed as restful places for us to retreat to, but they are also a kind of arena in which the forces of nature are locked in battle against the human desire to tame them. Brun writes, "The garden that is depicted in *The Wild Iris* is no spa for the soul; it is a conflict zone."

Just as gardens can be interpreted in different ways, there are many ways to read *The Wild Iris*. The meaning of the poems is ambiguous. Here is a portion of the poem "Snowdrops". Read it and then answer the questions on the other side.

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 –

From *The Wild Iris*

