

## Two Poems by Henk Rossouw

### Elevated Flare

The refinery amid the marshland  
of my earliest memories  
  
repeats itself on the Gulf—  
  
distillation tower, coker,  
flare stack. The horizon interrupted  
by chrome hills.  
  
The tower  
ushers naphtha into the next phase,  
tar at the base  
becoming the asphalt I'm on  
  
near Sabine Pass, hurricane sector  
soon to be abandoned.  
  
The cattails high, I cannot see  
the rufous crown  
of the swamp sparrow.

I know his markings, the text of his feathers—  
  
vivid, rusty wings,  
subtler browns, grays, buff, and black  
of the body.

I wish him near,  
songmouth open as a cave  
without sorrow,  
  
trill statistically constant  
for the last 1537 years—  
Bayesian computation says  
—his syllables cultural.

A scythe of white smoke drifts across the marsh  
  
from chrome hills. Crematoriums  
of the earth, owned by Aramco,  
  
burn the seabed's crude flesh.

## Passerine

The salt marsh pale  
green near the conifer

broadleaf and  
the I who walks into

a refuge in silence  
as if gazing at the blue

flame of being  
—language's pilot light—

this I is  
seen by an owlblur

first, wings cast  
like a net onto the late

afternoon. A surge inside  
as if owl prey

bursts out my chest-thicket  
to hide—a small dun

terror amid summer trees.  
The owl, near

enough to declaw,  
to index—*Strix varia*—

denies my presence,  
his pellets under

the red spruce dense  
with vole fur

and regurgitated crab.  
I'm a broken animal—

nothing eats me.  
If my hair were often

coiled in the shit  
of something larger,

would it make the night  
night? Something to be

in awe of other  
than language's fire.