

WEATHERVANE

by

Teague Morris

Joanna Klink, Advisor

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the  
Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors  
in English

WILLIAMS COLLEGE

Williamstown, Massachusetts

26 January 2017

*for Kat*

The world feels full.  
When we are silent,  
we see it bare.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are a number of people without whom I never would have completed this project, and to whom I therefore owe a tremendous debt. First, Lawrence Raab, to whom I am thankful for honest and insightful advice which I nonetheless was only able to take later; and Jessica Fisher, who likewise did an incalculable amount to improve my writing. I would also like to thank the other members of the English department at Williams College with whom I took classes, for all they have done to enrich my writing and thinking. Thanks therefore to Anjuli Raza Kolb, for Walcott, and James Pethica, for Shakespeare. And similarly my tutors at Exeter College, Jeri Johnson for Yeats, and Sophie Butler, for Milton, a poet I never expected to love. I am also heavily indebted to the advisor of my philosophy thesis, Bojana Mladenovic, for a number of delicious meals and for challenging my thinking at every turn. And, of course, thank you to my thesis advisor, Joanna Klink, for making far better poems out of my writing than I ever could have alone. Last but not at all least, I would like to thank Ariel Chu, for never thinking my poems are terrible.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

6	Pine
7	Radio
8	Rothko
9	Weathervane
10	Hush
11	Transparency
12	Thanks to the dog
13	Hyena
14	Bog-men
15	Paper Airplane
16	Lap swim
17	Kiss
18	Icemelt
19	Our sea
21	At night
25	December
26	Crystalline
27	Snow
28	Dream
29	The fire left
30	Knife-edge

## PINE

Pine-needles grow like moss in the beam  
of the streetlamp. Night is the stone  
beneath. The green patch glimmers

as I pass—river now, and flowing. Ahead,  
another light extends, slicing another piece  
from the flank of darkness. Studied,

I watch the crenellating parts of nature  
forming themselves. I feel, as everywhere,  
a stranger. When parts of me peel off

they look much like this: a stripe revealed,  
then vanished. The night recedes and rushes in  
again. I don't think of the bent old man

still pushing carts, or the children huddling  
in the minivan because they have nowhere  
else to go. Instead I look closer at the needles.

From a distance they seem one mass: up close,  
shining from the light, you can see their joins,  
perpendicular to the dark, living wood.

## RADIO

The clouds remain in the air: flute  
and lilac. Somewhere I know  
there are crickets. The dark hovers.  
Outside, you forget, there is

a whole world of creatures: the cats  
fighting over each patch of grass,  
the raccoons, ingenious, dismantling  
the traps left by neighbors—the skunk

running lookout across the yard—  
what do they care of us? Do they  
stop for a moment when we cross  
their paths, as if afraid that they

might harm us? Again the deer  
just losing their spots in the heat  
are wandering across the street—  
if no light catches them, they

will vanish from our world.  
They say the deer are strange  
people. We pause and pay them  
our respects—glinting as they wear

our headlights for a moment on their skin.

## ROTHKO

Quietly the lives of the animals are all  
going on. Like the way you feel most  
alone when surrounded by a crowd—

Out across the plains there are thousands  
of vanished presences: eyes which  
have not been gazed into have evaporated.

The lamp-post is orange's final boundary:  
evening is slipping into night's pale blue.  
The dogs are out again, they have broken

through your fences. Everywhere now is  
the crickets' crackling static. When space  
is cleared you can hear the sounds

which listening forbids. Now we are turning  
over our kitchen tables to find the things  
we have lost hiding in the hollow between

the surface and the wooden floors. Now  
we are watching the cold light  
of the refrigerator spill—



## WEATHERVANE

what is it like when the weather  
changes as if you have run now  
into a long marshy field hushed  
by the folding wings of grey geese

the sky like settled snow grey  
and pockmarked like feathers  
might be disturbed so you must  
tread quietly lest they wake

while the howl ruffling feathers  
never comes you imagine it  
but only breath fills the marsh  
lying asleep in the morning

## HUSH

The breeze that seems  
like breath to fill rooms  
when only the dust

is there—this sound  
not sound like a hollow  
threshing layers of bone

from ribs—the eye  
shaped like a coin  
is paid for the rusting

ship that ferries us  
nowhere—this sound  
left over lingering

in the air like a cloud  
over the water which  
does not rise

nor sink nor vanish  
but simply floats  
a brush-stroke forgotten

in the pause  
when the brush lifts

## TRANSPARENCY

Staring into the black glass, house-lights  
are indistinguishable from stars. And now  
the choreography of evening: the wind

soaring down spins into a pirouette,  
the outline of lavender. Following  
the leaves, gold and changing now

to grey ash. Against skin cool:  
the bitter table. We are building  
our houses always on the ground.

