

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/1

Alan Elyshevitz
Pressure

Weather bears down, applying pressure
to the rotting eaves, the buttresses,
the interrogator on a cigarette break
who will never call himself villain
despite the number of knuckles he earns
or the gimmickry of mourning doves.

When pressured the chronicler reveals
that all his sources have holy names.
A short time later a catalogue of relics
is seized from a sexton with blood
in his mouth. "To sing" is a colloquial
infinitive for the act of confession.

When the heart sings its pressure generates
disparate effects: the color of capillaries,
a pulse in the throat. Under pressure
an organ engenders a choir in its pipes,
a chorale for the fact checkers of the world,
a hymn to their bloody gums and teeth.

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Independence Day

She is familiar
to me, the unmarried woman
in a patio chair, a soda can raised
for a cell phone camera.
To cultivate her, I've enlarged
my kitchen and dismembered her ash trees.

She, I, everyone here
is encased in summer.
A sound like cowbells dangles
from my neighbors' voices.
When their children run,
their fingerprints seem to glow.

This evening we are grilling,
but smoke lags behind our appetites.
Someone subdues a child's hand,
reaching.
The hostess sprays ideology
all over the patio.

Newcomers eat, talk, sputter
like citronella flames.
The woman I've been watching
takes these strangers at face value
in order to take them
at all.

Tragically pruned, the ash trees
appear to admonish me
with their lofty reserve.

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Corners

The entire globe is said to have corners.
And rooms. And city streets. Yes,
I grew up in a corner house. Everything

passed beneath my bedroom window,
from the brown girl selling sugar-
cane to the old lothario's repartee.

I had ambitions then, for example, to master
the dazzling art of sideburns. And I have
them now. Periodontal health, for one.

Here's what I learned in college:
When cornered, sorority sisters
shave their thin blue veins.

In my corner office, I displace a cloud of cologne
shaped like a human being. We are paperless
here, and as stylish as autism or jicama.

At work I try to behave in a well-
rounded manner, cutting corners
to reduce the magnitude of numbers.

In the corners of my garage, I store
an assortment of paraphernalia:
my tripod, my raincoat, wines

of a disingenuous vintage,
my pornographic fluency,
my rhetorical flourishes.

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When cornered, some women calm
themselves with heavy rhythmic
breathing. This tends to occur

when I recant or dissemble,
when I forfeit a lover.

When cornered, liars lie.

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Hands

For weeks on end, a child's
hands will supplement the feet,

so a mother lends a hand
in lukewarm bathwater.

A pink washcloth and soap
bubbles on a little chin are

manifestations of her handiwork.
The bathtub breathes; the child's

handpicked toys form a logjam
around the sucking drain.

Now she is singing with child
aloft, bewildered, in dripping hands.

Absent from this scene,
a father's idle hands slacken

and slip from a wheel into suicide.
It is out of our hands, that highway

engineered to curl up in the lap
of treacherous mountains.

All men are designed to be thumbs
on the invisible hand of history.

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Akhmatova #12

All the rookies admire him: the Slav
With the boney knuckles, the heavy
Foot. His photogenic arms make
The maple trees expectorate. Crafty,
He can send love down the coal chute
Or send love out for cigarettes
In the middle of a stormy night.

What can Anna do but wait in a bath
Of petals for his ulterior humor?
Revolting. He has nothing to offer
But luscious and sinister debts.
Every night he comes home late
With his archetypical eyes and
A tusk in the very center of his face.