

**DON'T FORGET THE CAMERA: POEMS**

**HONORS THESIS**

**Presented to the Honors Committee of**

**Texas State University San Marcos**

**In Partial Fulfillment of**

**The Requirements**

**For Graduation in the Mitte Honors Program**

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**San Marcos, Texas**

**May 2006**

**Acknowledgements:**

I'd like to thank the following people who have been an inspiration to me and to my wacky sense of being: Deborah Moody for her unending support and care; Evelyn Cuda, Billie Jo Stehling, and Felix Stehling for making me want to grow old; Tammy Jo Ford for her artistic influence; John Harkabus, Kristy Teeple, and Robert Lopez for their comradeship and passion; and, finally, Susan Morrison and Diann McCabe for their insight and direction. If it weren't for all of you existing, I wouldn't be able to applaud your exquisite selflessness on this page.

*Poem to Poetry*

Poetry,  
you are an electric,  
a magic, field—like the space  
between a sleepwalker's outheld arms!

—Bill Knott

*art*

as the  
spirit  
waned  
the  
form  
appears.

—Charles Bukowski

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**I.**

**primitive**

when i succumb  
to that animalistic urge of hunger...

it feels awkward  
being clothed

**8.14.1987**

There was laughing, playing.  
We pretended to be Natives  
and Americans  
amongst the dry,  
brown grass of Texas.  
I believe you shot me first  
with your finger,  
but I used my hand  
for a hatchet  
to your scalp.  
We must have looked like kids  
running to  
and from each other  
like confused magnets  
not knowing what to attach themselves to.  
You felt there was safety  
behind the barbed wire fence.  
*You'll never get me here!*  
Your feet twisted awkwardly,  
and your head bobbed down the metal lines while falling.  
For the next month,  
you wore a patch and pretended to be a pirate,  
but I never understood  
why you wouldn't come outside  
and pretend to steal from my ship.

## **Forget it**

remembering a breath of whisky

windblast to skin—

skinned inertia

of nostalgic whims—

there were memories

destined only in mind—

given time

of course



## Orange

The sun slithers in,  
gathers itself  
on the windowsill,  
covering pottery  
and the ripening  
of fruit; hard  
and soft.  
Clay,  
oranges,  
a still life resting  
in the window.  
You drop three  
in a wrinkled grocery bag  
say  
*Give them a while.*

A few days later  
in the hot afternoon  
I look out my window  
at brightness.  
I peel an orange,  
smell its skin breaking,  
and imagine the weight  
of the fruit  
in your small, frail hands.

## Sydney

We would always meet at the fence  
To talk about the hatred we felt for our parents  
And distinguish who possessed the most.  
The fence was tall, or I was short,  
But deer weren't able to jump over it.

You wanted to borrow my Lucky Charms cereal once,  
So we met, made our barter, and departed.  
Two days later after you returned it, I poured a bowl  
And discovered that all the marshmallows had been removed.  
It looked like a bowl of hardened, freeze-dried oatmeal.  
I later punched you for this, only to be punched harder in return.

I wasn't supposed to go over to your house without permission,  
So one day you struck up a plan.  
You brought out the hose and wet the dirt for a while,  
Then slid under the fence with only a few scratches to show for it.  
We ran around the yard playing whatever while you were covered in mud.  
I, of course, was the one who got in trouble.

I threatened to kiss you and chased you around your clothing-covered house  
Until you slipped on someone's laundry and went hard to the floor.  
You chipped half of your front tooth off  
But never made me feel any worse than I already did.

You got me drunk for the first time and covered for me.  
You stuck my first cigarette in my mouth  
And introduced me to all of your pretty friends.  
And the reason I am writing this isn't for your attention,  
But rather for record-keeping.  
Because everyone has had a friend like this,  
And I just wanted to write down your name.

## Hunting

It's always a creepy place.  
Smell of musk invades the nostrils,  
sight of stuffed deer heads  
batters the eyes, the conscience.

*Mommy, can't we go?*

Then there's the man  
himself: the taxidermist with  
his goofy grin and tobacco teeth.

*This one was tuff, it wadn't  
guttet right.*

His eyes a bit crisscrossed,  
a bit unbelievable.

In his element, his trailer  
of dominance,  
the dialogue fades  
while staring in an antelope's  
wet, glass eyes.

*How do they look so real?*

That night there's this dream  
of the same man  
mounted  
up on the wall.

His arms are akimbo,  
his eyes transfixed,  
and standing on a ladder,  
a buck is setting them straight.

