

# Cultural Daily

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## The Way Home by Michael Morical

Richard Oyama · Wednesday, November 30th, 2016



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Michael Morical's poems do what you want poetry to do. They're conversational, graceful and acutely observed, equally at home in Asia or the Midwest, or finding pleasure in movement. He's a poet whose sensibility is *transnational* in the best sense, a cosmopolitan conversant in both Mandarin and jazz. As Eudora Welty wrote, "feelings arise in place": "We looked at each other / in the darkening glow: / the place to be, / the place to go" ("Relocating (Meet Me at the Airport)").

Morical studied East Asian Languages and Literatures at Indiana University. At City College of New York, he studied poetry with the likes of Marilyn Hacker. Morical taught English in Taiwan, Japan and India.

The speaker contends with the self's cleavings and illusions: "do you hear the ineffable?" ("A Shrink in Therapy"). Buddhistically, he observes the day's going: "the evanescence / of a rusty strip mall" ("Dessert").

"In the Recession" looks at the American Dream's fading luster, but with a saving irony and in a language of assumed scarcity: privatize, supermarket coupons, secondhand. Even the "blue lawn chair" has "broken straps." Morical's Whitmanic catalogues tilt toward the surreal: "tapioca tea, used power tools, / grilled giblets, Confucian classics / and plastic ducks" ("Hoosier at a Taiwan Night Market").

If the poet sees attentively, he wants to hear the sound, too—pop song, sirens, Chinese musettes and the solo of a certain Miss Chi ("Meditation on the Ground Floor"). "Taipei Moving Day" is a sensuous *noir*: "We rolled / in the soup of the heat, /laughing, grinding our knees—." Even Morical's nose is working overtime. There are glazed donuts to "bite into that smell."

"Pickled in Plum Fumes" is a favorite poem of mine, a deft and poignant portrait of Ueki, a jilted boarder in a matchmaker's house near plum trees:

He would not offer to pick the sweet, dark orbs  
the next year or any year. Every fall he squatted  
just out the cherry-wood door, breathing fumes

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of fruit-come-wine until they went to his head.  
Then he watched the moon through clouds and night.

Here's the telling detail that unfurls the darkness: "He didn't / smell the black and sour juice that spilled." "The Belle of Osaka" is a linked persona poem written in the voice of the matchmaker's daughter. Morical's sympathies are with the feminine, but his touch is undeniably light.

If the poet's voice is modest, it doesn't skirt the Big Themes. "Sharing a Mirror," written in an ailing mother's address to her son, concludes with these three lines: "God knows you'll have a chance to take me home. / But who will prop you up when your body breaks / down? Whose breath will you share?"

*The Way Home* is available for purchase on Amazon.

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