

Cultural Daily

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Rick Bursky: Three Poems

Rick Bursky · Wednesday, January 25th, 2017

Rick Bursky teaches poetry for the Writer's Program at UCLA Extension. His most recent book, *I'm No Longer Troubled By the Extravagance*, is out from BOA Editions; the previous book, *Death Obscura*, was published by Sarabande Books.

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Let's Become a Ghost Story

Let's scare each other — it's what lovers do.
 We owe each other that much.
 So why not, we've done worse.
 Together we're under construction.
 This has nothing to do with hammers and nails
 any part of our bodies can be a soldering iron.
 Separate we're the punchline to each other's joke.
 The other night I saw a woman run naked
 from a house across the street.
 I wanted her to be you ... fearless
 warm flesh steaming, glowing in a cold mist.
 You can be suffering and I can be sugar
 or you can be sugar and I'll be suffering. It's up to you.
 The more we collaborate the more frightening we can be.
 Let's practice naked under the whitest sheets.
 Let's take turns pretending to be the wind,
 slip out through an open window. Let's steal things.
 You steal the daffodils from the graveyard.
 I'll steal the plastic rabbit from the neighbor's yard
 and finally be good at something — that's the scary part.
 Are you frightened yet ... it's an emotion
 that must be constantly relearned
 like biting your tongue or mine.

Like Many Other Technologies, My Dreams Are Now Obsolete

A woman poured honey on my thighs
 then licked it off. This was the closest we came
 to love. A more honest version would have involved
 feeding each other to the lions.
 This isn't to say we were pagans. This is to say
 when I whistled I expected something to happen.
 She preferred something to happen when she stood,
 though that was confusing, like in the restaurant
 when she pushed her chair away from the table,
 stood up to go the restroom. I could say more
 but truth swells in my throat, think chicken bone.
 This is to say love requires more than a thimble
 of cruelty. What would you have done?
 A self-induced trance is preferable to feigning epilepsy
 for most narratives. Relationships are stories
 two people write at the same time.
 We were a bowl of bruised apples.
 Great sentences are metaphors for snakes,
 shaping themselves for comfort after devouring
 something larger than themselves.
 I stored my sins in a warehouse, I still do.
 It has a large door with a faded orange juice
 advertisement. Her only sin, me, required no storage,
 She never said why she cut my silk ties in half.
 I never asked. I never said goodbye.
 I put a storm on a leash and walked home.
 Imagine the rain parting as I went.

A Memoir of the War Years

I could tell you something
 beautiful about the troubles between us,
 could tell you about flamboyant disagreements,
 even tell you the cumulative amount of time
 we held hands during those years.
 Then I'll tell how it uglier
 like an open wound on your palm.
 I could tell you this but won't.
 Better yet, let's experiment.
 No, instead let's pretend.
 She's the sound of a struggle at night.
 All of this could be nothing
 more than a theory

but the wrinkled and torn paper
the smeared pencil marks...
Let's pretend I'm the darkness
and you're the ambulance on the side of the road.
Red lights twitching like damaged eyes.
We were naked by time
the late news came on television.
Small red streaks drifted from a machine gun.
A wounded soldier was carried
to a helicopter as my tongue touched her teeth.

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