

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Detroit Poems: Michelle Brooks & Naomi Long Madgett

Michelle Brooks · Friday, August 16th, 2013

Michelle Brooks has published fiction, essays, and poetry in the Iowa Review, Alaska Quarterly Review, Hayden's Ferry Review, Madison Review, Eclipse, Orchid, Baltimore Review Natural Bridge, The Mas Tequila Review, and elsewhere. Her poetry collection, Make Yourself Small, was published by Backwaters Press and her novella, Dead Girl, Live Boy was published by Storylandia Press. A native Texan, she has lived in Detroit since Devil's Night, 1997.

To His Coy Mistress in Detroit

by Michelle Brooks

Some guy in line at CVS starts
babbling about the end times, rapture,
yelling, Do you watch the news?
Do you see how everything is going
to hell? The checkers says, Fool, look
around you. The end times already
come and gone in Detroit and we still
here. I hand her the vodka that I've
been clutching as if it might save me,
if from myself if nothing else. End
time, the checker says. I heard that
one before. Men always saying some
shit to get you into bed, and I shake
my head and say, Don't I know it.

Never Blend In

by Michelle Brooks

Marvin Gaye looks down upon me
in the grey Detroit rain, his luminous face
on a billboard for Hennessy. I drive
the chewed-up streets, the streets Marvin
drove while writing those perfect songs,
knowing I cannot write anything anyone
would want to hear. My songs say I am
a small, petty person that there is jealousy
in my heart, perhaps no love can last.
Marvin says, If I could build my whole world

around you, and when I look into his eyes far off
and sad, I think just maybe he already has.



Naomi Long Madgett, Ph.D., is Poet Laureate of the City of Detroit. Among her many honors are an American Book Award, induction into three halls of fame, four honorary degrees, and several lifetime achievement awards. She has recorded some of her poems at the Library of Congress. At the request of his wife, she wrote the poem for the 1975 inauguration of Governor William Milliken and read it at the ceremony. Her poem celebrating the tri-centennial of Detroit was sealed in a time capsule December 31, 2001.

Boy on a Bicycle

(Summer Solstice, Detroit)

By Naomi Long Madgett

Slim bluejeans legs pump laboriously
up a wet incline while a steady drizzle
films a dark young face with satin mist.
Summer vacation has just begun.
It is midmorning, the twenty-first of June.
The daylight will be longer than any other
day of an uncertain year, but it is doubtful
that anyone will see the sun. The streets
are slick and dangerous.

Where is he going, young black boy
in a city full of clouds and shadows
pedaling two wheels up a hill in the rain?

City Nights

by Naomi Long Madgett

My windows and doors are barred
against the intrusion of thieves.
The neighbors' dogs howl in pain
at the screech of sirens.
There is nothing you can tell me
about the city
I do not know.
On the front porch it is cool and quiet
after the high-pitched panic passes.
The windows across the street gleam
in the dark.
There is a faint suggestion of moon shadow
above the golden street light.
The grandchildren are upstairs sleeping
and we are happy for their presence.
The conversation comes around to Grampa Henry
thrown into the Detroit River by an Indian woman

seeking to save him from the sinking ship.
(Or was he the one who was the African prince
employed to oversee the chained slave cargo,
preventing their rebellion, and for reward
set free?)

The family will never settle it; somebody lost
the history they had so carefully preserved.

Insurance rates are soaring.

It is not safe to walk the streets at night.

The news reports keep telling us the things
they need to say: The case
is hopeless.

But the front porch is cool and quiet.

The neighbors are dark and warm.

The grandchildren are upstairs dreaming
and we are happy for their presence.

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