

Breaking the Bone House

An Honors Thesis (Honors 499)

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Purpose of Thesis

Once I became an English major I learned that one of my strongest talents was writing. I proceeded to take poetry and, lately, fiction classes along with the required classes. Through these experiences, my perception of language and writing has changed. I am beginning to see myself as a sort of inventor, using language as my material. I have finally found a voice, and I've also found other people who have decided to use writing as their medium of expression. Finding people who also write has been one of the most positively influential factors in my career as a student. It can sometimes become hard to validate your image of yourself as a writer if you don't get any outside acknowledgment or a chance to share your ideas. Often, the act of writing feels frivolous, so incredibly self-absorbent, however essential it is.

I believe that our own perceptions color everything that we ever write. "Breaking the Bone House" is no different. It is a compilation of poems that I have been working on over the past year. Each poem is one that I feel particularly embodies one certain, crucial point of my experience over the past four years of college, and in some cases, experiences that have been important to the formation of my identity.

My writing is comprised mostly of images. I find images to be a particularly effective way to express myself because of their ambiguous quality. An apple sitting on a chair is not just that when it is incorporated into a poem. Through the juxtaposition of images, an emotion is captured by the writer. Each of our lives is only a sequence of images, and the interpretation is left to us. As a person reads my works I want his intellectual mind to sit down and lose itself. I do not wish for any of these poems to be greatly analyzed, which can often result in a distillation of the original emotions. I intend for the reader to soak in the language, reading purely for pleasure.

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As You Blink

Silently,
moss and stone consecrate their union,
branching through fields
of wind-electrified flax,
sending tendrils
among blue spin-food unspun.

Red or Silver

I've found myself
caught
in moonbeams
searching for the fox,
red or silver,
my eyes following
its movements
in the eel grass of night.

Maddening at times,
the licorice tendrils
bend,
swaying
against each other;
promises
wind-whispered
black.

Yuri Vasnetsov: *Still Life with a Chess Board*

Found things, it's said, hold meaning.
Textures revisited, scents inhaled,
a cane made bent
over hundred body-heaves
from a too-deep Lazy-Boy,
its rusty leather fading.

And on dark, wet nights, thick with mosquitos
it dances. Barkless,
splinters exposed,
the wood shows through unvarnished,
windowed yellow and raw.
And the vine limber-pulses
to the Victrola's breathy spin.

Recreation Is Not Singularly Human

Black palmed playmate
drunk in sea water,
a hula in seaweed,
tool-clapping food to your belly.
Can you be seen,
can you see
clasped in my lap like a baby,
drawn up to my chin like a baby
with claws?

Dive down to the pearls,
a tide driven demon
too soft for the land.
Grasp fistfuls of scaly mouthed mollusks,
beat their shells open,
expose their bivalve biology.

Lounge in the frothing pulse water.
Dance eights in the soup,
sixes and threes
all strung together.

Rumble with blue-bleached barnacles,
thumbs over back,
spun tailwise and speckled
like marmaduke mayhem.

Ode to German Mothers

Under my mother's pillow there are
red delicious apples,
china from grandma,
silverware, the real kind, she polishes in her sleep.

There aren't any
tickets to France or Mexico or Ohio for that matter,
little kid brothers with bee-buzz type eyes,
wrinkled Saturday mornings,
dishes stacked to the ceilings,
or hidden rooms with jingle bell doors or red lightbulbs.
There are no dice to be thrown,
and no icing on top.

On the Possibilities of a Choke Cherry Leaf

Blown brown

in the sun wrung blue--
your layers of cells grew
thin.

Light catches your worn freckles
then holes, veins, capillaries.

Tear shaped, Bartlett colored bruise paper,
pebbled for strength.

Jugular exposed, you danced,
leg~stuck, snapped
at the ankle.

And during that
moment you learned your weight,
your shape, the sounds you make against wind,
grass and let yourself be carried,
trusting in solitary joys,
tasting dandelion umbrellas
before bedding in cracks, between pavement,
under bushes, found
waxy as when you grew.

On Stick-History

Stripped from a limb,
you fell.
Insect-skinned, calloused sockets,
scarred.
You once held three antennae.
Now decapitated,
marrow shows.

Bumpy, has-been limb.
Bark black rings
caramel yellow rings
marigold orange rings
white.
Your stubbed links, rubbed red
like barnacle bones
jointed parallel.

For Susan

Grab the muckers.
The big green rubber ones with the yellow lines
outlining the soles.

The fish are running...

Leave your keys
 your biology textbook,
 your four alarm hot pants behind.
Even the daisy in your baby book
I gave mom when she brought you home
red raisin-wrinkled.

