

## Wilderness House Literary Review 10/3

*Llyn Clague*

### **Back Home**

A week-and-a-half trip, just ended, to London, Brussels, Holland,  
where they pay high for taxes and gas, while living smaller,  
but make trains, health care, social services work.

A year-and-a-half stay, at 20, in Sweden, Germany, France,  
barely a dozen years after Europe's repeat of the worst war ever,  
yet where I learned, strangely in foreign tongues, the power of poetry.

This morning, back in the land of McMansions, Wall Street  
McBonuses and screaming McHeads, I awake in the dark,  
still on European time, and for a little longer I am less belligerent.

But I bridle at wrap-around Euro-concern, at speed limits enforced  
– logically! – by fish-eye cameras ten miles apart. Soon I will get up and,  
for love of poetry, re-engage the free-range McCowboys in my soul.

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**I forgot**

*to Alan Kaufman, editor of The Outlaw Bible of American Poetry, that we not forget*

how sad and exuberant the Outlaw poets were –  
the American Renegades, the Meat Poets, the Carma Bums, the Beats –  
a few of whom, a very few, won a sliver of surface recognition,  
Ginzberg, Ferlinghetti, marginally Corso, Micheline.

Coming of age in the Forties, hitting their stride in the Fifties,  
in North Beach, Greenwich Village, Mid-Country Badlands,  
when Aboveground America practiced diving under desks,  
they sang like crickets among the cobbles under the titanic American Arch  
of Triumph.

I forgot

how threadbare the lives and fierce the imaginations of those literary bandits,  
vagabonds, drinkers, druggers, traipsing from room to cheap room,  
while legal poets – Lowell, Sexton, Berryman, maximally Plath –  
became famous going, in their despair, to madness, and suicide.

In their tiny journals and scrap-paper poems they wrote,  
those rebels, of grit and grease, alleys and ashcans, of little lives  
in little words, without presumption except the presumption  
that hopes, dreams, and the life of the imagination  
matter.

I forgot

how, chest-deep in the gruff of their days, and long nights,  
their minds roamed like mustangs through the arroyos of American underlife,  
how, knowing they would never appear in the mags and anthologies  
that gave such fleeting recognition as might come to any poet,

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how, searching for glimmers, as in a sunset, of the eternal,  
doubtless yearning, secretly or not so secretly, for their sliver of fame –  
how committed these American outlaws were to their art  
in a cold-water, five-floor, fire-escaped, roach-infested walk-up under  
the stars.

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### Lake Song

In a cork-like red kayak I hover  
a hundred feet above the earth  
on a glittering gray surface flatter  
than a saucer, the white sun over  
the mountain washing the world in light.

Beside my shell, ripples cover  
boulders, burnt-yellow, darker  
under water ten millennia,  
and I remember swimming, hair  
to the sky, as those chips of glacier

walk away in the deep. I discover  
an underworld, as imagined by the ancients,  
with fallen gods and damned men, a bubble  
at the center of the earth, the Boatman  
ferrying unfortunates across the river,

or as imagined at the center  
of my being, silent as boulders  
under water for millennia,  
and I, lungs burning, suppressing  
incipient panic, scissor-kicking,

shoot to the surface and rediscover,  
beyond my red bow, along the shore,  
oaks and maples in high-summer green  
reaching down hillsides, leaning delicately  
over water, like deer drinking at dawn,

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and I gaze above the mountain like a lover  
at a cloud in the shape of a continent  
crossing the sky. At its edges it fingers out,  
breaking off in chips like islets at land's end,  
reaching out into the blue that has no depth.