A hand enters. Bowing its small  
respect. The expected sea hovering:  
we realize that the night

is empty. The dog chained there  
in the middle of the field. The flash  
of someone else's hurt.

## THANKS TO THE DOG

thanks to the dog    there is a little spot  
of cream    in the world today which is  
full not at all of yellow leaves    and now  
withering branches    like the skin of old  
and intemperate men    look at him he  
does not know that strangers    may bite

thanks to the dog    I am remembering  
the smell of autumn    a brown ball  
of parchment paper    and the grass which  
endures the jacket    of ice each morning  
if he can look up    to the things above  
and the things below    why not us

thanks to the dog    there is something  
which is only good    in the world today  
watching his high-step march    filled  
as he is with excitement    leaping  
at the sight of anything    rolling himself  
in the things    we forget about

## HYENA

Told to pretend to be a hyena  
at a party, you recline and appear  
to sleep. I am myself pretending  
to be angry. I chew the carpet.

Now we are pretending  
to be each other. We try  
to imagine what it's like.  
We are already there.

You pretend to be concerned.  
You do it for so long your eyes  
get a little squiggly.  
I am pretending to be myself,

or at least who I think I am.  
And you are still pretending  
to be a hyena. Huddling on branches  
you hoot and I pull up my knees

and shoulders. The moon sees  
only owls. Are you pretending  
to be the person who I thought  
you were pretending to be?

Do you believe that I believe  
what I say I am only pretending  
to believe in? We are pretending  
to be each other. I am told

to pretend to be a hawk. I stand  
on one leg and squint. And you  
are still a hyena. I am told  
to pretend to bite you and

I really bite you. I pretend that  
I am sorry. Now I am pretending  
to be a tree. And you also  
are still

## BOG-MEN

Paper might be made from them—  
illuminated as the hidden book  
plated with gold held from fire  
and thief at Kells—look, they

have turned to stone. Look,  
they have lost each other in  
the ground. As skin and bone  
fused. As wishing hands

coupled finger-to-finger.  
Only five hours spent man and  
wife. On the cold and lonely bed  
lain before the firing squad.

A little cross in Kilmainham  
yard. Holding in desire until  
the whole body shakes—until  
the little egg-shell worn as skin

crumbles. Swallowed by peat  
and made mummy. All sucked  
from the body and only  
the outside left. Only skin.

## PAPER AIRPLANE

crumple the paper    and watch  
with trembling hands    as flights  
of others rise    only yesterday  
in the long backyard    the grass  
like a younger brother    still  
pacing in the tantrum's afterbirth  
gave you breath    lift the current  
you race across the sky    folding  
edge over edge    the difficulty  
of the crease    made with wrist  
not the pliant finger    bones  
that do not want to bend that way  
folded down    like the seal on the jar  
that held a spirit    such precision  
required to contain you    but nothing  
can hold you down to the earth  
except falling

## LAP SWIM

The thing with swimming laps is, you  
can never get to the end. Each kick  
of the lap-lane's end leaves a nick  
in the concrete. The water tastes blue

and covers like the night. Flip  
turn. Life is like this. Each arm bites,  
is bitten by the water. Wheeling kites  
of hands. The feeling that you could slip

and fall, though the water is there  
to hold you. Flip turn. Sometimes across  
the lane, someone appears. And the loss  
after they have passed is hard to bear.



