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Strike Out Across the Shoreless Ocean

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STRIKE OUT ACROSS THE SHORELESS

OCEAN

by

Julia Claire Paajanen

Bachelor of Arts
University of Southern California
2007

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

**Department of English
College of Liberal Arts
The Graduate College**

**University of Nevada, Las Vegas
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THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

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Julia Claire Paajanen

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and Dean of the Graduate College

December 2011

ABSTRACT

Strike Out Across the Shoreless Ocean

by

Julia Claire Paajanen

Dr. Donald Revell, Examination Committee Chair
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What happens between a reader and a poem is none of my business. The world has
always been yours; find your own way.

1. Every choice is correct.
2. Everything is true.
3. What is anything, unless so far as it is enjoyed?

All you have to do is see the course, and when you see it, go.

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Wake in the slumping red reeds, yellow mud and flies
lost in the fog. The algae's suction of each
tiny leaf on each pore, fingers of water up thighs,
tadpole boots, and the pulsing of peat moss and leech.
In the winter, reed edges nicked channels through skin,
it was crisp and the only smell was of snow.
The blackbirds have kept you too long, and the gin
is all gone. Feel the drowned dogs dancing below.
It is nice to be lonely, to look at the stars eating
holes in the sky. Eavesdrop the foghorns from cast-iron ships,
and think of the sea. It is cheating
to listen to me, or pretend there's a script.

There are cattail seeds caught in the air,
but don't think
about that. Try forgiveness, and patience
to sink.

6

Mosquitos will miss you. Relish the sins
of the selfish, and break all the nests in
your way when you swim.

10

A baseball player throws a baseball to another baseball player.

Take a walk/Carry:

:frogs

:Play-Doh

:a candle that smells like food

:a lock of hair

:a fondue fork, fondued

I am going out tonight-- to have a beer and dance to an old singer in a sequined vest-- I will jump in puddles-- without galoshes-- right now there is gravity-- there is water holding up boats-- there are cookies--

(I don't mind if you listen to Thriller while reading this--
I'll put it on too)

I promise to catch you if you come.

My head is star-shaped
waiting for a star

My hands have made
the most surprising things
out of cardboard

House, motor, horses
Here, little box:
this can be a spaceship
Here is a porthole, engine, fins

If I want to breathe more air,
I will make a hole for that

The breathing of the world
is too fast for me

I will breathe like this tomato plant:
making tomatoes

nothing here is not god

red plastic stadium seats

this is a new place

everyone is here:

dinosaur bones crusted in rock and the dogs that are

abused and not abused girls you knew

god pedaling his red god down the dusty god

lettuce leaves

try being the grass

try being a rock, the dinosaur

molecules of water:

stop
you're doing it wrong, running

your eyes over me

let's parade with him outside
drop those hands
held so tightly to your wrists

give hands back
to share the particles

:never stop loving

Phoenix lives in the mountain
she is red-beaked
and white like moonlight

Pull the down comforter up
or your feet will dry like apples

Body is only particles here
feathery dirt breaks bones for mineral

The farmer is here too
skin breathing in iron
spade breathing in oxygen

The girl's sacrifice skull
letting in the rains
that make the harvest hard

Farmer has your feet now
girl has your hair now
the rain beats at your ears

He expands
she laps over
cups of bodies spilling over

The world is warm and close
and made for sleep

Pull the mantle up
swap follicles for the thick everyone
4

The mallards tense wings in the water
muscle strain sticks to the soul

The frogs are too far away to be fingers
the mind remains mechanism to know

Your grandmother's near and she told
me to tell you
Let it go, let it go, coming home

Feel gravity pull all your darker parts
faster
weight is a thing that's determined to last
Travel needs presence to move and to
learn:
The gone and the silent are equally vast
8

I was running from the madness
the broken ship, the yellow torches
Phoenix hid me in her nest

Wade with me through leaf-piles of dead:
I am here to hold hands from turning smoky.

The skyscrapers fold open like dollhouses, fake
and solid. The dust that gathers in the creases

of your shoes isn't real, but it is heavier
than real dust. There is no sun.

Ask for Elvis, but there
are no souls unsullied:
like gorgonzola in your
fridge.

There are twenty copies
of your heroes, fifty
maps of where the will

is stashed. Every rock
will tell you the stories
you already know.

Follow the signs that
resemble feathers.

22

It's OK: darkness is real
and terrifying. Breathe
as much as you can.

The mountains over
there will lead up,
but the rocks will only
love you

if you believe they will
34

Stay: sift.
21

Oh! Mayan temple skyscraper!
Caged tops of the fortress!
Spears in the setting sun!

