

Ex Libris

By Eleanor Wilner

By the stream, where the ground is soft
and gives, under the slightest pressure—even
the fly would leave its footprint here
and the paw of the shrew the crescent
of its claws like the strokes of a chisel
in clay; where the lightest chill, lighter
than the least rumor of winter, sets the reeds
to a kind of speaking, and a single drop of rain
leaves a crater to catch the first silver
glint of sun when the clouds slide away
from each other like two tired lovers,
and the light returns, pale, though brightened
by the last chapter of late autumn:
copper, rusted oak, gold aspen, and the red
pages of maple, the wind leafing through to the end
the annals of beech, the slim volumes
of birch, the elegant script of the ferns ...

for the birds, it is all
notations for a coda, for the otter
an invitation to the river,
and for the deer—a dream
in which to disappear, light-footed
on the still open book of earth,
adding the marks of their passage,
adding it all in, waiting only
for the first thick flurry of snowflakes
for cover, soft cover that carries
no title, no name.

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Poet, critic, and translator Eleanor Wilner was born in Ohio, and attended Goucher College and

Johns Hopkins University. She was the editor of *The American Poetry Review*, and has taught at many universities, including Smith College and Warren Wilson College. In her poetry, she often writes of myth and memory, with what has been called a “mythical impulse.” She avoids confessional writing, choosing instead to invoke themes of mythology, and reinvigorate them in a modern context, especially with dense historical and contemporary allusions. Her poems reflect her wide-ranging intelligence and her commitment to peace and justice.

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