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Louise Glück

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From Reader Review The House on Marshland for online ebook

Mike Jensen says

The author said this is better than her first book, and it is. I respect it more than I like it, however. I find these poems uninvolving and unmoving. There is also the curious habit of using a word that seem inappropriate, such as in "Even now the landscape is assembling." Assembling? I could understand this if the sun was rising, but it seems to setting, if I interpret the next line correctly. I recently read an article that praised Glu?ck for doing this. Now, having read two of her books, the fascination with this habit eludes me.

Kat says

As with Firstborn, I look forward to finding out what was going on in Glück's life and how that may have influenced her in its writing, but I purposely read it without any referents in order to see what I'd make of it on its own.

This is a collection concentrated on the fecund decay of autumn and the paradox of life at peak ripeness so soon before its end. This metaphor is projected onto life and death and the realms in between, as in one of my new favorite poems about the Persophone myth, "Pomegranate," and onto mundane subjects rendered wondrous and painfully, achingly beautiful and ephemeral like a marriage in its death throes even at the dawning of a new life born of that union.

Myles says

Gratitude

Do not think I am not grateful for your small
kindness to me.
I like small kindnesses.
In fact I actually prefer them to the more
substantial kindness, that is always eyeing you,
like a large animal on a rug,
until your whole life reduces
to nothing but waking up morning after morning
cramped, and the bright sun shining on its tusks.

Lia says

I enjoyed this collection more than the previous book. Even though it was published in the 1970s, both sections, 'All Hallows' and 'The Apple Trees', are still relevant today. Especially a few of the poems in the second part of the book, I don't think I would have the same appreciation if I had read this before becoming a mother.

Steven says

"And already in its deep groove
the train is waiting with its breath of ashes."

"We were on the pier, you desiring
that I see the Pleiades. I could see
everything but what you wished."

"Look how the leaves drift in the darkness.
We have burned away
all that was written on them."

Joann says

I like the direct clear voice of these poems, and when I first read this slim collection I liked it so much that I have carried it with me for 25 years. But...I never felt enough to revisit the poems. Now I have reread, and now the volume is perched atop the sell or give away pile.

Candace says

I first encountered this book of poetry in the mid-70s, and some of the poems have stayed with me ever since. Perhaps most of all, "Gretel in Darkness," which begins:

"This is the world we wanted.
All who would have seen us dead
are dead. I hear the witch's cry
break in the moonlight through a sheet
of sugar: God rewards.
Her tongue shrivels into gas . . ."

Wow. This woman really knew how to do it.

Shannon says

"There is a soul in me / It is asking / to be given its body" ...

Louise Gluck is spellbinding. The poems in The House on Marshland are quiet, meditative, beckoning. The speaker's tender, thoughtful voice carefully considers love in its most vulnerable, bare-faced death, the apple wood of fire, the child and the apple tree, God, and motherhood. Each poem picks up an object, handles it with care, before laying it back down--japonicas, the ocean, a kneeling martyr. It is powerhouse writing, and

Louise Gluck in her second collection has already located her voice that demands to be listened to.

Lucy says

Louise Gluck's book breathes with nature, using all of her senses and encouraging readers to do the same. These poems of memory, tactile glimpses of childhood, romantic love, and inevitable loss are easy to grasp for the non-academic. This small book, so simple in language and tactile was a real joy for me to read. Gluck's work is truly embodied.

Laurence Li says

It's always great to see classic tales become formalized, twisted, strange versions of themselves, and so I have to echo the other reviewers' praise for Hansel and Gretel; and I mean who couldn't love a poem that starts contains such a brutally honest line like "I am not young anymore"?

mwpm says

The collection is broken into two part: "All Hallows" and "The Apple Trees"

The poems of "All Hallows" are predominantly about childhood and mythology. The poems about childhood can be divided into childhood generally (poems such as "The Pond" and "The School Children") and the poet's childhood specifically (poems such as "For My Mother" and "Still Life").

The hills are far away. They rise up
blacker than childhood.

- The Pond

How orderly they are - the nails
on which the children hang
their overcoats of blue or yellow wool.

- The School Children

Thirty years. Screened
through the green glass
of your eye, moonlight
filtered into my bones
as we lay
in the big bed, in the dark,
waiting for my father.