Meet me there.
Down the street then to the left,
under the bridge then
roll,
oversized boots hitting as you tumble green.
Hush. Rest by the edge of the creek.

The fish are running,
their brown fins like sails~~
a fleet of wind catchers
inching in the too shallow water.

The Mambo is Not a Subtle Dance

I'm writing a recipe for kings.
Cilantro, tomatoes,
onion fresh picked and sweet,
peppers, red, green and gold,
dried from the cedar rafters
in my cottage. Outside,
the cool river boils
over rocks it can't budge.

They'll never taste it,
mouths cancered a smokey brown,
their feet smothered in felt, royal purple,
soles wet and sweaty.

If I send the recipe to grandma
she'll send me a flower,
a stalk of lavender.

Time would fold itself into four even squares.

The world,
soft now,
the wind moist and heavy,
lazy,
like a still-sticky baby.

Granite Feels

Granite feels like this...
layers upon layers of rectangles
broken black and earth-washed
smooth.
Fallen wings,
crackle-packed insect legs
eyes
below steel laced cement
unraveling like the tide.
Hum wheels.
Hum
streets lined in
hum lights.
Hum finger-torn licorice tunnels.

It's been mudpies since these bare palms
grasped ground.

Time Holds Us

Time holds us--
fallen and withered in his eyes
along with marriage, love, religion;
all jaundiced, all yellowed.

*The damn stove need to be hooked up,
so many fucking gas lines.*

He says he wants a garden.

*Sugar snap peas, zucchini, sweet corn
all in a line.
I'm a very good cook, you should come over sometime.
I'll fix venison, fresh.*

He says he writes and doesn't reread.
He says he lays on his back while his brain blinks
off on,
off on,
off on.
He says lies told in the dark don't count as that.

We should have done this years ago, tongues and all.

He says I leave my doors unlocked too much,
 need to learn how to stack cards,
 fix the breaks,
 install insulation,
 wait tables,
 grit my teeth.

I've lost hope for most human beings and I think you're next.

When will the time spent spend me?

Pin Money Pickles

Thinly sliced cucumber -- 7 cups
add brine, pickling salt (w/o iodine)
1 1/2 cups of this mixture to every 1 gallon of water.
let sit for 4 days.
Some broke backs.
Others, less murderous, slashed arms or legs
stuccoed faces.

Drain well and rinse 4 times in cold water.

They slapped her into life,
she opened her eyes.
"Light my cigarette and sing me war,"
she breathed,
"Where do you keep your shame?"

Put in kettle with alum the size of an egg
cover with water
boil 1/2 hour
Drain

Callused hands cup sticky flesh.

Boil again 1/2 hour in ginger tea
(1T. ginger with water, covered)
Drain

She walks barefoot
in the subway smell
of piss and beer and flowers thrown out windows
by angry lovers.

Boil in syrup till clear

She carries crickets in her pockets,
shares tarnished treasures,
and wraps black buildings blue.

Syrup: 1 pt. vinegar
1 pt. water
3 lbs. white sugar to 4lbs. pickles

She
gathers dandelion floats of summer
crack-plants them between pavement and

Spices: 1T. celery seed
1T. cinnamon bark
1T. whole cloves
1T. allspice

listens to the lines of butterflies
nape-draped around her neck.

Put in jars and seal.

Blind-Bound

window knocker
with those candy-lined pockets

slow-step staccatoed
horoscope son

fold sound of snow
into leaf envelopes
maple-syrup-sealed

sent
to lima bean
me

Reaping

She's not a gentle girl:
tearing meat from bone,
sucking at the ends of hip joints,
her tongue sliding over cartilage,
lips poked.
Small points pressed into pink cushions.

Dented Wax Red

My father doesn't understand my mother.
She keeps twelve pairs of shoes in a closet
organized according to color,
irons button-down shirts
square,
keeps drawers lined
with folded linens
in corners,
in closets,
in the basement under pillows where the cat sleeps.
My mother doesn't buy pomegranates.
She eats apples.
They're always ripening on the window-sill,
dented wax red.
My mother believes in the government,
carries pictures of Clinton next to mine,
takes her prescriptions,
makes trips to the doctor every six months.

I've lived off pomegranates for years,
filled my teeth with strawberry seeds in the summer,
sucked black licorice in the winter,
built tiny brigades of insects around the sun
and hammocked, watched hill-lines moisten
as they slip into the sky,
like ice on a lake in March.

...and that taste of morning in your mouth

A full pot of coffee hummed on the counter.
Two mugs sat waiting,
stained and empty.
Last night he needed to tell her,
“I’ve fallen in love with you,”
but Pints of Guinness were a pound-fifty
and it wasn’t a moment for whispers.

