

## Wilderness House Literary Review 13/2

*Tom Evans*

### **On First Going To A Laundromat After The Separation Subsequent To My Divorce**

'It'll all come out in the wash',  
my father's standard response  
to my various *mea culpas*  
over the years, while rarely true,  
was comforting nevertheless.  
What I wouldn't give to hear that now,  
but he's gone, and for some things, it seems,  
there can be no forgiveness.

I have nothing against laundromats,  
they're what I'm used to,  
a necessity despite my mother's  
warning each time I left the house  
not to air one's dirty laundry  
in public. What else was I to do?  
Besides, didn't she also say that  
'cleanliness was next to godliness'?

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This one, on a sunny Sunday morning,  
the first I espied beyond the city line,  
would serve for now; it held no echoes  
of my past or inkling of my future,  
as far as I could tell, although the way  
things had been lining up lately,  
I proceeded with caution.  
One couldn't be too careful.  
Already bereft of my children  
it might seem I had nothing left to lose,  
nevertheless I kept vigil over  
my laundry as it tumbled in the dryer,  
making sure all was right, though I probably  
would have done it anyway, as I  
enjoyed seeing my personal things  
in a different context.

I suppose it was not unlike seeing  
one's household furniture outdoors,  
as Thoreau has it in *Walden*,  
'a real housecleaning,' albeit in this  
case infinitely more prosaic,  
not all that surprising given the  
conditions we are forced to live under  
in this wonder-working province.

Folding laundry, that's something I'm good at,  
nonpareil in fact, according to my  
ex-mother-in-law, who declared she could  
just watch me do it for hours, aided  
in part by the exhilaration I feel  
in a clean, airy, well-appointed  
establishment replete with an adequate  
number of extended folding tables.

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As with a visit to the doctor or  
dentist a book is requisite, the  
reading material left lying around  
such places being abysmal, though it  
proved to be difficult to concentrate  
what with the slippery hard plastic chairs  
provided, and the constant flow of  
traffic of all sorts of transient denizens:

College kids slumming it, used to Mom  
doing their laundry, newlyweds living  
on a shoe-string budget, the vast majority  
apartment dwellers, or living in  
low-income housing, most aspiring to do better,  
to one day get a house with a laundry room,  
an apartment with laundry facilities,  
and finally, out-of-town visitors.

Cheer tide 20 mule team borax  
lux biz duz bold oxydol wisk  
gain rinso fab breeze dreft,  
America's obsession with cleanliness,  
as if to assuage a collective guilt  
for their original sin against the  
aboriginal. But it won't work, and  
the surfactants have polluted our streams.

Then I think back to my children in their  
swaddling clothes and ask, 'After such knowledge  
what forgiveness?'