

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Peter Neil Carroll: Three Poems

Peter Neil Carroll · Thursday, April 11th, 2019

### CEO

When the customs officer at Newark  
pulled me aside to ask what I do, I told him  
I'm a poet. You write jingles? he replied.

Luckily, I live with a sensible woman who  
has a real job at a Silicon Valley company  
producing high-tech heat-shrinkable plastics.

She brings me to my first corporate Christmas  
party, not-quite bald men clutching drinks  
and blond-dyed secretaries sniffing champagne.

Already the big shots are working out whom  
to bed when the party runs dry, before they  
retreat to their wives raising virtual children.

Unsure of my welcome, I keep to the edges, mind  
my business, which is to say take mental notes  
for a poem I will write someday on male privilege

until one of the suits notices me standing alone,  
approaches with a handshake. Quickly I explain  
my ticket of admission and he scans the room

to find the woman I live with. She's from Brooklyn,  
he tells me, as if I didn't know, which is his own  
home town and goes on to relate his rags-to-riches

spiel. He is affable. I take a chance and ask what  
he does. He smiles, he winks, enjoying the question,  
concedes he's CEO of this Fortune 500 business.

What about you, he gets around to asking, amused  
as if he knows the answer. A poet I admit. His eyes  
narrow, measuring carefully. That's what's great

about America, he says, invoking his wisdom, you  
can be anything you want—an opera singer, an artist,  
a poet—as long as you don’t expect to be paid for it.

\*

## How I Missed the White House Tour

First trip to DC with street-corner pals,  
I know nothing of my destination

except it’s Memorial Day weekend  
and someone’s cousin will be Sweet 16.  
At the depot we huddle waiting for a guy

with a goatee who has collected three dollars  
each, promises to return with pints of rye  
purchased with fake ID—I’m 15.

Once aboard, the guy hands me a small book  
titled *Howl*, points his finger to the word *fuck*  
in actual print. I am really impressed. I take

my sips, feel very hip. Off the bus, we party.  
*America go fuck yourself...* I make friends showing  
that line about atom bombs, or maybe by passing

around my booze. I like the buzz, until the girl’s brother  
snitches, their Dad grabs my bottle, kicks me out.  
I’m stuck in his pink driveway with Allen Ginsberg,

his poems, feeling dizzy. My Dad used to say *Treat him  
like a man and he’ll act like a man*. I try to guess what  
a man would do now. I decide to light a cigarette.

Two kids in a convertible show up, the radio jazzed,  
I wave. Come, they say. They’re off to National  
airport, a joyride to pull slot machines. It takes

a while, I manage to lose only half the \$5 I had.  
It’s 2 AM, we drive to an unlit mansion in the burbs,  
kidney-shaped pool gurgling out back. In we splash,

dunked naked, when out of the night two policemen  
leap over the fence, screaming *Where’s the knife?*  
Finding none, they go away. Like magic. Miraculous.

Holy. Karma. I see there’s more to *Howl* than poetry.

\*

## Broken Blossom

Wandering past the sex shops in North Beach,  
I slip into Caffè Trieste where a few bucks  
gets you a bitter espresso, a side of salami,  
then head over to the Beat Museum, reliquary  
of testosterone poets and Dharma Bums.

Nearby sleeps the Condor Club, Sixties mausoleum  
where a skinny giggling kid named Carol Doda  
unbuttoned a white blouse, 34B bra, sang sad songs  
to a herd of four-Martini ad writers glued to their seats.

*A broken blossom*, sighs the weary *Chronicle* reporter.

She went on to bigger things, mostly a pair of silicone  
implants, blonde wigs and voice lessons that didn't help  
off-key tunes, as if that matters when a topless 48FFF  
descends from the ceiling astride a white piano  
singing *Hello Dolly*, wiggles for 20 minutes, and ascends  
like the mythic poets, leaving with her musical behind.

Once an overexcited couple, screwing on her piano,  
flipped the up button until it hit the roof, the man on top  
asphyxiated, the woman obliged to wait beneath him  
until the morning shift pried her loose. *It was tragic*,  
says Carol, tearing up. How does she feel about men  
hitting on her? She blushes, then admits, *I like it*.

The scarlet light-bulb nipples no longer sparkle like rubies  
on the outdoor marque, the bar stays dark in daytime,  
and here I stand again on the threshold of adult mystery  
and promise, wondering where the fun has gone and what  
I would say if a kind woman stepped out and invited me in.

*(Author photo by Jeannette Ferrary)*

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