Liquid sky and sacrifice clouds

Escape from the charred cigarette-earth
to air out of gold

Anything can save you:

Each day the towers still point up!
Still the circling desert, the wind

Silhouettes, halo set on earthy sand
crowned with the diamond searchlight
someday you will capture the sun

The distance may be dark—
in this circle we worship through the
night
29

West through dunes
and head turned up

follow what you can:
light iron roads
spikes into :things to pound rail

migration along the invisible trails

one thing cannot help but move to
another
32

Horizon! Lox! Automobiles! Sex!
Run to the ocean and swim past the sands

They're playing a polka
they're twining their arms

Dance with the dollar
wash off your scars

Sloshing your belly
One more night, please,
of lights
before chambers and
feet
9

(You are the camel
and they are the jars
start walking backwards
toward opening mouths)
12

Goodbye to the lillies,
the
streets!
Parkas to make the cold
joyful
14

And after that, nothing can govern you:
Play billiards with marshmallows,
or graft together a lime tree and a tulip.
Make a vacuum if you really really want one.
Use lungs, use water, the world is your machine.

What is left?

A metal lathe is the only tool that can make itself!
Make a kingdom:

Seeking God can be either easy or hard:
lay a trap with leaves or stained glass.
Avoid earwigs. Don't trust anyone
who doesn't know how to work a chisel.

paint, paint, paint.

run from the sun! there is no more room
under the umbrellas
13

(elbows in your ribs and bruised blue)
the elbows do not mean it: arms and bones
need space for their matter
rib, rib, ribs cage the heart and lungs:
they do not deserve to be bruised

but inside your body
there is no air:
intestine coiled next to
liver and only
warm too warm liquids
and skin
that hugs your body
together
push into this body next
to you:
diaphragm to lung,
move each other
and hairs that are not
yours in the drain
and the floor covered in
crumbs
but hold to the other
because
a body needs many to be
whole
26

because they were
strong, and wanted
the lungs to fill with air

hammer together a new
space
a fort of sailcloth and
paint: stretch

batten yourself with tar
paper,
you little hidden candy
stash

hang your paintings and
your lights
invent your own
transmutation device

11

because they were
strong, and wanted
the lungs to fill with air

hammer together a new
space
a fort of sailcloth and
paint: stretch

let in the man who plays
saxophone in the street
or notices when you're
changed your hair
this is conditional: fair

contract of family or
shared cigarette
pull up the ladder, you
have what you need:
sandwiches: value of
parts

28

Go forth!
and conquer!
icy winds will rub your cheeks
the stars will run from your astrolabe

diving bells made from garbage bags
and your feet dangling and cold and blind
it's not easy to feel the pressure grow
or the brushes of fish against toes

only wave, wave, wave
grey and smelling like crustacean

and here the dolphins!
apples in your teeth and the
crackling flags

dance to hear your steps make a noise
the echoes and the wake and the others
with you
folding into each other

down to the hairs on your skin
and the sun

2

salt to whiten your clothes
and crack your lips
and burn your hands

make this metal body float!
turn heat into motion and keep going

there are black-rocked waters
where a ship can't go
the thunder could be a waterfall
or it could be thunder

34

There is a hot spring by Phoenix's nest
It took away the rotting mud
and covered my welts with pale scars

I will say this in case you recognize it:
the heavy sun the dark paint that sticks to your skin
it is like playing chess with Orion: one move for each of his rotations

carrot cake filling your throat the roaches are already dead

the hills are accumulations: examine each blade of grass
to find the small green ants climbing on it

your friends have been exploded and reassembled:
dog's face pink claws crushed feet stalked eyes
lie still and the beasts will not see you: go to sleep
 and the green ants will cover you up
 if the brown leaves bury your face it is safe

17

Remember the yellow robes and the kneeling?
a long-haired god of kindness gave you a handkerchief,
and left you to the shackles
it always starts with this. the torn contract
the soft spots on the fruit
did you refuse the bitter tea, the butter with hairs in it?
or balk at kissing horned feet?
outside it is cold,
and those who chant the best are closest to the fire.

now all the straws but one have rotted: there is slime on your clothes

the rugs are hiding holes in the floor
every thread you spin is eaten from your wheel:
the butterflies need it more, we were told

there is no gold left in the dirt
wine is seeping out the windows
the rice is crawling away

cast your lines over the river: they will spool out forever
there are no trout to come back
hang the tin cans at the window
no wind will move them

The ship's sails are empty, the letter reads,
there is no way to leave.

18

You and I must learn to ignore this world.
Cut the ivy from your body, pull its sticky feet from your skin.
This stone in the stream, unmoved.

the mushrooms will only speak to one another:
they whisper about dark and damp
is this a thing to regret missing?
Say to yourself, no, until you believe it.

