

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/3

*John McKernan*

### THE GREAT DEBATE

Adam just finished barbecuing the last filet of serpent and spread the smoking pieces in semicircles on a large white leaf

"Uggh" groaned Lilith "This smells just like the inside of a dead toad What else is there to eat?"

"Pretty scrumptious but the water moccasin has more vitamins" said Abel

"I love it" Adam said "Tastes just like vulture jerky"

"I prefer the Rat Tartare with chives When can we have that Dad?"

Eve touched two fingers to her lips and whispered "Would anyone like some applesauce?"

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**THE MAN OUTSIDE THE SENIOR CENTER  
IN NEW SMYRNA BEACH FLORIDA**

Showed me a photo  
Of his wife's grave

Showed me photos of her  
And photos of her pets  
And her Tennessee Driver's License

Asked me  
If I knew of a book  
He could read  
That would stop his grief

He would wait  
At least a minute  
After every sentence  
To begin speaking again  
As if he'd just run a mile

He was young  
30 or 35  
I wanted to tell him  
About writing a letter  
Describing the contours of silence  
But I didn't say a word

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**I GROW SMALLER**

The longer

I stare

At the distance

Between my skull

And Ursa Major

Some photographs

4 inches by 4 inches

Contain the space

Of a trillion light years

If I saw myself

In a baby crib today

I'd go over and take his bottle away

Make him cry

Help him get ready for tomorrow

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**I WOULD PREFER TO SPEND MY LIFE**

As a leaf

As an acorn

As bark

As a branch

Food for the termites

Ladder

Stairway

Gallows

Cross

Nothing glorious

Or glamorous

Or vicious

Or terrifying

Or expensive

And I will never

Have to listen

To a sheriff

Lean on my car door

And whisper

Get out of this town    Toothpick    Quick

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**A MAN**

Was run over  
By his own old-fashioned wrist watch

Second hand  
Through his right eye  
Hour hand piercing a lung

Numbers  
Tattooed  
Over every inch  
Of his body

His skull  
Cracked twice  
To let daylight pour in & out  
So the dark hours  
Could drip back into their mother The Earth

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**HOMAGE TO A STOLEN BRASS SUNDIAL**

I prefer rainy days  
I prefer the thick cloud at noon  
I prefer morning fog  
I prefer trees with plenty of leaves  
I enjoy the shadow of a butterfly on the feathers of a hawk  
I prefer sacred objects in black velvet during Lent  
I prefer the sound of drapes being opened  
I prefer large hats not beanies  
I prefer lids that do not fit  
I prefer shadows smashed hard by a steam roller  
I prefer a trout stream to a solar panel  
I prefer a valley rather than a mountain top  
I prefer the peak of the roof instead of the window  
I prefer the wig over any razor blade  
I prefer that groundskeepers who spit on my grave mark it *Off Limits*  
I prefer that they always roll back the stone  
When they set fire to my shroud let it be a smoke signal  
Let it rise skyward in the form of a question mark

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**PRINCESS ORGASM**

Likes

Hit & run accidents

Likes to leave

The soul dazed & chilled

Beside the road

Likes the arrangement

Of road kill

In moonlight

Soul Deer Fox Chipmunk

You should see her at sunrise

Gunning her semi to 60

Waving at every church steeple

Always changing the radio channel

To find the hardest longest beat