

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Matthew Graham: Three Poems

Matthew Graham · Sunday, June 4th, 2023

Memorial Day, Michigan 2021

“Now these are memories only...
Fragile mirrors easily broken...” — Ivor Gurney

For Tom and Jan

A local band plays Bob Seger and Mitch Ryder
In a tent set up outside the American Legion.
There's an American flag and a P.O.W. flag
Displayed by the bar but no signs
Of our former president.
This is a Viet Nam crowd.
The very old vets are mostly gone.
The younger ones could care less.
These are the guys who didn't go to college,
Who were drafted right out of high school
Or enlisted out of duty or pressure
Or hard times.
These are the guys whose fathers didn't have friends
With connections,
Family doctors with deferments.
And beneath the wrinkles and silver ponytails
Of these men spinning their stout wives
Across the portable dance floor,
You can still see the young faces with
La Drang Valley, Dak To, Khe Sanh,
Written all over them.
What are we here to memorialize?
The A and W across the road
With the weaving neon and car hops
Of an imagined time between wars?
Or just this cool night when spring seems
To have arrived a bit early
And we are all still here
With the music for a little while

And maybe I should say
Nothing at all.

*

Fathers and Such

For Larry and Gene

Old men ourselves now, retired volunteers
Shoveling mulch along the paths
Of a nature preserve,
We sometimes talk about our fathers.
The misunderstandings and conflicts,
The small hurts and slights that grow comical with time.
The puzzling indifference of time.
And sometimes we don't talk at all
Because we know the shadows of fathers can reach
As far as the shadows of these ancient trees
We work among.
Leaving us, for the most part,
In the dark as always.

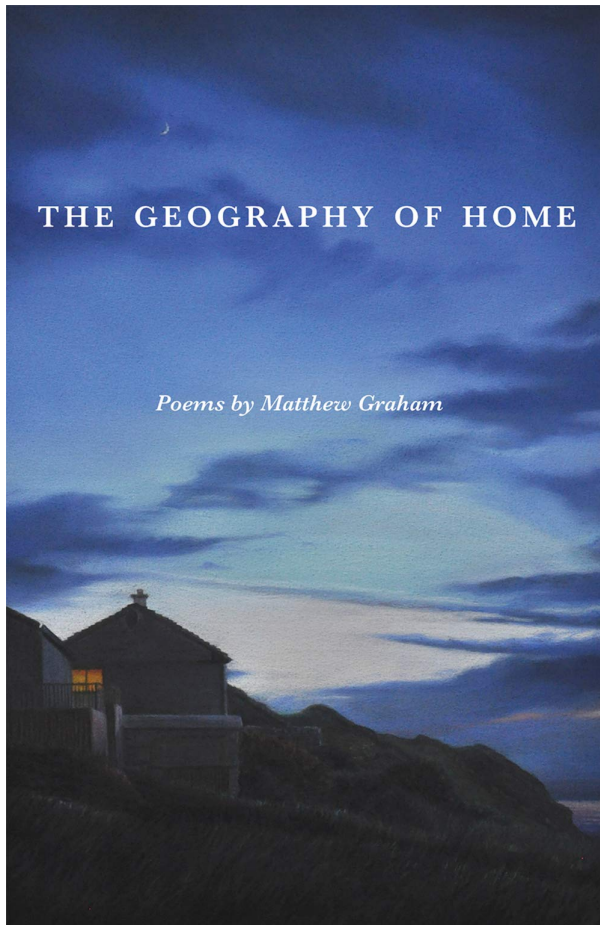
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Ending with a Variation on the Last Line John Ashbery Ever Wrote

My grandmother came from the holy land
Of western New York State
Where she spent summers on an uncle's orchard –
A navy blue whisper
Among the Empires, Cortlands and Ginger Golds
Of the early 1920's —
Before returning each year
To the immigrant avenues, the slack jawed
Smell of cabbage in the tenement hallways
And the black snow, the imminent black snow
Of Buffalo.
She never lost her Canadian vowels,
Her fear of street cars or love of dray horses,
Even when I last saw her
Singing hymns in a shared room
Of a nursing home
And accusing the staff of stealing her money,
Her plastic rosary,
Her favorite straw hat —
The one with the sun flowers.
No talk then of a husband or daughters,
A life lived.

Just a weak rage against nothing, from nowhere.

As if nothing was evil, exactly, or not.



The Geography of Home by Matthew Graham

Purchase *The Geography of Home* by Matthew Graham

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