WEIGHTS, MEASURES, AND MEANING

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
Morehead State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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May 2010
Accepted by the faculty of the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Morehead State University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree.

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WEIGHTS, MEASURES, AND MEANING

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"Weights, Measures, and Meaning" is a creative composition committed to ontological and epistemological exploration through poesy.

Accepted by: [Signature] Chair
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INTRODUCTION

Our son had just reached his eighth month of life, and after finding out four weeks earlier that he was seriously ill, we were quite used to his echogenic form before us. Now we would meet him face to face, but this would not be a joyful day ending in coos and laughter. This was a day when a mother would lower her sweat-drenched brow to gaze on yesterday's dreams while a father breathlessly mouthed goodbye, not knowing the pleasure of greetings. This was a day when death so unnaturally preceded birth, producing a most pernicious silence.

Across the country, a nine-year-old girl was also admitted to the hospital. She and her father were hit by a truck, and that little girl would soon find out her Daddy wasn't coming home. And many more weren't coming home, for it was on this very date that thousands of families in Sumatra were informed the search for earthquake survivors was officially called off. Not only were so many not returning, but often there was nothing to return to.

This was the kind of day for many that threw into question all that was known—or desired to be known—about the cycles of life and ways of this world, yet these are very real experiences that could be encountered at any time on this realm of existence. These are just a few of the occurrences that make one ponder his or her relation to the world, as self is appraised and reality is reconsidered. However, the grounds of perception are ever-shifting sands on which one may toil endlessly to find stability during the storm. One wonders if that solid ground, that steady truth, is palpable through rational measures or solely experiential—only to be understood by traversing these steep hills and treacherous valleys. Or is such an understanding ever attainable?
As one stares at this black box called life, he or she may speculate as to who is in control. Is it what is inside this box or outside it that makes the difference? Is there a larger mechanism at work that can only be responded to, or is our activity a truth-making impetus in this world?

Empowered—or disempowered—by the weights and measurements (those tools of assessment) one may utilize, everyone strives to find—or construct—meaning. And every so often a glance at these apparatuses themselves reveals significance. This compilation of voices and experiences is a testament to the many laborers involved in such a project.
SILVER STAR

A smattering of sunsets glazed my bedroom window
propelling manifold repetitions of Butterfield’s Lullaby
That obeisant star just undulating in the mist
resisting dawn for each harrowing descent
cleaving my ears again, three volleys of seven.

I nearly slept through that incessant ringing
my soul quickening to you
wherever you had gone
and I would have so slumbered if not for that fact-seeking inflection
cast over cold scribble-scribble on the other line
As if the entire nation truly paused mid-breath
all senses accessible to divulgence of this ignoble genesis.

How I wished to retreat to before farewells poised on palates
and make this distinction to you, too,
so young that what was appeared to you to be what you were.

I know if you had to answer for yourself, you’d remark
you were no more enchanting than your home state
just a resilient yucca
sleek petals defying desiccation
that unyielding sandstone
crown of the mesa

Anguish: though altered you still retain
that old hand-me-down crib
in a get-it-before-it’s-gone, make-it-from-what-you-got place
you right-now-I’m-busy, sit-down-and-shut-up kid
Still just the gin lingering on Daddy’s breath
the ashtrays strewn on every windowsill and milk crate.

Ornament with golden star, a silver one within
rest upon Apollo’s crown, inscribed of gallantry
and you remain the matter same
Neither the root nor fruit
Nothing I can explain—
You were surely tomorrow’s greatest pleasure
our inherent aspiration unknown.
A little round O, my mind, is it so?
They say to fill it and it will grow
but how, I ask, does a world change a mind
when I know I have left so much behind?

Ask me, one day, to seek from that hole
all, each bit, each piece of my soul
and I shall ponder, probing to pick
each tiny fragment from that fading wick
charred and crumbling from memory’s grasp
I gander and guess and finally gasp
for what do I know of that transient flame
that captured my breath in pride and in shame?

