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Watch. By Greg Miller. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. 73 pages, \$18.00 (paper).

“My vision is partial, my voice middling, and I do not trust myself to the heights/though everything here below begins to mingle....I ride the bus up the mountain....” (“From the Heights,” p. 3). Thus begins Greg Miller’s newest collection from the University of Chicago Press’ Phoenix Poets series. Entitled *Watch*, it is a spiritual ride “up the mountain” that turns, twists, propels, lingers, but never stalls in a finely tuned pilgrimage. A book of physical and spiritual travels, *Watch* will captivate any seeker of truth, but particularly those inspired to prayer by liturgy, language, legend, scriptures, nature, and art. Miller, a George Herbert scholar and professor of English at Millsaps College, also serves as chair of the Sudanese Ministry Committee of the Episcopal Church, Diocese of Mississippi. His keen interest in and insights about the stories and struggles of humankind link the personal within the Church Universal as he transports us as readers from one place and peoples to others.

For instance, in the book’s title poem, “Watch” (pp. 18-19), Miller brings us both to the sea and to ourselves. He does so through the simple act of whale watching. The poet tells us that, similar to the way a fin disappears, “I sink in sleep,/but end, I think, where I begin.” He details how “the great eyes set back/water crashing rushing/to let me see where it ought to be./I lose track.” The connections to Melville and Jonah give us pause, preparing us for the poem’s epiphanic ending: “And then, that’s it,/I think. Nights I’m thrown/upright from my rest. Brine/thumps my chest.” With the thumping, the biblical injunction “Keep watch” reminds and reverberates.

In poems that follow, the author makes real—often through startling images—love, compassion, sorrow, suffering, and yearning. He examines doubt and faith with Dinka seminarians, and the human and ethereal in art, particularly Caravaggio’s *Saint Ursula* and Gauguin’s *Le Cheval Blanc*. Likewise, he captures nature’s beauty and terror. In “White (II)” (pp. 32-33), for example, Miller describes how “white peaks broke/the white

canopy/of the world's bedroom" and the poet and his love "caught/soft in one another's arms...looked up/at the stars over the peak/clear nights invisible now/nearly unbearable." In "Wake" (pp. 24-25), Miller gives us sharp, often painful fragments of the September 2005 floods: "My head, a child's/swing, turns a hinge-song, rain crow, rotted crown."

Such images of hope and hopelessness further prepare us for Miller's exquisite liturgical sequence "Crown" (pp. 63-67). In these seven sonnets, the poet moves from "Advent" to "Feast of Christ the King" in a pilgrimage of preparation, recognition, repentance, and reverence. The poems do not pose easy questions. In the opening lines, Miller asks, "How can the wolf not kill the lamb?/How can the rich be any less/Than in my heart I know I am?/What wars are won with gentleness?" (p. 63). "Advent" concludes with "Faith's not an entrance singing grace./So I, unbroken, still defy/His mild child till mute stones must cry."

Throughout this continued journey "up the mountain," the poet leaves meditative landmarks: "Eternity sleeps on the old year's bier/As the still word speaks so that we might hear" ("Christmas," p. 64); "We kneel to stand. We run. We discover/A life mysteriously familiar" ("Ordinary Time," p. 64); "Tempered by hope, bright sadness, forty-day exile/I fear I grow too happy in unhappiness,/Mastering myself (as if I could) through new denial/To set an idol up, false cross, and lose God's goodness" ("Lent," p. 65). And yet the sequence ends—as do many of George Herbert's poems—in grateful worship, "See, know, taste his goodness. He who was least/Offers himself in love, each day a feast" ("Feast of Christ the King," p. 67).

In *Watch*, the feast is received ultimately with humility and obedience. Greg Miller summons us to follow the Light out into the world. As he exclaims near the book's end, "Light sought me out....Come out, the clouds said, and I did" ("Come Out," p. 70). May we all follow—our feet ready to climb, our eyes looking ever up.

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