

Kaitlin Hughes

Devin Becker

Writing through Literature

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Literary Analysis

Gifts are a representation of the heart. When one decides to present a gift to another to convey their connection with them, it is typically meant for the other to show appreciation. However, if it fails, a sense of disappointment and distress occurs with the giver. Everyone deals with some sort of disappointment sometime in their lives. Louise Glück is the author of the poem "Retreating Wind", just one selection of The Wild Iris. Throughout this poem, God is disappointed with the people. God expresses his dissatisfaction with how creation has treated one another and themselves, always wanting more and never happy with what is offered to them. Towards the end of the poem, God contrasts our lives to a bird's flight, perhaps leaving the reader curious as to how comparable their species are. Glück uses tone to show her disappointment throughout the poem. Tone conveys the emotion of a piece to the reader making them empathetic to the speaker's emotions. Glück expertly sets a tone and combines disappointment with visual imagery. Her straight forward view of life and its use becomes clear as one reads the poem. In Glück's poem, "Retreating Wind", she combines tone and imagery to convey the expression of disappointment.

Glück sets the tone of disappointment at the beginning of the poem. In the first stanza, God is disappointed. She shows this because she states "I loved you / Now I pity you." "Pity" positions the speaker as someone who is wiser, older, and of higher ranking (2). Instead of using a word such as "sympathy" or "upset", "pity" helps to set off the speaker of the poem as being at a higher standing

than a normal person speaking (2). She uses that same choice of words throughout the poem to help make the speaker seem more important and to show demand in what is being said.

In the third stanza, Glück once again sets up another good point about God's disappointment by using particular word choice.

I gave you every gift,

.....

You wanted more, the one gift

reserved for another creation. (10, 13-14)

In using "I gave you" (10) and "you wanted more" (13) helps one to see all of God's sacrifices, and one's greed and self-centeredness. God explains how he had given each person their own gifts of everything they could want, yet it was not enough. One might look at this stanza as God putting a burden on the reader for putting his son, Jesus on the cross. God blindly states that if creation had not been selfish, then they would not have to ask for forgiveness towards our sins, therefore Jesus would not have had to die on the cross to save us.

Glück's tone helps the reader to better experience the imagery. As one reads through the poem, the speaker's emotions are instantly felt with the images offered. Right away one may feel sympathy towards the speaker when it is stated "When I made you, I loved you / Now I pity you / I gave you all you needed...../ I see you more clearly" (Glück 1-6). These set up a picture in one's mind of God looking upon his creation; once happy and proud of it and now upset and embarrassed. With each stanza, imagery takes its toll on one's mind and helps the reader to see past the average picture and to perhaps see it in a new perspective.

I gave you every gift,
Blue of the spring morning,
Time you didn't know how to use-
You wanted more, the one gift
Reserved for another creation.
Whatever you hoped,
You will not find yourselves in the garden,
Among the growing plants. (10-17)

These two stanzas combined, helps us to see the disappointment in the way we have led our lives. It also presents the universal downfall of God's creation. "You will not find yourselves in the garden" puts a clear image in the reader's mind (16). This image could be taken as a garden of plants and vegetables or as the Garden of Eden. You can imagine many of the scenarios throughout the poem and see Glück's tone shining through.

The garden and tree scenario also reveal the sort of disappointment God had towards Adam and Eve in the Bible. In the Bible, Adam and Eve ate the fruit off of the forbidden tree because they wanted more than their usual surroundings. They concentrated on what looked good and not to what God had planned for them, resulting in being banned from the Garden of Eden. Once they were banned from the Garden, life did not come easily for them anymore, thus having to work for it. In the poem, "Retreating Wind" it says "you will not find yourselves in the garden, among the growing plants" helping to induce the fact that we must work to make a living and to survive, whereas plants are given their nutrients and survive on little work (16). As they ate the fruit from the tree, their eyes were open to all truth and wisdom matching the humans being poisoned with the new and exotic wonders of our world. There will

always be things that seem better just like the apples on that apple tree. However, in the end, sometimes it is not better.

To look at the last stanza in a theological perspective, it describes one's predestined path. The white birch symbolizes purity while the apple tree represents the story of Adam and Eve. When one is born they begin as a white birch, pure from sin. As one grows older and progresses with their life, they are introduced to sin and like Adam and Eve, are tempted to give into the devil and go against God. God seems to be saying that one's life "begins and ends in stillness" thus saying we are all born pure but die with much sin and little love in our hearts. On the other hand, Glück still uses a bird's flight as a metaphor to describe a human's life. However, "begins and ends in stillness" describes one's coming into the world as an innocent baby and leaving with no more fulfillment as one had come. A bird's flight never lasts long, wandering from one tree to the next. "The white birch to the apple tree" symbolizes the nutrients needed for the bird to survive thus comparable to a person's life of jumping from one thing to another, having no plans, no goals, or never thinking of the future. This also represents a bird's quiet, sheltered life comparable to our lives of leading our priorities in the wrong direction.

All the way through the book, the poems help to set the overall tone of disappointment or the sense of loss amongst the plants, humans, and God. In Glück's poem the "Matins" it discusses a man's broken heart, asking God for reasons behind it (Glück 26). In another poem, "Daisies" a flower warns the human to be precautious because people may make fun of them and laugh at them for countless reasons (Glück 39). Each poem has its own way of presenting the topic of disappointment or loss, enabling them to compile together to form the overall tone and theme of the book.

The poem "Retreating Wind" helps to tie in all of the speakers of the book and each of their stories they tell. In this particular poem, the spokesperson mentions a "gift" which has been given to

us, yet we do not fulfill those gifts (10). Glück sets each poem into place to form the conclusion that if we had followed our gifts and lived to our fullest potential, most of the poems in the book, The Wild Iris would be invalid. Most of the poems relate to the tone of disappointment or loss and if we had followed God's plan for us and allowed our souls to be immense, many of the other pieces of poetry would never need to have been written.