

Fall 2022

Chekhov's Gun; Galleons

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Recommended Citation

Williams, John Sibley (2022) "Chekhov's Gun; Galleons," *CutBank*: Vol. 1: Iss. 97, Article 5.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss97/5>

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JOHN SIBLEY WILLIAMS

CHEKHOV'S GUN

more the potential for shrapnel / future
ruined classrooms / the collapsed spines

::

of decades-old textbooks & bodies
slowly separated from / brick / these

::

modern hieroglyphics & nothing / else
to read the world by / bomb-brightened

::

faces relearning their worth / prayers
imprinted on / the vestigial walls someone's

::

god pulls letters from in order / to weep
together / sincerely / consider the lack

::

of children / on today's streets & how
moths never seem to singe / their wings

::

on open / hearts / consider the papier-mâché
heart of the city & raw song of the city

::

& all the muted violence / of these
gorgeously rutted avenues joining

::

homes / & the barbed wire interrogating /
us & / like holding your breath underwater /

::

how we are speaking today / from one mouth
waiting / if not for the bullet / at least a loving hand

::

reaching for the bullet / the switch / even if
it doesn't detonate / we are here now / together /

::

auditioning for the role of grieving parent
lover captor captive / both exit & wound

JOHN SIBLEY WILLIAMS

GALLEONS

— *Patricia Goedicke Prize in Poetry Runner-Up* —

Tenderness stained everything it touched.

— Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper”

The hull still unsilent
as a dusty old cigar box
trembling with not-yet-
forgiven memories.
Bruised birds still
ricochet off our glass.
The same waves carry
the same blood farther
from this sublimely
static shore. Erasure,
I think I mean. What
a body owes us, they
used to say. & owns.
Ownership?, my daughter
who was born with all
the wrong parts asks me,
its older context worn down.
The world already wearing
her down. Making its ugly
myths from the constellations
in her soft night eyes. I tell her
someone else’s great-
great-grandfather deep

in the belly of a ship &
mine likely somewhere
above breathing freer air.
Debt is a word I don't know
intimately enough to wield.
So, I say sorry. I say I love
how she still aches for
more light. Despite &, yes,
because of. As days divide
wound from consequence, each
word from its meaning, touch
from every damn thing we will
never touch tenderly enough,
I tell her she can be whatever
is missing from the song, & the song.
That there are still ships out there
as hungry as ever. & a box I'm scared
to open, that we can open together.