



1-1-1995

Altarpiece

Michael Hicks

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Recommended Citation

Hicks, Michael (1995) "Altarpiece," *BYU Studies Quarterly*: Vol. 35 : Iss. 1 , Article 13.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol35/iss1/13>

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Altarpiece

I. Eve

It was easier
 to sleep then,
 before the wolf
 in the pasture
 had learned to howl
 and only the river
 sang at night
 behind the fresh orchard
 where she reclined
 amid acres of stars.
 So this was sleep,
 to unloose the senses
 like horses in the field
 and dream herself
 across that first day
 of pruning and staking
 the long rows of trees
 whose tides of leaves
 bobbed with fruits
 only she and he
 could name.

But tonight
 in her sleep
 one fruit named her,
 its voice like
 peeling a branch,
 its flesh thick
 with syllables
 as if to say
 that with one bite
 her body might ripen,
 her hair become
 a crown of blossoms
 whose scent could
 worm its way into
 some extravagant dawn,
 maybe tomorrow,
 indistinguishable
 from yesterday,
 except for
 a thought.

II. Adam

Lately the fields
 turned to hay.
 The wind gusted
 in his bones,
 his skull blowing
 with sentences:
 The clothing would not last.
 His children would outlive him.
 It would be harder to sleep.
 So this was death,
 to walk all day
 among frosted apples
 and cakes of ice,
 wondering how arms
 once hard from raking
 could soften like
 yesterday's fruit,
 how eyes once
 sharp as branches
 could cloud
 in a blizzard of cells.

But even so,
 when he walked with her,
 flocks of melody
 crowded his brain
 and he felt a fresh
 swarm of praise,
 not the old kind,
 but one ringing
 in his whole body,
 a hum of recognition
 that the whole earth
 forever after
 would sing of him
 and sing of her,
 not with tunes alone,
 but with metaphors
 clanging in the wind
 and the crazy blows
 of word against word,
 hammered out
 on a page.

—Michael Hicks

Michael Hicks was one of two first-place winners in the BYU Studies Poetry Contest.