

OVER STATE LINES: SOMEWHERE BETWEEN

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Caudill College of Humanities

Morehead State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

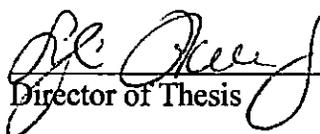
by

Melodie Past

2004

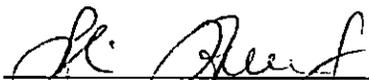
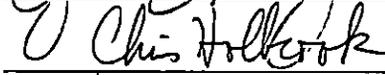
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Director of Thesis

Master's Committee:

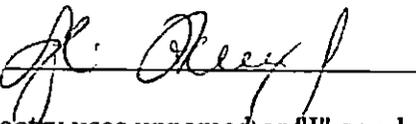
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20 Jan 2005

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OVER STATE LINES: SOMEWHERE BETWEEN

Melodie Past, M.A.
Morehead State University, 2004

Director of Thesis: 

This collection of poetry uses unnamed or "I" speakers who work toward discovery or epiphany—work revealed through the use of space and time motifs and may therefore be considered to be in a phenomenological vein. The major question in this collection is whether the sacred and secular are discernible. The majority of these poems are lyrical in that even the narrative poems work to arouse emotion as a means to invoking new realities in the reader. Vigilant attention is paid to language, therefore the multivalent nature of this lyric collection allows for multiple interpretations rather than for obscurity or incoherence. Manufacturing of poetry is done through line breaking, experimental technique, diction, figurative language and other imagery and ideas, and in other ways traditionally accepted to be methods of construction in poetry. This collection fully subscribes to the worth of reader response as a way to divining meaning from the text. Part of the text may be considered semi-autobiographical but its intent should not be characterized as confessional if not used in the loosest sense of the style—its use of an "I" speaker. To characterize this collection as confession would diminish its scope. The careful attention which is paid to individual experience is an outgrowth of its

phenomenological underpinnings. This group of poems is an exploration of experience and imagined experience, action and imagined action, reaction and imagined reaction expressed through the music of language and from the cinematography of the mind.

Accepted by:

St.acey, Chair
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Over State Lines: Somewhere Between

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I. Over State Lines

OVER STATE LINES: SOMEWHERE BETWEEN

Give me a place to stand, and I will move the earth.
—Archimedes, circa 235 BC

The river has frozen over. We stand
on its milky glass and glare
all the restraint to run away
with our eyes, with furious anger and love
for ourselves. My brother has chosen
an ice chunk I could never have lifted.
We bicker because we love each other
and somewhere in our childish minds
we know we won't be able to bicker forever.
If his will were a catapult, that block of ice
would have hit me square in the chest
where I stood, immobile as the river, ready
to take whatever came my way. Ready to be
moral. Yet it was only right to see my brother
slip with the massive ice in his arms, to see
the block land on his chest, pinning him
to the ice. I move forward, bending down to him
to the ice. I find the strength to melt
the glacier into a puddle. Together, we rise
on our knees, seeing what we have achieved.

WHAT'S ON THE LINE

With a dull ache at the neck's base and turn
at the sight of cars, you begin to wonder
whether you can afford to drive. The cost
of nausea is rising and you have nowhere
to go. Everything's reflection is what you
never quite see. With a reversed red and blue
chevron sign and double yellow arches
everything's the same. You wait for the father
to bring your children after the settled time.
The price of gas is rising and you are
not getting any taller. You are learning
why sharing the precious can make you
see everything in auras, even in rearview mirrors.
The chevron, the arches, the vessels in the mass
at the top of your spine pulse in time.
You begin to feel your reach.

FREEPORT, GRAND BAHAMA ISLAND

Consistent warm weather, calm waters—
 but damn that sand will burn the feet.
 The elixir such a clear true blue
 when I remember it
 I cry.

The calm waters—the cay
 which surrounds us is why I think
 (though, on the boat,
 the tour guide from Texas never told us)
 the waters remain so calm.
 It is this protective area surrounding this
 island that gets little deeper than ten feet.

This cay:
 a womb without a mother.
 This unreal paradise

“Darling, come here. You’d look lovely in braids.
 Won’t you let me braid you?
 Only \$3 a braid. Maybe later? Okay.
 You say you’d rather go and dance the night away?”

