

LAURA PAIK : "Gretel in Darkness" by Louise Glück. It sounds sort of weirdly militant. "All who would have seen us dead are dead." Like a battle's been won. That's to me saying that you want to fight. You want to fight, and it's not this glorious sort of riding off into the sunset imagery. It's a witch's cry breaking in the moonlight and "Her tongue shriveling into gas..."

So to me that's definitely some sort of mixed imagery that I often hear associated with war, is that it's this bitter victory where you have all these traumatic memories of terrible things happening.

And again, "Her tongue shriveling into gas..." As a postmodern child, like all of us, I will never see shriveling into gas without thinking about something sort of militant or at least industrial.

"Why do I not forget?" OK. "My father bars the door, bars harm from this house and it is years." So we're all shut up in the father's house and it's been awhile, but there's still something not quite right with it. "But I killed for you. I see armed firs, the spires of that gleaming kiln--"

This is starting to sound like PTSD sort of, like she has this feeling of they fought this fight and God rewarded. There's imagery of gas and killing the enemy. And she's still stuck remembering it. Armed firs is very sort of militaristic.

"Am I alone? Spies hiss in the stillness, Hansel we are there still and it is real, real, that black forest and the fire in earnest." So it's very interesting. On one hand, you have Gretel describing this sort of battle with the witch and then using words like armed firs, spies in the stillness. She keeps sort of flashing back to it and worrying about it, even though it's been a long time.

And I'm going to circle armed, for armed firs, and spires of the gleaming kiln, because again, I got war and I got industry from these. These seem to be the biggest moments for me, of sort of that kind of imagery you hear about in things like "Dulce et Decorum Est" where you have people's faces dissolving in mustard gas and things like that. Cold gleaming things destroying people. "We are there still and it is real."

That last sentence, again, for me that is some post traumatic stress in that last couplet there to me because that's-- we're still there, the fire in earnest, sort of the circumstance that you would

associate with PTSD where you hear victims say they had to numb themselves and wall up and constantly be alert and vigilant in sort of this altered way for so long that when they're safe again, it's difficult to get out of it.

Let's see, this was written in 1968, so that's a big year in America, at least. And of course, if it's in '68, I'm thinking the Vietnam War because the war where people started coming back and there was this whole big thing about PTSD and people maybe not respecting soldiers in the way that they would have from say, the World Wars or something like that. And these soldiers having a really hard time with flashbacks and memories and feeling really alone and left behind.

So I'm thinking, I'm wondering, if maybe that colors this. So if I'm going to write a paper about this poem, that's something I want to go find scholarly articles about and see if anyone has said anything about that.

If not, it could be a pretty unique angle which I'd have to find some sort of evidence that she was concerned about the political climate at the time in some way in order to support that. But if someone has said something about it, that will be very interesting too.

What I would normally do in a case like this now is I would sort of free write about it. I would go on to Microsoft Word and I would free write, just narrative thoughts, straight out of my head that I have about it.

From there I would go on and figure out which thoughts had sort of similarities to each other. So I'd pick those out and drag and drop them next to each other, or I would color code them. That's usually what I do actually, is the green stuff goes here and maybe because it's a combination of the blue thoughts and the yellow thoughts.

But that's how I would begin to construct an outline of what I generally think of the poem. What usually happens is the outline deals with more things than I can cover in one paper, so then I go through and find out which colors are the most interesting and I pick those. So I take all of the purple, blue and red thoughts that are related. Because I can fit those into a paper, and then go through and pick out the nuances.

So this thing that was just a red thought might be sort of a mauve thought, and that goes into paragraph two. The mauve thoughts go in paragraph two, and things like that. the color coding, the outlining, the general contemplation is definitely the longest step for me in any

paper by far.