

## Wilderness House Literary Review 7/2

*Ron Yazinski*

### **Old Guide at The Animal Kingdom**

After we had tired of watching the silver-back gorillas  
Chase each other like kids on the playground,  
And then the tiger fall asleep  
Like the misplaced student who found long-division,  
Even with a calculator, too difficult,

We ran into a pleasant old cast member  
Who guessed we were either teachers or nurses.  
Teachers, how did you know?

"I noticed you were paying attention to other people.

"The only kinds of folk who do that are either teachers or nurses.

"I myself am a retired teacher from New Hampshire.

"After thirty-five years of killing Romeo and Juliet,

"One-hundred-and-seventy-five death scenes,

"I had had enough.

"When I first started, I tried to make kids feel that we were in it together.

"But I was only kidding myself.

"During my career, my students went from Cliff Notes,

"To movies, to Internet summaries, to "I bet you can't fail all of us."

"My last year, I took them up on the bet, and failed all of them.

"That's when I came down here.

"But it wasn't all wasted.

"Since Disney doesn't give out the names of the apes,

"I'm free to I call the immature ones Benvolio, Tybalt, and Mercutio.

"Of course, the dominant male is Romeo,

"And all of his females are Juliet.

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"If anybody, ever asks me what I know about them,

"I tell them that silverbacks speak to each other in sonnets.

"They think it's a type of ape-language

"That Disney came up with.

"I take consolation in knowing that I did my job as well as most."

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### Illuminations

This is the meaning of Christmas.

When we once again realize how deeply we are affected by fireworks,

How talented, trained singing still moves us.

Even if it takes a three-hundred strong chorus, in a Candlelight Procession,

Half in green, arranging into a Christmas tree, while the rest settle into a field of white.

They humble the hosannas of both real and imagined angels,

As the orchestra reproduces the music of the spheres

That accompanies the Birth Narrative of Mathew.

This is so much bigger than the crèche,

Which is secreted away in a side alley of Epcot,

Where only reactionaries can find it.

No kid wants his picture taken with a cast member in a Joseph or Mary costume.

Nor, for an exorbitant fee, as the Christ child in the manger,

Not when there are green lasers blasting holes in the night

Where the Star of Bethlehem used to be.

And the great choir sings, "There's no place like home for the holidays,"

And fireworks fall like God's grace from the sky.

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### Integrity

Anyone can tell a woman he no longer loves  
How beautiful she is,  
Even though her hair looks like a shrub  
Which gardeners might shape into an animal topiary.  
He might even justify it  
That by saying the words of love, he hoped to make it so.

But when your ninety year old mother asks  
If you believe in the god of your father,  
The god that she never burned with desire to know or serve  
But only endured the empty rituals so that she could be with him  
At Sunday Mass and soon in approaching heaven;  
You could say, "No, I never felt the need to."

And if you were completely honest,  
As if that's all it takes to make a man,  
You could add that it's probably her fault:  
She never raised you to feel it was important.  
But now it is, so you nod and say, "In my own way,"  
And her smile makes you smile.

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### Exhibition Games

In Clearwater stands the original Hooters,  
With a large sign that it's been proudly showing cleavage  
For two generations.  
On the other side of the street an older woman in a Jazzee,  
  
Putters her way up the sidewalk in the early morning heat.  
I think of her as a member of that original staff,  
Who has her memories of those golden days  
When the young ball players would come in after spring training  
  
And swear that her perfect breasts were the only things  
That fit a man's hand better than a baseball,  
Before they sagged onto her stomach  
Which jostles on her knees.

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### Ballad of a Fat Man

Before the Christmas party, my wife and I exchanged gifts.  
To my delight, she surprised me with a box set of Dylan.  
Included was a remastered copy  
Of the first music I ever bought as a fifteen year old, HIGHWAY 61 REVISITED.  
I'm an old man now, no longer a thin man.  
But, in other ways, I'm the same as the music.

It's still surreal to kiss the cold make-up of women  
Who once thought of themselves as circus aerialists  
So high above my head,  
Who in their prime dated unfaithful strongmen;  
Now that they've slumped into the bodies of fortune-tellers  
They bemoan the stinginess of their manager ex-husbands.

All their lust and looks have dissolved like ice in their fruity drinks,  
And their left predicting great things for their grandchildren  
Who inherited a special endowment of mediocrity;  
They're the ones the world has waited generations for;  
How they radiate a special light  
And move with the grace of ghosts when they perform.

In the next room their new lovers  
Who already look like tired ex-husbands,  
Recite the mythologies of the successful men they know,  
Men wealthy enough to own golf courses,  
As if Sisyphus would be happier  
If he possessed clear title to his rock;

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Between hors d'oeuvres and puffed pastry,  
They reveal the intricacies of the business world  
As if it were mere hocus-pocus,  
The silky black cloth that covers the yearning of the heart  
Before voila, it disappears;  
And how even people in the front row, never catch on.

I nurse my beer until it goes flat,  
And realize what I'm humming:  
I'm still Mr. Jones:  
Something is happening here,  
And I don't know what it is--  
And never will.