
Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

James Cushing: Three Poems

James Cushing · Wednesday, September 2nd, 2015

James Cushing is the author of *You and the Night and the Music* (1991), *The Length of an Afternoon* (1999), *Undercurrent Blues* (2004), *Pinocchio's Revolution* (2010), and *The Magicians' Union* (2014). Cushing currently hosts weekly jazz and rock programs on the college's radio station, KCPR-FM (www.kcpr.org). His daughter is the New York-based poet Iris Cushing.

The Solitary Rider

That's Dad behind the camera, with headphones and a frown.
The man to his right wears a bowtie – he died in 1997.
I know that what the Pontiac thought was true *is* true
but Dad and the bowtie man know what the Chrysler knew
and after such knowledge, a man can only ride alone.
Yet a perfected picture happens every time that solitary rider
sits on a blanket as the sullen highway rumbles past.
Kids, face the facts. Crying won't help you, and in
this house, all furniture is made of poster tubes and twine
and no one drinks water, only milk. Yet the sofa casts
a stable shadow onto the angry blue carpet, and
outside the bedroom, finches alight on fences. I'm
drawing a moustache and glasses on a President when
the rider's sneezing fit awakens the skunk family living
inside the kitchen wall. It's like a TV crime series
being filmed right in my bedroom as I try to read.

Lifting the Cloth

The desk undressed in its shy way, exposing a bare belly
where anyone could dance. We tried, but our families kept
stumbling past, spilling drinks and crying all the way
to the airport, where they ordered and spilled more drinks.

Their shadows, darker than hades, spoke a Spanish I had

never heard, and a Russian that resembled the cries
of wild dogs. I put on my reading glasses like a wasp
and prayed for B. B. King's fingers. I looked at you.

"You're a camel disguised as a cow," you said.
Exciting? Oooh yes. My ears were big happy
garbage cans, full of licks. Country boys stood outside
waiting for apples to drop. A piece of bridle lay on the ground,

gathering these memories, potentially, perversely. Memory,
built slowly from the ground up, tumbles, and the bridle's
broken for good. It was charming and wise while it held.
But before long, every face presents you with a test.

One Evening, Years Ago

The little lakes that condensed in my bathroom
became my son's new toys.

Even his special cereal bowl
sometimes refused his spoon.

In front of the boy stood
an explanation in the form of a Moebius strip.

I sit behind him under a florid sun that declared
"You have wanted this wet heat since you were a baby."

White curls spilled down my neck in ringlets, like money,
and we both felt grateful for bicycles, cement, rain.

Author photo by Alexis Rhone Fancher

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