We dance at Club 2000 in 2001.
 Tony, the head lifeguard, told us to come here
 to capture the true essence of Freeport.
 We are here
 and I wonder why.
 We drink a little, dance a little,
 confer with two brothers we have met.
 Two brothers, one quiet, one not
 Telling us what they live.
 “How do you like my gun?” He lifts the tiny toy
 dangling from his neck on a chain. “Guns are illegal here.”
 I wonder why Chairs fly

The music moves me.

Forty-second screamdown taxi ride through town.
We arrive somehow alive. We sleep

I wake with the sunrise.
Where are the porpoises?
I'd seen them in Virginia.
Do they hunger in these waters?
Water must be too shallow around this island.

I'm alone here—how can one sleep?
The elixir so warm, so calm at the surface.
I swim over black manta
who does not mind my presence
but if I were to step on him
would be quick to return fire.
Not entirely alone with manta
around, our language
our barrier reef.
Will we ever fathom
the depth of these waters?

“Are you ready today?”
I will sit
and she will stand
when the sun is its highest
her friend will come help
we will talk about the murderous mother
and of unforgiveness
for the husband and doctor
we will talk about their ten children
(I will think of their long days
and impregnable wills)
their husbands who will
get away with nothing.
We will laugh together

as they rip out my brain
my womb contracting.
It moves me.

BIRTHING WORDS

As quetzal feathers, beautiful is my song.
 Look how my song bends down over the earth.
 In the house of butterflies, my song is born.
 —Aztec poem

Father works all day
 to learn the nature of disease.
 Symptoms. Diagnosis. Treatment.
 He specializes in internal
 medicine, not preventive medicine.

Father is very busy.
 He must not be disturbed. He must
 have absolute quiet. No friends allowed.
 We must not knock on his door
 unless we have an emergency.

In my corner near a window,
 a crack in the vacuum, I breathe
 best behind my desk, I write—
 As quetzal sings, beautiful
 is my song—over and over

and over in the silence, near
 my window, hovers a hummingbird
 too polite to knock. Or it's examining
 its reflection, or me. Without the graceful fury
 of those wings, the silent bird would fall

fast into its hunger.
 Could it survive
 on creatures that crawl?
 Could it breathe without the wind from its wings?
 Can my song be beautiful as quetzal sings?

THESIS ON CHEAP ENERGY

Fluorescence is obscene. There's a blasted banshee
in the machine. A cheap way to enlightenment is no way.
The buzzing will blockade the necessary way.
The buzzing will stop those who listen from listening.

MOUTH BREATHERS, NOTHING MATTERS

In the solitude summer brings, we swim
cicada calls to bullfrog songs and float
where ridgetops meet.

This blessed idleness may be the one gift
no one envies. The memories I hold:
Goya's grotesqueries, ocean's vomit
premature remains—chewed to the dark song
of an August night. Refusal, your Technicolor.

Coy dominance, your MGM musical. You
breathe a synthetic dream into your right
nostril, exhale your song, the left. They
choked my common senses; I thought they
were ready for show. But they did not matter.

The best of you died on television, after the hero
meets the girl who was desperate to be seen
above water. She asked, Do I exist? and he
fell toward the hot studio lights.

You'd think an anaconda might have grabbed him
on the banks. You'd think he'd have scaled
the cliff she drifted. But when he hit the ground
an ad landed on his face. He was on the rig next
Wednesday, dancing numbers for the oilmen
making tips on the side. Sometimes he sings
while they rape the ocean, breathing heavily
through his mouth.

NO SWIMMING

No swimming here now.
The water has become toxic
from the bilge of passing barges,
industrial waste and raw sewage
from houseboats named *The Squat Pen*
and *Ulysses* and I think, Those bastards
have violated our childhood home: where I
swam with minnows on five o'clock mornings
and did pull-ups under the dock to spy cicada
skeletons and dragonfly lovers who would take flight
together in the noonday sun, so non-linear, not knowing
where they were going, so attached to the moment. But
who's to say the river was ours for the arrowheads and driftwood
and islands I found?

DOMINO EFFECTS

Some unknown kept us from leaving
At our scheduled departure | “Arriving UFO” on the airway
In the international airport lavatory | was compensation for the waste
We felt for having rushed
In the flood of wanderers.

Whoever you are
You led me to the shade of the banyan trees
To burn my corneas, tracing and retracing
The motion of their twisted cords, to lose
The foreign brew in my brain.

She lay on the shoots, blind, still drunk
From the night that could never have passed
So quickly | thinking the shoots should grow into her
So they might infuse | the wetness
Was leaving like the stranger | she knew better than herself.

Where are we going?
The men will show us | they make a game
Of what we need to know. They already know
This is their home. We aliens
White rectangles with black dots | dry bones and burn scars.

