

Honors Senior Project

Spring 2011

I.

Animal Engines

Torn Pocket

Evening light casts
the rows of turnips and lettuce
in gold.

Hands have straightened
and fed the rows,
but growth is
a mystery.

Cabbage sit side by side
brother and sister in
the soil.

The red paint on the barn
smolders. A door stands
open, ready to receive.

Holding animal dust
and iron machines, it
sighs into itself.

In the orchard
the peaches sing.

Taste their brightness.

The smell of dirt on hands.

This is the place we
come from.

The Quick and the Dead

I dream my bed alive with snakes
and see at least one ghost a day
silver and reticent
or flashing
in my eye's corner

The blackened bean pods
that litter the whole wet spring
are very animal
and alive
crawling into the ravines

There are faces
that smirk and howl
out of the cedar fence's
burls and knots
no longer menacing,
they sulk.

What I need to know is

are you alive for yourself

or because I am weary
of the things
I am sure of?

And She Will Dance All Night For You

The sea jogged forward endlessly
as a photographer,
forgetful at the sight of ghosts,
held his straw hat
and believed the touch of the woman near him.
For though she pocketed the sand of dreams
the fine hairs along her jaw are very real
and tipped with sweat.
And this is all he is looking for
a hint of the corporeal
for her slim hand is very like
a dry leaf
and her ears speak of seashells.
Believe it, because even though bees swarm
around her, but never sting,
and when the sun hits her high-necked blouse,
he smells balsam sap,
she will die some day.
Be brave.

petrichor

sometimes when a depression creeps
leaving its oily fingerprints
on my coverlet or windowpane
or un-homeness threatens the sacred pool
of light on my desk
and chokes my hands of their words
what happens is a going outside
of self and its malaise
of my wood-framed stolid house
to where brown sparrows dive above the asphalt
resting on the dry thin twigs that grow
intertwined with the chain-link fence
these birds that hear the sun
before I hear the sun
and greet my rising with atonal song
going outside to where the backyard
lives unchecked and every decision
made by the vinca and crabgrass is sovereign
except when it rains thick and cold
like it did today
the yard has no choice but to absorb
and this union of earth and rain
wakes me up from my sad sleep
strips my heart of its lonely protection
and raw and young and far from tired
I smell the wetness growing around me
and soak, and grow green.

after the earthquake

inside every dancing building there must have been a person
who felt the uncertain ground and decided to be honest

a person whose memories of her grandmother's garden
crowded out the fear with camellia leaves and jasmine
who wants more than anything to return to a normalcy
in which to believe in what is solid is to be saved

when the surging water wrapped its fluid limbs around the
foundation
there must have been a person who forgot his own breath in
remembering his wife's
a person who saw the dooming wave and held on with a
terrible love to a god
that didn't keep her alive
whose family shook her frame and knew nothing true

around every bonfire that brightens a soaked grey world
there must be a person who regrets the ways in which she was
a coward
or a bullshitter or indifferent or cruel
a person who is in small ways becoming more generous and
brave

after the earthquake shakes down what i have built up, will i
build it again?
will it be better?

Magpie

Who gave memory the edge to hurt?

May whoever it was
be pierced
with memories of the ocean
so painfully blue in the mind's eye,
weep at cliffs never to be
seen again,
and bite back tears
remembering
a birthday bright with candles
a game of catch
on a dappled summer day,
slow in memory's cinematic sleep.

Whoever you are,
you should resign yourself
to the stale smell of
your grandfather's attic
and remembrance of
the beach trip day
when your dog pissed
in the family van.

Never forget that life
was simple and beautiful
maybe thirteen years
or eight months
ago,
and you'll always be
doomed
to remember it.

