

*Everything  
Reminds  
You of  
Something  
Else*

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ELANA WOLFF



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Michael Mirolla, editor

David Moratto, cover and interior design

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*For Menachem*




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“Your anxiety ... I see in it a lack of necessary faith.”

—Franz Kafka, *The Trial*



“Everything resembled something else.

Everything was connected to something else.”

—Roberto Calasso, *Ka*



“And the one who lives in secret / abides in the shade.”

—A. F. Moritz, *Sequence*

## Jerusalem Day

First commandment: drown and all is water.

They pull me from the lake ~

fish-slippery ~ grappling at the raft.

White jelly-legs, amphibian feet.

Tongue as slow as Moses'. Cold. We laugh

but I am gasping, clothed & drawn from water.

I'm the pike who swallowed the frog, the frog

who died for science. I'm the guy so wise

he had his uterus removed; the maid who climbed

inside it, mute as math. I'm the child—the copula

to be / betwixt / the link. *Anyhow*

life gets into our lungs. It's trust that has to bristle up.



## The Bower

The village has a pond,  
 it has a bower.  
 The pond is broad and shallow,  
 the bower small and lower—

hidden in the valley  
 from traffic in the street.  
 Its face as firm as faith,  
 its back an even sheath—

from equinox to equinox.  
 This is when it draws  
 you down and when  
 the bond is strongest.

The pond is there for those  
 who want the mirroring  
 of water: world & self  
 reflected back in image.

The bower is a cover  
 for a secrecy that deepens.  
 Lie beneath the over-  
 lapping boughs

and climbing vines.  
 To form you are a supine  
 mind: to mind  
 you are idea.

A bird is picking glitter  
 from a twig above your head.  
 You used to do that as a child: pick twigs  
 and glitter, hide your little treasures

in a box. The box was found,  
the top removed; they'd outlived  
their objective. Glitter  
and the twigs retain their mystery.

The village has a pond,  
it has a bower.

## The Tower

At first there was the brain-grey plane.

Warmth arose

as cover. Context dawned elliptically and swiftly: tower,

town:

the intersect of upright/horizontal, portrait/

ground.

Light replaced the anvil with a silver wingtip-touch,  
a fluency of flutes.

Outwardly, I'm drawn toward the swath of corn-pone gold.  
Here there could be anything—

all the mirth of rose un-

folding mauve

in perfect birth.

Inwardly, I'm focused on the sliver—

gun-grey blue:

the tower, and the old familiar sequence it reflects:

reach and freeze,

block and dodge.

Fey and fade away.

The soul slips into the hidden oubliette.

## The Bestiary

Long before speech was achieved, the elephant held memory.

The dog embodied the sad devout,  
the mouse—the dutiful doubtful.

Conjugal life produced the spider-and-fly.

Celibacy—the leopard.

The lion was always mighty but the cat could be capricious. S/he chose,  
therefore, to be the force for history as poetry.

From poetry we learn to be the pupil of the other.

Amongst *The Bestiary* beasts, cats are fabled most for being seers.

## Vole

Sky is rising, ground is stiff—  
 resistant—and the night a die.

I've reached a ring on the cedar: one old  
 wound I have to work around

& wind in the white syringa  
 throwing voices of the folk.

April flicks its split tongue out > a surcharge  
 and it jars. Wherever there's air,

there's chugging and shunting;  
 breath, the howl between. It's cold,

a vole comes in from it > beat;  
 crawls like a baby, into your boot.

Stays there, safe, till you stick your foot in—  
 it's not a foot to him but a club

that comes so fast it all looks  
 black to the mammal.

—Since you ask, he isn't crushed.  
 We fling him out, alive, to the dust.

Before he scuttles under the brush,  
 I'm sure I hear the gnashing of miniature teeth.

## Grenade

I smell your replica, *sitra achera*, shadow overlording dusk—  
 your favourite time of day. The whole night spread before you,  
 door ajar. I sense my shoulder tightening, from the teres muscle  
 up. Your fruit-fly eyes descending and those digits—canny as  
 bats'. I feel your spin and think of ants and spider-legs on flags.

A word escaped me yesterday. Its image came up vaguely in the  
 painting I was painting and I aimed to put it graphically in black.  
 Instead I shaped a pomegranate ~ shattered. Rudiments of colour,  
 split & spilt. I hit the floor, exasperated—curled up, knees-to-  
 nose; couldn't bring myself to rise for the door-chime;

saw in mind a man outside, standing at the portico, clutching  
 a delivery—my husband's power-pack. I set myself a *quid pro quo*:  
 If I recall that AWOL word, my husband gets his mail. The door-  
 bell chimes eleven times, the mailman is persistent. I stay lying,  
 down like Abel. Dumb in my bright red dress.

