

If I Had Children

May Swenson

If I had children, I might name
them astrometeorological names:
Meridian, a girl. Zenith, a boy.
Eclipse, a pretty name for either one.
Anaximander, ancient Greek scientist
(who built a gnomon on Lacedaemon,
and with it predicted the exact date

that city would be destroyed by
earthquake). . . . Anaximander, wonderful
name for a girl. Anny could be her
nickname. Ion, short for ionosphere,
would make a graceful name for
a boy. Twins could be named after
planets: Venus and Mercury, or

Neptune and Mars. They'd adore each
other's heavenly bodies shining
upon their doubles on Earth.
And have you ever thought that, of
the Nine, only one planet is female?
Venus. Unless Earth is. So, seven
of Sun's children, it seems, are male.

The recipient of Rockefeller, Guggenheim and Ford Foundation grants, MAY SWENSON received the Shelley Memorial Award of the Poetry Society of America, the International Poetry Forum Translation Medal, an Academy of American Poets Fellowship, a National Institute of Arts and Letters Award, the Bollingen Prize in Poetry from Yale University, a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and, a year and a half before her death, a MacArthur Fellowship.

She published nine books of poetry. Mona Van Duyn said of her work, "May Swenson's is an art that comes as close as any I know to what I like to think must have been the serious fun, the gorgeous mix of play and purpose of Creation itself. . . ."

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But, if I had children, and grandchild-
ren, then greatgrandchildren, myriads
of newborn moons and moonlets crowding
into the viewfinder would furnish me
names both handsome and sweet:
Phoebe, Rhea, Dione among daughters
of Saturn, with Titan and Janus the

brothers. Io, Ganymede and Callisto,
Jupiter's boys: Europa and little
Amalthea, their sisters.
On Io, most exotic of the Galilean
moons, are mapped six great-and-grand
volcanoes: Loki, Hemo, Horus, Daedalus,
Tarsis, Ra. Beauties all! But all

boys. Well, if I had children
I wouldn't fix genders or orbits, only
names for them. Wobbling Phobus,
distant child of Mars, misshapen as
a frozen potato. . . . If I had such a
lopsided moon, the name Phobus would
fit. And I'd love it just the same.