

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/4

Mark J. Mitchell
ACOUSTIC

My guitar is wildly out of tune.
Its rosewood neck is striped with dust.
Today I will read my fortune
In the hidden patterns that rust
Is starting on the low strings. Just
Waiting for it to spell some name,
Tell a story, then I'll adjust
The pegs, tighten strings, play again.

Ennui is suffering. Passion,
Having nowhere to jump, to fall,
Trapped in yourself, your reactions.
I rise, leave one room. Down the hall
There's always another. A wall
Is a limit, not an end. I
Want a room with no guitar, all
Flat, solid, no musical sighs

To accuse me, coax or tempt me
(Let's ignore the effect of pens).
Because I like to play, you see,
But I'm bad at it. I depend
On old songs, those tired wires, to mend
The torn seams life leaves behind
As it plays on by. In the end
I'll dust it, tune it. I don't mind.

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/4

SMALL VOWEL GAVOTTE

A dog barks uh-oh
To a vacant hall.

Dusty pictures swing
Slowly on long wires.

The abandoned couch
Hides a scent of old love.

Ancient whispers hang
In this stale air.

The dog senses
The smells, hears what human

Ears miss and barks
Uh-oh in the vacant hall.

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/4

THE SESTINA OF THE AIRPORT BAR

Trying to flag a cab, looking west,
Overdressed and more than a little late,
The low sun making him almost blind,
He looks down the street, glances at his watch.
He exhales, sure that he'll never get there
And recalls what he just learned about someone he knew.

Just dead, really. He'd heard the news
Time zones ago. Someone like him, flying back west.
Someone he'd met, was just sitting there
In the airport bar. Both planes were late.
So they shared a drink while they watched
Departure times. "Remember___?" "Big kid? Blind

Without those glasses?" "That's him. Not so blind
Lately—had the surgery." "Oh. I only sort of knew
Him." "Well, he dropped dead while setting his watch.
Been traveling, just landed—back from out west,
And—boom—fell over." "He was never late."
The answer dropped flat. "I mean, he was there

When you needed him—family?" "Young wife, kids. They're
Taking it tough. And you know, his mother's blind?"
"Christ, that's hard." Glance at the screen—still late.
"Back home, no one thinks they really knew
Him at all. Think he lost something out west."
"You mean...?" Small gesture, nod. "They wish they'd watched,

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/4

You know?" "Drugs. Who knew? You gotta watch
That hard stuff." "You speak a truth there."
(Still trying to sort a taxi out of the west,
Where everything's yellow). His poor wife's blind
With grief." Well sure. Still, it's nothing new."
"Happens more than we know. We'll both be late."

"I guess so. That'll mean another late
Night when I land. I'm done here. Need to watch
What I drink." "Me too. Anyway, I knew
You'd want to hear." "Thanks. Any idea when they're
Having—you know?" "Nope. Papers maybe. Keeping it blind,
Private. Shame, maybe. Not sure. Shouldn't have gone west

I guess." But it wasn't the west that made him a late
Young man. He was blind to danger. He didn't watch
Himself. Is that a cab there? Just some kid I knew.

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/4

FORMAL EXERCISE

She used to read by lark light.
Then they drifted off like kites.
Now she waits blind as the night.

He's patient as a banked fire.
Sparks pop in a lazy choir.
He compresses his desire.

One by one she counts out stones,
Mistakes this one for the bone
Of someone she left alone.

Sleepy, lazy, keeping warm,
He molds his desire into form,
A garment that won't be worn.

He whispers of that and this
Not knowing she wants his kiss.
Larks fly home to brush her lips.

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/4

A VOW OF POVERTY

But who, faced with her face

Would not rejoice?

--Theodore Roethke

All the Earth, All the Air.

My soles are worn thin.

Boots are so close to pavement

I know each loose stone.

These shirts are old, thin,

Not rags, but I should mend them

If I could. She can.

Weary, but not worn

She pulls me to her. Stones don't

Cut, the wind blows past.