## Metamorphoses

Some are born human, most have to humanize slowly.  
 I want to say I'm on my way > at this point: pelican;  
 in time, perhaps: writer. It seems every act of writing  
 is compensation for a shortfall of some sort; that to become  
 a writer one not only has to work hard at the part, but also  
 be a little less than human. Ideas like these weighed heavily  
 on Franz K. much of his truncated life. In fact, under their  
 anvil, he forged one of the few perfect works of poetic  
 imagination of the 20<sup>th</sup> century > according to Elias

Canetti. I don't wish to create the impression my mind  
 is turned wholly toward becoming other. I also peck at my  
 breast and reproach myself for succumbing, now and then,  
 to nihilistic piety. Mostly I've stayed upbeat in dark times—  
 satisfied to fish and fly. If, on occasion, I've felt the pull  
 of despair for having been bequeathed such an insignificant  
 tail, I'm grateful to have been compensated with a large  
 mouth-pouch and useful bill. Also with the vision to see:  
 my feathers moulting, over the open sea.

## The Innocent Spin of Dreaming Real

I fell asleep on my elbow once and woke up  
on a donkey that I rode into a monkey

sitting jauntily on its back. *See me as a rabbit*,  
it said, believing it could speak:

*The great thing is the no thing that is not*,  
it said repeatedly and threw me rudely off.

I think of monkey's rabbit and its 't'  
becomes invisible, which shifts me to a city

with a wall where people come to wail  
and pray and tuck their notes to God

into its broken gaps.  
Once you said you were praying there—

forehead to the olden stone—  
you glanced into a cranny and saw,

a mote or so from your nose, the wide eye  
of a pigeon staring back. The hole in the wall

was big enough for a messenger bird, so scared  
of you, it couldn't muster a single note. Or coo.



## Spool

In the deep field where the spool people's  
old moon sometimes succeeds in moving

bog waters in June—to flow over  
wan weeds and make them gleam, we meet.

Far out—  
like migrant geese on evening's sleeve.

We've lost the notes but not the song,  
which leaves as much on air as it lifts.

Your vaulting voice  
is like the maundering moon in the meadow well—

there echo of December comes to drink.

## Tammuz

We drove by dark in highwayed lights—  
asphalt drawing us on, face-forward,  
hard as hard-wired. Tents of trees, their  
angles struck by glancing diamond-white.  
Our narrow faces pale as newborn mice.  
In the blued cool that fell as sunset  
sank, we stopped talking > of the  
fish dinner, the gallery visit. Hills  
of pinkish dogwood at an inadvertent  
turn. The coast hotel, its hallway smell,  
sheets like gunwales and hulls. The message  
stuck to the Monkey Puzzle: *It's alright to be  
troubled*. The afternoon movie, analogous  
hurt. Dark-descended made us see like chiefs.

## Velocity Text

Flat seas, frozen axe.

The levelling force of vortex.

    Daughter, my laughter >  
faster and faster.

    Stones blossoming,  
        mammalling plants.

The man in my body com-  
posing a poem > his fox-box.

    King bed.

        Velocity text.

Dreams demanding I give up sleep  
that heaves me, harrowed, elsewhere—

Stoat approaching,           also crow, I'm

                                  at the window

slipping into thinness of erasure;

nothing in the foreground

presses back.

## Fractals

She comes to the seaside, air-salts slick  
her skin like kith and kindling.

Runs, and needs to peak.  
If she were an actor, she'd be the star kind—racing  
and blazing away. A condition she can't really call being fit.

It happens that a man in a hot black suit  
and high black hat,  
raises his voice as she passes:  
*Messiah, Messiah, Messiah, ai yai, yai-yai-yai-yai ...*  
A crowd soon gathers, catching the tune,  
dancing like Rorschach and clapping.

How easily she runs, how concentrated. Eyes on the widening shoreline,  
sinews glinting,  
levity, levity ...

Anxious cats and mongrel dogs—  
at first she thinks they're pets.

Then the bigger visions and the voices—grand  
and crashing.

Crumpled tickets, scribblings, clippings—  
things that can't be thrown out now  
because they weren't thrown out before.

Summer done and scuppered.

Down from treetops: leaves, the upper branches bare and airy,  
bottoms—heavy yellow.

All the trunks upright, but one—  
split into recurring curves,  
diagonal across the ground  
and sodden with September.  
Time, we hope, will pardon the view;  
time, as only  
a spiral can.

## *A Panegyric*

The pursuers withdraw to the citadel,  
relieve their arms of upward gesture.

Dusk descends,  
they lower their heads as well.

Kneel and keen for the people.  
Violet skies reflect the forfeit;

wine-yellow moon, a truth.  
They suffer sleep like hellcats

hounded; dream, as part of the penalty,  
they'll not raise arms again.

At daybreak sun is storming orange.  
Three effects, announce the solar seers,

will ravage the planet:  
protons at careening speeds

will seize communications; mass coronal  
plasma crash the electromagnetic

band; radiation inundate the planes.  
To speak of sun, they say, is to embrace

its oscillations. Swaying like their leis,  
they let the limpid vision lift them —

three eyes on the blazing rose,  
three eyes on the binding.

## *About the Author*

Elana Wolff is the author of five solo collections of poems and a collection of essays. She has also co-authored with Malca Litovitz a collection of rengas, co-authored a chapbook with Susie Petersiel Berg, co-edited with Julie Roorda a collection of poems written to poets and the stories that inspired them, and co-translated with Menachem Wolff poems from the Hebrew by Georg Mordechai Langer. Her poetry has been translated into French and her poems and prose have garnered awards. She has taught English for Academic Purposes at York University in Toronto and at The Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She currently divides her professional time between writing, editing, and designing and facilitating social art courses.