
Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Cynthia Atkins: Three Poems

Cynthia Atkins · Wednesday, July 15th, 2020

Mirror, Mirror

“I am a collection of dismantled almos’ts”—Anne Sexton

There is a parcel of land where everything is true
in reverse. Ribbon-cutting ceremony into the Mayor’s
grave plot, where Nana Ida is a shopper putting on her lipstick,
shade 53, *Maui in the Moonlight*—Setting sail after the war
of ideas. We’re all headed for nasty weather, or its opposite
like *breakfast for dinner*. I found a lone diner just off
the grid. In a plate, I saw myself, I saw my mother back home,
tweezing her eye-brows—Nylons behind her drying
into leaves, or grief itself. My cracked lips homesick for a smile
and a familiar meal. The waitress has a run in her stockings,
like confidence in reverse, as when Gus the bartender
at the *Ramada Inn* held my arms behind my back
and touched my 16 yr. old breasts. I felt my pimples stir
into a hurricane in the town square—that Mayor selling
raffle tickets to the thinnest skin of dignity. The tip jar
wrestled to the floor. With two birds perched, my mom
pulled the tiniest stubborn hairs, as if twigs exhumed from
her brow—Hard triumphs of pain held under the light.
I hear Nana Ida’s worry lines in my ears. I am my mother pulling
out branches, the whole family tree. My face is the universe breaking
off the smallest possibilities—with each shard of self.

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God Is A Library

If you look under G in the card catalog,
 a hunched-over landlady will rent you
 a space made of dust, albeit, a little domain
 of quiet— Where the rent is cheap and so
 is the debt, and silence is not morbid.
 On these premises, text and rhetoric
 mix a sexy playground for words.
 Exquisite human machine of pathos
 and debris, allowed the pages to be set
 on letter-press, then ink bled and seeped
 into a refinery of senses. The kids practice
 spelling in the back stacks. We are all polar-opposites
 on a stage of belief, fact and faith. Yes, Borges
 digressed for an atheist and an Aleph. Delinquent,
 these prophets and scholars broke the dress-code
 in favor of *out-of-fashion souls*. Under the desk,
 two students knock knees to make contact.
 Egg to sperm, pen to pulp—Ideas fly to where
 our better angels reside—Where chairs are stacked
 on tables at the end of the day.

*

GOD IS THE MYTH

“What cannot be said will be wept.”—Sappho

Not for the sheepish or the faint of heart—Every day
 we mark the calendar with one more hangnail of grief.
 I shivered on a porch swing, locked out of
 my house, donning a terrible secret.
 Owned and handled, I stood sedate
 as a police out-line. My past until this moment
 is penciled in the way an artist suggests a cloud.
 This is the narrative—repeat it, repeat after me.
 I never existed before this moment.
 Under a stairwell, I could feel my fear
 like skin caught in a zipper. The last touch
 of red on the artist’s brush. I heard many cries,
 like scrawny cats in the alley of my heart.
 My swagger was black and blue and smacked-up
 with pool hall chalk. Now, a civil anguish that

ransacked homes like weeds in the sidewalks.
A militant boot in the face of every word. The gods
are lactating in stone. So this is what I did, proof
I was here on this rocky turf—Sketched this narrative
of cardinal sin and madness. Careless sleuth
of testimony, I set this self on paper. There I caught
a glimpse of my old aunt brushing her hair,
her wrist was inked and numbered. I built a fort
out of fabric and rubber tires. A thunderclap
to light the wholly and fearless Interior.



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