

## Wilderness House Literary Review 11/2

Robert Lietz

### THE LIKENESSES

*After the Ohio child abductor, murderer is arrested in Florida,  
among the memorabilia and dolls he'd hung from a high ceiling,  
years after his first crimes were committed. committed.*

1

#### The Dolls

The tripartite tests invite surmise, and haunting  
hail-pocked likenesses of children, suspended like that  
from drop-ceiling tracks and rafters, to provoke, be  
sure of it, to amuse or horrify, when nights evolve to tantalize,  
and what a wife becomes, discovering, in that basement,  
a living daughter then, decades ago, then one, two, three,  
her child and she survive remembering, compressed  
to these dolls raised up among obsessions marking him,  
whatever we think we know of it, of the windows once  
a living sister could not squeeze from, and the thinking  
turned from that, unable to persuade or make the decades'  
fantasies seem worthy, bring the mind or heart or knees  
to kneeling. Whatever a moment allows us now, or bottles  
bring, recycled or made good on, there'll be this for  
ciphering, and how a child's fingered private things bespeak  
the damage, left with all that's left of him to perish,  
as if to exceed, extoll, while his name drops, serif by curl,  
from memory. It's more than this be sure, brought up  
as we, having driven a route uphill to park and walk unmenaced mea-  
sured miles, warm in our snapped down vests, after  
one rainy week suspending regimen, must ask in silence why,  
wonder where Bucket's gone, the volunteer gardener  
we've chatted up through this and other summers, retired  
for the season, we can guess, with the polymeric frights  
arrayed, to keep the geese off lawns, from the walks, away  
from the pond and the gazebos, where the geese,  
as if they'd been attentive after all, splash down, successive

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dozens splash, into the shapes a summer meant, and  
summer business, to paddle and crap and muse the walkers  
trying blocks the geese arranged with obstacles, so  
that attention matters now, and not one word comes, about contracting, or  
early Seventies designing, about  
sows' ears or purses or Floridian deliberations, deaths  
a sad man willed but never quite succeeded at.

### 2

#### Calendars

Remember the tunes we thought ordained, and tunes,  
even a decade earlier, when that child, conceived,  
matured, endured a birthing, birthday then, while he sprayed  
the dull enameled walls in a gym shower, cock gripped  
like a small doll he might to nothing with. We'll have our walk  
about, wondering ourselves what words suffice for part of it,  
what credit or cash back, imagining that woman's eyes and witness  
signing off on history, and the displacement then, in dolls  
and the identities surrendered, even as hands inflict what hands  
had learned from something other, and he, rolling his papers say, packed  
loosely with some flavored leaves he's saved for pleasure,  
with tomorrows tricked to burn, smoke sheerer to see through, fathoms  
the grandeur, din, welcoming the ghostly chums he's wooed  
with currency and drizzle. This grey-capped pond  
the hazard tape rings round, warning the geese away, on mornings  
like our own, seems the perfect match, for this bright  
sweat band and grief there's no addressing, for squeezing out  
our exercise, when news like this, furrowing, leaves behind  
these channels the rain plows down and through, and these comics  
we share or local columns over breakfast, serving this much  
ourselves, parsing the captions, the photos of hurt or loss or literacy,  
and what the years have made of it, that simultaneity  
forever in rehearsal, like wrinkles say, nobody seems undone by.  
But what's there to say for that, recalled, or for the call-in,  
subscriber engendered nonsense, the mindless and obdurate stuff,

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like a simian self-portrait the local day's distracted by, that  
photo a naturalist turned up, where the camera came to count, no  
more than a cage away from the cage he'd slept for days in,  
getting acquainted say, and getting used to the protection, or this  
one after all, too fragile for the main yard and disappointments,  
for the local rites and service and sub-rhythmic understandings,  
like itineraries, as these were, he had to imagine once, and,  
finally, must imagine for himself through calendars.