



Stephanie Bolster

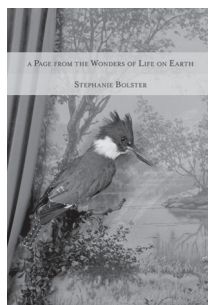
reading from

*A Page from the Wonders
of Life on Earth*

Monday, 19 November, 7 pm

Hazen Hall 232

Stephanie Bolster's latest book, *A Page from the Wonders of Life on Earth* (2011), was shortlisted for the Pat Lowther Award in 2012. Her first book, *White Stone: The Alice Poems*, won the Governor General's and Gerald Lampert Awards in 1998. Her work has also received the Bronwen Wallace Award, the Archibald Lampman Award, and The Malahat Review's long poem prize, among other awards, and has been translated into French, Spanish, and German. She edited *The Best Canadian Poetry in English 2008* and *The Ishtar Gate: Last and Selected Poems* by the Ottawa poet Diana Brebner, and co-edited *Penned: Zoo Poems* (2009). Raised in Burnaby, B.C., Bolster teaches creative writing at Concordia University and lives in Pointe-Claire, Québec.



A Page from the Wonders of Life on Earth begins with a quotation from Walter Benjamin's "Arcades Project": "At the entrance to the arcade, a mailbox: a last opportunity to make some sign to the world one is leaving." Exploring our impulse to mark and enclose, Bolster reveals the wonders of the world as signs of ourselves. In "Versailles," Marie Antoinette decorates the walls with sixty pictures of animals, but the palace also contains the room "where the queen gave birth, watched by whomever came to watch." We may enclose, but we are also enclosed. In "Life of the Mind" (Constellations) and "Topiary," Bolster points to our need to mark and contain. In the former poem, she writes, "It went on, the universe. No edge that was a shell that held us in." In "Topiary," the poet describes "One wild thing/ pruned to another's shape,/ animals, mostly./ The taming of both." Daunted and lost in this endless universe, we try to tame, shape and hold in whatever can be held. Bolster looks at the wonders of the 19th century world, its parks, zoos and grand works of architecture, examining what they were once and what they are now. Her approach is a wry invitation to visit these sites and examples of flora and fauna as artifacts in our human collection.

"There is a tension at the heart of Stephanie Bolster's wonderful new book. That tension is between the title with its huge inclusiveness and the contents of the book which is often, though not exclusively, confined to zoos and their analogues. Bolster's new collection is based around a central conceit of the zoo as a place in which humans not only place animals but also themselves; it is a site for the gaze. And that gaze has an uncomfortable way of reflecting on the viewer as well."

Ian Pople, *Manchester Review*