

David M. Katz

The Poetics Lesson

Her name was Mrs. Lazarus, the wife
Of Mr. Lazarus, my seventh-grade
Physics teacher. He was dry as chalk
And lost to us behind a boring cloud
Of crabbed equations, though we loved
The block and tackle, with the hook that raised
An anvil high. He drew that diagram
So we could understand how pulleys work.
His wife was something else, at least to me.
“In Flanders fields,” she read to us one day,
“The poppies blow, between the crosses, row
On row.” Her voice was hoarse, as I recall,
And only loud enough for us to hear
If we leaned forward. When she read the part
About the dead, I saw the open graves
Of pain, and listened to a sleepless voice
Inside of me. The night before, I’d tossed
In fear of being buried in the dark,
Dreamt another dream of World War III,
My parents gone, along with everyone,
And me alone amid the rising smoke
And fallen pyramids, a broken tree.
The worst has come to pass, the voice had said,
And it was time to either scream or waken
From my dream. More than fifty years
Have passed, and still that voice is in my head,
About to speak, while Mrs Lazarus
Returns to earth to read those lines again,
The lines in which the living hear the dead.