

PAUL Z. PANISH

Pines—Fort Lee, Virginia

He tapped my shoulder below the rifle strap
and pointed ahead and up to the right:

“That hill—

Y’see them pines?”

Past the runnel of sweat
tracing the grimy concave of his cheek
from helmet strap to lip, the single hill
guarded our line of mud, our daily march.

“Y’know what them trees mean?”

I knew that grove
high in the upland saddle, a perfect square
of swaying green holding against the swarm
of darker woods and shapeless, nameless brush.
Especially in winter, when the snow
peered through sickly, brown stubble, that stand
was a vast square banner of living green.

“I know what it means,” I laughed. “The flag of life
leading us home to a dream of no-more-boots.”

He pushed his helmet back where a bit of his hair—
that blond silk, like baby hair—was pasted
flat to his skin; he turned away to spit,
then pointed up to the hill again.

“Them trees
is where your gaddam Yankee soldiers burned

some Southern farm to the ground.”

Southern pine,
fire-pine they call it, because the seeds
are hatched by fire: A cannoner’s match,
a square of flame; then, for a hundred years,
that cool grove; and ever green, that rage.

Paul Z. Panish’s poetry has been published in literary journals including *Signal*, *Bluestone*, and *The Formalist*. His short opera libretto, *Marry Up, Marry Down*, was performed by the Opera Theatre Unlimited (48-Hour Opera Festival) in 2017. His translation of Euripides’ *Medea* was performed at Columbia University in 1965. He has taught courses in classical Chinese poetry in translation (University of California, Berkeley) and was a high school and community college instructor of German and Latin poetry and prose.