

Wilderness House Literary Review 11/1

Dr. William Miller

My Dad and Bear Bryant

They are buried
twenty feet apart.

In life, they knew
each other casually.

When the Bear came
to town, they shook hands
at the Quarterback Club.

And my dad knew
the coach never went
anywhere without
a bottle of vodka
in his suitcase.

And they both
smoked Chesterfields
pack after pack.

They both wanted
to win football games,
watched with
a flask in their coats
for a quick sip.

My dad and many
grown men cried
the day they heard
the awful news—

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a heart attack
six weeks after
he retired.

The Bear said
he was “nothin’
but a winner.”

But my dad got
fired from his
executive job,
drank even more
when he started
his own company ...

Maybe they drink
and coach on
on another field.

A tie is a tie,
no overtime that
turns the clock
back to zero.

Winning, losing,
is still the risk
and the only
thing that matters
in a crimson world.

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Yorick

The prince picked
up his skull from the ground,
said he knew him well.

The court jester,
he amused with pratfalls,
recitations of silly poems.

He and he alone
could make the young
prince laugh.

Even then he was given
to dark thoughts
brooding in his

private chamber.
But the jester cajoled
into the fresh air,

hopped like a frog
along the castle wall.
when he grew old,

He still gamboled
for the king, praised
his name in Pig Latin.

He never knew
the prince envied him,
all purpose and no doubt.

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His life was so simple,
so simple, cap bells shook,
motley worn.

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Poe's Grave

Every Halloween,
a lady leaves a bottle
of cognac, a single
red rose.

TV cameras can't
catch her, though one
reporter claims
he saw a woman

in funeral black.
but it seems no one
really wants
to trap her

with a lens, much
less lift up
the veil. And she
is the woman in

the story who
returns from
the grave to claim
a living dead man.

Poe would have
smiled wryly
at such devotion
from an unknown lady.

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But she returns
to the marble tomb
year after year,
leaves gifts only
a true lover gives.

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Bloods and 'Necks

The white soldiers
fixed a rebel flag
to the top of a tent.

They drank whiskey
from bottles, listened
to their music:
Hank and Merle.

Ten yards away
black soldiers
rolled joints
while the music
of Motown played.

Ten yards away,
the path was mined
with old fears,
wars won and lost.

The yellow men
simply waited
for the next firefight
to be lost by
soldiers who hated
each other
more than them.

Two Murders

Last night, there were
only two murders
in New Orleans.

Maybe drugs
bought and sold
Was the cause,
the drug trade
on every corner.

Maybe the signs
the diocese put up
were finally read,
“Though shalt
Not Kill.”

The drop in
the murder rate
Is only a number,
victims ignored.

Both were shot
miles apart,
had last names
and nicknames,
died at 17.