
Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Michael Miller: Three Poems

Michael Miller · Wednesday, March 4th, 2020

College Town

In a city awake on tea and subtitles,
the freshman boys fight off sleep
to hear a bluesman sing at the corner club,
his foot tapping and hoarse voice wailing

about fleeing the river hounds; and all the faces
look warm and dry here, the Lost Boys of Sudan
sheltered behind glass and glowing
on the art-house cinema, the neon sign

of the conquistador blinking over the nightclub
with his rifle drawn (the children of the Aztecs
on the sidewalk below seeking wristbands cool
in their pressed silk collars) — here the bus shakes

to a stop every hour, the doors snapping open
and the couples pass (consummated)
through ocean breeze and the crash of the fountain
in search of a drink — the girls in mascara

who glint like fireflies in the yellow lamps,
the one who breaks from the line at the tavern
and ducks into the gallery, past
the corner magician and the swirling eyes

of new babies, stands wet by the glare
of the bootleggers brutal and handsome under
their shaded brims in a portrait
in the hall, the newspapers cheering New Deal

and the trays of Cabernet in back (a finger
polished red half sober texting
about *free food, gallery show, what time
do u get off wk*) — the kisses stolen

over floodlights and the donation box
 overflowing by ten, the eyes of migrants
 that lust from photographs, the cards telling stories
 of when this town was dust, when everyone was hungry.

*

Our Money's Worth

Saturday at the Honda dealer,
 two more errands to go,
 we park it for the last time
 and wet a tissue to rub the stain
 from the frayed plastic top of the key.

In a bright, hot office,
 we smile wanly at the numbers:
 200,000 miles without a breakdown
 worth \$1,500 when traded in.
 As the woman explains the spreadsheet
 (no bargain in the offing),

the frail man through the glass door
 widens an eye to meet the headlamp
 he steadies his thin rag to shine.
 In our thirties now,
 we have logged enough milestones
 to know not to dwell on new ones,

and so when the woman sighs
Two hundred thousand without a breakdown,
 we nod that, yes, the dealers served it well —
 snow tires in Connecticut
 and lubes on the desert drives,
 no seam on the side mirror from the shop
 after the hit-and-run at the curb.

A signature now, two hard handshakes
 and we toast with bottled water
 to what did not let us down —
 no Jim or Luke or Pedro
 here in factory clothes to thank in person,
 luck the only name we can give
 to what kept each wheel steady,
 the brakes resilient and tight.

*

Young Father

The house still undone
from his bark and the slammed front door,
he ponders a jacket, then faces the yard
in tank top and paint-smearred jeans.
The neighbors' girl in the wading pool
stares as his mind sizes up his person:
the stubble on his chin,
good for scaring coyotes.
The dirty jeans, a sign of work.

The door will survive
just as it toughed the last earthquake.
No carpenter, he scans the homes down the block
and pretends to figure out the supports.
Behind the pastel walls,
the boards clench in some machinery,
some intricate weights and balances
to quell the unexpected blows.

Before long, his mind will reshuffle the story:
He shouted first, or maybe the boy,
something interjected about toys in the kitchen
or a forgotten promise of a ride.
The woman kept quiet, pressed the boy to her stomach.
She holds the foundation, stills the pulses
that the walls tuck, wavering, inside.
They do their best here, the ones who moved in
after someone else conquered the wild.

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