

Three Poems by Michael Shorb

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Night unending and rain Spearing the pavements I turn sleepless Imagining each watery Shaft an echo Of the world's unending Troubles

the pallor of starving skin Gray feet of refugees Navigating bonedry roads

The cry of the prisoner
The arching emptiness of
Loved ones washed away
In memory's red water.

I put on an old noir mystery And soothe myself to sleep With a focused and specific

Evil

a gunman staring
From the window of a seedy room

A detective Shouldering the burdens Of the last honest man

A beauty in a sports car Engine running smoothly Aimed at the nearby Borders of resolution.

The Black Box of Angus the Tinker

I walk backward in the steam-Shrouded light of depots. I ask the lounging railroad men where I can get hot food.

They point out the door
A battered Camel billboard
Fast food strip joint
Araby beyond the intersection
Of alarm and vision
To the north shore of Lake Huron
200 years ago.

Walking again I'm startled By geese overhead in roaring profusion,

Darting shoals of passenger pigeons, Hundreds of black bears and grizzlies Drinking at lake's edge without looking up.

Maybe the earth, its ozone girdle Ravaged by moths of chlorine monoxide, Its atmospheric immunity system Riddled by bromides

and chlorofluorocarbons, Is filling up with blind animals, Radiated micro planktons. Acquired Immune Deficiency Planetary plague.

I am pulled by something out of time. Toward the Great Plains. Empty farmhouses

and baseball diamonds streak past.

I approach a group of Crow Indians Busy roasting a buffalo hump. Ever the scientific Western man, I am about to ask them To tell the story

of their migrations, The significance of their feather Markings, the vision behind Their ritual dances.

All that comes out Is a crude sign indicating The one constant: my hunger.

Sit down eat, they say,

Expressionless.

I gorge and fall asleep. The red men are gone When I awake. Only a few bones Left in the ashes.

I am invested in a wilderness of bones. Bones of Mandan and mustang, Mohican and prairie chicken

knotted together like coral reefs beside a sunless sea.

Song chokes in my throat. Puccini aria, Apache chant, St Louis riverfront jazz or motor city

Rhythm and blues, nothing comes out.

A human form appears.

Down from the charred hills in a tradesman's van,
Rosebuds painted on each side, circa 1867.

It's Angus the Tinker, mutation of an old Scottish immigrant to eastern Wisconsin in the 1850's.

I feel better now that commerce is here.
I rush over to launch a barrage of questions.
He silences me with an imperious
Gesture.

"Damn you and your questions," He says gruffly, throwing down A large black box and clattering northward in the waning light.

Eagerly, with shaking hands, I open terra concordia

The Black Box of Angus the Tinker, And look inside.

Escaping

They weren't after me.

I wasn't the one tied by the ankles to a Cyclops of uranium dragged across floors of the Age of Invention a convict in chains ram in the thorns steel mill rabbit in thickets of rain

they didn't hunt me down in coal-

black veins of my own land smash the colored beads of my alphabet hook me across the gills with a printing press shoot me in some neck of the woods when nothing was looking

I'll see you around drifting

through town soiled parody from the Book of Prophets blurting the old green songs.

last seed bursting last wind stirring last swordfish

in slate-green sea.

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