Clarion Review

General

Meditations of an Imperfect Mind
Jamie L. Atwater
Lulu
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Three Stars (out of Five)

This offering consists of thirteen poems two of them prose-shorts and six stories with floss-thin connections between them. Most poems are in the form of rhymed and near-rhymed couplets. The subjects are couplehood and the reflective authority afforded by age. Younger people are admonished in *The Words of Experience*: “Wherever you’ve been / I’ve been there twice.” And Atwater opens a discussion on her overarching concern the unsettled dichotomy between God’s will and free will with *Innocence Forgotten:* “We are each responsible for our own souls.”

The stories are set in and around Detroit Michigan mostly in the late Sixties and early Seventies. Reactionary white flight to the suburbs and a stalling auto industry spurred an era of massive change and precipitous decline for that once-promising city. The author delves into the origins of personal destruction and subverted ambition. Through the lenses of young women and teenage girls evidence tips the balance toward divine determinism. Death is no further away than a partly crossed street trajectories are permanently redirected by moments so casual that they are only recognized as crossroads in retrospect. Even the sheriff of Wayne County is compelled to live a lesser life than he’d once charted for himself.

The catchiest story *The Mind Demised* features an unforgettably erratic Vietnam veteran named Leland who mixes cocaine and anti-psychotic medication while playing guitar in a neighborhood bar. He battles with a lustful impulse toward Mae Tuttle his mother’s best friend and a devout Jehovah’s Witness who has given him shelter. For better or worse Leland chooses to engage with society rather than pass time safely in a V.A. hospital.

The milieu is perilous for many though the point-of-view characters generally escape the egregious consequences they observe. A expanding decay is easier to identify for those who’ve been out of town awhile such as Elaine in *The Unfortunate End* watching stolen goods change hands in the open: “…one could buy anything in that lot including drugs men women and

children." Some peripheral characters are more dramatically provocative than the principals suggesting further opportunities for fictional exploration. One such figure is old Mr. Jackson from *The Flower of My Years* who offers little girls quarters for a chance to pinch their behinds.

The fallen and the spared the base and the beatific populate Atwater's Motor City. In the hometown of Philip Levine and Berry Gordy people play into their destinies or forge new ones becoming more aware of the universe's workings with every year of survival. This book of cameo portraits goes by too quickly.

Todd Mercer