

## Wilderness House Literary Review 12/2

*Gene Twaronite*

### DEMOCRACY AT THE MALL

Seems strange to talk of government by the people  
in this corporate domain, where every move  
is manipulated by apps and advertised needs  
and the inescapable aroma of Cinnabon®.

Yet, if you look past the dazzle and contrivance,  
you will discover democracy alive and well  
in this climate-controlled space,  
where young families with their children  
play in plastic playgrounds open to all,  
where citizens in blue sequined outfits and coiffed hairdos  
line up at the model and talent search for a shot at fame,  
where dazed teens stare into their phones  
seeking new parameters and connections,  
where the huddled masses exercise  
their inalienable right to shop  
and promote the general welfare,  
where a candy store promises *a piece of happy*  
and another promises to *get your life in order*,  
where you'll find Justice® and domestic tranquility  
and still Payless®,  
where there's *fashion for the people*  
and you can vote for your favorite pants  
(as long as it's *our* brand of pants),  
where mall walkers can breathe the free air  
finding sanctuary from weather's oppression,  
where the people ordain this place each day  
to secure the blessings of liberty  
to themselves and their posterity.

**THE STUFF OF POETRY**

Give them circles of Hell  
the stench of battlefields  
and young lives lost  
love's passionate embrace  
a young mother's grief  
at her stillborn child  
the vanity and futility  
of all endeavor  
despair that falls  
like acid rain  
doubt and faith  
the ways we meet death  
and off they go  
writing verse that matters.

But give them something  
like a hangnail  
or the place you  
always stub your toe  
the fit of your new sneakers  
that little lift you get  
when your favorite tune  
plays on the radio  
or the cute way  
you still pull in your gut  
when a young girl passes by  
the quiet sigh you make  
every morning  
for no particular reason ...  
and their voices go mute  
as if there's nothing  
sacred or profound  
no truth or beauty  
in life's detritus.

**THE LAST FACT**

You might think it  
one of those folks  
like earth is round  
or the sky is blue,  
but those two died  
years ago  
in a rest home  
where old facts go  
to die in peace.  
Everyone knows  
earth is flat  
and the sky any  
color you want.  
Like his parents—  
death and old age—  
he was stubborn  
till the end,  
hiding out in  
dark taverns  
of falsehood  
and innuendo  
drinking absinthe  
to forget, but  
forget he could not,  
no more than  
a forge can forget  
what it fires,  
or a sieve forget  
what it filters.  
Reality police  
caught up one day  
and brought him in  
for questioning.

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They beat the truth  
out of him till  
there was nothing left  
but skin and bones  
and a shiny red stain,  
as the sun sank  
in the east  
and the stars shone  
from the heavens  
like distant campfires.