

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Richard Oyama: Three Poems

Richard Oyama · Wednesday, May 19th, 2021

The Crystal Spring

For Bill Evans

You bend your back parallel to the keys
Like Glenn Gould. Critics called that eccentric.
Who doesn't want to be inside the music?
Miles said it was always Evans they credited: you, Gil.
It was your sin to be an intellectual among the booboisie.
Still you squeezed the plunger like Bird did.
You made sumi-e, the saddest music of the world. You
And Miles were brothers sans skin, imagists
As limpid and exact as you were. Your life was
A diminuendo, a dying fall, a crystal spring.
And you flew solo.

*

Elmore James Outfoxes Old Scratch (1955)

That cold December night the hawk blew.
Elmore was mad as hell.

Damned television. I
Play the blues for my own self.

Tears drain from his mouth's coarse grain.
How does the skin contain so much feeling?

Elmore's fingering a genuine bottleneck,
Its lip broken. He slicks the griefs that bedevil him.

Old Scratch's a trickster.

He tastes bleeding metal on his tongue.
I'll taunt the Devil.

Believe I'll dust my broom.

This the wolfish hour. Everybody's abed, 'cept
Hoodoo ghosts. Elmore slides the high strings, his life

Hanging on it. He sees the future and rips it up.
I believe my time ain't long.

Hell's a country where not a damned thing change.

*

My Clean Shirt

She slugged vodka shots and blew white lines.
There was an ineffectual husband back in Akron.

Her friend gave me the thumbs up. We
Left the downtown blues club

And repaired to someone else's crib.
You're cute, she said. That's what

They used to say. She cut out
Paper dolls for dress patterns, rehearsing

Guilt, passing out under the sheets.
Her pubis was like a Rousseau jungle.

I am a gentleman. At the subway
We kissed in the diminished light. I was

Not satisfied. But
My shirt was clean.

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