## A Strange Lunch Box

Yesterday, I saw  
a small boy – not older than  
five or six  
hand-in-hand with  
an older man plastered  
with blue uniform.  
They didn't  
speak, and there  
wasn't need, because  
at second glance,  
when the child looked  
up, I watched  
the expression  
evaporate from his face.

## Mannequin

There was a boy posing as a mannequin  
for as long as he could remember.  
His arms were plastic, at least to him.  
They served a meaningful purpose  
if only to perform pleasant gestures to passersby.  
His friends would call him “dummy” when they came shopping,  
but he was resilient in keeping a stoic pose.  
*They just don't understand me*  
he would think to himself  
and go around trying to chat with the plastic dolls standing in the store,  
but they never responded.  
One day, enough was enough.  
The boy brought down his congenial hand,  
bunched it into a fist,  
and knocked all the dummies to the floor.  
He kicked through the door's glass  
and stood alone outside in the dark,  
the wind grazing his cold skin,  
wondering  
*Where do I go now?*

**II.**

**“I finally accept fate” by Johannes Kahrs**

This piece  
pulled me inside  
under its space  
of black,  
smoothing itself  
over a body  
of canvas.

Single,  
separate hands  
lay open  
waiting to be shook,  
or held,  
amongst a chaos  
full  
of bodies.

Candles blown out  
by a fury—hiding  
faces  
as if to say  
*Shhhhh.*

One of these hands  
resembles  
my father’s—  
it’s still holding itself  
firm, it’s  
waiting for  
the friction of skin.

## Planes

The creaking safety  
of flying.  
Hard plastic  
opening  
your neighbor's  
eyes. Addictive  
anesthesia comes  
with the safety  
of numbers.  
Always waking,  
residing,  
in a monotonous  
hum—like  
being  
hypnotized.  
The only control  
is over  
the overhead  
light—heating  
your head-top,  
illuminating your lap.  
People filled  
with seats  
and hope-notions  
who look  
like children incubating  
in a nest.



## Singularity

I think you saw me once  
in a picture:  
an old photograph frayed at its edges,  
a white perforated border stained with brown.  
What were you thinking?  
I'd like to guess  
it was how you missed me—  
but let's step in reality.  
It was probably about  
that morning you spilt your coffee  
and how no one was there  
to pass you  
a paper towel.

## Someplace else

looks so much nicer  
in travel guides.

A pretty picture—  
sunlight cascading down through trees.

The elegance  
of a rainy day  
is only found in photographs.

Questioning yourself  
while shoes  
and socks  
are soaked.

Dreaming of driving  
while riding  
a crowded train—  
what you dreamt of  
while driving  
in rush-hour traffic.

The plane ride  
feels satisfying  
while you're still  
in the air.

## Taking Pictures

There's a girl  
in front of my face  
seen through a maze of glass  
and mechanics  
that try to operate  
like an eye.  
She's wearing green  
and stands  
before an old, brown doorway.  
*Have you taken one yet?* She asks,  
but I've already snapped three candid  
without her knowing.  
My favorite  
is the one  
with this look  
of melancholy on her face.  
At that moment I know  
that forty years from now,  
when the photograph is lost  
in a cardboard box of junk,  
it will be that image  
I reversed and developed with my actual eyes  
that's still up there.

## **On the metro**

the train  
is a blur  
of recognition.  
Masses  
moving in,  
coming out.  
High-  
speed  
shopping bags,  
backpacks,  
baby  
carriages.  
Noises.  
Falling in love  
with a face  
in the crowd  
again.

## **Spread**

Red,  
painted  
line  
streaking  
across  
grey  
side-  
walk  
stones  
like  
commun-  
ism's  
march  
through  
europe.

## **Holland**

skeleton frame  
once a bike  
now robbed  
of its tires

locked

with chain  
to a fence  
that was snapped  
off with pliers

## **The Bistro**

I have this picture  
up on my wall  
of a sharp man  
leaning towards  
a lady dressed  
in red.

Her head is turned  
away from him,  
and every time  
I look  
he's bothering her  
with questions.

But she seems content  
to stay in her seat,  
and I wonder  
if the topic is more sullen.

Maybe there is  
no dialogue at all  
because they're in France,  
and the painting  
is mostly red.

## Doing Laundry in Germany.

Learning how to walk  
and how to count  
to one  
hundred  
were easier.

Put into place  
by rumbling machinery  
labeled  
with instructions  
written  
in language of code.