Oh no, oh no, ‘tis no little O,
filled to the brim with words or with show.
Graceful that organ to transmogrify—
not simply a dull or sleepy old eye.
SHE UTTERED NUPTIAL VOWS

and I saw
chubby nail-bitten fingers
gently pinching reins
every hair pulled tightly into that braid
new boots resisting her every step
tiny dirt-dusted crevices of her palm
threatening to release
my hand gently holding hers
eyes darting from me to those massive hooves
as we led, each thump and snort turning her from course
until, in time, she would follow
feeling and knowing each movement
looking ahead to the end of that arena
unaware I kept watching
the walk
the trot
and canter
long, gloved fingers agile
directing that horse
his ears twisting with each cue
sensing her shift and pull
lifted off of that saddle
legs firm
galloping past me
meadow’s newness calling
a ponytail shaking in the breeze
floating up and then down
up and then
down

some spectacular speck on the horizon.
WHAT I SAY ABOUT WHAT WAS TO BE FOR THE FUTURE:

Mom always taught there won't just one way
so I sit and I waited for all my to-bes
but in the middle of it all I couldn't help but think
(expecting everything from a to z)
that I must be more sure of what I was looking for
but I was patient
so I sat and played with my wases til
little I did know but my to-bes come and gone
and I's left wondering about them wases:
was it a single was like I used to think
and so just one lil to-be?
and what about my now?—
yeah, ain't no nows
though I never did know one
cause just as soon as I known it was was.
Now that I say it,
how could I catch a now
when I never seem to get in
or can stay in
and sometimes can't seem to get out?
[WE LEARNED TO HATE THAT STANCE]

We learned to hate that stance
our knees upon the floor
hands quietly folded in our laps
we sat enough
and heard too much
with hushed lips
as if to hide amongst inanimation
not so much loved
but neither despised
little things
covered in microscopic flecks of dander and dirt and bacteria
we preferred unused to misused
and shrunk under such tutelage
if one could call it that
for little was guarded by ignorant eyes
rolling about unsteadily on every breath and care
under which our only reward was survival
thus when we could speak and stand
we walked our way
to be loved by one
or none

unlike you
whose every act of submission
strangely led to independence
sitting was never so hard for you
for when you stood, you arose
bathed in praise
your very action, joy to a parent’s soul.
KEEPING STEP

The room has fallen ghastly silent

where sneakers once screeched and thumped
working away the unnatural gloss
on that wooden floor
reverberating with each thump of the bass
in joyful agreement with every clap and creak
to your one
two
three and four

where sound was so beautifully crafted from motion
reflected in every direction
muscles tensing and pulling
legs jumping
arms pumping
that five and six and
seven and eight

12
where movement somehow won victory
over the rapid pulsation
the deep heaving
that trembled
no more, no more

where your voice steadily led
one and two and three and four
five and six and seven and eight
breathe
and two and three and four
don’t stop
and six and seven and eight

where spirit met velocity
coursing through that confident gaze
which always rested on a mouth that bowed pleasantly

where so many toiled to mirror this model
who stepped though feet were planted
and clapped with hands of marble
until such marvels were seen no more
where the only motion is light on the floor
until I one
and I two
and I three
and I four.
SHRIVELED BRANCH

Help me begin, dear one; my pen
occluded with thoughts, ugly
whispers, threatening to seep,
dappling this polished affair.
Offer another this moment,
easily filled with pleasant smiles and gestures,
so that my tongue may rest unaffected
over this grave called your life,
ever expected to seek so:
eagerly grasping shards of nothingness
and peddling them before multitudes as
glorious articles of desire.
Evening's chill explains too much
before I even utter yesterdays and
unpeel year and decade
to pith so bitter
never finding delicate pulp but
obligated by ear and eye to create some
tincture of goodness from this insipid dryness.
Generous your lines but few your words; your mind
readied for pleasure, yet never
owing anything to anyone—
whimsical old oaf.
GIANTS AMONG DWARFS

they were whenever Wordsworth would allow

Wundt, though hindered without laboratory equipment

accomplished much, each second filled with thought or word

Samuel lifting his matted locks from his pillow
to stare deeply into that glass

quantifying color hues as sunbeams danced

Wilhelm scurrying to measure the light’s angle

amplitudes of resplendence

lower lip tucked, awaiting patient input

awe-filled how it happened again and again

congruency of projected to perceived

clearly denoting the point at which physiological met psychological

inner and external colliding

Samuel delighted to add the evidence of specters

intriguing process indeed

how various angles at which the candlelight hits the eye

elicit corresponding changes

oh, go on, go on, dear Samuel

yes, it—too—happens in perfect proportionality

so then, you see what I mean:
stimulus changes geometrically; sensation, arithmetically

oh indeed, indeed

and how Sigmund would just huff

observing Wundt grinning, clinometers trembling

Freud interjecting—my kind sir, recline once more

return to that earliest spark

torn from the bosom so young

rejected; you too became as that fiendish king

soiled by arid Arabian night gone by

ready to plunder but taken first by that vivacious spirit

never attainable, though you'd continue to watch and listen, waiting . . .

or I do implore you to speak of the splendors of laudanum slumber

(though I professionally advise a switch to Coca)!

