

October 21, 1967

LOUISE GLUCK

Four people were present at this meeting: Ben de Soto, Shirley (who made her debut as Girl #3 in my first entry), Valerie (Shirley's friend) and Alvin, an impartial observer. I shall have to give up my dreams of some logical progression; perhaps because we teach Saturdays we teach transients. I repeated much of what I had discussed the previous week. I read Blake's "Little Black Boy" again, and Jarrell's "The Woman in the Washington Zoo". I also read several of the dream songs of John Berryman. To drive the word home, I asked that everyone contrive some sort of monologue for the next session, in prose or verse, but preferably transcribed from someone else's skull. These will be read in class next week, if they materialize.

It seems clear that the best way to conduct a class with some measure of success is to work for maximum participation. Many people like to talk; almost all people like to be asked to talk. Unfortunately I am not experienced enough, or gifted enough, to manufacture crafty, telling questions. So I ask the kids how they feel about the poems I read. This stressing of gut-reaction is no gesture of condescension. Any reader of poetry must begin with his instinct. One cannot explore unstated, unacknowledged impressions. I know graduate students, infinitely well informed, who can speak for hours on a given

line, contriving elaborate cases for its excellence or its failure; they have their "yes" votes and "no" votes constantly on tap. And they have no idea at all what they think. I will not be party to this sort of bravura.

The Blake went over best. Everyone liked it; Alvin was particularly articulate. The Jarrell poem, with its Roman senate sentences - those single breaths bloated into paragraphs - is perhaps difficult for them to grasp at a reading. I went through the tricky places slowly. No one knew quite what to make of the Berryman.

I ended with Ben's poem. The girls had heard it already.. They are unwilling to criticize each other. It is my hope that these children will eventually find a security that allows for really strenuous discussion. But it's a question of atmosphere as well. The atmosphere in which useful, fierce criticism flourishes is one of mutual respect. We must effect it.