The slow bricking, the glacier climbing over the tree:
if you sing slowly, the crickets will learn your song:
Scallop-moons, shine white in your shells
bowl of water, you need nothing added
ukelele that sings from its body

Rowboat on water, sky in all directions
the oars that can walk over waves

Let's stretch our arms and row away
break the rope and shelve the stings
no force can hold our wings

Phoenix fed me figs
until I was no longer starved
I slipped the pits in my pockets

Step from stone to
stone in the soft river

little leaf
in the wind,
 Hello

21

the ways are myriad and many
of us were great fish of the ocean
that will whisper secrets water
cannot consider footprints on the white tile white tile
with sunlight filling in lines on the sand
fish fish fish scales of wax on the candles
can only move down the path is the only way
you can look forward but your head turns
around a single point treading water turning sun
and at the end of the circuit
is something new turn turn turn
until the light grows out of itself

Come, O reader, walk beside me:
there are many potholes on the road to Hell.
Slip on this vest of wool and honey
and I will tell you how to make it.
I could sing to you the battles of a Danish king
or names of the fifty states, if you will learn the tune.
Sit by the lamb, sit under the low roofs!
Turn this orange over in your hands.

Come on: there is a population
of prophets, doublets and trees, who love to talk.

You will recognize the path: it is made of women,
gravestones and moons.

23

I kiss Phoenix on her hard beak
I did not know how else
to love my champion

Do you wake up limb on limb like icing? The sweetness from entwining, the heart-shaped eggs. You are a lover, dear reader. The tree that loved the sky so much he turned himself blue. The berry that became silk. Wave that throws itself at the sand, kissing the buried clams.

I am in love with a man. I am in love like being caught in a rainstorm, or seeing your own skin under the moonlight. It is nice, love, building a chicken soup layer by layer, golden fat and carrots. Pour me out with your hands, love. Reader, come with me; the way is lined in linens. Let's listen to the echoes between bodies.

39

Place your body inside another: be a pancreas. We are always inner, hugging: cog cannot turn without its spring. Stretch your body and watch the storm grow miles away. Feel the resistance: cozy, whole: the core is pushing out. Stand on others to see far, the bubble on bubble climbing from ocean. You are structure, becoming thing.

Are you a sleeve sewn to torso, sewn to collar? Pattern, thread. Folding is planes wanting to be close. Membrane, keep us close.

Are you cake bubble, soda dissolved in water;

4

or mantle layer, hugged, hugging?

25

Phoenix fills the mountain with her chicks
like fireflies and stars
I was not allowed to stay

Sharks! They do not love everybody!
An octopus will eat any other octopus it encounters,
unless it wants to mate.

And how good is a steak?
There is a math for this: a crane has the longest legs,
but the wings are more lovely: keep those
in glass jars, or stitch them into quilts.

The man in the cloak has trinkets, and knives,
the hen carries her eggs like a bribe.

Moonlight asks for nothing, it gives what it wants.
Air is free, and where will you stand to breathe?

What do you want?

hands
teeth
glue
rocketships
mountaintops
the day can be stretched like taffy
36

puppy
bowls
bubbles
wild grass
blank stretches of sand
to watch your being glow like plankton

We are a party of imperfect souls.
We have gin in our veins and sweat on our skin!

This is only an imitation of the ocean; this is not the real desert.
We made them better for ourselves, full of danceclubs.

If you are happy here, clap your hands!

Be brave and stay in the light because we are honest
and we are here: moles, wrinkles, lies, jealousies,
tell them all! Build monuments to them!

Stay if you can see: this is a cracked egg,
but damn! God loves an honest omelette!

Phoenix left me in the valley
with nothing but my skin
She told me, this is how we fly

We are not only trajectory:
we are an aluminum cigar
rolled on the thigh of God!

We are speaking the language of obedience
the rolling ball that loves to roll
we brought the coin to the plastic-funneled gravity well;
the movement was forged by something else

We are a juggernaut!

The grasses tremble under our feet
because we are following orders written
in the stars and hairs of the world
43

the wind wraps itself in our sails
and carries us to its home

weight is not ours, it is a hand that holds
us close

if you sit silent and still you can feel the
movement
a heart pumping us through veins
20

Watch the row of seconds: like a line of baby quail!
they can run as soon as they have hatched

the world is full of invisible batons
carried out of throat and into ear
scents carried on the wings of bees
the tiny darling flashes from neurons to fingertips

one giant trampoline that goes in all directions!

the geese eating marshmallows are innocent
when your lawn lies between the poles

iron filings and falling water and geese:
31

let's run! There is no such thing as still
and our wings want the sun all year
round
33

Roll up your sleeves, the quivering
hours must be calmed into
stillness, ice cubes in their mold.

