
Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

John Sibley Williams: Three Poems

John Sibley Williams · Wednesday, April 15th, 2020

On Being Told: *You Must Learn to Love the Violence*

Like a man who sets himself on fire
on purpose every night without quite
achieving ash. This is something like
saying every stain, every scar makes
a home on the surface of a body
it can't penetrate. Why can't I mainly be
a body sturdied by love? Though sometimes,
when I feel the city dreaming itself innocent
around me again, it's true I want to liberate
the steel-springed horses from the park where my
son has learned to take and do his harm
and see how much wild is really left us. Sometimes
I want to be recognized for what I'm not,
yet. I want to show I burn, and burn bright
as the gods we're meant to fashion ourselves from.
Bright as rage, as goodbye, as a throat
unzipped to give the bullets their voice. If finally
this voice becomes the sound a man makes. Something like
the sound a man is supposed to make.

*

Death is a Work in Progress

My mother says *fox* while gesturing toward an old red wagon abandoned in our yard for decades. A word so cavernous her entire body vanishes into it. Body of misfiring electrons. Scattered images, contexts. Body that is mainly just body now. No other animal knows how to be this incomplete. I think: if you were a fox coyotes would have eaten you by now. I say: *yes, I'll climb into that fox and let you pull me through the high grass one more time.*

*

Killing Lesson

This is the part where we crush
the most beautiful crayon in the box
beneath our bare heels
and refuse
to wash our feet.
The part of the story
where childhood falters. That palm
we cut on a stray nail.
How we spend
the rest of the summer
convincing our friends of our divinity.
When they laugh, how old we feel.
How some of us close their wounds
as others slash at their free hand
and smear themselves on everything.
We are not yet at the part
where sorrow becomes its pantomime
or blood learns to brown.
The house hasn't burned yet.
Our thumbs can still block the sun
without scar. Let's forget that time
we torched a haze of ants.
Let's call that prologue. Let's call it draft.
Pretend we can revise.
Like that stolen bicycle's plunge
into the quarry in reverse.
We are so close now to the part
where some of us eat
and the rest of us are eaten.

(Author photo by Jory Clay Sutton)

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