

Elisha Porat

To Die at the Springs of El-Hamma

Down into the fichus boulevards at the springs of El-Hamma
come the starlings, trembling then landing.
The water is hot at the springs of El-Hamma,
Yet night is more hostile than day.
Layers of sand on those who landed before:
Layers of sand cover their faces,
The water is dead at the springs of El-Hamma.
From great distances come the starlings
Beating to these death-ponds: always they come.
Who sends these birds to end
In the booby-trapped springs of El-Hamma?
They fly so urgently, with no chance or time,
No time for life and no chance to learn
If someone expects their return.
The starlings are flying in to die in the seducer
Springs of El-Hamma, poisoned by the salt.
Fowl can't stop the soldiers, for their faces
Are pointed into the earth. Oh, how easy it is
To finish as a starling, and not as a soldier.

translated from the Hebrew by the author and Ward Kelley

Elisha Porat, the 1996 winner of Israel's Prime Minister's Prize for Literature, has published 17 volumes of fiction and poetry in Hebrew, since 1973. His works have appeared in translation in Israel, the United States, Canada and England. The English translation of his short story collection *The Messiah of LaGuardia*, was released in 1997. His latest work, a book of Hebrew poetry, *The Dinosaurs of the Language*, was recently published in Israel.