Thirty years. He closed
your eyelids with
two kisses....

- For My Mother

Across the lawn, in full sun, my mother
stands behind the camera.

- Still Life

The poems dealing with mythology are more diverse. They are divided, as mythology is divided, into many categories. For example, myth as fairy tale (as in "Gretel in Darkness" and "The Murderess"), myth as religion (as in "Nativity Poem" and "Jeanne d'Arc"), and myth as symbol (as in "The Magi" and "Gemini")...

Nights I turn to you to hold me
but you are not there.

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.

- Gretel in Darkness

You call me sane, insane - I tell you men
were leering to themselves; she saw.
She was my daughter. She would pare
her skirt until her thighs grew
longer, till the split tongue slid into her brain.
He had her smell. Fear
will check her beauty, but she has no fear....

- The Murderess

Singing &
with gold instruments
the angels bear down
upon the barn, their wings
neither white
wax nor marble....

- Nativity Poem

It was in the field. The trees grew still,
a light passed through the leaves speaking
of Christ's great grace: I heard.

- Jeanne d'Arc

Toward world's end, through the bare
beginnings of winter, they are traveling again.

- The Magi

There is a soul in me
It is asking
to be given a body
- Gemini

The poet continues her exploration of childhood and mythology in "The Apple Trees" (in poems such as

"Abishag" and ""). In addition, the poet considers dreams and the act of dreaming (in poems such as "Brennende Liebe", "12.6.71", and "The Apple Trees")...

At God's word David's kinsmen cast
through Canaan:
It was understood
the king was dying
- Abishag, 1

In the recurring dream my father
stands at the doorway in his black cassock
telling mee to choose
among my suitors, each of whom
will speak my name once
until I lift my hand in signal.
- Abishag, 2

...Last night
I dreamed that you did not return.
- Brennende Liebe

You having turned from me
I dreamed we were
beside a pond between two mountains
It was night
The moon throbbed in its socket
- 12.6.71

I stand beside his crib
as in another dream
you stood among trees hung
with bitten apples
holding out your arms.
- The Apple Trees

But the most dominant theme explored in the second part is love. Her love poems range from unromantic to anti-romantic (in poems such as "Love Poem" and "Here Are My Black Clothes"). Hand in hand with love, the poet explores death (in poems such as "The Fire" and "Japonica")...

No wonder you are the way you are,
afraid of blood, your women
like one brick wall after another.
- Love Poem

I think now it is better to love no one
than to love you....
- Here Are My Black Clothes

Had you died when we were together
I would have wanted nothing of you.
Now I think of you as dead, it is better.
- The Fire

But death
also has its flower,
it is called
contagion, it is
red or white, the colour
of japonica -
You stood there,
your hands full of flowers.
How could I not take them
since they were a gift?
- Japonica

Stephany says

Oh, Louise. "Instruct me in the dark." This is a book about compression, about the physics of emotion. Unflinching. Possessed. More a live animal than a book of poems, this is one of my top ten books, regardless of genre.

Anne says

Each successive reading of Glück's poetry reveals what a gifted wordsmith she is. This, her second volume of poetry, is smoother and more fluid than her first, "Firstborn". As soon as I finished the book, I started over again from the beginning. New layers and perspectives are discovered each time.

Krys says

Purchased for "Gretel in Darkness," discovered in a student compendium.

Also enjoyed: All Hallows, The Undertaking, The Letters, and a few others, like The Swimmer.

Sometimes in Gluck I encounter a sort of small, everyday rapture: her language is as simple and shocking as ice. Not a glacial melt: just a woman and her warm, human hands holding ice she makes to melt. Gluck is a woman who keeps time with ice cubes, marking an afternoon's flood into night.

"It is night for the last time.
For the last time your hands
gather on my body.

Tomorrow it will be autumn.

We will sit together on the balcony
Watching the dry leaves drift over the village
Like the letters we will burn,
one by one, in our separate houses.

Such a quiet night.
Only your voice murmuring
You're wet, you want to
And the child
sleeps as though he were not born...."
- The Letters

metaphor says

Far away you turn your head:
through still grass the wind
moves into a human language