Dwarfs amongst giants

the effort of apprehending actuality from human experience.
THE MEETING

I’m the one with the book, page four
ink blot, top corner
booth with the bulb dim and buzzing
chasing droplets down glass
lost in fog and perspiration
skimming the mass of words before me
that meaning might penetrate the mumbling
refill after refill ineffective.
How I wish to be seen as she
two friends, chests pressed to the table
one attentively brushes back the tendril glancing the other’s plate
with a smile continuing (I strain to hear):

*You wouldn’t believe his rage over every detail . . . that office!*

*Oh, I’m sure. I’m just glad he was kind enough to grant me leave.*

*It’s been so difficult.*

*I know; I should’ve been there.*

*No, no.*

*Yes, Denise. Come on!*
What kind of person am I to

Look, I'm just glad we can be together now.

Silence for a moment
the first biting her lip, pushing tomatoes into place
a perfect sphere enclosing the bed
cucumbers boxing the olives

Me, too. How's that salad?

It's great...so many toppings

I see. But salsa with macaroni...and beans?

Yes, you should try it!

No; I just couldn't.

Unable to find a place for her olives, she leaned forward
pushing the other's ranch-touched ends back again
and grasping for the drink menu.

I took another refill and returned to the unwavering phrases
page five somehow fresh yet familiar
I almost heard his fingers pecking the keys
lips quietly mouthing each word in my ear
subduing the babbling.

His quiet corner and my quiet corner.
JUST A FEW OF DR. BRUTTMAN’S CONTRIBUTIONS


“Utilizing the Competing Risks Model to Investigate the Relationship between Previous Fertility Outcomes and the Marital States of Young Cohabiting Couples” (1991).


“The Bereaved and Complications to their Grief” (2000).

GALANTHUS NIVALIS

If only this harsh day could be equally cold
that my skin would contract as my soul
and reduce me to my smallest state of being
retracted

And I could wistfully stare into my breath
as if to levitate and bound on each mighty plume
a snow-covered hill
winding and shivering
reaching for equinox
so that these rays might dissolve its brumous cap
and vernal sprouts launch
discovering the age-old walk of celestial wanderers above

Or I might be obdurate in my musing
languidly lying on the frost-affronted ridge
to welcome the first snowdrop
as it penetrates earth and ice
in victorious splendor
I wait
ear burning against snow
sanguine
that I might hear earth part
for this tender bud
oh downcast little lantern
I would labor to gaze at your heart
three by three
so perfect
that Hermes might dash with simply a sprig
and rescue a wandering clan
it’s no mystery

Inoculate me with galantamine
that I might remember
that I might know which way is home
and no longer need this sting upon my cheek
that I might rest in my body
calmly floating from this ethereal vapor

and once more expand.
the day reclines unperturbed
in the case of the sacred
filled to complete transparency
upon origins untainted

while clouds shimmy without cause
coating the lung's basin
formerly gurgling with death
and enchant the bride to speech

first stepping unsure as infancy
until a grand sound emerges
steaming from the base
a balm delicately sweet
to exact revenge on the petals
in their penitent dance
They say she took a dang’rous turn
the year her father passed,
as if she lost all sense inside—
each lesson first to last.

She always used to fascinate;
what skill in which she’d dress.
They say she’d eye each pleat ‘least twice,
just to check the press.

And how her shoes could scintillate,
below those silken stalks,
and neither snag nor fleck be seen,
no matter where she’d walk.

All knew her locks met symmetry,
for ruler can’t be fooled.
She’d measure each sweet piggy tail,
perfect it as she pulled.
But now, sad child, her foibles grow
to gross inadequacy,
though we try not to stigmatize,
for each deficiency.

Strange, yes indeed, we all agree,
self-exile to that farm,
where dirt and stench collide in one
monstrosity of harm.