## KISS

Like the moment when you break  
the water's surface and breathe  
in the first lungful of air, I  
am trying to inhale the distance  
between us. We are clumsy,  
a bit drunk. Although we have  
already stumbled across the air  
parting our lips, although our bodies  
have been this close before,  
there is something remaining,  
something that makes us need  
to lengthen our quivering fingers,  
to brush anything we can touch.  
Although we have left the friends  
with their gossip, the pigeons  
hopping in circles under the stars,  
although we have left the noise  
and press of the club, an urgency  
remains—

## ICEMELT

I wake running thoughtless  
into a broad and open field—  
an intruder in a gallery at night—  
each statue draped with a veil—

I stand among them lost  
as the animals themselves  
might stand when no human  
voice is there. A sudden,

unseen signal—the sound  
begins—first angry, like horns  
the call of the numberless birds  
unmoving—the moment breaks—

I reach out—brush a shoulder—  
your eyes startle—the morning  
brings again a delicate thaw—

## OUR SEA

### *Santorini*

It's an overwhelming  
feeling, as if your mouth  
were the center of gravity

drawing the past continually  
into the present. My eyes  
which once were stones

turn to pools of water.  
Your fingers make me  
taut like the water. And

somewhere I find under  
your skin the ocean  
lit by its own moon.

### *Florence*

The night condenses. There  
over the river you can see  
the dome Brunelleschi built.

The streetlamps flank  
the water that is as deep  
and quiet as the sleeping dead.

I perch above a graveyard.  
The wind has died down,  
the lights cold, undisturbed;

and now I begin to feel  
the tug of your absence  
like static in the air.

*Mykonos*

In a tunnel halfway up  
a hill on one of the Greek  
islands you are pushing me

into the wall. You are biting  
my lip, your fingers everywhere,  
your eyes shut tightly, looking

for something behind me,  
something in the concrete  
at my back. I turn you,

grabbing your ribs, searching  
out your edges, trying to find earth  
under the stones in the riverbed.

*Santorini*

Your mouth is around me.  
Hastily I think of the sea  
and try to catch the surf:

I am shaking like a fish  
caught in a net. Water  
never held me as you do:

each fingertip like a wave  
cresting, the brush light  
and frothing like the foam.

I think of us on the beach.  
The moments linger like  
stones at the point of impact.

## AT NIGHT

i

Walking, later, still kicking up silver dust,  
we find the long bird-cries wheeling in wind  
like divers—the whispering kind of upslope  
breeze, carrying the sound of cattle sheltering.

The rose-wound light of the mountains  
binds us. In quiet we cannot see the trail  
ahead. Like water sucking in, our treads  
vanish down into ancient seabeds.

ii

We talk for a while. But while we talk  
I'm thinking of you—like nautilus-shells  
hungered deep into spirals by their need,  
you keep shaping me with your absence.

Led on I think of time spent sharing a bed  
in the innocent past.

iii

And at night the choirs of the unborn,  
the unremembered, the dogs, the forlorn—  
the snow like falling stars, losing form  
as it shelters the red sandstone. Black

and trembling, the air descends. Grass bleached  
by winter wavers and cracks. The coyotes,  
thin with cold, spend the little hours murmuring.

iv

We leave each other messages, but I think  
only of fingers lithe and reaching. Brushing  
a scar left in childhood like the lessons  
we learn by falling. By scraping our knees.  
By getting up again.

v

And at night the stars lit by a candle  
are sliding past the airplanes, matching  
the tide. Dreaming over the Atlantic I  
am strangely restless. Anxious dreams,

steeped with the uncomfortable deepness  
of hands whose reachings miss each other.  
Beneath me the endless heap of all the creatures  
piled in the sea lies unmoving. I draft

regretful letters I will never send.

vi

The distance between us brings a quivering  
unlike anything I have ever known. As pines  
may be torn from the soil when a flash-flood  
rushes headlong down the mountains, this pain

uproots me.

vii

Tautly your eyes ask me to wait.  
If I wait any longer the rain will eat me  
down to my bones. If I wait any longer  
my skin will shed me.

viii

We are meeting in the airport. We are talking  
around the weight of a black star, pulling in  
its net as it catches us in orbit—we wheel  
and turn like kites held in the same fist.