For Katie And All My Lovely Brown-haired Friends

Why I feel dead in strip malls
might be related to something good
about the world
something that lives in swamps
and is ugly, but resourceful
something that burns in a candle
alongside the pale flame
asking you to love it
It might be related to
the bitter dredge of wet tea
in a forgotten cup
left behind when the dog barked
and someone showed up
on a sunny day
with a basket of fruit and an idea
and in that moment
you chose people
got up from your solitude
and went for a walk
Knowing all the time
that it was risky to choose
this way
because people will
disappoint you
and fuck you over
time and again
but
there is nothing better today
than walking with someone
who is pointing out crocus spears
and laughing with her eyes and hands
at spring
and promises

When All We Could Do Was Drink and Develop Film

We drank gin and tonics on a bad day
The sweat on my glass drank the sweat on my palm;
it was the bigger sea.
The ice danced near my teeth,
threatening.
The alcohol slowed my blood.
We didn't say much, but as usual it was enough.
Those last few days,
the heat wanted to be heard
and we listened
weeping when the night's cool finally blessed our balconies.

The process of finding out
where in the friction
the sound is made:

Leaf to leaf
bow to string
water to stone
tongue to tooth
toe to road

In the upward stroke
of a fist to a jaw
does the thud happen
once
or all the time
pounding forever
in the head of one
the hand of the other
and the critical moment
the impact
is only one possibility
in a string of connections

as death is.

II.

Shorts

penny dreadful

lacking intrigue
in my daily paper
I will invent a serial life
in which I am both
rescued heroine
and hero(ine)
and the worst parts of me
will recognize themselves
and see their better counterparts
locked away somewhere
and they will saddle up
and throw over their shoulder
a scarlet cape
sheathing their scabbard
and
hi-oh silvering their
dramatic ass
to my rescue.

Reeds Lake

A day began in the warm wildness of early morning wind.

I saw myself in the bruised sky.

I saw the striated color,
the curved lens of horizon,
my own muted heartbreak.

Maybe my friend saw her own
for we were quite silent
in the burgeoning half-light.

The light seeps upward.

Every morning the same.

I am always asking to be impressed.

Rest Area

Wiry old people
in fluffy pink hats
probably have more
control in their lives
than you.

It's not so much a question
of comparison
as a comfort in the fact
that life
can be done better
than you're currently
doing it.

geology

if the firmest place in the world
is the small of his back

or

death valley

then the softest is his mouth

or a flume in the pacific ocean

reaching tendrils

toward the surface

hot and delicate

all at once.

uptalking

what if i walked left instead
toward the mossy banks
and totally missed the bridge?
what then?
i wouldn't get hurt so badly.
probably?

Heartbreak Music

Today when I grazed
The tenderest part of my knee
I felt the great potential harm
And thought of you.

Because This Autumn

No more will she sit on the porch long after moonrise,
waiting for the train-whistle.

She's not afraid of it anymore.

She will get up early and slice a peach, looking out the window
above the sink, absorbing the sun's early life and knowing that
she is loved in this world.

Subjective Truth

There was a house right where the road became treacherous white like all the other houses but more majestic for the way it faced away from land toward the sea that had an apparatus with a dubious purpose on its roof that was golden and more than anything else looked like a lion quiet and very watchful and the first time and every time after and now in my memory it is a lion because it is better that way and no one can argue for truth anymore anyway.

Bravery

Stick in the grass: I see you, and you're not a snake.

III.

Lists

Some Things We Are Ashamed or Afraid to Admit:

1. When we broke the neighbor's godawful shepherdess figurine and blamed it on the cat.
2. How we lose interest during long prayers/technical explanations of carburetors.
3. How we don't love her, him, or it. Anymore.
4. When we couldn't stay awake for the opera.
5. The way we thought god damn you instead of thank you.
6. Just how intrigued we are by *Mob Wives* on MTV.
7. How we love him, her or it. Still.
8. We didn't listen when you told us that important thing.
9. Instead of trying we coasted through the whole golden summer.
10. We tried our hardest and still. We were defeated.

