

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/3

*Dennis Herrell*  
**Family Tableau**

It was our version  
of the childhood game of statues  
where we were spun away  
and had to freeze in time our pose  
no matter how awkward and unnatural -

me stuck with drink in hand,  
mouth open and eyebrows raised,  
Martha bent over the coffee table,  
putting out her cigarette,  
and grandma with her bewildered look,

while our perfect daughter Debbie,  
sixteen, hands on hips,  
defiant and yet fearful  
with a quiver to her chin,  
told us her news of a new addition to the family.

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### Only People

God doesn't litter:  
no old lawn chairs,  
no plastic bags strangling turtles  
or defiling green shrubbery,  
no oil waste polluting creeks  
or coating blue herons,  
no soda cans,  
no candy wrappers,  
no cigarette butts flipped from car windows.

If a tree falls after lightning strikes,  
it decays back to the earth;  
plants complete their life cycle  
and become nutrients for new growth;  
bacteria plankton fish  
reptiles mammals insects  
decompose  
into their basic useful matter,  
and the world is beautiful.

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### The Crossing

He did not shout  
at the old lady so slowly  
so slowly  
crossing the street so that red turned  
to green  
and red again as fingers gripped the wheel  
and he did not wish her well  
did not think have a good day  
but he secretly hoped that something  
might happen  
from some other car's angry  
growling rush  
so he finally gave one  
just one

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### The Lotus-Eaters

If all you want is simple pleasure  
without thought,  
long drinks of spirits until the jugs are empty  
but more available at the convenience store,  
where easy convenience is the theme  
and nothing more;

if all you want are fleshy moments  
without thought of anything more  
than steaming dishes of beef, cuts  
of bottom round, mounds of sweet delight,  
your long legs of young lamb,  
and everything very saucy;

if all you want is simple music  
without thought, a way to wander  
deaf to anything  
other than programmed sound,  
and you avoid History and PBS  
to watch some canned reality show;

if all you want are predigested views  
without tiresome thinking on your part,  
nodding your medicated head  
in time to the cadence of marching  
bands of politicians and quacks  
promising the one and only truth;

then you and your brethren bilk  
must round up the poets  
and drown them one by one,  
until their legend mouths  
fill with water  
instead of words.