

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Tiffany Wu: Three Poems

Tiffany Wu · Wednesday, September 23rd, 2020

Playing the Part

INT. MY BEDROOM, AFTERNOON

3:43 PM

I squint at a screenplay while my brother crouches in the other corner, finagling his way through any old love song on the ukulele. He sits like a heathen or a pigeon, perched on the stool with his long legs askew.

3:45 PM



3:47 PM

BROTHER

I can't even get two minutes and forty seconds into my lecture.

3:53 PM

He gets up to change into a striped gray shirt and take a picture of our dog while the video drones into my closet. The lecturer sounds like some kind of European, but the video is on double speed, so I can't be certain.

He sits down. Gets up again. Goes to change into a sweater.

4:06 PM

A click.

BROTHER

NO!

I rub my temples.

BROTHER

I restarted it.

A moment of mournful silence.

BROTHER

(in the style of an overworked mother)

Everything is fine.

4:45 PM

BROTHER

How do you spell Papua New Guinea?

Papua he pronounces “Papa,” and I think of Liesel Meminger crouched in the damp corner of a too-short basement. “Pa-pa-pa”—he gets in a couple of false starts, sticks on a snare head. Pa-poo-ah. He writes it down.

He furrows his brow at Guinea.

ME

(unhelpfully)

Like guinea pig.

BROTHER

Gwinny. Gwinny pig.

A beat. He looks at me for affirmation, mouth working too hard for a two-syllable word.

BROTHER

Gwi-nee-uh.

I nod.

5:03 PM

A sneeze. “Bless you.” A sneeze. “Bless you.” A sneeze. “Bless you.” A sneeze. “Coronavirus.” He laughs.

INT. ACROSS THE SEA – DAY

My student complains to me after a class. “All the flowers are blooming n’ shit and it’s making my nose itch and I sneeze all the time but I can’t sneeze too loudly otherwise the police will come and arrest me because, well, y’know.” I know.

“It’s just spring allergies, man.”

*

Matutine

I used to picture you
 with a voice oscillating like ocean water, casting words
 as nets on a surface shimmering effervescent green.
 And even the handful of stars outside dawdle just
 a while longer to see the fish rise up and wink
 out in the morning sun, scales slipping together
 the way clay lips slot against coral white heart-cages
 and curved, ivory xylophones patterned like shadows
 and gold strips of sun. Everything quivers; we are only a
 cosmic moment singing aubades, horsehair and rosin falling
 like shooting stars against mahogany and warm steel, origami
 folded bed, redefined by sharp angles and all the ways I am not afraid.
 When we rise to sleep, pressed sable drips down
 and the air is rimmed with the sea salt tang of dried coffee.

*

“I Meditated Every Day For A Month And Here’s What Happened:”

And he’s off again – Seabiscuit! That’s the wrong way *damn it* the wrong way.
 At which point my horse-mind squalls like an uninvited peacock; excuse me sir
 just *where* did that sandpiper come from? Stop asking questions.
 Did you know that shape of question marks makes them suck to sit on – never mind
 the origami snowflakes and their delicious stickiness. Come here. Come.
 Here. Inhale the glitter-wet cherries without getting a nosebleed *please*
 the hospital bills are atrocious. What’s he saying now? Expand outward
 like spilled antifreeze – you stupid beagle stop drinking that.
 Too late. He collapses, muzzle like a soaked-through teabag.
 Something is wrong with the passage of time here – well yeah, you’re crushing it
 with your clumsy, meaty fingers, dripping robin egg yolk

all over the bent radio antenna. Didn't they teach you
how to wrestle time back into the confines of language in college?
Bring the mind back.
But then how will the astronauts talk to us now? Pop them, of course,
like helium balloons pressed skin to skin against the heat of a ceiling bulb.

You asked me to conceive of the universe in ten minutes. Here! The consequences.
I don't know what kind of world this is. But there is at least some possibility,
I think, of life quivering, liquefying, peering breathlessly over the cliffs
and marveling at just how small the houses are. I think of life,
jostling, stretching, reaching up to press that button-moon light just to see
how small the containers of the universe can be.

VOTE!

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