

Swans

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in the volume are "All Hallows" and "The Apple Trees." "All Hallows" is a harvest poem, but it remains for the rest of the book to disclose what price must be paid for "harvest," for experience. Glück is too good to theorize, but in the last poem the father stands, a resplendent Adam, "among trees hung/ with bitten apples." Choices have been made; a child has been born. The woman holds her son to the window for his father to see: "I raised him to the window saying/ *See what you have made/* and counted out the whittled ribs,/ the heart on its blue stalk/ as from among the trees/ the darkness issued..." Already the son's future, by some deep dark inheritance, is being written on his hand. "I wait to see how he will leave me," the mother says without surprise. "Already on his hand the map appears/ as though you carved it there."

Other poems reflect Glück's concern with the myth of Adam and the garden of Eden, such as

"The Fire," "The Shad-blow Tree," "Pomegranate," and "The Murderess." None is overtly about Adam, Eve, and serpent; in fact, the Biblical and classical allusions often overlap. But there are tracings, parallels. The mother in "The Murderess" slays her daughter because "she would pare/ her skirt until her thighs grew/ longer, till the split tongue slid into her brain," the way the serpent's forked tongue beguiles Eve, seducing her imagination. Finally "the stain/ dissolved, and God presided at her body," absolving for the murderess, not only the murder, but the soul of the daughter who "had no fear."

"Pomegranate" is based on the myth of Persephone, but it works equally well as a poem based on Old Testament myth. Without any mythological context, it works as a poem based on a young woman's relationship with a man: "First he gave me/ his heart. It was/ red fruit containing/ many

seeds, the skin/ leathery, unlikely." Obviously it is a temptation poem that operates against the backdrop of the situation of the daughter the man seduces, and her mother, who figures in the poem but does not appear. The final appeal the man/lover makes is the one Satan makes to Eve: he offers her knowledge:

*When he looked up at last
it was to say My dear
you are your own
woman, finally, but examine
this grief your mother
parades over our heads
remembering
that she is one to whom
these depths were not offered.*

"These depths" are the domain of the underworld, the chambers of the pomegranate fruit, the dark gift of experience, or all three, and the poem is sufficiently complex to sustain all these interpretations.

Similarly, "The Shad-blow Tree" presents a backdrop of

experience against innocence in the young man who takes a photograph of the Shad-blow "through sunlight pure as never afterward." And the lovers in "The Fire," who cannot ward off the night in which they "see one another so clearly" are still able in the daytime to intuit their former Eden:

*And in the days we are contented
as formerly
in the long grass,
in the wood's green doors and shadows.*

The young bride in a poem called "Bridal Piece" from *Firstborn* says: "I want/ My innocence. I see/ My family frozen in the doorway/ Now, unchanged, unchanged." The longing for innocence in *The House on Marshland* is more qualified. The necessity of being "likewise/ introduced to darkness" has become Glück's reality; it has given her poems texture and tension almost unequaled by any other contemporary poet.

LOUISE GLÜCK

Firstborn was Ms. Glück's first book. She lives in Vermont.

Four Poems

For My Sister

Far away my sister is moving in her crib.
The dead ones are like that,
always the last to quiet.

Because, however long they lie in the earth,
they will not learn to speak
but remain uncertainly pressing against the wooden bars,
so small the leaves hold them down.

Now, if she had a voice,
the cries of hunger would be beginning.
I should go to her;
perhaps if I sang very softly,
her skin so white,
her head covered with black feathers....

The Somnambulist

A cat stirs in the material world.
And suddenly moonlight pours into the room,
as though somewhere a blind
had been opened.
And on the floor the white slats of a ladder appear.

In the corner a small boy
is watching his brother.
Now slowly the folded body of the dreamer
shifts and rises and is led away—

Wherever he is, he will not suffer if he returns
but wake out of that static flesh
as in his own bed
under the even layers of snow.

The Mirror

Watching you in the mirror I wonder
what it is like to be so beautiful
and why you do not love
but cut yourself, shaving
like a blind man. I think you let me stare
so you can turn against yourself
with greater violence,
needing to show me how you scrape the flesh away
scornfully and without hesitation
until I see you correctly,
as a man bleeding, not
the reflection I desire.

Swans

You were both standing, looking out over the water.
It was not now; it was years ago,
before you were married.
The sky above the sea had turned
the odd pale peach color of early evening
from which the sea withdrew, bearing
its carved boats: your bodies were like that.
But her face was raised to you,
against the dull waves, simplified
by passion. Then you raised your hand
and from beyond the frame of the dream
swans came to settle on the scaled water.
The sea lay mild as a pool. At its edge
you faced her saying
These are yours to keep.
The horizon burned
as though releasing its withheld light.
And then I woke. But for days
when I tried to imagine you leaving your wife
I saw her motionless before your gift:
always the swans glide unmenacing across
the rigid blue of the Pacific Ocean, then rise
in a single wave, pure white and devouring.