

## Wilderness House Literary Review 11/1

*Timothy L Rodriguez*  
**Down the Line**

We stand like staffs at port arms  
Below red regiments assemble,  
A force with which we have  
A reckoning, and long yards  
For true sightings and great harm.

White wisps, clouds thin as shade,  
Weave through our brigade.  
Some say we're atop Breeds,  
Others claim it's Capitol Hill.  
I say call a corner.

The name is of no import,  
History will knee to a steel  
Exhumed from a time when  
Men, pushed against and again,  
Could no long abide.

We have to take a side.  
There is too great a divide  
Between what we hard earn  
And what we see in return;  
It's a tarred lesson to learn.

To us they proffer a ragged  
Rope to inch, hand over hand,  
From here, across the abyss,  
To reach nowhere. They call  
This, nigh extol it, as work ethic.

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In taking what no one had  
They wielded names like populace,  
Not my name nor Horace there.  
We count only when it matters—  
Every other November.

With more bluff than bluster, they  
Took for certain that we would  
Pay court to the disassembly  
Of distance, allowing them  
To listen in; all the while

Looting our late fate.  
Once we stood up to the color—  
Fired at scarlet in coats  
Bloodied brothers for blacks  
Tanned tyranny of brown belts.

We won, yes. Our victory, true.  
But triumph? Not for very long.  
Wars with weapons work wonders;  
Even so, we remain insecure,  
But a man is given his time.

This is ours, as red comes to rank.  
With muzzles for our voice  
Our standard waves—a mirage.  
A promise upon promise  
Flipped like a dealer his deck.

The order comes to aim,  
A caution as to white  
I saw it then, I see it now  
So I take my sight and fire:  
Prescott yells, Fire! Down the line.

**Don't Turn on the Lights**

The last words of Bin Laden—  
Don't turn on the lights—  
An appropriate anthem  
For our era where  
Nights are days  
And days suffer stage fright.  
Make no mistake, the muddle  
Is by inimical design and tacit consent  
Meant to keep us aligned to the grind;  
We, the grist, summarily dismissed  
Under a statute called repose,  
A regulation enforced strictly  
By controls hidden in plain sight  
Which preside rather than guide.

Oh, no, here comes the unseen hand  
Of History to ease our doubts  
About how dense this darkness  
And how benighted we are  
In our own ignorance  
And how ignorant we are  
Of our own insouciance  
And how damnable we are  
For taking the dark lord  
At his word and hie  
Shove hands and hopes  
Into empty pockets, realizing  
But not really understanding  
That night is just right for us.

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### Midway down my throat

Midway down my throat  
A canary swings, sometimes sings  
Seldom flutters fast its wings.

It's there in the name of safety—  
Other's, not always mine—  
The current bird isn't the first.

Mind you, I borrowed the idea  
From old miners with methane fears;  
Like them, I'm alert to baneful vapors.

I don't always know the time  
The hapless one topples  
But even when I do, I'm helpless.

Sometimes I overlook the signs  
Of the evils mines in my path  
And am surprised by the upheaval.

I loathe the bird its flat fate  
Which ends in my trembling hands  
Even as I gag on bright feathers.

I assure you that the stench  
Of the dead yellow cannot  
Compare to the vile I spew.

As I age the bile comes only  
Now and again but it's as volatile,  
Powered by the same alchemy.

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On holiday travels I carry five  
To six, especially to family events  
But even then I need ten more.

Between family and deities  
There's only so much  
I can take without some protection.