

## Wilderness House Literary Review 19/1

*Russell Rowland*  
**Our Tree-Hugger**

Angela was a noted hugger of trees.

Houseplants are believed to respond to solicitude,  
but trees are impassive. We must dig  
deeply to find the ties that bind lives like theirs.

Roots would be channels—  
in dense woods they intertwine. A common cup  
refreshes them.

Trees lift their branches skyward  
together, in praise of the fast friendship of rain,

the wind's winnowing.  
Maybe they are too much into old age to notice  
an ephemeral like Angela—

the warmth of her arms would have meant little  
to those thick skins.

Yet I've heard her lips moved  
while hugging, perhaps in answer to an answer.  
She came down the hill smiling,

as if certain knots in the rings had untied for her.

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### Paying Respects

When I pass the Whitten graveyard  
in woods that took their pasture back from them,

I look to see if that little flag remains in place.

Sally's husband came home from a Confederate  
prison camp in a long box.

Our local Daughters of the American Revolution  
provided the flag, which I check  
in passing, aware the wind could make a kite of it.

I enter the little plot without  
superstitious dread; pick up fallen branches there.

If I felt the soldier still had soul enough to hear,

I'd thank him for giving life to save the Union,  
and make it a point to walk away

before he could inquire if he had died in vain.

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### Ghost Pipes

Lately, rain has driven the sun  
right out of the sky. While we weather it  
  
indoors, in dim wet places  
little forms emerge that don't like it bright,  
  
or dry. No green about them:  
chlorophyl finds no place in their pallor.  
  
We call them ghosts—  
we who see specters in the gentlest dark;  
  
who set up rationales  
in hopes of sparing ourselves all that,  
  
instead of living in the time  
allotted us by the weather that we get.