

## Wilderness House Literary Review 10/3

*James B. Nicola*

### **Glasnost Brown & Rubricon**

Free Spirit fled from Soviet Ukraine  
tired of having to look over his shoulder for a thousand years  
(except for that one vacation per year way out in the woods  
with a single Soul Mate, maybe two).

They'd killed his best friend Andreyev in the fall of '72  
'cause Uri the rat had come along that summer. So

when Glasnost rose and loosed he led the first wave of pioneers  
to the new Little Russia in Sheepshead Bay, USA  
the Home of the Brave.

He landed a post at Brown eventually  
because back home he had been some physicist.

When a few years later the date-rape case came around at Brown  
where that youth was proven innocent after all  
but railroaded off campus by some  
who would not admit they were wrong and apologize  
and the poor kid transferred to an innocuous campus to the north  
Free Spirit did, too.

Shame on Brown, he thought. He thought a lot.

When, at his new small town to the north,  
he overheard a klatch—a coven—  
dissing a married “friend,” now pregnant with twins,  
for deciding to stay home with her children after graduation  
instead of pursuing a brilliant career (she was  
an English major, anyway—what career,  
she thought—she thought a lot)  
and he heard one of the Sisters sneer,  
“If all you came for was your MRS degree  
then you're nothin' —nothin'!” and another, “You you you

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are setting women back a hundred years, you c\_nt,"  
he bristled and walked right over, but could not speak,  
not right then. Still, he eyed them all for eight seconds,  
humiliated them with his shocked silent compassion,  
and rescued the expecting one from the dark spell of Free Speech.

Then he went home, reread some Emerson,  
and wrote a letter to the college paper  
on Bully Culture and Coercion and the failings of Feminism  
(championing Feminism while documenting Her failings)  
but made the mistake of signing the letter—on purpose,  
requesting in the postscript that his name be withheld.

Then ten months later not a single faculty member  
came to the defense of the physicist with the off-putting accent.  
After all, what was a physicist getting involved  
in a sociology question for? they thought.  
Not one defended his Free Speech, which of course had an accent.  
But Free Spirit thought a lot.

Then he gathered his wife to his breast with kisses,  
and, nearly choking on the free flow of saliva and emotion,  
told his 9-year-old son Andreyev,  
"If  
you  
want to find  
someplace in the world that's  
free,  
study hard and exercise every day,  
so that when you grow up you can become  
an astronaut,"

then loaded his revolver  
proceeded to the school paper's office

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put the barrel in his mouth  
and pulled the trigger.

The safety was on. Thank goodness. But no one stopped him  
when he adjusted the thing and fired again.

The blood flowed free as a spirit  
all over my desk, a chair and the floor  
and then congealed, in a radical, left-bank way  
into a swirl of post-post-modern art.

After the police were finished and the ambulance took the body,  
the editor who had published his name had to mop up the mess himself  
because the custodian had said, "That's not in my job description, Bub"

but not before I snapped a photo  
of the bloody design, lucent as ice  
and strangely becoming as any true Free Spirit.  
Besides, I knew him, so—

Next day, the college paper began  
printing in color.  
The headline, like the photo, came out red.

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Sometimes I still see the blood, as if  
it were stained on my retinas or something.  
There was a lot of blood  
and it flowed free as a spirit  
from Soviet Ukraine.  
I knew him, you see.  
He'd laugh from time to time  
deep, from the belly,  
with his face all contorted in joy  
as if he trusted me  
like a soul mate on a lake  
some summer vacation from years ago  
remembered, cherished, shared,  
lost.

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### White Wicker

The angels of white wicker have come back.  
They blow white wicker horns. Their sound: white wicker.  
I see their harmonies as crowds bump graciously  
and dads lift tots on shoulders and rotund  
police keep crosswalks safe with turnpike-ribbons.  
And underneath the giant fir with variegated  
freckles (which will turn to lights as night  
descends, keeping the dark from affrighting us so)

skaters unbreath me with their miracles  
of leaps and spins, and I, who've purchased nothing,  
am reminded once again of the sound of snow angels  
heard not through the ears, but possibly the pores,  
to warm an inner inglenook, heartside,  
with a child's raw eyes and ears supplanting mine.

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### The Statistician

He hewed through soggy sedge along a strand  
where some developer had thought to place  
a hotel and resort. He had been hired  
only to confirm—along with mouthpiece men  
who laid out sketches, smart projections,  
and artists' renderings, and hued and cried,  
Reclaim the beach!—that money should be made  
supplanting Wasteland with Prosperity.

As Consistency was a hobgoblin  
Statistics was a saber—or the scythe  
he brandished to impersonate a Reaper  
and be deferred to, claiming the sharpness of  
an Expert. But it wasn't grain he mowed,  
in season, for a harvest; nor was he  
collecting souls whose date of shrift was due—  
though he claimed to be sort of doing both  
and swaggered in apocalyptic moment.

What he knew, but did not report, was this:  
the bulrushes, so tagged Unusable,  
kept firm the shore and held the sea in place.

Now only Statistics proves how well  
the Statistician lied. Even the hotel  
is overgrown and frequented by fish.