DADA IS MMM . . .

A spontaneous work of art,
Dada, I make you
What you already are—
To what you amount,
To what you know.

Moments like this last
In the collective pool
The dark matter of our race:
Present in its absence.

I drop you, Dada,
And the rest:
To sweep would be to smear.
So I flush

Minute
Inane
Absurd, you
And what you know

You and your sorrow
Down your pale throne
Down your dark tunnel
Down your easy road.

FERLINGHETTI DID THIS

A trapeze act
is one
in that
the risk is high
while the one
taking risk makes
the feat look easy.
Done with hours
of practice
each day
practicing
for years
to accomplish
what seems
unaccomplishable.

I may
(run away
to) join the circus.

TELL ME, PAIN

Tell me pain is not injury or invoker
when I see it moving inward with the waning of the lune.
There was disregard for a word, a treading upon an honor.
Nothing is ours that we cannot spend.
The kiss is the spin.
Nothing is mine that you cannot reach
after dipping into my crescent dream of water.
Silence leaches: the body of soul.
Penance: ingress to expense.

AFTER THE ICE STORM

A window reveals the icy limbs
In discourse with disturbing winds:
Warning of a potential fall
Breakage of those brittle limbs.

She wants to generate heat
Without violating the season.
She wants more than heat
For every season. A geometric transparency,
An exchange of visions.

What can she say to a tree
In pain? Will a maypole dance
In arctic climate thaw the soil and save it:
Hope for future talks and fertility dances?

AN END

I've been married
to the summer
since I began
to love the water.
We've been together for 24 years.
Summer and I separated in March.
The water and I are left
to stare at each other.
We can only perceive
the eddies and waves
that will soon pass.
But our senses sharpen
and together we slit my throat.
Now when I kiss the still water
it returns to its solitary place.
I will join it in the passing of my time.

II. What We Know

WITHIN THIS RHYTHM

To be listening
to the music
at this moment
for the first time
since ancient time
since before
the call of war
is proof that pain
is a collection
pulsing to the
syncopated beatings:
rhythms we move
but will never hold.

WITHOUT THE OASIS WITHIN

Expatriate in his own backyard.
“Where do I plant the garden?”
“Where do I hang my hammock?”
“Which way is east?”
Inside humor in his writing outside
the boundary of truth.
Your place of origin
a point of reference
but not a measure of worth.
“Meaningless! Meaningless!”
can be a guiding way
directions to the oasis—
we all at some point
thirst.

WHAT WE WANT, OR WHAT WE GET

Mercury is the early morning sky that finds
us with no thoughts of darkness.

We believe in stretching points of light.

We know no limits for we know nothing and
sleep is the romance of nothingness
treading the horizon of dreams.

Water is everything we cannot be.

WHAT WE WANT, OR WHAT WE GET II

Rubbing my forehead did nothing for me.
You were eager to make that mistake
for company and regret. I regret
having had that faith. When I was called
an atheist in American literature class
I almost kissed the ground with laughter.
When people stretch my skin like that
I want to swallow the apostate and be sorry later.
My head is a big stone gap without a family name: lost
in the idea of itself, the image of itself.
You can kiss the mouth of god and complain
about the stubble or you can continue
to breathe through your nose. He might say,
I'm tearing up your face.
Segues get me sometimes, so I did not stop him
when he carried me to bed.

CAMPING

This body never seemed to be mine
until I was with him and even then
this body she felt through his hands
as something worthy of holding—
at least as a sleeping bag in the cold.
What do the Blue Ridge Mountains know?
Snow, wind, rain, erosion.
Erosion and the manipulation of demigods
the howling of demidogs—they will not change.

WHAT WE SEEK, OR WHAT WE FIND

Remember the time you found yourself
pressing knees into frozen patio
piercing silent ground into screaming
for little things that break with one precise blow.

GUIDE TO GETTING THERE ALIVE

Primal rhythms pulse in the heart of my sleep sending news of war in code.
If only the rhythms were mine to keep, the vicious cycle would die with me.
Nothing is ours.
Ownership is mythic as capitalism to Amazon women.
If I awaken before this dream becomes another's
perhaps the code will crack over my capitalist head and bid the rhythms return.

WHAT YOU DO WHEN YOU GET THERE

You come to love
what you find still in water.
You turn
your back on a waxing shadow
the unseeable of your moon.
See destruction's penumbra.
Know that nothing matters.
When you touch me I know
nothing else matters
when I'm feeling what I'll never hold.