Stepping into  
an inside joke—  
the machines all spin  
with laughter.

So is a man  
who folds his clothes  
and watches  
my naivety  
in progress.

*Spin dry*

he tells me in accent  
and points  
to a silver cauldron  
that looks more fit  
to hold soup.

He sees my confusion,  
says

*It's faster*

and throws a sock in  
for example.

I thank him  
in English  
and kneel down



to gather dirty T-shirts  
as if in prayer.

Before I add the soap,  
I turn to ask  
if I'm doing it right,  
but the man was gone.

He left me  
with all my dirty clothes  
and tourist questions  
rattling around in my head.

## **Melting into History**

black,  
leather shoes  
with no body attached  
lay empty  
on the sidewalk  
next to this statue

nobody's around

it looks like  
this chiseled,  
bearded man of granite  
jumped onto the podium,  
his socks  
sticking  
to the cement

## **Vaguely Leaving**

open-ended-ness:

hello, are you there?

(meet)

with me somewhere.

**III.**

## Poem

Your hair:

Seaweed scents brush my body, yours  
Scarring, eyes with tissues  
Lotion for sand, bruises

:rigor mortis:

What time graffitos us in  
Records of scratch, simile bounce back  
Caterwauling, waves made windy-ing  
Not known; tickling

Your face : an out-of-focus

## Compromise

I dreamt I dug you from the sand...there was seaweed, starfish, and Thelonious Monk.

You wore a bikini of turquoise scales and were mad that I had woken you up.

*Please, just let me sleep!*

You said this with exasperation; of course the moon was out.

The sand served as your oxygen, the surf as clouds.

I noted how the foam always resembled pudding, but you looked disinterested.

*I'm not in the mood for jokes!*

I asked if I could help shovel sand back over you, but you said no.

Before I could say anything else, I was pulled up to reality as your face turned to a palimpsest.

Now awake, I turn my attention as you clear your throat from under the sheets.

I ask if you want some water, but from buried under the covers, I hear a muffled "no."

## Jazz

They like to

Warm

You up

Nothing too fancy

Just Yet

But your head's

Still bopping

When a set

Of puckered

Cheeks

Dominates

A brass sax

Or long

Spaghetti

Fingers

Noodle

A set of keys

This is when

She looks

At you

With a glimpse

Of ferocity

From across the lit table

No room

For conversation

From the mouth—

It's all eyes

And movements

And for the wind-down

When the last note is sustaining

And the cymbals

Sound

Like

Sprinkling

Your chairs are pulled closer

In a final coda

Of contagious agreement

**waiting in line at the 42<sup>nd</sup> street deli**

near the end,

by the chocolate desserts and plastic trays,

there was this woman with an aroma

that meshed well with the scent

of sliced lunchmeats deliciously,

a stranger who ordered something I had never heard of,

its name nowhere on the menu,

and I looked over the whole thing

for the first time,

*how do people know about this stuff*

I thought,

it's almost as if ordering this extraordinary food

is as satisfying as digesting it,

then after she ordered

that same woman

who I had actually been living with said to me

what are you getting honey?

*what a weird question*

I thought,

because I got the turkey and swiss on rye like always



## **When you have no control...**

What I'm trying to say  
is that sometimes, just existing  
really is the best choice.

Like when your dog  
doesn't like the dried food bits in her bowl,  
so you switch to the wet, canned kind  
that lets out a pungent wake-up-call to the nostrils everyday.  
Then, your dog stops eating that, too,  
and appears to be eating grass in the front lawn instead.

Or when you tell a friend  
that his girlfriend is quote unquote  
walking all over him.  
Of course, he doesn't like to listen.  
So, you try to break it to him  
that you may not make it to his wedding  
if he does, in fact, marry that bitch.

Sometimes, like today, the light is entering and warming its way  
through the window in just the right amounts.  
So right that it feels as if you know everything  
and just sitting is gratifying enough.

Until that phone call from the grandparents  
spent every week talking about your diet  
and listening to the financial reasoning  
for you to make a career move into engineering  
or some other field in which you have no training.

But it's okay  
because your grandparents' only prerequisite  
is that you've always been good at math.

## Counting Cards

If I lived in a house of playing cards,  
I would decorate one wall with numbered  
diamonds, one covered with hearts, and so forth.  
They would look like tombs of hieroglyphics—  
dirty numbers and symbols in cobwebs.

If I were to look up at the ceiling,  
I would see it was made of the four kings—  
my fathers—and their perpetual scowls,  
my mothers—the queens—with their hopelessness,  
and all of my older brothers—the jacks.

