Everything Reminds You of Something Else
Everything reminds you of something else

ELANA WOLFF
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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 overlapping 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 devout 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 acher*, 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 doorbell 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 20th 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.
Notes

**Metamorphoses:** In Kafka’s *Other Trial: The Letters to Felice*, Elias Canetti writes that in *The Metamorphosis* Franz Kafka “had written something he would never surpass, because there is nothing that could possibly surpass *The Metamorphosis*, one of the few great and perfect works of poetic imagination written during this century” (Schocken Books, 1974:20).

**Tammuz:** The Hebrew lunar month that corresponds to July. For my mother.

**Grenade:** “*sitna achen*” is Aramaic for the “other side” — the evil inclination in Jewish mystical literature. The word for “grenade” in Hebrew is the same as the word for “pomegranate”: “*rimōn*” — the word that escapes the narrator in the poem.


**Oculus:** For Leah, Judah, and Ami.

**Burnt Bridge:** In Franz Kafka’s short story “The Cares of a Family Man,” “Odradek” is a mysterious star-shaped spool with an inextinguishable creaturely aspect. For Ann and Warren Howard, in whose Writers’ Cottage the poem was drafted.

**Riding to Ronda:** The italicized phrases are from David Young’s translation of Rainer Maria Rilke’s “Sixth Elegy” in *Duino Elegies* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2006:115,117).
Cuy: Guinea pig (pronounced “coo-ee”), a traditional food of Andean people. The line *apprentice to the common law of harm* (italicization mine) is from Lucie Brock-Broido’s poem ”In Owl Weather,” in *Stay, Illusion* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2013:35).

Strand: Ows a debt of gratitude to the poetry of Canadian born, American poet Mark Strand (1934-2014).


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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.