

LEWIS TURCO

The Trading Post

The Western Reserve, 19th Century

Out of the weather, in the first room,
there are knives, blades lying on shelves.
The glinting lamplight slices shallow.

The river passing over the stones of the valley
does not quench with its voices
the flame on the hearth nor the dark fire
of the beads looping the pegs of the wall.

Beyond the logs of the building and its fire
are the boles of the forest bearing firs,
leaves and needles green and sere,
drinking the sun or the sounds of footfall,
light and leather.

In the second room there is a pallet
of pelts and sticks; a musket
lies beside it, its iron rusting.

The air is drowsy with musk and leather —
the animals lie flat or curl in bales
as though listening to the river, or the fire
among the beads and knives,
steel jaws and powder horns.

But the forest lies waking
beyond this frame of logs hewn
in the clearing against the river.
The animals wake listening
for fire and knives and the dark weather.