WHAT WE KNOW, OR WHAT WE LEARN

A prophet's poetic puns brilliantly resound:
the catalog extends, the metaphors abound
analogies arise rhetorical questions
to which no answers must be found.

III. Field Guide to the Night Sky

ANTIPODAL LUNE

Celestine providence lights / the fire, kindles the eros, / drives toward god.

SUMMER GLANCES

Astronomy says calculations are amiss.
Philosophy says believe in doubt
yet its stone vibrates
alchemy in glances
to me.

Middle ages—more myth than truth.
Commitments—more broken than binding.
Yet spring stars are arriving
in western hemisphere
our planets are aligning
close to the moon:
our last
chance to see
this century
is in the start of June.

PLATE TECTONICS

The shapes merged with warm color, light refracting from multidimensional points.

How long has the blatant observance of physical and spiritual laws persisted

Despite the wishes of stamp collectors? St. Francis was in ecstasy

To feel warm color within himself, even during mass

Assaults in private rooms with square layouts and circular reasoning

Revolving a couple of degrees around broken lights. The shapes made

A supercontinent for nondenominational sensualists who collect methods of self-

Preservation older than Pangaea.

LOOKING FOR THE BIG BANG

after Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* and the shuttle *Columbia*

They will not call it an explosion:
these deaths in our atmosphere.

The starship troopers were moving
in the midst of their stasis, restraining
belts holding them firm to backbone-
friendly chairs, their minds telling
them not to fear. They did not design
the vessel of flight, the oldest
one which could take them so far.
Breaking apart is how they refer
to the accident,

assuming one believes in a breaking
apart instead of a movement away from
eine Interessengemeinschaft. This
fellowship of interest keeps calling us
away from the regular programming

for instance, at nine o'clock (21:00 hours)
EST, 28 January 2003, on all the major
networks (for one hour), when we were
told what we needed to know, we know
we have our own IGs, never independent
never free, forever in response to others'
IGs. A Slothropian conditioning stimulus
or paranoia? The troopers had their own
star points to cross. Yes. Their own holy

wars, needs to move away from this world
when
returning can only yield death:
a forever clinging to and letting go—
this fellowship of interests.

We continue to make love despite it all.
We persevere only to move toward a
more certain means to an end. Of war
we cannot understand—how we can
shift from parabolic to vertical movement
without killing us all. Sublunaries

we will become sublime. And, certain for all
we will live or die.

eine Interessengemeinschaft: German for “fellowship of interest,” to what “IG” refers in this poem—terms which are both repeatedly used in *GR*

FREEDOM MOVEMENT

You know what freedom is
while
you sit on a lounge chair
strategically placed
in the hotel parking lot. With a fix
to keep you focused, a buzz
to keep you calm, you envision
though your eyes are seeing
revelatory spheres
exploding spheres
luminous spheres.
You wonder
what keeps this sphere going 'round
while
you sit on a lounge chair
with a fix and a buzz so
you don't jump at the noise
and cling to some one
like the youth next to you.

IV. Dance or Fly

NEXT SPRING: A HEALTHY BLOSSOM?

Only the beginning of spring, and dogwood blooms have died.
A couple of cold nights sent them in flight:
Why won't they thrive under mutable skies?

Spring came early in '94 to regenerate
White blossoms, concealing wounds: absence is bathed in light with
Only the beginning of spring, and dogwood blooms have died.

The sun cannot resurrect what has been chilled erect.
Shadows under broken petals are consumed by night.
Why won't they thrive under mutable skies?

Useless involucre, even now, what good are you
When you failed to protect your children from the harms of frozen dew?
Only the beginning of spring, and dogwood blooms have died.

Evolution is dependent upon you
To develop yourselves to see your children through.
Why won't they thrive under mutable skies?

Though vulnerable in appearance, the petals are just like you.
Why won't they thrive under mutable skies?
I mourn and celebrate for them making me love you.
Only the beginning of spring, and dogwood blooms have died.

THESES OF AN ESSAY ON A CANVAS

Appalachian Leda knows the *différance*
between mimesis and verisimilitude.
Making her discovery between blue jean
washings, she spots that deceptive bird
approaching—her laundry
sodden from the incoming flight.
Pastel images
professional thinkers suspend
in conspicuous places.

ESSAY ON A CANVAS

I will put on my silk teal shirt
 and bring out the canvas. I will separate
 sea greens and peacock blues from the blackness
 think of your fingers and corporate lawyers. They all fit.
 They bark of nipples in harmony. They stand
 me at the stove, portfolio at hand. My pen and your fingers still
 move as heat around the element—gyraling to the inside. Standing
 here, my face burns.

