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Standing in the night

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STANDING IN THE NIGHT

by

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Bachelor of Arts
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1997

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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**

**Graduate College
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ABSTRACT

Standing in the Night

by

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Standing in the Night has been completed under the influence of phenomenology with its curious regard towards reality. Yet it makes no claims to be anything other than what it is: really, we're just making it all up as we go along.

PREFACE

I think it is safe to say that we are all here (i.e. in MFA programs) because we find value in the written word—the beauty it has the possibility to convey. We know how it feels to come across that kind of language, and we want to be able to produce that kind of ecstasy with our own unique language choices. I think it is also fair to say we are here to explore our own voices in order to maybe, just maybe, express the beautiful with a newness that will blow readers away. So, we want newness. We seek beauty. And we have joined ranks to explore the possibilities. There is value in the commonality this quest produces—it brings us together as creative thinkers. Then again, maybe this is an entirely bad thing.

According to William Bronk, commonality is dangerous. Our perceptive capabilities lead us down the path of common sense in that we insist on affirming, through each other, that which is reality, but this affirmation stagnates until, eventually, “as we agree more widely, and experience confirms our agreements, we cease gradually to reject the external world” (VSC 10); henceforth, the danger lies in wanting only answers—answers that we make up in our own limited heads. For Bronk, as it should be for all writers, the challenge lies in not rejecting reality. It requires that we remain vigilant and seek out and accept those “wild, strange impressions we continue to have” (11). The hope is to reveal a unique philosophy using language structures and genre forms as the vehicles that will move the thoughts beyond the rhetorical mood of statement.

Although, on the flip side, this approach seems possibly too full of intent: in doing this, am I rejecting “reality”? Is this, in the words of Jean Baudrillard,

a case of the map engendering the territory (Poster 166)? Perhaps my inner imperialist is attempting to make the function fit the form. What are we even talking about when we talk about writing or art in any sense? These questions are beyond the abilities of this modest preface, but they have been slithering around in my head for the last two years.

In brief, the most enduring theory I have encountered so far describes the function of art as the relationship between the beholder and the beheld—and this is as I think it should be—as a dialogue. According to Dave Hickey, art has shifted away from the effeminate ideal of providing beauty, harmony, and generosity to the masculine ideal of strength, singularity, and autonomy (42). Hickey’s issue, as I understand it, is that contemporary art has digressed. It has severed the relationship between the mystery that once tied together the work of art and the viewer. Upon the advent of the Renaissance, the art and the viewer came to share the plane, specifically because the artist was allowed to create non-organizationally sanctioned (i.e. state or church) subject matter (9). The pleasure, power, and beauty evoked by the piece became a dialogue between the beholder and the beheld. The subject matter depicted personal politics as opposed to an idea pressed down on the artist from above.

Even at its bleakest outlook, Hickey’s theory proves one thing—there is still hope. Maybe art has veered in the wrong direction by tossing the beholder out with the bath water. But, even if there is a nefarious ideal to which art is currently held up, at least it still provides an “atmosphere” as opposed to the simulacra where everything is already perfect and perfectly severed from reality:

It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real

itself; that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double, a metastable, programmatic, perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes. Never again will the real have to be produced: this is the vital function of the model in a system of death, or rather of anticipated resurrection which no longer leaves any chance even in the event of death. A hyperreal henceforth sheltered from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and the imaginary, leaving room only for the orbital recurrence of models and the simulated generation of difference. (Poster 167)

The system in place now may not be perfect, but it does allow for a real experience to come through now and again. It slips in through here: in between reality and simulacra, in between the id and the super-ego. In this weird indescribable place that claims either, yes, this brings pleasure or, no, it doesn't.

This idea of liminality came up in my encounter with the Japanese poets. One idea that continues to resonate is Shuntarō Tanikawa's comment about his early sonnets. He states he wrote them without having any knowledge about the true sonnet form. He merely imitated the visual form he saw on the page. What he produced though were beautiful poems with a distinctly new feel with the importance lying in the fact that it was an accidental newness—a freshness that occurs when an artist stops taking the process so seriously. (The process, not the product.)

