

**Wilderness House Literary Review 21/2**

*John Grey*

**SUNDAY MORNING IN THE CITY**

Early morning,  
sun shines on a church wall.  
It shines in the window  
of a dive bar too  
but don't tell that to the ones  
looking for signs.

The priest stands at the door,  
ready to welcome the parishioners  
for morning service.  
The bartender won't be  
on the job for hours yet.

It may be Sunday  
but there's still foot traffic.  
For most, church or bar –  
there is no difference.  
Just two doors among many,  
two sirens competing for  
the same human restlessness.

Holiness, drunkenness -  
there's a wide, bright,  
sunsoaked middle.  
Most of us walk there  
without looking up.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 21/2

### DON'T LET ME BE KNOWN BY THIS

I pleaded to the gods of bureaucracy.  
It was the time they pressed my name  
flush down on the deportation order.  
I cried out and people came running.  
All the neighbors were concerned for my welfare,  
but those looking down on me were busting a gut.

I can still hear their taunting:  
Does the trespasser beg for mercy? Does the worker  
drop his wages at the border? Is the intent of a migrant  
to build a home or to be cast out of it?  
Hasn't a boy learned he's not at his best  
darting about the detention hall and screaming, "Oh Jeezus!"

I rinsed my burning shame under silence.  
My mother applied prayers. My sister came at me  
with letters of appeal. I held my head high so that  
the tears ran out of it and the rest  
of my body could forget it was there.

But it continued to sting, to blister.  
And I cursed ten thousand times the poor soul  
who invented borders. No family member lectured me,  
but those gods were more than generous  
with their incessant "I told you so."

It was a week or more before the papers expired.  
For me, it was a relief. For the gods,  
a taking down of their banner.

**PROGRESS PROGRESSES**

It's hard to believe but  
this housing estate, the strip mall,  
were woods once,  
a great acreage of forest  
that I got lost in many times,  
both figuratively and actually.

What I know of peace and curiosity,  
life forms and their connectivity,  
I learned in the classroom  
of oaks and pines,  
wildflowers and streams,  
deer, foxes and woodchucks.

And what is here now?  
Twenty-eight lookalike houses.  
A chemist, a breakfast stop  
and a shuttered shop that once  
traded in bubblegum cards.

And yet, if you lean close to the ditch  
behind the parking lot,  
you will find the milkweed  
lifting its lanterns,  
the sparrow rehearsing  
its plain but perfect song.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 21/2

### THE ETERNAL AUDIENCE

A trip, a fall,  
you're sprawled out  
on the sidewalk.  
Mockingbirds break the silence  
by mocking you.

Car with two flat tires,  
on the side of some  
lesser-traveled country road.  
Barking dogs can't get  
enough of your fate.

Then there's the one  
that strangers' children enjoy –  
the argument with your ex  
in the parking lot of a grocery store.

And remember  
the lawnmower accident  
that cost you  
your right big toe.  
The neighbors loved it.  
The sparrows were impressed.  
The squirrels thought your scream  
was worthy of one of their own  
when confronted by a feral cat.

Pain is performance.  
The crowd never misses the show.