

## Olivia Kate Cerrone

### A Tenuous Balance

Maria Terrone. *Eye to Eye*. Bordighera Press, 2014.

In *Eye to Eye*, Maria Terrone's most recent collection of poetry, language transcends the boundaries of memory and imagination, offering a more penetrating look into the workings of grief and desire. Time becomes a fluid construct, evoking a sense of constant movement and possibility—one feels as though one can travel anywhere in the realm of her poems. In the opening, "Spaccanapoli," the narrator emerges as a spectator in an ancient section of Naples, absorbed with a rich array of sensations that soon bend into fantasy:

*Ciao! Bella!* Over-ripe vowels  
thicken the air; I'm lost in black eyes, as if tumbling  
through layers of earth and time into a chamber swelled  
by a cult's chant . . .

The image of eyes serves as an alluring motif throughout each of the four sections of this book, questioning the limits of perception and intimacy. In the title poem, eighteenth-century loved ones exchange miniature portraits of a beloved's eye—keepsakes to foster remembrance and desire against distance and loss. Terrone ends this poem with the image of Lazarus, risen and seen, but still apart from the living, harboring knowledge impenetrable through sight alone.

The presence of such distance, compounded by a longing for greater intimacy, is found in many of the poems in this collection. In "The Manicurists," the narrator silently wonders about the private history of her nail technician, who speaks with her co-workers in a tongue not shared with their Western clientele. In "Pastorale," the narrator struggles to penetrate the strange, alienating mystery of her brother, Bob, whose home is surrounded by a collection of armored trucks, revealing a lifelong obsession with the military. In one of the most heartbreaking poems of the collection, "Across the Gulf," the narrator attempts to forge some deeper connection with her father, whose memory has been locked away by Alzheimer's. This unwavering sense of alienation and loss, this failure to see and be seen, also lives in the poet's larger engagement with a violent and politically-charged world. In "Missing the Names," the poet meditates on her failure to know the names of birds and nations as

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people revolt and take aim,  
while impossibly brilliant birds squawk above  
plazas and plains, the bloodied nameless.

The influence of social media is also a recurrent theme throughout Terrone's poetry. In "A Facebook Page in Iran," the narrator, though unable to decipher the Farsi on her friend Mohsen's homepage, still finds his grief, conveyed in "heartbroken English, / a rant that out-roared oceans," inspiring, and she is left hoping that he continues to "post and post again to burn the tyrant's Rulebook." In "The Office," the narrator peruses different web-based technology:

data-min[ing] for meaning,  
believing  
it's there to be found.

Perhaps the most haunting aspect of this collection is the vulnerability felt in the poet's examination of illness and mortality. In "Horsehair," the poet grasps for some higher meaning in the traumatic aftermath of cancer, as she considers the healing power of horsehair thread, used once among wounded Civil War soldiers, and now to soothe scar tissue. Layered in association—images of horses, childhood, scarred flesh, and historical commentary—the architecture of this poem is powerful in its transcendence.

A longing for release, free from mortal concerns and inevitable disappointments, is embodied in the recurrent description of birds, their joyous flight depicted with awe. In "Envyng the Birds," the narrator imagines an avian life, free of "words that ricochet and fall like spent bullets." Yet, it is through her human ancestors that Terrone takes further inspiration. In "Lace," the narrator finds hope and endurance in an ancient Mediterranean tradition, where women produce lace that is as "intricate as brain circuitry." There, the narrator depicts an empowering reminder that:

When the world is like a skein  
unraveling, look again to the lace: see  
how absence forms its pattern,  
and purpose fills even the smallest space.

Rendered with compassion and stark honesty, the poetry of Maria Terrone offers readers a powerful meditation on life. It is a pleasure to read her work and embark on this transformative and exciting journey through a subconscious terrain crafted through language. Like the linen heirlooms passed down through generations

in “The Tatted Handkerchief,” Terrone’s poems “defy expectation, achieve a tenuous balance,” and offer redeeming beauty in the face of sorrow and uncertainty.

Maria Terrone’s essay, “A Facebook Page in Iran” appeared in *Kestrel* 31. —Eds.