

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Peter Neil Carroll: Three Poems

Peter Neil Carroll · Sunday, June 18th, 2023

### Clemency

I never met her, before or after. She  
was up for parole, she needed a letter  
for clemency. I had good letterhead.

Back in the 70s, a 20-year-old woman gets  
40 years-to-life for believing a liar: lending  
\$400 to her boyfriend for a car, but instead

he bought a rifle for a gang of radicals.  
She hasn't seen or heard from him since.  
She has already served 22 years good time.

She stands near the gate, watches the yellow prison  
bus approach. The telegram yesterday brought  
her a reprieve. Did my letter matter? Unlikely.

She waits with the wind, buttons the blue denim  
jacket. She worries where she will live. On parole,  
she can't meet old associates (as if she would).

Her parents have passed, she's lost track of a sister.  
She's a new woman, no longer interested in men  
(she thinks). This is America; she is free to start over.

\*

### Club Bonobos

I pick a stool not far from the barman,  
a chance to listen in. He pours me Scotch.  
I take out my 3×5 spiral, a blue pencil,

get to work. My specialty is chit-chat,  
my hangout the place where folks can  
talk their thoughts whatever they think.

*My sister's about to marry a four-time loser,*  
a woman announces while tugging the waist  
of her turquoise polyester pants. *I'm jealous!*

Me, I'm zealous. She brightens, leans close.  
*What you writing?* Story of your life, I say.  
She pulls back, glares. I buy her a refill.

The barman lingers, *I see you're writing*, says  
he, adding he's a former high school teacher,  
got tangled with a student. Nothing happened,

he claims. His eyes say nothing happened *yet...*  
when in comes a pair of mature ladies in jeans,  
bragging how they just won a harassment case,

eager to guzzle margaritas. Against who? I  
ask. *Who do you think?* she snaps. I hear  
trouble in all directions. Shame is no problem,

nor is privacy a constraint. All they want is  
to get it said, people begging to be heard.  
Drunk or sober, they know what I want.

\*

## Of Gamete and Zygote

He holds the open textbook  
with two fingers, scribbling  
his biology test as she enters  
desperately late, takes a seat  
at his side, her hand grasps  
the book at a different page.

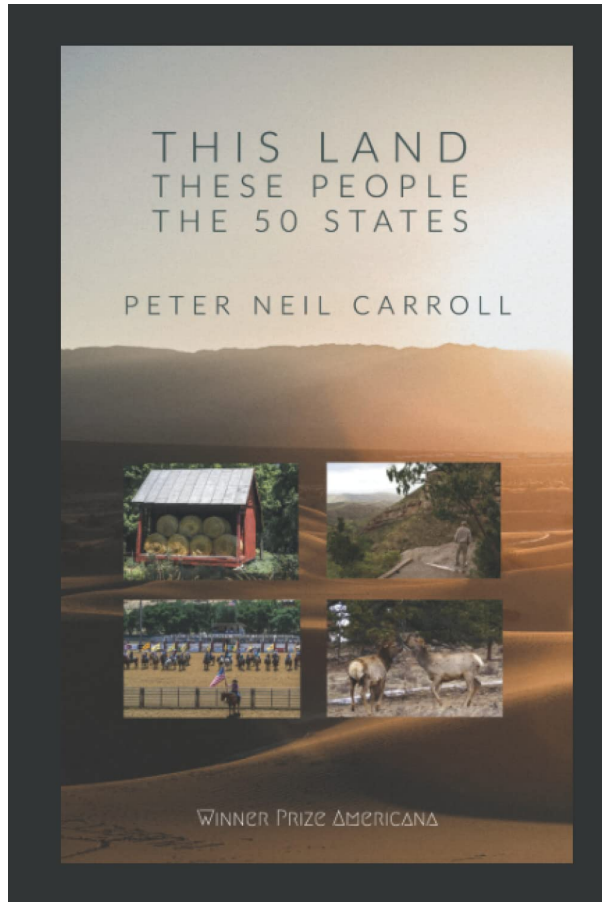
She too writes rapidly, answers  
neither of them will remember  
in a year. Today they search  
fine print, sketching diagrams,  
purple glands, green fertilized cells.

Their taut faces show no sense  
of desire. No word passes, no breath  
audible, their torsos twist away  
as mirror images. Obviously

intense yet they seem unaware  
of what lies ahead, what a human  
life cycle means to beautiful children  
on the cusp of tenderness.

Whisper, I want to say. Touch.  
It's not too late not to flunk biology.

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*This Land, These People: The 50 States* by Peter Neil Carroll

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This entry was posted on Sunday, June 18th, 2023 at 7:45 pm and is filed under [Poetry](#)

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