Pour all your gold out as
track through the mountains,
this is smooth, but it's meant to be scratched.

Can you tread the new trails?
Can you stretch out a line that is perfectly straight?

This flea circus is real:
teach them to walk tightropes,
to drink tea, to take tiny bows.

Black specks moving like
notes on a score: yes!

11

Remember the dangers of high grass,
say thanks to covered wagons.

Do not forget that truth can also be a real
thing:
that a cooked egg cannot be unwound.

31

sing a song of loneliness, the rising of the sun
deer in the ocean, whales in the wood

the flailings are far away: hoof and hand
and dirt are days behind you

the water is thick as honey and there is no more forward
the empty space in sky where the moon should be:
 plucks at your eyes and mouth

ask for the city of lace
and light:
put the silk scarves over
your eyes
and the gravel will lift
you up

do not look back, do not
look up
this earthy elevator has
no counter-weight

take a step when the
moving stops:
38

use the coracle when
there is nothing else
make cracks in the cliffs
with your fingers
when you push against
the rocks,
they stand still for your
feet

roll the boulders from
the path,
and place yourself at the
peak
11

when the wind steals
your teeth,
and the waves wear at
your skin,
black eyes, drained
veins

try the warmth of the
volcanos:
bubbling salt and the
blind red tubes
in the dark, the coral
will kiss you a thousand
years
6

Sacrifice is sufficient but not desirable: return the ring to the store and you will lose its finger

Watch this gold transform into an arm!

See my silver become the sound of a foot tapping!

Where do the doves go? The woman? Will you keep the smoke you traded them for?

trade sugar for blood.....transaction cost

plus this effort

plus this tax

to every entry

36

About a man:

his nose black under the ice shell
blood turned to crystals in his limbs
and the granite cliffs ripping at fabric and flesh
loosed featherdown in the snow

Oh, mountaintop, what pleasure you take in the scratchings!

Mr. Weathers left alone and he still walked home

The base of this mountain is made of bodies:
will you climb over the frozen legs
or will you heap your sled and
pull their weight to the valley?

Or will you go with Mr. Weathers,
pushing higher in the cold mud?

I never saw Phoenix again
I can make the flowers flare
the springs are sweeter

Open the gate with your own hands!
You may carry the wreaths that are waiting for you,
that are yours.

Here, everything else falls away:
the evils, the little pains
no sand, no salt, no little specks
to rub the scrapes

The tiny droplets everywhere in the air
are cold and soothing

The driveway and the water balloons hanging in the air like lanterns. The golden flaky
promise spinning gently above the floor. Fresh plate of hors d'ouvres. Rows and rows of
pink, uncorked bottles!

Here, we are all filled to the top, with hot gravy and white tangled root balls

I will go with the mud-caked woman, who dug for reeds at the riverbank, whose
body contains me, and we catch sunfish, floured and panfried like they've always
been, and when the sun is hot, we leave the bank for the bar, a margarita with the
man who could see my height from the size of my head, also a glass of wine with
all of our mothers doing a conga line down the dusky street, all of our fathers
hammering nails in the infinite treehouse, all of the rice forever falling from the
sky and the grasps of all the hands over our hands!

your arms contain
shoals,
soft around me
40

if you cut your hair,
where will my fingers
swim?
41

soft hill of your abdomen
the valley of your throat:
anyplace is paradise
42

lover, there is no body
in these pages
I seek your skin

We write the lists and
post them by the pool

To understand the reason behind those red letters,
that is a curse

We wish for them to listen: turn signals! children! thin walls and the wisdom in leaving
one cookie on the platter!

When the crickets chirp, it means the water is too deep.
When the tree splits, it means that the sky is spitting bolts.
When the ground sobs, it means that the sand is hungry.
Now we will recognize these.

We put each footstep in the best place
to show the best trail.

44

The language of small notes:
the singing bird who tells the forest
to leave the seeds for him

The lion is honest, he takes his food at a run.

I can hear the rain on the roof,
I still do not want your umbrella.

Can subtraction be stopped once it is started?
If I choose to ride a bicycle, will you ride one too?

45

Here is the
heart of the
frog: Liberty!

Gesundheit, gazebo!
Sing, cellar door!
So long, ladies: the frogs are trilling to me.
I'll meet you in the sunset marshes
spreading feathered arms like thrushes.

This is how I am real:
bundle of blood, wearing socks
meatloaf for dinner

I am sitting on a blue chair
typing these words

It is poem o'clock because we are on this page
that is all I have to say about that

VITA

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Degrees:

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