

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/2

*Steve De France*

### **High Drifting Alarm**

The train sways unsteadily and  
rolls over yet another high-stilted trestle.  
Couplings clang, whistles blow as  
my nervous stomach does a swan dive  
splashing into a silver string of boiling water.  
a mile or so below.

Out my iron-windowed compartment  
Northern landscape. Trees & water.  
Water everywhere.  
Not like the desert of L.A. at all.  
Not like the harbor freeway.  
Not full of frightened eyes rushing from work.  
No, just trees. So many trees I feel dwarfed,  
drowning in these encroaching trees.

Above the trees, hunched clouds  
full of rain scrape their sexual bellies  
across the green canopy of treetops.  
Then  
a patch of sunlight. A sudden furrowed  
field---a man in coveralls, a jaunty  
straw hat & a bright orange  
bandanna tied round his neck,  
as he sits on a yellow tractor.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/2

Wiping his brow, he stops to watch the  
train. We see each other. He tips his  
hat, By reflex, I open my hand in salute.  
We connect.

We watch each other out of sight  
until he's just a distant color  
pressed into the impression of a landscape.

And in this moment, I wish to be him.

To fade away, fade faraway  
atop his tractor, plowing  
this field. I need to take up his life.  
Snake-like I want to shuffle  
off my dead skin, leave my dry life,

and discard my city dirt.

I could see in his eyes  
or maybe I imagined it--he wished

he was the haunted one---sitting on the  
train--unshaved & speeding South.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/2

Watching his dot of color  
fade & disappear, I think of  
the many people staring  
right now at someone else,  
wishing it were possible  
to become them.

Needing---

needing to leave everything--all of it  
behind. To just check out.

To go forever missing---

to give up on the harshness

give up on the pain

give up on the incertitude of breath

give up on the fear of eternal night

give up on a world grinding off its own flesh.

Yes and again yes. . .

To live a new life as someone else,

someone without these damn darkling thoughts.

Unexpectedly, the train whistle

shrills-----calling me back to myself

from far across Seattle Sound

and my train rushes forward---windows

on fire with the reflected sun.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/2

### Fog

Fog rolls over a seaweed mottled beach,  
swirls across a busy Ocean Boulevard  
and gathers at the San Francisco Zoo.  
There it settles in ethereal shrouds on  
animal exhibits & making mystic  
the evergreen trees.

Caged flamingos with legs too delicate  
to survive this world--- stand etched  
in the mist like plastic sentinels surrounded  
by Styrofoam shards. Depthless flamingo eyes  
follow as a flurry of shrieking kids flush me  
toward another more obscure path.

Monkey Island.

I was here once as a student.

I think I was in love.

But time has changed all.

The Island's gone now & love savaged,  
so to---its rock-to-ground-to-tree inhabitants.

Today Monkey Island is a grubby caged pit occupied by two decrepit  
chimpanzees,  
a shambling shaggy gray---the other a black & white with a prosthetic leg.

I speculate on these two veterans.

Were they part of the original  
island population?

Gothic Punks from The City,  
pierced & tattooed---shout & throw  
peanuts at the cage. The chimps  
tilt bored glances at them.

I consider time and destruction.

The chimps eye me---strangely.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/2

I, too, have grown older---  
do they recognized me? We stare at  
each other--- looking for answers  
or maybe new questions.

The temperature dips as a Northern wind  
rolls a second screen of fog across  
a wrinkled slate-colored sea toward  
the ruins of what was once Monkey Island.  
Soon the three of us are bound together.  
Blinded inside our memories  
by time, and now by this enveloping fog.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/2

### Should I Simply Say

The deceiver, deceived.  
The lie a web, catching the liar.

I want to believe this.

But shit, I don't believe much today.  
In purple splintered sunset, I walk this beach.  
And wonder if I should call a girl friend; tell her  
I'm sleeping in public toilets,  
next to the ocean, where derelicts roam.

Would she believe  
I didn't know a touch  
would blind me like Oedipus.  
Or a breath would condemn me like the Greek to wander alone.  
And that the desert would be in my head?

When all the time, I only wanted  
the taste of her mouth,  
needed the smell of her body.

But her eyes so bright  
blinded me. And she cried,  
"Love's hurting me.  
Too much pain."  
And then,  
the wind stirred, the curtain fluttered,  
and the moon shone on her breasts.  
Naked  
she walked across my empty room.  
Somewhere a door closed.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/2

Or should I say,  
sometimes, before sleep,  
I lie still trying  
to see her face.  
Feel her warmth.  
Taste.

As outside on the street,  
a car door slams.  
A woman laughs, then shrieks.

And later, as the street grows quiet again,  
the night settles in and curls into my room  
like a street cat.

Strange. As I write this  
I can't remember

what her face looks like.  
There are no images now.  
Nothing's left.

I find no rest in any thoughts.  
My ideas still skip and try to  
dodge the truth of her.

I never knew her angers,  
she didn't know them either.  
And when we were together,  
she couldn't tell me.  
I regret that.

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/2

Where is she now?  
Who is the new man?  
Does she lie down in quiet nights  
to sleep next to this man?

Does she put her leg between his,  
and bury her face in his chest?  
And then, just as she tries to let go  
and really love someone,  
will she be unable to remember  
his name?  
Won't be able to recall it?  
Or recollect just how to say it?

Just can't.  
Just won't.

And as she turns her head away  
on the cold pillow,  
the man next to her won't matter.

Not at all.  
Or  
should I simply say  
the moon shone on her breasts?