

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/3

*Tim McCarthy*

**The Gale Paints an Ocean of Metastasized Memory**

(A Couple in Brackets)

The only piece of wreckage  
in that expanse of sea  
she could find to support  
her weight, slight as it was,  
was his left arm.

She held on  
with both of hers' and floated  
while he drown in the homeless  
liquid of his heart.

But he thought  
he too was floating--  
no, flying  
deeply between sky and earth  
curling the friction of gushing air  
to himself as a gull wing molts  
quote marks to feed water  
or light on some fragment  
of floating debris  
causing it to bob  
like an approving head.

Don't quote me

the couple would hear  
voices in the water say  
as they floated, flew, and drown.

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(The Male in Brackets)

In the future he will have become  
a person who never even liked her.

Free of friction,  
he will then have sailed through life  
betwixt the myriad shores  
as if having fallen through air,  
a brush pondering yet refusing  
to touch the canvas, telling himself  
it wasn't the raft  
but the water  
  that shattered and flexed  
like gardens of gull wings.

-- Still, siren songs did lure  
her from corporal harbors  
and sail-stolen wind howled  
in her heart for home  
less liquid[.]--  
  [where]

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[i]n the forest by the lake a candle  
dims by a wine bottle attending couple.  
Their eyes adjust to each other with what  
moonlight the Spring evening provides.  
They huddle in the blanket and listen  
to the barely audible caressing of the water  
while fierce memory of the gentle lake  
sang

to future structures too fragile  
to survive it,

sang

of a spirit

that would not endure adulthood,  
and recognition of death's clear,  
definable features,

sang --(no, protested),

teen transcendences of societal taboos  
and the petty bourgeois profession of artists  
whose spiritual lives also confused  
image with substance.

He was not to be,

yet will have become, the water-body  
whose waves sculpt his hands clean.

(Ceramics)

Partner hands peering from windows  
of an artist's oversized pull-over sweater  
alternate between narrative gesture  
and the touch of soft gray clay  
spinning a field of potential  
from which to harvest another  
reflection of the artist's heart.

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They turn from clay to me  
and perform Indonesian Shadow-Puppet  
recitations of Miles Davis, Kandinsky,  
Martha Graham, and the hope  
of fashioning future  
from what substance  
time offers.

Like all art studios  
this room is uniquely picturesque  
with efficacious disorder, thick  
with the scent of substances that care  
nothing of a lung's physiology  
yet, contrary to an artist's belief,  
does not serve the cause of sight.  
She knows shape becomes  
permanent in extreme heat  
but art is not about  
being certain.

In dream  
where she has no reality  
we have continued like this  
for as long as we had been alive  
when last we saw each other  
and men like plates on sticks  
were spinning and she danced  
from one to the other long enough  
to skillfully flick her wrist  
and disappear. At least  
such was the picture  
she seemed to paint. Or  
did I dream that too, dizzy as I was,  
struggling to keep my shape, recoiling  
from the roar of some imaginary kiln?

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(Art Theory)

After amputation space matters  
and what assumes the old position  
is interpretation of previous substance.

This space,

this corner of the studio  
that holds a series of fresh  
unframed canvases strewn  
with oil of Expressionism,

you interpret as

How can you not like Jazz?  
Some of it's so cosmic!

It's just that we can't both fit  
on this delicate craft of already  
skilled teen brush caresses--

these formative years  
when you realize the power  
of image is its ability to stand  
in place of what is actual.

Years later you demonstrate  
the truth of this principle.  
We take our places on a bed  
where I have my final tutorial--

a love-severed brush stroke  
you interpret for me as

I thought it would make you happy.

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(Heart in Heart Drowns)

Then he became soldier still  
and shore caressing ceased.

You need to cut something  
out of me,  
                    he heard the water say.

Could he do that  
without leaving his post?

*I'll pull you under*, she explained,  
where poetry--

the best surgical instrument  
with which to remove intimacy,  
even love  
                    (as are art and sex)--

will drown you.

He put pen to paper,  
asked for his orders,  
and heard,

"All this grief,  
all that time:

mere memory."

Not here.  
Not there.

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(Gale's Last Stroke)

What might be

the color of a balloon

whose dangling string taunts the hand  
from which it has been freed to rise  
to unreachable, indiscernible heights--

what texture

this prodigal object

framed by periodic clouds  
whose shadows dab eyes that wince  
in otherwise imperceptible wind?

Where will it taste down  
as its death hissing consolidates  
with door-beaten buildings,

vehicle-licked streets, or trees  
whose earth speaks assent  
by refusing them motion?

How will it lay, spent of journey,  
lost, its string uselessly strewn  
in random cake icing swirls?