Your foot tapping against mine says more  
than hours of conversation.

ix

And at night I wonder, as stars fall and die  
in the great darkness—how is it that we come  
to open our eyes together? How is it that when,  
like divers caught in the billowing mane

of bioluminescent coral planed by the hands  
of fish, we look upon something we mistook  
for something ordinary—

x

And at night all our caution wraps us  
like bedsheets. I wonder at the way our eyes  
are trying to say something we cannot come out  
and say. I want nothing more than to say it.



## DECEMBER

The wind has gone now, and the morning  
is quiet. We get dressed in warmer clothes  
than yesterday's. Some few leaves are still  
clinging to their boughs—the snow

cannot quite stick to them. The sun spread  
out across the whole sky—no part whiter  
than another. Like fossilized bones the black  
trunks of the trees emerge from snow.

I sit inside and read. The world is hushed.  
The snow still falling. The first snow of the year.

## CRYSTALLINE

The glass on the window    seems to be  
solidifying    dirt and ice painting it  
so that when the sun    grey and cold  
with winter    comes flat against it  
the crust    like the grime under fingernails  
needs to be dug out    the air grey too  
coming to wrap itself    around shoulders  
around unleashed dogs    creeping in  
to every bed    a ghost tangling sheets  
when no body is there    not only glass  
but the growing things    are turning  
slowly to ice    the empty spaces within  
expanding    cell walls cracking one  
by one    freezerburn coming now  
to shine the edges of things    but  
look how beautiful    they are jacketed  
in the thing which kills them

## SNOW

to turn from your words    still stinging  
I consider the snow    heavy and dead  
unfeeling as the ground    supporting it  
the day is a single color    grey longing  
to become white    covering everything  
the way it clings    though the warmth  
will kill it    the way it frosts a nose  
or a hand although    the heat of the body  
will destroy it    the way it packs itself  
though it will become ice    inimical  
to turn from your words    although  
the ice will kill them    although snow  
will pack itself    although the frost  
will come to seal the sky    silent  
as the grey    and unfeeling morning

## DREAM

There you are, lying in the dark  
shaken by the short fall taken  
after almost having fallen asleep.

The eyes of the angels like points  
swallowed by the sky are closed  
and the blue night settles in.

Earlier the fog made the streetlights  
flower and muffled the sound  
of footsteps until I was alone.

Out there you remember again  
what you forget while in a crowd  
that the body is eating itself.

The small buzz of things hangs  
like the snowdrifts cover ground  
cold and heavy as the grey fog.

The knife-edge is poised again  
to make you remember the things  
you forget until your body shakes.

Rehearsing the words of those  
who we still remember holds  
the heavy wings at rest.

The window's beam casts you  
into the quiet blue water  
which you must pass through.

Sleep again, and do not let  
the night's angels or fog  
or any cruel dream trouble you.

## THE FIRE LEFT

*for Yoshi Endo*

The snow comes early    branches still  
burnished gold even    though the frost  
lingers    you who cannot but be  
remembered    in your presence  
in the everyday    when you rustle  
leaves or disturb the air    at death too  
the world does not alter    the vanished  
taking with them    the things  
they saw and touched    untouched  
by spring's fire    green and leaping  
kindling in this branch    or that  
as in the ground    what is gone  
may cede its place    to another fire  
goodbye    you who cannot but be  
remembered    we must take down  
one by one    the things you have left us  
to furnish    the place we build  
for you

## KNIFE-EDGE

Things proceed from sharpness  
to sharpness. The leaves strokes  
left in air by a brush. Swans

settling on each living pool, wing  
to wing. The water hums in answer,  
deepest, oldest. I am alone. Even

surrounded by such life. The curve  
where the land meets water begs  
as I do. They are different kinds;

they can only change each other,  
mingle, become mud. But in change  
the ecstasy of the drowning stone.

You are not the first to be a water  
I cannot drown in, a wound  
I cannot close. The sun creeps

crouched in the long grass. Its hand  
pointed, reaching. Even here  
the unfathomable touch of light.

What we grasp is only blood and bone.  
It is not ourselves. We try becoming  
in others. We only change; mouths

less true than those behind. Hands  
not our own.

## NOTES:

The first lines of “Hyena” are taken directly from J.L. Austin’s essay “Pretending”, and other lines are paraphrased and inspired by it; “at death, too, the world does not alter” is Ludwig Wittgenstein, in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.