

## Wilderness House Literary Review 7/3

*David P. Miller*  
**The Afterimages**

Be a gentleman and don't look again.  
What you see  
legs just above the ankles  
there must be ankles  
rhinoceros limbs  
pouring straight down and  
spilling over the tops  
of the largest sneakers she can find  
you know  
the feet can't fit  
so stop looking  
and don't look again.  
Elephantiasis.  
You've seen it.

Supporting herself with  
    a little folding grocery cart  
on the bus at the supermarket  
off the bus at the subway  
steady smile and  
the small voice of a girl  
wears so many layers  
dressed for November in May  
she pushes forth with cheer  
thanks the driver for kneeling the bus to her,  
enormous, weak, and tired.

This time there's a teenage boy  
wired to music  
stands just inside the door.  
She can't get past him.  
He continues standing there  
then sees her leaning  
against the cart.



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### Pause.

The driver tells them to get up.  
They look at each other  
stunned past eye-rolls or giggles.  
Instead, vague incomprehension.  
Inside a dream, they rise  
and clear the seat.  
Their movements stammer.  
She sits, we go on.

Boy, girl, and boy,  
what actually happened here.  
Age, decay and corruption  
erupted into your  
after school ride  
looked you in the eyes  
asked you for a favor.  
Too late to find fascination on the floor.  
Look at her now.

Time was when  
the old were always and only old  
the sick, always sick  
the decayed and grotesque  
        never once lovely.  
And we did not need to know them.

Then you fall across a threshold  
and the afterimages  
of those you wish you had not seen  
cease to fade.  
So push forth.  
With cheer.

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### April Light

early spring, late afternoon  
April snow soon melted  
fresh orange slices tossed  
into leaf debris

dusk of early spring  
layered bare-branch shadows  
shimmer across  
grey corrugations of  
weathered clapboard

early spring, sunset  
lozenge-shaped clouds  
gather in silhouette  
above the treetops

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### Not Seen, Then Seen

Six-fifteen, my wife and my mother asleep  
stepping into the early dawn  
cool high breezes  
rasping rustle of palm leaves

behind the low pink wall  
enclosing this retirement community –  
“Forest Pines” –  
four lanes of droning traffic

still in darkness  
writing without being able to see  
crickets heard in traffic’s lull  
wind chime murmurs behind me

an early morning walker  
strides by, arms pumping  
I’m inconspicuous  
sitting in the carport entrance

palm fronds wave, undulating  
like an imagined tropical skirt  
beyond the wall, a motorcycle  
its engine gunning flatulence

is that an airplane or something else?  
a dog’s barking in the next neighborhood  
overcast dawn – which way is East?  
visualizing the street map

there’s the morning paper,  
plastic wrapped at the end of the driveway  
my father’s in the hospital  
I’ll retrieve it for my mother

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many-armed palm trees  
describing Floridian gestures in the wind  
the first bird has awoken somewhere  
it calls, a chopper answers

pearl-grey sky, gradually more luminous  
emboldens the trees' silhouettes  
now I can see what I'm writing  
but I can't describe the trees

the walker strides by again  
having shed her nylon jacket  
she's in a blue tank top  
I think she's the same one

as the sky lightens  
crickets become more audible  
there's the first mourning dove  
for fifty years the same lament

another bird, in flight now  
skims past toward the roof opposite  
and a second mourning dove  
the two stereo echoing

truck rumbles, car engine turns over  
the mottled masses of cloud cover  
begin to clarify in my sight  
dark grey against light

standing and looking down the street  
roofs of vehicles passing beyond the wall  
and the same walker again  
who doesn't hear me sneezing

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now, a human conversation  
two women taking exercise together  
“had many wealthy clients” “face lifts”  
“didn’t want people to see” “so black and blue”

I’m seen sitting in the carport  
one smiles and waves, I wave back  
it’s the day now  
Seven-ten a.m.

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### Route One

Chittenden County Transit Authority bus Route One  
ascends to the crest  
of its glacial lake basin.  
Outside the city on highway 89  
two whales' flukes in metal  
rise from a tufted mound dividing four lanes,  
invoking their once home,  
because we have forgotten.

Nineteenth-century University buildings  
come into view as we climb,  
poised at the lip of a shore  
unconsidered by riders  
intent on their dorm rooms  
or the malls.  
New construction at campus edge,  
unimagined by my grandfather  
in fifty years' teaching.  
Which building nearby  
held his specimen closet  
with small mammal skulls,  
a squid in a jar?

Route One bus begins its steep descent  
toward what remains of the old inland sea,  
a living lake still vast enough  
to host its own rumored sea monster.  
A gradual passage down Main Street  
past the school building  
where Melton and Dorothy went steady,  
they who became my parents.  
Where the trees thin  
the water comes clear into view.



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This water that might have defined me  
had I remained here.

Route One crosses South Union,  
                    Saint Paul,  
                    South Champlain.

At Battery Street  
near the ferry landing,  
the tracks carrying the Vermonter to Montreal,  
it turns and ascends to rest at Cherry,  
the lake at my back.  
Students and old men and former teen mothers  
gather to ride and disperse.

I visit the only remaining bookstore in Burlington  
then turn from the pedestrian mall,  
gaze down the prehistoric lakefront  
toward late afternoon October sun  
and this water abruptly marking the city's edge.

This was my mother and father's daily landscape,  
and what you see,  
where you walk,  
where you climb or descend,  
run, slide, or dodge,  
is the person you become.

You are a person who lives in a city that falls toward a lake  
from which rise the Adirondacks.  
Or you are a person who sees a left-facing mountain's brow  
defining your small-town neighborhood's horizon  
as you laugh at situation comedies.  
Or you are someone  
who looks into the windows of the Elevated  
as the riders look into yours

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every day of your childhood.

I was born at the edge of a glacial basin  
and have always been visiting grandchild,  
adult tourist, Boston flatlander.

I am gazing at Lake Champlain  
from Main Street Route One  
to make this sight mine.

At fifty-six,  
to recover my nativity.

**Two or Maybe Three**

I'm watching a man,  
balding and with bowed head,  
sit cross-legged on a grassy delta  
in the middle of the quad,  
bent over a book. Nobody else  
in sight this late spring afternoon.

I no longer know  
what my age is, as in,  
is this man my age?  
He doesn't see me  
trying to figure this out.  
Nor does he see the cottontail  
hop away from behind the flagpole  
and down the far slope.