To keep the house standing after a sneeze,  
the ceiling's corners – to make matters worse –  
would be the four aces, rather, my gods.

## **Escarpment**

Bird cooling its black—

Feathers from a pond

Torrid gravel tarring from engines

And—tired wings left from last week

:keep beating:

Beak dripping drink—don't you see

Its rapturous waves?

## **Elegy for R. Edson**

So this old guy named Russell walks in to the optometrist's office and says to the optometrist, "Let me take out my false eye before we begin."

"According to our records, Mr. E., both of your eyes are alive and working well," says the optometrist.

"I know what your records say, but one of them isn't telling the truth," says Russell.

So he pulls out his left eye, cuts off its stringy appendages, and hands the ball to his optometrist. Without hesitation, the optometrist puts an eyeglass over the peeper and points it toward the sheet of letters moving it closer and closer before finally backing it up.

"You're right," says the optometrist after some serious deliberation. "I had diagnosed this one as 20/20, and it's actually fairly blind, however, we could have done this without all the mess."

"Well," says the old man, "you know how I feel about liars."

## Sobering up

This is for you,  
the waitress at the local late-night deli  
in New Orleans  
or anywhere else, for that matter.

Listening to you put up  
with constant degradation,  
you stood stiff and unflinching  
behind only yellow fabric, nametag  
and an apron.

Your cedar skin  
screaming from its lack of seams  
while pouring coffee  
in a drunk twenty-something's cup.  
Oh how you wish  
it could slip from your hand  
and end up like hot mud  
caked to his lap.

*if only something could wash these people  
from inside out*  
you thought.

*if only there was water*

## Sleep

My sycophant neighbor's smoke  
alarm has been obedient  
in beeping every a.m. hour  
like electronic drops of water  
drumming an endless sink of serenity.  
It makes you dream like a slave  
in dreary intervals imagining  
exotic beaches equipped with  
mechanical noises and the steady  
stream of sirens, body only  
awakened from  
the nasal itch of smoke.

**she, he never**

she doesn't like him telling  
    of inverted shadows and ambiguity  
    and his story of salmon  
when tangling legs and feet  
                                    weigh down bed sheets in afternoons  
(sultry)

*you should stay away  
                                    from farm raised*

like the first story from under  
    a tree always sticking  
    to the cork of memory  
  
    as aggravation  
the shock she (of unshaven  
    at second glance) says  
                                    is worth it

## **moisture**

...there's this self-  
absorbed sink, really  
a basin of aluminum drum,  
which water tip-  
toes on in  
an effort to keep you from  
dreaming  
about anything else,  
about the silvery question: is it real?  
no, well,  
sometimes, but  
usually it's  
only in my head...see,  
now it's gone,  
you say, but then there's this  
drop  
echoing down your forehead  
like an evaporating  
iceberg...



**palette**

if day drips on

past the brush

of my wristwatch

which indicates *night*

has earth

lost its orbit –

or have all the inky parts

been infected

with sand

and oil

## Don't forget the camera

Spacebar: the most nonviolent action  
of the keyboard. It causes the least damage,  
creates white between this and that.  
There's safety in that.

My hands have grown three sizes  
too big; they won't fit anymore  
in their horseshoes without ripping.  
Whose childhood nightmare is this?

There is a whistle sound heard, like that  
of a human mouth imitating a dropping bomb,  
when one dies (my Grandfather says).  
This comes up whenever there's a whisper of religion,  
before my Grandmother switches rooms to find TV.

If you're cold, you can dream of covering  
yourself with sheets made of my body, but  
in the morning, I'll be crumpled all over the floor.  
If you're hot, you can find me in the freezer.

Feather pillows contain feathers: fact.  
Feather pillows contain birds: fiction.  
Hopefully the body-bald birds  
have plenty of blankets to share.

In my first film there will be a scene shot  
from a vehicle inside a drive-thru carwash.  
The soap sliding on the windows darkens the interior  
like the inside of a jellyfish stomach.  
"Your mother told me *everything*, John."  
"What did she say?"  
"Your excuse for buying dolls was that you were destined  
to be a fashion designer."  
"Well, then, why do I work in real estate?"  
The only sound is the wash's digestion as they examine each other.  
*Cue the somber piano.*

Tim's father always told Tim that his bellybutton  
was a scar from an Indian's arrow, but Tim  
never understood why there was the same cavity  
on his lower back. His father would patiently explain:  
"...that's the spot the arrow came out..."