Some Things That Look Good On Paper:

1. Communism
2. Matching sweaters
3. Space travel
4. Commandments
5. Water beds
6. Art school
7. Pyramid schemes
8. The Constitution
9. Saltwater taffy
10. Joint custody
11. Heated blankets
12. Colonization
13. Chinese food
14. Cumulative exams
15. Red lipstick
16. Pet sitting
17. Hovercrafts
18. Blind dates
19. This book

Some Things About Growing Up:

1. Eat vegetables,
2. Mind deadlines
3. Exercise and like it.
4. Buy great shoes, but only once in awhile.
5. Steer clear of cheap alcohol, and remember that your life is not the only one worth caring about.
6. Drive sensibly, be on time, care deeply for others, and the earth, and especially for people you don't even know. The earth is beautiful, and you, you have a place in it.
7. Don't get selfish though, for there are countless others out there more beautiful, smarter, kinder, more grown up than you.
8. Don't let it stop you from taking good care of your brain, soul, and body, your parents and your beloved.
9. Read the books you know will nourish you, and maybe get a dog to take to the park. The weather is fine, but even if it weren't, you could go and bear the rain because transcendence of physical pain is just one more thing grown ups are good at.
10. Realize that most people are not out to get you. They're just minding their lives quietly, perhaps living for those moments of Brahms, or rain in the

park. You go home and among the stuff of your life, the chairs and photographs and vases, the music of unknown worlds plays your living room's piano, and death rests nobly in the corner shadows. You take out the trash without complaining.

Some Things You Never Get Used To

1. Watching someone walk with a limp.
2. The sharp tang of trash in your nostrils.
3. Underdogs winning.
4. Stepping on nails.
5. The way a maple sings red in September's old age.
6. Our twin capacity for selfishness and abiding love.
7. Waking up crying.
8. Sour milk.
9. How hurt shines in everyone's eyes the same.

IV.

Daughter of a Voice

Rain Jacket

When the rain began
on Mykonos
only the windmills
separated me from Michigan.
A jacket does the same job
everywhere I go.
Why bring this particular weather
on a weak soul
when all I've ever asked for
is cold that can be
guarded against.

Measuring In Elephants

In that time
when frozen windows touched her skin
chilling on contact
as if pulling out the drawers of warmth
in her fingertips and replacing them
with figurines made of ice—bears foxes badgers—
She saw:
glints of faraway golden rivers
in the cat's eyes
on the copper kettle.
She saw:
Bright crazy quilts of green land
cut by loamy earthen roads
and gauzy woodlots
and edging fields of red wheat;
the angular order of farmland
that only reveals itself from the sky.
Her own farm speaks its neatness softly,
but more important are the hens to feed.
She wonders: will I ever be warm again?

Mountain Time

1

You are the ache
that rounds out my
most perfect happiness,
giving form to what would
otherwise
be a shapeless joy.

Isn't that enough?

I pretended to write to you
on a sunny day in winter
while coffee sat hot in my belly
and conversation roared
and whispered around me.

2

I'll never send you a letter
and never will I stand
beside you on the
continental divide
the world folding out
below us
for that world never was.

A tapestry perhaps
sewn with careful stitches
golden threads and blue
but we were always
standing on what we
ourselves had made
and our feet, friend,
they knew the difference.
They walked home.

Swallows

I.

Because they've lived here forever,
they know the taste of the wind.
And while you try to take
pictures of the sky,
they remark to each other
in song:
the smallest eye can still
see a beetle,
and
your best intentions are
hardly ever enough,
and
where does the sun
go to sleep?
and
how the mighty are fallen.

II.

The waves are gentle in this part of the sea, but looking at them you know how tall they've been before. Maybe nature never did betray the heart that loved her, but she taught a cruel lesson in her time. The first time the volcano blew endless night into the sky, did people watch from cliffs or boats? The swallows saw it from the air and their small hearts trembled, but they slept and the grass grew back and I saw them soar just yesterday.

III.

I put them on my body
trapped in ink
to remind me of flight and freedom
this is a paradox
but it's also a kind of art.
They talk about
the winds
from the four corners of the earth
and in the quiet wilderness of
my mind.
Their lines make me unafraid
of mine.
Their bones make me proud
of my strong ones.

IV.

In the museum
I saw the painted
birds,
and next to them
in ochre and blue
the words:
beauty remembered
Is never lost.

february 7

what is left when the afterbirth glistens out
is an emptiness in one place
and a child in another.

what is left when you move far away are traces
your books and trophies
calls and letters
photos of cats and strangers an idea

of what your life is
how is it like mine
how you eat and play and sleep
who are your friends, and at night beside
your pretty wife who I know as quiet and strong
and full of delight

do you miss the places you left
the places you might have been

and brother i want to know your son

whose softness and smallness i know
without knowing

oh he will see islands and creatures

he will cry and sing out and forget

in these sleeping months he will believe that

the sky is him

mount fuji from the train is of the same

and your eyes

tomo's eyes

they are his too commanding

a sea of certain worlds wherein he is everything

and everything

is him

and all the bells in the world today were for you kota.

