



The Laughter of Adam and Eve (Crab Orchard Series in Poetry)

Jason Sommer

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Near the beginning, just after the fall, was laughter—at least as Jason Sommer imagines it. In the title poem, Eve catches Adam’s hilarity over what passes for a tree outside of Eden, their laughter a heady combination of longing, defiance, and perhaps even relief, through which they find they now possess “a knowledge of evil that is good,” an understanding that will carry them through life after paradise. Through settings mythical, historical and biblical, through characters that range from Gunga Din to St. Kevin of Glendalough, the poems in this book often search out meaning in the tracing of origins: of a bird’s song, of laughter, of a word, of language itself. Poems explore the source of the word *brouhaha*, the song of the “resignation bird,” and the dangerous way a poem of Anna Akhmatova enters the world, under the eyes and ears of Stalin’s secret police, escaping the house arrest its author must endure.

In *The Laughter of Adam and Eve*, Sommer speaks from a multitude of voices and perspectives, in short, formal lyrics as well as longer free-verse narratives. From the archetypal parents of us all, down through anonymous voices, throughout these pages, women and men speak to—and of—each other, in many roles and relations—as lover and beloved, as child and parent, as dreamer and dreamt of. The poems attempt to travel beyond the traditional binary in search of the common thread that binds us to one another. Perhaps chief among them is story: whether recasting myth so that Pygmalion and Narcissus become a single figure or using an Appalachian tale retold as a message, lover to lover, these poems narrate, while engaging deeply with those special properties that poetry can bring to story.

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