Quite possibly this is where beauty and newness come from—in this liminal space between old and new. This brief moment when the concept is barely formed. Yet the concept is fleeting, and once the influence has been

assimilated into a totality, the newness is gone, replaced by dogma; henceforth, we must be vigilant that we are not heading towards the simulacra—for what has already been proven *good*—and instead keep faith that what is innate within in ourselves is enough.

The simulacra, which by nature refuses reality, can only isolate the beholder from the beheld. It does not leave room for dialogue. It just *is*. From my point of view, poetry should use language as an agency for overcoming isolation (as Bronk does so beautifully) as opposed to using it as a means by which we estrange one another. As a result, I have strived to find the words and meanings that express the communicative inadequacies of the human experience even though, in the end, all attempts at meaning will still leave the greater part of existence a mystery.

END NOTES

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STANDING IN THE NIGHT

SUMMER SQUALL

The journey towards death requires no oars no boat only faith in
energy drifting unnatural weather shifting tide moonless night cast out
the mended net the long wait for morning lake not lake
daughter's dream father's fear of falling out of favor

FOREVER TOGETHER

Lines at the eyes where age springs petals pale in the gutter
one tenth of a second the time it takes for the face in the cloud to fade

SWIFT TEMPER

Empty synagogue on the Rhine banks the evening sun sinking
history asks nothing of the present except an audience of willing listeners

Police in small white cars line the white wall shades the absent congregation
reflects the pistol's gleam

MINE THAT BIRD

Daughter's arrival always departure
in the dark the skylark cries
empty nest eggs eaten by snakes
the slither of bodies coiling
blood on the tongue words fail

WELL ARMED

Meaning veils the concern ourselves concerned with our own well-being
the voice drifts as orange bleeds into blue
while white collared men at tables trade tobacco
scrap metal carts bent wheels barely roll
past the old beggar her filthy feet shuffling through

GIO PONTI

Gray the color that makes the most noise drifts
between city and sky the buzz of drills and electric asphalt saws
space is a journey of one minus nothing leaves no remainder no room for less
seagulls from a rooftop
an echo more far than near
the street trash the little girls' arms woven together one and one

QUE PASO

Turkish puzzle pieces of a map scattered cats with calico borders
the man and the cat occupy the same doorstep same sun sets on both
pavers grow rotting fruit stench rises the cat gnaws its paw
the sun's slow death the last death the escape from ourselves

SUMMER BIRD

Small town streets filled with strangers
a dog half dead a break in the pavement
the procreative explosion
the rush of greed and the scum scraped up
the weight equals a house the contents squeezed together
we have outgrown our atmosphere
the best of us hide in the dark smoke crack off of tin foil
grocery store shelves emptied of baking soda
the neutralization of the masses the means to the end

RAVEN'S PASS

Floating on waves greened cupolas
lost in the answer the question rises
walls evaporate my voice evaporates
burning goldbeater skin rains down
the failed experiment is no less worthy
a thousand wooden doves take flight

HENRYTHENAVIGATOR

The field of mouths blooms tongues speak of
centuries spread out space settles into black holes
lies become habits words become strangers
in the Istanbul airport waiting for the cripples to load
the mute boy holds his father's hand maps a vacant course

MEDJOOL

No time to bury bones
we bury them anyway eager diggers that we are
to the rhythm of the days' culmination

Tangerines fresh from the tree is what we think of when we think of
death or sex the same equation the same

Today half gone already half my life gone
the fear not enough to make me live
as I am dying I am dying I am already dead

VENTURA

It's not the death but the worms through the empty eye sockets
not half as gruesome as our own slithering while alive
the sun passes over and over useless apparatus

Summer rain leaves already falling away the muezzin's prayer over
the loudspeaker the distortion
when sound travels long distances the message becomes clearly what we want
to hear when we no longer want to hear
here we are

GOLDIKOVA

We sift through the rubble of a gravity-stacked history
the bomber no longer drones over Germany still
we cannot let go the atrocities of our humanity:
lampshades of human flesh

We cannot let go it's a set-up
restless bodies determine forward pull
we're all in this alone
the plane lands empty runway single passenger embarks

