

# 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-smeared 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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