

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/4

John Flynn

Anna Berenson

Count her among the complete

Forever brittle
surviving
three husbands
her city destroyed,
killing as a teenager
countless Nazis per day.

Her shrill tongue
Zalman, where's moy Zalman?
may complain about American bread
but will never complain about her cancer
nor understate
the human penchant for cruelty.

Okay, she says
Uncle Sam's monthly check
lice-free follicles, running water
and a heated room to die in.
America is great place.

Okay, she says
now look closely enough
see how well those Soviet doctors
concealed her shrapnel wounds.
Russia good place, too.

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/4

Zalman Berenson At Institute Park

In Worcester's oldest public park, oldest in the United States
Zalman Berenson sits alone eating the dry toast
wife Anna has wrapped in a napkin for him.
He needs this fresh air, even if it's chilly.

He pushes crumbs off his lap to feed gathering pigeons.
He thinks about Anna and how young they were
and how hopeful until the juggernauts of idealism collided.
Now the Cold War is over. What did it prove?

He knew Levine, loved him like a brother.
Misses him. They took Levine away
like so much of his family on one of those trains.
Goodbye Levine, your bones fertilize poppies in Siberia.

Had a kopeck once as a boy in Odessa,
seemed at the time like all the money in the world
wouldn't give it up as he hid from bombs
in those dark tunnels like arks in Odessa's belly.

Under avenues named after Lenin and Marx
where he was never really a child,
not like these noisy children he watches
with a ball playing a game he doesn't understand.

How he worshipped once his Kalashnikov.
He how he worships still the smell of bread on his hands
even when it rapes his dreams.
Oh those children, such pure bright miles in their eyes.

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/4

Trophy Wife In The Land Of Milk & Honey

Eloquence

Mama will this ever really be my country?

in her skeptical regard

of sloping pink promises

from women costumed like men.

And these men, too, grooming lies so politely.

She curls her feet on the sofa,

rain streaking the windows.

Dear Mama, I miss you.

It seems everyone is much too busy

wanting snacks, ignoring the trees.

Yesterday, the ocean smelled like fried foods.

Nearly impossible to live without debt.

Everyone works so hard. And the children

rather plump and moody.

Mama, I miss the smiles of innocent children.

The rush from screen to screen,

driveway to car to parking lot.

Few walking anywhere

and few who converse spontaneously

without fear of violence.

I miss the safe chaos of the open market,

the smell of strawberries and tomatoes.

There are cowboys on television.

She may send money soon

and the future still offers honest gains,

more wealth and security

than what she could have found back home.

None of my friends were actually born here.

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/4

Poverty and revolution are studied at universities.

Many expect, even demand their future.

Few have seen a war destroy their illusions.

She pities those who came without special talents
without English or family already here.

Mama, where is the country I imagined?

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/4

The Horse's Head

Balți is quiet this warm afternoon in May, 2007
city residents having left to seed
their gardens at Grandma's in a village.
Times can't be all bad.
Shouting boys kick a soccer ball.
A young mother pushes a German-made stroller.
So many more children now.
Twenty years back the maternity ward was empty.
There's a pair of hog's heads at the neighborhood butcher
to counter anorexia's entry into the lexicon.
Like telemarketing and insipid advertising, it's a headache
imported with allegations of prosperity.
Gone is the horse's head like a giant chess piece
that for so long acted as symbol
of a city celebrating its 585th anniversary.
At least the paper Argument and Fact is still around.
I'm searching for the grizzled men with medals
who play dominos and chess in the park all day
arguing Marx versus Lenin versus Stalin,
their granddaughters rather stout now
with children of their own
still apt to complain to each other
about sovetstva vlast and how things really are.
About the way, what was, what might have been.
New Fed Ex sign at the post office.
Billboard that reads Mai mult, meaning much more.
The young have caught on,
with capitalism enough is never enough.
Still the memorials remain
for those who died in World War II.
Like bed sheets on lines between tenement sills,
or feral cats prowling garbage piles,
certain facts do not easily expire.