

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/1

Ed Meek

Negative Numbers

are easy enough to understand
in the abstract.

They are on the opposite side
of the ledger,
underneath

the positive numbers
that climb to heaven
like a ladder to the stars
while the negative numbers
plunge down
seemingly endless steps
to the catacombs below.

Yet they balance the world of trade:
addition and multiplication
subtracted and divided.
We can't always see them
but we know they're there.

They represent loss,
what's gone, or missing, or stolen.
They operate in the shadow world
of debt, deficit and derivative.
We ignore them at our peril
for they can sneak up behind us
and jump on our back;
we may carry them for awhile;
eventually, they will weigh us down
and pin us to the ground
though we may crawl out from under them
on our hands and knees
one long day at a time.

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Gravity

--14 pounds per square inch.

No wonder we're tired.
No wonder it's so hard
to get up out of bed.
That's why we sink into chairs
and fall asleep on couches.

It is the weight we carry
from birth to death.
It anchors us to the earth.
And we shrink from it.

Its song is the creak and groan in our bones
as we make our way home.

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Swimming

--the human body is 60-70% water

So we're floating
sort of, not
sinking under water
but immersed
in water—wet
inside.
Not drowning—
swimming
in schools
in cities
and beyond,
happy or unhappy
as whales in pods
singing our songs,
circumnavigating
our world.