

# 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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