Breaking the Bone House

It was time,
when the days came to unhook.

Atoms shook, ready to fling themselves apart,
each one wishing liberation.
Needles withdrew,
leaving loose flesh
poked
into tents.

Those times when words, hands clung
to the small, silent peace
of little-girl eyes.

I was only five
when my mom brought her mother home
in a box wrapped tight,
silver bows on the corners.

That time of dying,
when grandma stood
ripe and upright,
cultivated like a queen.

White Hurricanes

We go lurking on wet spring nights, knowing that each of our tomorrows has turned to mud. We paint our faces and strip to our skins, glue sequins to our eyes and smear the earth over our stomachs and backs. Silva wears three peacock feathers in her hair, matted into small curls around her bare neck. Erica blows bubbles with her lips and tells us that she can grow twice as fast as any boy can; she says she understands it all now, and will teach us when we were ready. Becca sits under the willow tree in her sandals, she is the only one who wears shoes, and weaves the branches together so that all we can see of her under the tree is her face, glowing a pale violet where it peeks out the hole she uses for entry and exit.

I like listening to them quarrel over when the prowling would begin, and who would be the leader. It fills the evenings with a sound like the water makes against stones it can't budge.

I paint my toenails with the lacquer I made the night before. I love to let them grow long so that I can scratch the bites I get on my legs. I stand on one leg and use my other foot to scratch. Mosquitoes enjoy young girl-flesh. Mud prevents some bites, but not all, and I know that I'll never outgrow the "Ahhh" of scratching.

Inevitably, the quarrels occur between Silva and Erica. Erica thinks that Silva spends all her time searching for peacock feathers and other

ornamentation, which she does, almost; and Silva thinks Erica spends every moment blabbering about the boys, which she does, almost.

Some days I wake up, thinking I am still in the village and there is food in Mother's basket by the front door. I think of the fruit, set out for me in the morning, on the table's warped wooden slats. I live in the smell of ripe fruit now. The jungle seeps its smell into my dreams like poisoned honey. The only time I think of the village anymore is when we go lurking. At times I have nightmares, waking from sleep to find myself in the hammock I've taken, shaking with the madness of fire that whips around in my eyes. My mother's face, mouth open and wide-eyed, rises from the shadows of leaves in the moonlight, staring at me as if I were a ghost. These dreams pulse through me like blood.

So, when they quarrel, I am quiet. I am always quiet when they talked of the village and lurking.

Silva considers the peacock feathers magical. She scours the forest floor in the evenings, looking for their iridescent flickerings by moonlight. Some nights Silva stays gone for hours while the rest of us make paints to use during our prowlings and eat dinner. Sometimes, I follow Silva on her search in the jungle. I practice my lurking, staying low and quiet, and watch as Silva pranced in the dark forest, stooping to pick up a found feather, then attaching it to the belt she wears slung low in the front, balancing just above her girl-hips.

We usually take to the night--it is the safest time to be awake because the jaguars do their prowling then, and a body should be awake and aware. Erica is the only one who prowls and lurks during the day, and she always comes back with huge flowers from the village and animals that are already skinned. As she cooks them over the fire, she tells us stories and we fall asleep.

Becca was the last to leave the village. She stood so that she was on the edge of the village, where the shade line of the forest broke the sun, and stared at the houses and confusion we left behind. With her hand on her forehead to protect her eyes from the morning sunrise, she sighed and turned toward the forest's night-like obscurity. Becca carried a bag of grain and a metal pot. The pot was charred on the outside from the nightly use at the fire, but the inside was shiny and clean. She had scrubbed it every night after her family's dinner. Becca wore her hair in two blonde braids that rested on her shoulders, but twisted with unsatisfied longings to be undone whenever she moved. It was as if each hair wanted a moment apart from the rest to be celebrated singularly, instead of being bound to the others. The soles of her shoes were also braids comprised of dried grass orderly spiraled to accommodate her feet. Two straps of leather emerged from each sole and wrapped themselves around her feet then crawled up to her ankles where she tied them when leaving the willow's protective shade.

We had decided, all of us together, that there was no reason for us to continue our lives among the rest of the village. We had no time for boys' jabbing and pinching. We did not want to have children. We wanted to tear through the forest, until our legs burned. We wanted to taste the

fruits that one must climb for. The trees called to us, promising cradle-branch beds and boats for fishing. We were young, and we would always be girls.

