

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/2

Robert Joe Stout

The Retiree Remembers College Debates

"Debates continued outside class...bizarrely intensifying under the influence of good smoke." —D. E. Lee "Swampman"

that given his age and all that had happened since
now seemed superficial. Superficial but enriching
those ex-G.I.s in Mexico on whim. Siemanowski
and Kruse from Chicago, the Lithuanian
from Detroit, Okanishi from L.A. Arm wrestling
in the Balalaika, shooting hoops at midnight,
that jerk of a dean who couldn't teach
and was kicked upstairs, Sunday morning
breakfasting with whores. Laughter,
always laughter—sometimes feigned,
often forced: wall crucifix hung upside down
so Christ could peer up Bardot's skirt; La Virgen
with a serpent curling towards her crotch.
Braving teargas to support the Polytechnic strike.
Long hair, beards, Hawaiian shirts:
("Who the hell am I?" "A bucket filled with shit!"
"Fuck you, you jerk!") They laughed.
They had to laugh. Be more than dogtags.
Dropouts. Faceless others hanging out in class.

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/2

After Dreaming That She and I Still Were Married

The man outside my window peers at me
perplexed, the left side of his face
a blur of greenstroke as I peer back
aware that he is my reflection
imposed by sunlight against a mango tree
that obscures my view of withered hills.

Like empty nodes where fruit once hung...
the fragment of a mouth that I can see
imposes words ...*we live what was, not who*
we are... and scowls my frown into rebuke
for sitting here, alone, shadowed
from unveiling sun, her voice not his
on the accusing breeze.

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/2

Leaders Are Made Not Born

"Arizmendi...se arrepintió haberla distinguido como presidenta honoraria de la Liga." — Gabriela Cano *Se Llamaba Elena Arizmendi*

Anchored in a *Who She Was*
not who they wanted
her to be
the loyal followers
of brilliance, fame, slid away
insisting they, not she,
dictate the path
that all should follow
faithfully. Then turning back,
their new selves gained,
lost *Who They Were*
to *Who They Were Supposed To Be*:

strangers whittling hands
and thoughts
to fit a mold
they barely
could conceive.

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/2

Cap'n "Dog Hole" Jensen Explains Why Scandinavians Make Good Seamen

"Norskes? Square Heads? Drunken tars?
Call us what you want. It's a job.
Work. What we do. Truth is, I'm two-thirds
fish, the other third a son-of-a-bitch.
I never met a sailor I couldn't throw
ass-over-teakettle into the wind. Knock
buildings down using my head
as a battering ram. Blindfolded, hands
tied behind my back, I find my way
into any cove from Pender Island to Mexico.
Kanaga, ever heard of it? A frozen rock.
Wind so fierce it hurled a whale forty miles
past Nunivak. Lived there two months
--blown overboard. Wrestled polar bears.
ate walrus fat. Swam eight miles to a passing
salmon boat then worked sixty hours straight.
Biggest damn haul they ever made!"

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/2

Equinox

Like music fading past
what one can hear yet
somehow audible to memory
night recedes into itself
leaving one to hover
bodiless between the *is*

and stars so far away
the light one sees
began before one's birth:
flicks of essence
given form as feckless
as one's dreams.