

Wilderness House Literary Review 16/2

Dennis Herrell

A Man Discovers He Has Gotten Old

Now at over 80,

I must give myself permission to look at my own body.

I decide to review it part by part:

my little toe is not so bad, in fact, rather cute,

knees are knobby, but grudgingly do their work;

my butt sags, but retains vestiges of a curve;

stomach retains its middle-aged paunch;

pecs are a laugh, and jiggle when I do; my nose

I accept with honor from my French-Canadian grandmother;

my eyebrows are like wild gray caterpillars,

and my hair is best kept undercover by my old baseball cap,

worn even in a restaurant, when I'm able to open the door.

Older sometimes means partial successes—

I mostly walk a crooked mile,

one wary lurch after lurch, two back for one forward,

my knees drifting to port, hips to starboard,

old rudder creaking under stress,

my shirt a sail to wind,

as I tack my way to store and back

like some old galleon's wandering wake.

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A Poet Analyzes the Patients

How to write a poem
while in a doctor's waiting room:
First,
look at, then study, the other patients,
until you find
the one who can laugh
while sitting among sickness.
She is alive
and laughing at something, anything,
that lets her know, and everyone else,
that she is still happy to be alive.

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Clone... Me?

You want to copy the anxiety
of waiting for the possible release
of a rude noise at a sit-down dinner party?
Or reproduce in full detail
the stupid, inane, awkward
remarks by a red-faced young man
on his first date and then the near amputation
of his date's hand by means of a car door.
Or display the bumbling attempts to teach
a youngster the fundamentals of any sport,
resulting in multiple injuries to both participants.
Use as an example the goofy attempts of the ultimate
incompetent, lazy employee to coherently explain why
he deserves a pay raise plus reserved parking place.
Finally, why would you want to replicate the one person
who failed three times on national television
to guess the name of who was buried in Grant's tomb?

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Communication

I
(the physical me, myself)
am a messenger, an agent (of sorts)
a
transporter of thoughts
aspirations and ideas and hopes
misgivings and impossibilities
by way of words and symbols
snorts grunts whines screams
gestures sneers frowns smiles
waving of hands
stomping of feet
etc.
by way of this physical body
to any other physical body
in the vicinity of sight and sound
and sometimes
not always
successful and/or responsible
for the communication
or lack of.

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Deception: Two Paths

Your artful mind can create over time stories of you
that are more than just about the physical you,
but all the self-characters you wish to be enhanced,
not only dress and manners, although important,
but the larger fictions, such as background credits.
family history, morality and worth fabrications,
and on-going love and hate pretensions:
all those examples of dream-wish realities
that blossom from thought to mouth
into full integration of daily deeds.

Then there come to light,
little instant lies that pop out
like corn in a hot skillet—
like the switches
you turned off and on as an idle child
saving your face and grace
after an utterance both stupid and demeaning,
by instantly attributing those very words,
with a mischievous smile
and conspiratorial wink,
to some fictional person you say you quoted.