Plant Food

The part refusal of my whole self
fought the spring and summer through

A lasting breeze, the darkest note
while islands lived on, growing blue

Stars died, coffee chilled, and the stones made round
while the sea and high mooned night

no halo made, no crown.

To what I made no mention of
the windowpanes now bare

Is to the lemon tree's deceit
a length of sun-bleached hair.

And all the more, and less that goes
the way of fruitless trees

The airless space where all my lies
were buried deep in winter's freeze.

Yet new spring, growing out of dirt
and ice of past decay

shows itself in wet green shoots
and brighter, longer days.

Compline, Or a Peaceful Night and a Perfect End

Last night I dreamed
of our wedding:
simple.
Dark wood colors
and those of spring-wet leaves.
our rings of raw gold
The hushed touch of tulle.
I don't even remember
the cut of my dress
or
the voice of the priest.

What I remember is
your face
and how the look
was one I'd seen
only once before.

Once, when
we were in the car
the winter sun silver
on your beard
and on the tears
that pulsed gently
down your cheek.

You spoke of hearing
God's voice,
and of your doubt, and
of knowing,
with edging certainty,
that you were loved.

Loved in a way
you didn't deserve
Loved in all the
interstices between
grace and justice
bone and muscle
blood and bread

That crying minute
lived on your mouth
and eyes
in my dream

To link those faces
real and pictured
is the blasphemy
and blessing
of the lover.

Demeter

I laughed and made apples.
Giving the seeds to you,
I made you a kind of immortal.
My feet deep in the
Richness of a field,
I spread barley.
It sparkles off my fingertips,
falls to the soil without sound.
I bless it as I would my
own child.
It is my own.
My hands grazing
the soft heads of wheat,
I scatter the brightest
poppies, their faces lit
by my father's stars.
Redder than blood
or love,
girls pick them and
remember beauty.
Once,
in a thrice-plowed field
brimming with poppies,
I felt the nectar flow
in my veins and the
sweetness of youth in
all of my body.
For this fleeting joy
I was punished,
But the song of
love still plays
delicately when the
wind strokes a field

of my flowers.
I am a gentle soul.

I bear the fruits of harvest.
The reward of hard work.
The nourishing bounty of creation.
On my full hips, I carry
The gifts of renewing life
And awakening spring.
But I also know winter
and loss.
The gift of life holds
hands with death.
When my child
was stolen, my gentle
soul broke and anger
choked all growth
from the ground.
Without my hands
there is no food
for farmer or shepherdess
from sheaf
from limb
from blossom
from all the earth,
but it only took
seven seeds keep her from
me for three months.

Bearing.

I am a mother.
I make the harvest come.

the way my mother says God
is smooth and round
but never cold like marble or distant like stars
this warmth from her lips is more
natural
reverent
sonorous

this sound
is shaped like the small stones
lake michigan wipes smooth wave after wave,
the kind for stroking and pockets and sandcastles
polished by calm persistence

i fell in love at lake michigan
we crashed against the waves
daring the undertow

until
wavetired lovecolored
we collapsed into the wonder

breath tight, eyes glowing

i watched the dunegrass
draw circles in the sand
each blade a truer compass
than any of us can make or follow
tracing circles

like the glowing stone
i cradled in my palm
smooth and round
like the way my mother
says God

Religion Sometimes

And how the sea spread out
in wide medallions
below the monastery.
The white wall where
Paroikia Bay
and
Naoussa Bay
can both be seen
edges of the same paper island
flat and metallic in the six o'clock sun,
sequins sewn on the green brown fabric
of minor mountains dotted
with white nubs of doves and goats.
But child, see it for what it is:
The islands are made small by the sea.

And how in lighting slender beeswax tapers
watching the flame sway
burying the ends in sand
asking a prayer with my fingertips
a prayer, asking always the question
a prayer
a question

I always knew the answer.