KUDEKUDE

Physics draws a mathematical map a discrete possibility beyond
the orphan's oracular vision clearly without country unity in isolation
in wanderlust the love of leaving the want for a home

AROUND THE MOON

Driftwood strips naked woman washed up in sea edge waves
a face reflects another face reflects the cloud layers on cloud layers

Father's fear the daughter's death sea emptied of ships shifts in endless ripples
north not north enough the riptide repeats
the refrain and already the day dialed into something different

MISS DU BOIS

Lover drifts through time zones patterns a grid farther apart becomes closer
the view from the shoreline the same view from the opposite shoreline
the telltale swings from the beam tides time in currents

DESERT FORT

Frog skin in a crocheted cup holds motion gaping mouth draping yellow

Time in changes constant shifting energy bleeds together tears apart

The alchemist's throes final alloy forever alloy the glint a yellow nightmare

ON LOCATION

A whisper in the early morning sun breeches the rain comes down

The woman with crow's feet eyes the old lover still hard

Nettle leaves stripped from stalks stinging palms the mouth a burning poison

R JACKI

Oars in the water boat drifting unmanned rain through a colander

The lines unravel the weight cast out heavy cloud passes over

Ethiopian boy in the arctic wayward journey lost and found longing

Empty bus northbound nowhere to lie about leaving soon gone the wait long

TRAMORE BAY

Deeper into the forest trees thin sky clouds over rain could be standing still
lone tree

Imagine a three-dimensional sphere around a four-dimensional sphere this is
your universe

The bone turned muscle swollen fear far back in the throat whereabouts
unknown

MY CALABRESE

Window pane painted over the name carved with a pen knife
the captain longs to sail south bound by shifting shore no return
the edge a point of departure the sailor sun-blind
only the bend and haze of gray horizon

EASY TRIP

The sun dusking at midnight dawning
two never dark sleep
wake the town from dirty dreams the sheets soaked with rusty water
a light bulb falters
the thief's hands red the clock stops

THIRST FOR DIXIE

Petals still unfallen white fading shade midnight sun forever
seagulls return underbellies reflecting the sea reflecting the arc of arctic sky

The roundness of the atmosphere held together by
gravity a small magnet can overcome

SAID I WOULDN'T

Over the cries no one hears the whoosh of the woman falling from the cliff
yellow flowers linger in the field the farmer plows rocks under
the woman acts desire the stranger's disappointment near the skiff the plover

RALLITA LA JOLLA

The gold leaf pressed lotus blossom between the pages of the book a lost
chapter

Wing flap spans the silent evening spans the silent universe the sound caught
in the ear

The hand that wove the purple robe reaches still from the grassed-over grave

GRAY SNOW

A woman stands beneath a tree peony voluptuous beauty

The petals open time lapses slow drawing in the heat exchange of skin against
skin

Words fall onto the page random symmetry orders meaning

SIGN TO BE A RUNAWAY

Lightning and the reindeer scatter
summer weathered white shed fall a broken foreleg

the fence to keep the herd in
autumn yellows the cottonwoods in July

heed the day's darkness drawing
near the cow and calf stray their way found without

MEKIA MIO

The dead in their graves last words whispered echo
between buildings a bus stops a woman gets off listens

One thousand stone carvers carving
the rhythm rings across the valley

Our once together now a ghost fleeting
a butterfly caught in a car grill

JOE SOMEBODY

Fading koto string pressure pulling wires tight a single spring unbound

sudden explosion gravity falls
off matter and radiation spread
uniformly filaments strung together
generate geology in pools of sexed sulphur

How it ends before it ends after hours of endless chatter

LIBOR

Across the field the woman waits beneath the yew the woman waits
the tree grows slowly seasons shift

At the shore one oar no boat to row on the water concentric circles fish rising
the Earth's tilt felt the arc of flight curves
over the lake the sun sinks the oar discarded

SILVER DADDY

Night gathers moon-lost
in the reflection two faces waver into one

The phone rings till the answering machine picks up
the old lover's voice sounds older
the love for the old lover older
the weirdness of being and time

