

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Wayne Miller: Two Poems

Wayne Miller · Wednesday, August 2nd, 2023

### SOCIALIST REALISM

(*Tirana, 2019*)

In a courtyard behind the museum  
stood two derelict statues of Stalin—  
each twice as tall as a man,  
patinated green, the bases  
still slick with last night's rain.

The space was empty except  
for two kids rasping up and down  
the concrete on skateboards,  
then landing with that  
familiar, wooden clatter.

One statue's arm had been torn off,  
so I could see into the hollow  
I imagined was still filled  
with the air of the twentieth century.  
Inside the museum, the exhibit

was on socialist realism,  
because thirty years had passed  
and those paintings were now  
powerless artifacts—it was  
time to consider them

through the abstracting lenses  
of period and style. Back home  
across the ocean my children  
were sleeping, their sound machines  
projecting up into their rooms

like statueless plinths. In *Candide*,  
the deposed kings will dine forever

in Venice, while all the buoyant,  
resolute people in those paintings  
are building a future.

They're mortaring walls  
and climbing telephone poles,  
they're working the fields  
in flowery dresses, melting down  
metal for I-beams and monuments.

The future is *right there*—  
a transit station waiting for them  
to lock into it. I can't help  
but exude my country's aging  
narratives of triumph. Art

is not just agreement  
or disagreement, you said,  
it shapes the moment into form.  
In the cab to the airport,  
as we slid beneath a dappled

canopy of beeches, the driver  
blessed me three times simply  
for being an American  
who could say in his language  
that his country is beautiful.

\*

## THE END OF CHILDHOOD

The cathedral hung suspended  
From the narrow parachute  
Of its cupola

That had unfurled  
And snapped full with the silent air  
Of the thirteenth century

Then I was inside it  
Eight hundred years later

The relics I'd read about

Were an ampule of dried blood  
And a severed tongue

Pieces preserved in a museum  
Pull away from the public  
As time passes

But these objects were still  
Grotesquely present

Their simultaneous  
Persistence and decay

In the packed café across the street  
I ordered a beer  
And lit a cigarette

I was there on a fellowship  
Unreachable to my parents  
Except by email  
Owing nothing to anyone

And my childhood was a room  
I could finally exit  
I was sure of it

Not this open world  
I would keep entering  
From a vaulted and echoing  
Darkness

Not my wet blood  
My living tongue

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## WE THE JURY POEMS WAYNE MILLER



*We the Jury* by Wayne Miller

### Purchase *We the Jury* by Wayne Miller

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