

Transnational Zoo

BOARD OF TRUSEES

Enclosure Act, 1773. Carves up hills. Little boxes made of ticky-tacky to put sheep in. Then, discussion in Parliament over dry stone walls. Then, worry that a fox might slink in, might bring its offspring, might invade rabbit-hutches, denigrate chicken coops, might steal the sheep. One politician cries wolf. The rest abnegate responsibility. They call this consensus. In 1939, the Spanish resistance are abandoned. Some make it through Madrid. Some fall in Barcelona, and a red sun falls over Sète. One evening, a bedraggled troop boards a ship. On the deck, a red-legged partridge alights. Cocks its head, furls its wings, and is gone.

MAMMAL

She is borrowed by coyotes. She lends her nape, her back, her spine, for toughening. She lengthens into a hide, thickening, mirrors the dusk. In the day, she soaks dishrags at the watering hole, stitches each together with cochineal thread, this fishing rod, dips in, and disappears. Then the dye washes out, detaching itself as petals newly fallen, from the bougainvillea up above. What remains, she sells at street corners. Sometimes, she invents to pass the time. Another context. Another name. Sometimes, she wonders, in what language rain falls on tormented cities. Soon, the figs ripen.

PREY

He fell to the wrath of Artemis. She, to the corner at Calzada de Tlalpan. There was a sacrifice that day. On the shore, are washerwomen. They clean the Big House, on tourist visas, renewed each day. To the border, he tracks them, the sea slipping over stones. They say the moon lost her virginity, that night, and the sun shred itself against the rocks. She was dragged. Dragged through Juarez, Zapata, past General Anaya, spread out, finally, at his foot. By Francisco Sosa, she was gutted, her antlers removed, her hide skinned, while he was torn by hairless dogs in Coyoacan square.

ZOO KEEPER

In old manuscripts, small difference there is between *s* and *f*. Take Cotton Nero, for instance, Gawain wandering, a pearl glinting, poised at the brink. And the river rising, the swell-surge into flood. Then, new translations, new transliterations encode distinction. The banks of the Mississippi are hemmed in. Now, a catfish thrusts through jet-quartz. Quicksilver ripples over skin. Its membrane, permeable. A great, rusted hook clenching in. Then, a Council of Elders in Illinois. They reverse the Chicago, this great feat of foreign intervention, now flushing sewage to the gulf of Mexico, massaging children as they swim. Deposited on the shore: oil-spill rainbows, bits of shell.

CAGE

In the Bible, Adam gave each animal its name. By the time Milton got his hands on it, there'd already been a fall, and no words left, uncorrupted. That prefix, 'un', trying to unwrite—negate that first negation now—caught in this cyclical self-erasing, and the English language, with all its twisting, its incorporating—lands, tongues, limbs—can never bridge that distance. Some names remained. Some were lost in mistranslation, or as the scribe's eyes, copying by candle-light, grew dim, or simply were forgotten. Then the rain came, and others washed away. Now, the Authorities turn people into birds. Some nests are burned. Some wings are broken.

Of leaves & lintels &

little things
on indefinite loan. Aztlan
across the border.
New Mexico, now
home to borrowed lives. In Mexico
the lakes are gone,
lava-flow solidifies. Becomes
tezontle-stone, still
shivers in windsometimes.
Ehecatl mostly sleeps
The curators reimagine the gust.
The sky cracked.
People converted into fish. They collect
lost gods. The romantic lies
in excavation. The archeologist
trampled
leaves
into dust. Skeletal vein
crumbling. The professors are professional
necrophiliacs, salivate
over ancient
civilizations, leave empty
coffers. Yaxchilan's
450 lintels
missing, now
framed
in the basement of the British Museum,
where amber holds
the tears of mermaids

[**Maia Elsner**'s recent work has been published, or is forthcoming, in *Colorado Review*, *Willow Springs*, *The Missouri Review*, *The Carolina Quarterly* and *The Ekphrastic Review*]

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