We stole when we left. We carried vegetables and spices picked from the village gardens. We packed seeds and left the grain bins only half full. Erica loosed the chickens that morning. She ran through the chicken coup screaming and waving her arms. The air was peppered with feathers, black and white. No, we did not leave quietly that morning; we left like fire. Erica grabbed two of the hysterical chickens by the feet, their wings pumping, her arms jostling with their senseless terror, and threw them onto the block. I watched her swing her right arm so that the knife came down on their necks with the precision of one of our mother's hands.

In the midst of that blizzard, humans and animals screaming white screams, I saw Erica, the eye of the hurricane, standing calmly with the legs of the chickens' limp bodies in her left hand, their thick blood falling onto the rest of the flock twisting in convulsions beneath them. The stains probably still burn in those feathers. It was as if she had summoned the hysteria with nothing but her mind. Her eyes caught mine, and with the intensity of a jaguar about to pounce, she whispered to me, "Do the same. We will need food. Bring all you can carry." And I obeyed.

*When the sun,
the seemingly inexplicable sun,
tempts me
with his iridescent obesity,
I will figure his turning.*

I.

Get married. Do it.
Fall face forward into lunacy, telling yourself you want it.
You do.
What was he like half-his-age ago?

II.

When I scream my heart blinks.
When I close my eyes, whirlwinds of kaleidoscopes,
diamonds and triangles,
broken into grids throw me into sleep,
spinning.

III.

She cuts her finger sometimes, second from the left.
The latest was on Tillotson
during an unsuccessful curb hop
upon entrance to the bridge party.
Dirt caked the blood on her knees, elbows and palms.
She smeared some on her face too;

there's nothing quite like a facial wound
amid cheesecake on china.

IV.

Ryan still hasn't called.
Ex-boyfriends are funny that way.
They spill themselves over the table,
leaving a mess to be cleaned up.

V.

My mop is no longer wet,
hair no longer combed,
my body no longer firm.
Grab that eighteen-year old and run!
Maybe no one will see you, or maybe
you'll make it home in time to see me
burn it down.

VI.

China is so fragile these cold winter days,
brittle,
like the top layer of snowflakes--
the last group landed.

VII.

Lady Day, laydiday, La Di Da

*My wings are too tight
and my hands are too loose.
My strings like the sky
and my love like a noose.*

VIII.

The robin screams spring...

Every plant has seeds.
I hang them in my windows,
in their casings--intact--suspended
by girdling strings,
unsoiled and condensation-wet.

Over time I will plant them.
They will sprout.

Anticipation is the key...

IX.

Each moment of lust is a wrapped bloom.

She watched it grow,
watched the way things move,
grinding against each other until
compromise, the match.
Edges meet, flush.

X.

Being breathless,
eyes strung together green-grey-blue,
they laid under the calicoed sky
watching for flaming pigeons,
long-foreseen partings, and dreaming
all the time.

XI.

Tomorrow is holding a contest with yesterday
and we're the prize,
two hazel-eyed lovers too soft for the fall.
You in green pants--invisible in the forest,
gone to play,
returning in 24 hours
smelling of gas and sweat
and hand-held
guns.

XII.

telephone rings

"Anything can wait 'till monday,"
he told her one rainy sunday afternoon
while the streets escorted rivers to their drains.

“Don’t look for me now,”
she whispered. And drops crawled down
the obscured pane,
his hand resting on her hip,
next to his thigh, his palm, his thigh.

The road, rain stained,
sequined over like a clutch purse.

XIII.

I helped push him out.
You see, his wheels had been spinning,
and I was in bed
warm and frustrated, like yeast and water
in a small bowl, fermenting.

XIV.

Wake
 pink-and-bruise
 sore.

Christ, I’m drowning in sin syrup.

XV.

She felt sick this morning,
sick in the morning, mourning.

He soaked me up and pulled me over too many times.

XVI.

*College,
college,
college is for people who don’t understand people like me.*

A tick will perforate each hour,
eyes draw needles through the holes.

*I get the idea,
that is, I... understand,
comprehend,
regurgitate information
blandly.*

But sometimes jellybean me sings songs of boundless lemondrop
sundays and on twitter-click warm saturdays between five friends,
ricki lee jones, and nudity, share-speckled over the cliffs (that's what
we called them when we were there) when the days and nights ran
slant and laid next
to each other

like
we
do
now.

XVII.

I'm a bad friend.
I carry pocket-fulls
of unwritten postcards.

XVIII.

Yet, I'm in love.
There,
where core touches core.
There, where the days grow thick
with disorder and laziness.

Rain-grown,
sun-blistered,
lime-lipped,
love.
Bashful eyed through the screen door.

So I place the words
on the pages
of my life.