

## Wilderness House Literary Review 7/4

*Martin Willitts Jr.*

### **Mirrors**

*Catoptromancy: Fortune telling with the aid of mirrors.*

He asked the mirror to show him  
where his wife's spirit was —  
would she be whole?  
Would she be attended to by angels?  
Would it be magic glass to see back to him,  
and would she admonish him  
for his grief beyond grief,  
his sighing nighttime,  
his feverous moaning into crystal grass?

Would he see what he wanted;  
or would he see what was real?  
Would her love still be the fairest of all?

Would he get a clear reception?

## Wilderness House Literary Review 7/4

### Laurel Branches

*Daphnomancy: When burning laurel branches in a fire if the branches crackled loudly this is a good omen*

The branches did not burn in the fireplace,  
too green, too immature, too unreliable  
for any good and portending ill omens,  
ghostly warnings— nothing good  
could come of it, not prayer, not warmth  
of memory. It could not crackle, witchly,  
not like twig snap when trying to avoid them.

He could stoke, drive a poker all he wanted,  
it would not burn brightly or weakly, or smolder.  
He could blow; he could turn his fingers into matches;  
he could speak the language of forests —  
and nothing. No wishes. No phoenixes.

No rubbing his hands on his wife's back.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 7/4

### Closing the Cabin

Each year, he would close the summer cabin —  
when would be the last time he would process  
the procedure for laying it to rest? For soon, he knew,  
would be his last — his last reflection on surface of lake,  
a final tip of oar leaving water —  
he would tug the lumbering canoe up shore,  
flip it over, rub off moss, and sunbake it for wintering.  
He could feel the last days coming —  
the last fling at the cabin —  
he did not fear it, just wondered at it,  
as though studying a butterfly up close  
to see through its waxy wings.

When would be the last scent of pine; the knock  
of woodpecker; a last kingfishers snaring trout,  
lifting it in rainbow molecules of water droplets?  
What would the next life be like?

Or would he have summers still? Would he witness?  
Would it be true? Would it be elusive or effervescent?  
Would it resonate?  
Would he attest to the stillness, the immensity  
and intensity of silence? There were sounds  
so ingrained, he would hear them even in the next world.  
Would there be more?

He had been able to, at last, hear the pine needles  
singing in stilled wind. Would it be the last thing?  
Or would there be more? Was there more? Was this it?  
Would the latch on the screen be it; or, the repair of a screen?  
Would it be the ice chest draining water? Would the world  
continue to sigh? He looked at the roof tile —  
how it gathered leaves, desperately, not letting go.  
But unlike everything in this busy world, he was ready to let go.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 7/4

He boarded the window from the crows,  
sank his toes into the gravel,  
held each image like pictures he never took  
and always promised he would — and if he had,  
would he have put them in a photograph album?  
Who would turn the page asking what that was?  
Mostly, would he remember?

Already the epileptic moon stumbled across the night —  
things moved too quickly; what remained of his life  
had already been. and was in the process of going —  
what did he have for it?

A maple leaf scooted across hard ground,  
making a scraping sound, taking the quiet with it.  
He checked the scene one last time, just one more —  
then opened his car door, a dome light going on,  
his hand inside the light, while the rest of his body  
was still entering into the car with a curling motion  
of settling behind the steering wheel. It was late  
to be leaving — regret held him back —  
clouds were pulling through empty fall branches  
looking too much like his dead wife's hair.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 7/4

### Empath

*Empath: takes on other people's feelings of pain or pleasure, actually feeling the emotions of others. An empathy healer knows symptoms and cause of an ailment.*

This body of transfers, of connections  
to the ailments, cannot store any more  
emotional traumas or it might fragment  
into pumice. I cannot go into public places  
without picking up residual pain,  
or get it from touching doorknobs,  
or leeching from the talk of funeral arrangements.  
Is anyone not sick today? Now I emulate scoliosis,  
now tuberculosis, now sickle cell,  
now bad vibes from the couple about to argue.  
Why do I have to be so sensitive?  
What is unique about me that draws out suffering  
into me, stockpiling negative emotions,  
doubling over sometimes, sometimes moon-like.

Yes — I can tell what is wrong with you.  
I can also tell who is about to have a nervous breakdown;  
who is about to slap a child; who is overcome  
by cash register opening like shark jaws,

I could diagnose if I knew anatomy and physiology.