

Wilderness House Literary Review 11/1

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Gwenhwyfar and the Dwarf

*"The children born of thee are sword and fire, red ruin, and the breaking
up of laws..." -- Alfred Lord Tennyson*

Go now, Gwenhwyfar, no need for a nunnery,
not now, as the velveteen gloam of your betrothed's reign
fades into the artificial buzz of this present age.

No need, not now, to cage bruised desire,
restless as a would-be mother
on the starched sheets of a fallow bed. No,

better kiss sin and lick taboo: salty scents
of midnight trysts, warm winds filling cotton
curtains in the sunflower flare of the candelabra.

Through the still dark your lover crept to cuckold his liege,
loyalty forsworn for the sake of carnal yen. Oh,
the mingling of sweet summer sweat! What splendid heat!

Now it is cold. Flee this concrete cloister! Why do you wait?
Soon the night will asphyxiate inside a cloak of electric
bright where all-will-see-all in a godless eruption of community.

Sail away across the sea, flee, stowaway in the wooden bowels
of a cargo ship: the rhythmic swells of water coursing sickness
through your womb a tiny tithe for the promise

of peace on the far shore: children complicate.
Go. You are free now. Art's life ebbs, his royal
blood oozing into a misty pool pale pink.

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Weep not, not now, no need. I am but a dwarf, kitchen knave,
no knight, fancied first by Lancelot and next the King. On the green
moor Art forgave you, in the rain, then yielded to Lethe's embrace.

Not I. Kings can forget; dwarfs cannot. Like powerful Priam,
when Helen professed, "Dog that I am," Art pronounced
you exempt. The God now you serve will not. Why worship

perdition? Return to the fire. Swim the saline waters if you must,
before it's too late. Your flushed knight needs you. His armor, once silvery
bright,
now dull as drumbeats to a deaf man standing at the edge of a parade.

The day of the hero dissipates. The King's blood leaks
into the pale pool. Chivalry, once spirit, transubstantiated
to flesh, now becomes populace, legion without meaning,

polite. Lancelot's longing your truth, your fervor his, no other succor
to suffice. Go now, fear not, need knows the way. Discard
the King once now for always. The old gods have flown, the new

not yet arrived. Who do you pray to in this dank place where sonance
is sucked into stone so only silence now responds? Is your God
dumb? The clouds here are like corpses wandering death's realm—

spectral flesh pocked with sulfuric pustules of rot—
where they can escape ever not. When last have you spied
stars, seen a new moon on the moor in the night?

Go now. Nothing is all that is left. The Table Round
splintered by the load of its own weight: Justice unable
to untangle the Gordian knot of your gollum want.

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And now the dragon turns for you, my dearest. So, go,
you need not worry about me. Dwarves are dwarves and serve
the same purpose now as then: to attend and entertain,

grotesquely attractive good luck. Take shelter in Lancelot's halls that smell
of dead peonies and dust; partake in fine foods; be drunk on the reddest of
wines.

Adopt a dwarf from his kitchen, a knave of your own. Are you not happy
now?

You will be then. Wrapped for winter in the warmth of your beloved's
arms,
what mind you if kingdoms fall so long as appetites are met?
Your center, your need, will hold, for a while, whilst the world falls apart.

Go now, then, Gwenhwyfar, and cry not. Why weep round tears
for a world pounded flat? Need necessitates. Go. I'll stay here,
in the drizzle, outside the clammy cloister on the gray moor.

Art, the wizard once whispered, will return, one day,
and, perhaps, new gods will ride in his wake. So go, your murky
reflection in Lancelot's eyes to serve as the mirror of our last hope.

Go, now, Gwenhwyfar, to your bliss. This I,
a dwarf, insist. You need doubt not:
I will await the return of our King.