

## Wilderness House Literary Review 7/2

*William Ryan Hilary*  
**Author's Note**

The composition of a poem  
Is no longer an event.  
Everyone writes, but alone.  
No one touches the other  
Inspires sibilance, like fireworks  
Towards revolution.  
The majority do not share—  
—nor gather round in stone squares  
For fear of cruel academes  
Or skeptical friends.

There are thus, tons of yellow pages,  
Like stripped, torn, canary feathers  
Filed away, ultimately discarded in so many abodes  
Like the desk you, young, private printer  
Grew up using. It finally ends its life on the sidewalk,  
Lost during the endless process  
Of coming and going.

We fill abandonments with so many owners  
That no single person matters.  
And when the furniture is removed  
The space is hollow because  
Nobody has marked the territory  
By writing on the walls.

Only infants write on walls.  
We scold them for it.  
Their work becomes a secret.  
Hidden from concrete, commerce, commuting,  
The very things that render our collective aching  
Obsolete.

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### Offering to Kali

Sleep disturbed:

Two blue moons rise pale as mourners

To gaze with languid liquidute

At the prone offering of my body.

Eye-lidless, a probable Goddess,

Awakened early, before the cycle is through

She sets about putting on her rings and jewels.

Her silhouette crow-feather black

Upon the whitening altar of our bedroom window.

Still half asleep, she leads me

Through a storm of night-rank hair

To a temple courtyard,

Somewhere in the queer, wild

Universe behind her irises.

Former lovers slaughter chickens on the stones.

We pay no attention.

We tether, hair and squirming.

"Come here."

I let the opal-tipped cipher on her finger

Scratch my bare back,

Fine red lines upon my shoulder blades

Appearing on my skin: the children of a sword.

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### Waltz

Was it a lie? Is it? Or merely the skewed perspective of a thirsty man? Did I lose control completely? Did I perspire, and my sweat fall like seeds deep into the heart of a shared memory? Did strange, stunning flowers, sprout in the garden? Did you have to—Memory—Dress it up so? Cultivate and tend to it so?

Every tactile surface, every smell, every damnation, every office, every room, every lover's moment, every song, every night and every street and stone. Every collapsing bridge, falling tower, every chapter in the rowboat book of time and the pages torn out and cast to sea. Every life raft beneath the stars—great leather tome—ship of fools, every page like the silver wing of a moth, a brief existence in this temporary garden. Every passing location, images painted on the side of circus cars speeding, or flipping through the naked women on the back of a trick-pack of playing cards. Every journey, every evening spent working late, every lonesome cigarette on a freezing concourse, every time I think of her and the jobs and the bars and the nightmares.

Were they all lies? Were they then as they seem now? Numb? All the sensations renumbered and relabeled, never sad, only blind, ungrateful—were they? Here is the truth: The Past dresses like a burlesque dancer, paints her face in thick, gaudy shades—memory has that awful pastel feel—and offers to move with whomever, in whichever manner, committed forever, to the asylum of a steady, unending

Waltz.

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### Sweeping Away Maggots at the Country Store

"They'll never get to vote  
Grotty little creatures  
Limblenesses,  
Wee, haggard, fire, pokey round noses  
Headed straight for jail.  
Please sweep them out of our century"  
Said the good public who posted  
Naked parts of politicians for green laughs.  
On the web, say.  
And threw pearls. And squandered pearls.  
Never had a chance did they, sir?  
The weak ones.

Mamma nation swept the 'dirt' from the counter  
So to speak  
Then promptly died.  
Something bitter  
Had been eating her up  
From the inside  
Out.

I hope.

**The Calibration of Silence**

I

What better way to calibrate  
A long, and weary silence,  
With all its clumsy shades  
Missteps, and wrongs,  
Than her pale painter's hands,  
Thin as bone,  
Knitted on her lap like  
An ivory, crosshatch  
Of driftwood and salt weed?

I watch them as one  
Watches a nervous sea  
The knuckles rising and falling  
Like waves.

II

You start off loving people  
As bold abstractions,  
Grand displays.

But if you aren't careful  
They become nothing but knuckle, nail  
Even shell.

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If you stop examining them,  
Pulling their many threads  
Through the loom of mutual suffering,  
If you come to see them only  
In the occasional casual gesture  
Almost as insulting  
As a nod goodbye—

Then not at all

You throw them away.

Unless you maintain  
The ever-continuing calibration  
Of silence—the constant bargain  
Between love promised on a rising tide  
And wisdom earned from  
Skimming foam off an uncertain break.

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### Proper Animals

Proper animals man the phones  
Drink cups of coffee and  
Duck out early on Fridays  
To see their wives and kids.

Their communiqués—  
Such subtle writings—  
Are oh so perfect lines  
On the gray page of the city.

With after work drinks.  
With car pools and office parties.  
With memos, faxes, and water-cooler hellos:

We dress nice  
Go to bed early and  
Dream—quite by accident—  
Of inking our Teeth into the boss's neck,  
Or driving our cars off the freeway,  
Or building villages amongst the trees.

We are sad demigods.  
With a casual flick of the mouse  
We could move mountains across China  
Or submerge India in the sea.

We could man your subway cars  
Pave your highways and feed your masses.  
We could show you a thing or two

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Finesse, fine manners, a hearty handshake:

All these qualities

Make an animal proper and

Set him aside from the rest,

So that he is as clean as a box

On a warehouse floor

Maybe twice as empty.