

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/3

George Moore
Tone Poem

It's never enough to merely hum along, your feet get going and you are on the floor before the ready-made dolls are up and at 'em, feeding the drinks to the diddled, but Oh that was way way back then, today it is more the suckled, like fish swimming through their own medium, and landing momentary in this stream. The high school dance comes back when you enter the gym. Then, you wish you'd rented a decent car after all. So keep singing, they say, like the song is going to save you, float you off into the stratosphere where you can see both the greenly earth below and the clouds turning to absolute black without air, at that edge, like the life lived out and going away, but without the light they say you see, the tunnel, someone you know calling you forth into the absolute insanity of some blinding radiant feature that you knew damned well you should stay clear of, but you are half drugged from the morphine last days and all but thinking anything better than that hospital bed, so you let yourself be led like a Hollywood stand-in off into the netherworld, hoping for better results than promised you by the Catholic church. You see the faces you cannot recall, but for the hint of fleshy mask. And the song never fades, that's the thing, it rings like an old green iron bell from the fifteenth century in one of those country churches on the Alentejo, where no one seems to have melted them down for tanks, and they are aging through metal stages into the earth elements they once were, purified back into base metals, as it were, and all that in your head, because the song lives on there when it dies out in the world. But what about the poem, that sort of soundless afterthought that music creates, or is the inspiration for, the music without its melody, words searching for a sound, for a line, the song not so much a moment in the memory but a gap in past events? We leave together, the balloons all down, the high lights over the climbing ropes washing out the auditorium's cheerless blue. Wherever we are, the guitar can't seem to pick up the right beat, perhaps the guitarist is herself incomplete here, wishing for something more than this sawdust covered floor and the too-high stool, and a few mouthy old men dangling their shoelaces over the edge of the spotlight's brim, and so she words it out, speaks it plain, forgets the music and the sounds around her, the bar being wiped down, the toilet in some far off place going a little too long, the traffic outside sliding through the first snowstorm of the season, and she gives it to you straight. You can either pick up the pieces and fit them to your poem out of these other worlds, or you can dump them in a box in the backroom, in some forgotten closet of your brain, and hope you never need to find the right word to say when she finally comes up and smiles at you without a reason.

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Borders

Demarcation of torn histories we are not concerned with now, so far into our own futures that time itself can't catch up, a line that separates country from country, but fails when it snags the legs of lovers, the ones whose living it should not cross.

Northern means the opposite of South, the tongue rests on it like a cliff, each word oozes out of its shell and lays down flat, a hypertext of geography. Then there are your visas, the name embossed on book cover, mirrored, crossing a perfect face.

Canada, I recall, was where I once almost fled, rumored to be a warless tribe, a group of loosely collected states of better being, one even French, or frenchified, others thick with giant pine, somewhere out of the range of M16s and Claymore mines.

But borders soften, a watery signature up from the papery plains, without so many hard angled fences, no more rough bywords for our difference. Like wolves we wander where we will without thinking about the nomenclature, the lexicons of caution.

I draw you down into me, into the alpine center of my state of being, but the state is nothing to me, a square on a map, a range of barrier peaks. I would live anywhere with you, love, even hover over this seamless earth, walk the borders of the galaxy.

Articles of the Hunt

A baseball bat
or *hakupik*,
three foot pole with
a kind of hook,
or a shotgun,
the soft spot
in the skulls
thin as milk
in the milky light
of dawn tundra,
and a right hand
to palpate pups'
craniums, just
to be sure they're
crushed. Can't
be slipping into
darkness, must
rush toward it,
correctly caved-in,
for bone hides life
beneath blubber,
check blink reflex
with a finger, eyeball
should not move.
Good, now string it
(you're doing fine),
think of it sleeping,
this white shadow,
indistinguishable
thing, brought to the
brink of consciousness

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by its absolute
whiteness, the fur
in winter, of sheet ice
cut by jokes about his
Mickey Mantle swing.

I steal down the street looking for the nearest market where I can be me.