

## Wilderness House Literary Review 20/3

*D.R. James*

### **Drawing a Blank**

*To get started I will accept  
anything that occurs to me.*

*—William Stafford*

But what happens when nothing occurs  
to you, just your black and gray reflection  
in a kitchen window, an older self

you otherwise haven't yet conjectured?

With the panes clean and the outside  
winter world predictably darker

than at this same time yesterday,  
the double exposure you could call

*Haggard Face over Exterior Scene*

is like Community Ed. photography,  
amateur-hour art work, a first-ditch effort  
to mean something significant.

But then the dark subsides,  
the framed face fades,  
and there is just that world.

**A Couple of October Options**

An invisible train's distant whistle  
this unseasonably warm  
yet seasonably blustery early hour  
plays a fetching, come-hither counterpart  
to the crickets' mad ventriloquism,  
their ceaseless, crass rasping  
somewhere outside the open door.

On a morning like this – long before  
the garbage truck will rumble by –  
sprawled on the familiar hide-a-bed  
that doubles as the center mezzanine  
in the psycho-surgical theater  
of your own emotional vivisection,  
you're torn between

– critiquing your perpetual allegory  
in which Long-Suffering and Proaction  
engage in their stylized dialog  
about your non-unfolding life

and

– coveting the rustic romanticism  
of a hobo riding the rails,  
whose only concern is to time his roll  
into the liberty of an accelerating boxcar  
so as to minimize his potential  
for slipping from its lip and clipping  
his otherwise unencumbered body.

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### If Only I Moved by Instinct

*Life has been a grand migration  
to where you are today!  
—well known wisdom*

I didn't know!

Otherwise,  
when those raggedy squadrons  
clamored overhead last evening—

three V's disarrayed  
like frayed arrow feathers,

their leaders insistent as clowns  
with braying horns, honking  
for plane geometry—

I would have taxied, sprinted,  
lifted arthritically  
from water's edge (granted

more dodo than goose,  
my splayed toes just scuffing  
the webbed crests of waves),

and elbowed my way  
into a rhythmic wedge

to claim my slot  
in that mindless rotation  
toward the life-saving draft.

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### Good to Know It Could Be Sunny

The lake some days goes calm,  
no longer rolling against the shore but  
undulating the way you'd picture  
sheets spreading and smoothed,  
slow motion, a mother or a lover  
gently raising and lowering  
the broad cloth, catching the air  
to square that expanse with the bed.

Just so.

And such thoughts come  
when the bed has warmed only  
to your restless presence,  
a few blank dreams  
you would have gladly lived.

Then the lone smell on pillows  
tells you to do laundry,  
to pay bills,  
to water plants,  
to consider stringing some lines.

Forty – maybe eighty? – feet out  
a gull levels west, clear,  
it would seem, to the horizon,  
and then the lake planes  
south, tips east, catches fleeting pink  
across its ashen wings.

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### Whose Life Is It, Anyway?

A dingy ladybug just slammed  
into this split-ended web of grass  
as if shot from an organic cannon

for a miniature net. Nonplussed,  
she has seemed to decide  
to climb to its frizzy top

and fling herself,  
to no applause whatsoever,  
toward the sharp tip of a taller,

naked shaft nearby—  
there, to re-form and sway  
in the slightest breeze.

I say she has *seemed* because  
I don't know whose life it is,  
anyway. It's all about me,

of course: earlier,  
I found myself atop  
a mental mountain (you know,

surveying the lesser peaks?),  
then flung myself for this poem,  
fluttering into the snare

of choosing this or going with that  
as if I determined all my decisions  
all along the live-long day.

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But I know me: soon enough  
I'll fold my wings  
to re-form a spotted shell,

and it will seem I've decided  
to head down that one long blade,  
then, to no applause, up another.

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**Whenever geese in a scraggly double-V  
skim the short swells just offshore,**

you turn to the comedy  
by nature, not to join it or  
consider their destination

but to ogle, to attune their bugle  
to your own inner ear, their  
careening, their wacky flapping,

their exchanging of places, that  
ever-changing intermingling  
of shape, sound, sense, and

nonsense. Meanwhile, what's  
roving that word realm you call  
your brain, that wetland habitat

of theory and blood? How often  
it doesn't seem to matter, doesn't  
seem to be matter, just flocks

of terms, odd ducks that don't  
appear to do you any damned  
clear good. Grateful, though,

you suppose, you come and go  
in it, oblivious, adept, as if  
it were the easiest thing—

easier: as if it were gods,  
gaggles of jabbering gods.

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