Midwestern, urban and Appalachian
 Ledas have much in common.
 They beg
 to be fucked in various ways. You'd be amazed
 how much they know. Biblical
 or secular makes no différence. Phallicly
 speaking, I love your fingers. I hold what I love
 in my mouth: you are so under-the-tongue.
 Subliminal? I joked that this forum was not
 meant for ego-boosting, but you could not
 hear me. Oh, your face is still lovely, even
 with the extra weight and discrepant hair.
 I fear nothing but refuse.
 Who is your favorite Leda? What *is* your criterion.
 What she does for you is not a mystery.
 You slip
 inside yourself. Vulnerable is a pointed staple
 on your tongue. Do you stand erect when you come?

WAITING FOR THE END

I am waiting for this period of involuntary mortification to end.

I am waiting for the self-haters to stop seeking me out.

I am waiting for the narcissists to stop looking to me.

I am waiting for the box to drop from the sky, its parachute
following the way to my toes—ending my wait
with a bang, while I begin waiting to see a light
at the bottom of the box, but can't be, 'cause
the parachute has landed on my head.

I am waiting for the taste of your skin again, as I wait for the kiss
of sleep.

I am waiting for a reason to believe again: that your taste supercedes
the skin.

I am waiting to supercede
waiting.

MOVING STATUES OF LIBERTY
after Lucille Clifton

these hips are my hips
monuments of no passive
resistance. they uphold
affirmative resistance, lovely
symmetry. they fit into vital
places where mutual liberty
is key anatomy. these hips
are your hips ambiguous as
they seem to be, tempestuous
as our physiology. we move
our hips in tormented time
to the time after resistance
that cannot be forgotten.
sometimes we'd rather forget
our hips oppose our extremities;
yet you touched my hips
moving me.

V. Sink or Sing

MY CHILDREN LAUGHING

I lie on the asphalt and wait for it to come
At this sunny moment with dusk rushing in
The warm breeze of wise children
Laughing at the curls lapping at my mouth, moving
A universe in blades of grass.
The distance of my gaze lays me on bituminous beds
Searching for broken universes.
Once I was wise and laughed at my mother
For being beautiful, for letting me pick all the dandelions, for
Telling me to stay off the circular road.

HARMONY

She is much taller than
I was when I was almost
ten. Her frame is slender;
her hair is the color of honey.
She avoids trouble.
I was never a girl like Harmony.
She finds nothing uncanny about
dolls. She used to ask me to give her
nothing besides them. She never asks
for anything, really. She's determined
to make something of herself.
She doesn't want to be
like me. She has a different laugh
for every occasion, writes
with her left hand. She can hear
before my voice sings or cries
her name. She is connected to me.
She balances her center—walks
the curb—and never falls. If she does
the grass will catch her while I'm there.
Glasses slide down my nose and
I hope she will notice. Before I can look
her way, she's smiling and teasing me.
Sometimes I like not being able to see.
Do I look better without my glasses
Harmony? Looks like a part of
your face is missing. She is
laughing. She's serious.
She is still a part of me.

FOUR-YEAR-OLD SON SEES "THE SEAFARER"

Water falls
beyond the bleeding serpent.
The wall-eyed pike sees
his next meal before him.
The walrus looks back
into the night. The sailor sees
nothing. Mommy, the sailor
has no eyes.

He points to the Klee print.
I want to be an artist, Mommy.
One thunderous July night I saw
you, Trevor—with sparklers you
made the moon. He says, But I can't
draw like that, Mommy.

VALUING STATUES, OR WHAT FALLS FROM THE SKY

Children, tell me how to make love
leave my mind.
Will you teach me the art
of transcendence or obedience
in playful talk
as we drive to the center of the state?
I've been working to unlearn much
of everything.
Maybe I will teach you something
while I soak in the rain
so I may or may not be impressed
by people with umbrellas or manners.
The rain is cold, a wet cold, and I am
remembering my appraisal of the drops
on my three-year-old tongue. They were
the kisses never returned
when I would walk through the cemetery
during some cruel month
to find bagworms in trees
and to climb stacked circles
that became smaller as I climbed higher
until I reached the statue of Him.
I would embrace Him and kiss His hand
thinking only of how much
He looked like my father.
In your clinging arms
with your smooth damp cheeks
pressed to mine
I am learning why a world religion follows
a child with an obscure father.