Love's strange passage going nowhere one dog barks distant neighbor

JUST AS WELL

Northern sky slippery with sex light long warm skin the physics of bodies
quartz glints in the granite fingers run the length of the vein

Orbits bounded but not precisely repeating

The rough surface dried sea beds the place where your searching leaves you
search your lover's eyes for the depth for the sea a dusty remnant

MARSH SIDE

A field of gold ten thousand years for fertile soil the bracts spread open the
drought comes leaves wither on the stalk

Spired temple in the midst drifts in dreams geraniums blossom white clouds
low chant

Found house the foundation long gone inside an infant's cry crumbled walls
fallen the woman crawls across the floor feels for something familiar

WITH SMOKE

Rain through the rafters words slip downstream dripping
the sound of a voice rafted up floats away

No symmetry in language to speak of
death the definitive gesture

Is this your frustration or

the mountain crumbling over
old bones blood-sweet daughter's marrow
the dirt swallows the father ferns sprout from his mouth

OUTRIDER

Under this sun blue harbors a jet's distant rumble as a bus stalls in China a
glacier calves up north

The unbroken breeze lifts from the dry season one tree all leaves no fruit bears
the weight of this almost

ORPHAN RUNNING

Kimono sleeves deep leaves adrift as the lover left abrupt tire stuck in a
chuckhole down Darby road

A quick flash at the bend in the road where the deer drink thirsty from fire

Our thirst a light caught in the fabric falls away folds again into dark matter
crows consume the sun

HEZAFITER

The Earth turns until it is a blade across the eye
a black spot on the back of the retina
the aesthetic value in infinite regress

Want does not want does not fill the barren belly

PLACER DAWN

Blue heron nests river's blue-green witness young child on the bank

The day's arc long days the child's woman covers her breasts pendulum moon

The image overlaps the waves the shore soft sand-colored face a retinal scar

The boat returns night and ten thousand stars lost light against the current

SKY FULL OF HOPE

Cable across the seafloor tethers together continents drift still foreign the
feeling lost in the turn cold current sinks deeper

The crane caught in the seagrass yellow eye rolling tide

The woman embarks no oar no boat white shore white swelling her black hair
billows breasts below the waterline the current carries her out

Final breath vanity's last grope the measure of absence the necessity of
accuracy

SHIHALI

Ash tree a map in veins the road the lonely travel at night

is the same road with the blind curve
how many sons and daughters lost
their own now cry in the night

We fold paper into tigers light lanterns for effect
knowing
no relief
finding no solace in familiar

FLYING SIX MOONS

On a space of lawn speared leaves cup
the rooster's red head flightless
feathers greased together
energy waiting to dissipate

Words are knives

Farm the land farm the sky
the sickle your soft hand against

this stolen love for mountains

The rhythm leaves the you at dawn
a weak pink color a faint unbound
restless feet

C.J. EIGHT

A week of black winds crossing the ash crowns

Sea salt storm bearing down in the hole passengers pallid faces clouded over
white shores faint fjord line

The apple's gleam holds fast filaments eyes teeth same sharp tongue the tomb
looms where the gleam was long

Time roped out if only near here far there something necessary in between

ZENYATTA

Death is a present already past a future mathematically finite
Asleep the mountain ridge rises the night as endless day
Awake the river's current a soft cradle

HOLD ME BACK

Trees in fall orange leaves something hesitant in that death
as cold through a wool shirt seeps into our fabric not woven tight enough

pitch through a sieve

This infinity as a light outlasting our light produces
textbooks and conspiracy theories
the difference between tree and human a degree of trust

LAKE VICTORIA

In between the hum perpetuates: is this and this
strange dream that takes on the scent in metaphors
a field of red poppies the petals fluttering
the mind unattended makes its own sense
and the sun propels this honesty into waking
uncertainty the dreamer's opiate

COSMO MADNESS

Loss is exile in the tree
across the street same oak bark same oak leaves
the body stuck together by the impulse of atoms
so the self finds solace in numbers less is less is more
the physicist's blackboard blank the equation parsed out:
we have left our atoms

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