“This is of course
a kind of pedagogy
that we can only exercise
upon ourselves,
according to methods
invented for the occasion
and with unpredictable results.”
—Italo Calvino (1988)

“Words—I often imagine this—
are little houses, each
with its cellar and garret.
Common-sense lives
on the ground floor.
...To mount and descend
in the words themselves—
this is a poet’s life.
...Must the philosopher alone
be condemned by his peers
to live on the ground floor?”
—Gaston Bachelard (1964)
if bachelard were in verse II

life begins well.

it begins

enclosed.

protected. all warm in the bosom (of the house.

it is body and soul. it is the human being’s first world.

when being is being-well in the well being originally associated with being.

in its countless alveoli space contains compressed time.

within the being

in the being of within an enveloping warmth welcomes (being reigns in a sort of earthly paradise of matter. and the poet well knows that

the house holds childhood motionless in its arms. here space is everything for time ceases to quicken memory.

in this remote region memory and imagination remain associated.

and even when we are in a new house the memories of other places travel through our bodies. the house we are born in is physically inscribed in us. it is a group of organic habits.
the word  habit  too worn (a word)
to express  this passionate liaison of the body
which does not
forget.
we are never  real historians
but always  near poets.
and our emotion is  perhaps
nothing  but (an expression
of a poetry  that was lost.

Note: As I read Bachelard I was struck by how poetic he is at times. This is a poem where all the lines come from Bachelard (1964, pp. 5-15). All I did was find them and arrange them, and of course intervene stylistically.
By the swiftness of its actions, the imagination separates us from the past as well as from reality; it faces the future. If we cannot imagine we cannot foresee.

—Gaston Bachelard (1964)

Discourse as I find myself engaged in it is a continuous act of improvisation.

—Roy Kiyooka (2005)

Silences are all that remains unconditioned in our lives.

—Roy Kiyooka (2005)

walking back(words) (looking for.words)

the past is a distance to cover. (I keep trying my grandmother

tended silences in her garden like prized plants (of words.

don’t look back she would say. look forward behind her

world war II fires bombs siren bunker rations evacuations.

she could not even finish baking the potatoes run and hide.

was she blinded to the river in me

flowing? questioning? the mutabilities of being (self becoming.

how my father as a child gathered coal on his sled when the coal-trains rattled through his town.

how we carry ourselves across to another with .words. wit .laughter.

these (silences) in between what discourse? are silences

whose discourse?

all that remains unconditioned in our lives?

I have learned to doubt silence.

I can interrogate words— their never ending improvisations.
her silence was to (spare me.

today I am looking ahead (the way she told me).

what do I see? War gathering dark clouds.

what would she say if she were alive?

don’t look forward? look back?

or be quiet and

eat your food while we still have it?

I am putting on paper (what is
already changing in the process under the magnifying glass
of writing.

of the imagination

with my words (building a fire
I have to keep well stoked

for my children to be mesmerized
(taken) moved by a past

I am trying to recover.

Note: “under the magnifying glass of the imagination” is Bachelard’s phrase
Old Hill

If you stand right here at the top of Old Hill
you can hear the wind un-winding a myth
it remembers blade by blade leaf by leaf root by root.
Then the storm that follows whirls us together in the struggling light black feathers
bits of bark
round lyric fruit gathers us around the fire of
a tale: inside its hollow bones the twigs of nests
shards of shells (and broken teeth).

See the lightning inside their quivering blue
souls. The eyes of children wide with
what rumbles in the blood.

Hear the thunder in our starved throats. Borrowed
words and bits of tales swirling in our need—
with chants draw maps of buried bones.

Listen how the years of the old ones (open like flowers)
turn to children let loose in fields of wild words
(where most of us meet for the first time).

Do we remember storms or do we imagine them
at the top of Old Hill?
Contemporary poetry, however, has introduced freedom in the very body of language. As a result, poetry appears as a phenomenon of freedom. —Gaston Bachelard (1964)

**if bachelard were in verse I**

how word phrase image creates. (being

hangs on the tenuous thread of the sentence. the fleeting life of an expression.

by experiencing living re-living the life of the poem

the reader is

the writer’s ghost in the salutary experience of emerging not through the pragmatic-language or language-as-an-instrument but language-as-reality. the poetic image

a sort of differential of this evolution.

a great verse

influences the soul of a language. and the language in turn becomes

an expression creating being.

such is the unpredictable nature of poetry

and if we render speech un for see able is this not an apprenticeship to freedom?
Note: Except for the first two lines, this poem is created entirely from stitching together phrases and sentences from Bachelard. As I read these fragments kept jumping out from the text and demanding more attention.
References:


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Daniela Bouneva Elza is pursuing (poetically) her Ph.D. in Philosophy of Education at SFU. Her work has won a number of contests, has appeared in journals like *Existere, Paideusis, The Capilano Review, Quills, Contemporary Verse 2, Room of One’s Own, The Arabesque Review, dANDe-lion*, and is forthcoming in the *Journal of Environmental Philosophy, Van Gogh’s Ear, Fields of Green, and Poetic Inquiry: A Critical Survey*. She can be reached at daniela@livingcode.org