We've tried to help since we do know,
the terror of her loss,
I know she moiled day and night,
at once to find a cause,

And then, I think, she gave up hope,
such energies were spent,
and with that, too, there went her mind,
just see the note she's sent:

I thank you all a thousand times
kindness and concern you’ve shown
but, oh, how this ranch contains worlds of knowledge
such I never could’ve known
within the realm of certainty I’d stay
but for the emptiness in figure and in fact
that made me ponder what palms could hold
and that which nature had lacked
that chasm could not be crossed by me
just teeming with creeping and romping
slithering and fluttering resounded between
where I was inevitably stopping
yet none but this weary and stagnant soul
beheld ‘til fatigued from its flitter
What number I’ve found was shocking indeed
though hazed by mortality’s slaughter
So let me aspire to utter a wonder
to my most attentive, good friend
and I pray that such amazement will move to a height
long after my words find an end:
The mouse that smoothly slides right through
man’s construct, sturdy and grand
cement and aggregate simply give way

28
to an endless tooth and a hand
and how this critter then navigates
through tiny pen-width way
through which a collapsible dome bends
like a fetus reborn day after day.
What about the bird of song
that cob lauded delicate throughout the whole world
who gracefully indeed shrouds strength of a steed
when his nine foot span is unfurled.
These are just two, a sample of few;
do you see how I'm content in my end?
I could never tread beyond gravel path
back to your home, my friend.
For where in that town would my heifer reside
born with a double mind?
she would lack adoration so sweet as she glanced
amazingly at both poles at one time.
Such treasures do stand right now here before
expanding my scant span and range
for I used to glance in a mirror and behold
that all else was awkward and strange.
Why look as a man with limited sight
when I can be as the goat
whose odd horizontal pupils bewilder
but offer 300 plus degrees of scope?
Or what of the equine, a marvel of prey
who lacks vision right in front and behind
but boasts an unparalleled three-fifty degrees
of sight; he’s one of a kind.
How I wish I could repeat
this surging in my root
for you that we might be one mind
and truth would not be mute.
I know it seems so odd
I live so basely as I do
but each new miracle I grasp
serves henceforth to renew.
I whispered a prayer for you, my dear
it rolled and twisted and swayed
swelled in the sun for you, my dear
it stammered then finally stayed

Oh how I had wished it’d rest on your cheek
to see your brow rise up in joy
and march all around your cradle this day
my sweet little child, my boy

Spoken so softly and easily too
I placed it on toddling head
where the angelic strands whipped about in the verbs
as quickly as they had been said

And much to my fear they increased in speed
rebounding off lashes so great
then finally fragmented as powder it flew
concocting another escape
If all is in you
flooding four chambers
pulsing two hemispheres
wrapped in one grand organ
smashed to microscopic thinness,
then what is circumstance?

Circumstance must be something that changes
only by the wild relations between protons and electrons
discrete conversions
messages in synapses
cycles of contraction and relaxation.
DEJECTION

It helps me to see that brilliant red head
lifted above those poplar blades
Its fragile dusty body a stone
thrown through vastness
to land only on delicate twigs

How I love the beak upturned
that proud little bird
earth-pushing bird
balancing on flowers and leaves

A strange combination—crimson and dirt
that life-giving bird
unafraid
MUD-STAINED KNEES

assaulted from above by showers

suffocated below with sprouts

I immersed one foggy afternoon weed whipper to hip

prepared to hastily clear some space

before once again retreating to mantel

where only spark battles grayness

and crackle competes with patterning.

I cleaved denseness

taking back edge and nook

brilliant green line unrolling

roar rebounding down this final lane

a line of obstacles

arm tensing and quivering under

one tiny portentous drop

supplying a weed-entangled front of arum lilies

in rigid attention

My cutting edge easing forward

to take each blade before and behind

orange strand approaching stalk

my mouth a barren cell

34
alveoli packed to trembling

as life met life

and beauty met pain

with the violent release of yesterday’s flood

and the irreparable fall of pure ivory flesh.
BANYAN

Before a grand canopy I sit powerless
a propitious ordination
for if I had come much earlier,
I would have gathered that fruit
or if too late,
mourned the waste
plucking seed from feather high above
where flame nor flood nor foot could touch

And would I have beheld that epiphytic dwarf
infantile roots knocked by a moment’s wind
my compassion would only lengthen plight
(if I could restrain my hands as it reached)
I might have ungraciously planted it below
administering foreign design
and put a filter to life

And if by chance it’d grown to yield in my care
the wasps within would pleat my brow
and I might spray your pollen sticky thick
for I know little of your pleasant mutualism

And even now, edified by this unthinking monument,
I return to cerebration:
What of that fusty host
that once nourished this up
and being swallowed by appendages
withers in darkness to sounds of chewing and pecking?

Before a grand canopy I sit powerless
perplexed by seasons and symbiosis
UPON THE STOOL

All I need is you
this quiet thought that you are listening
an untouched leaf of air and spirit
that draws the ink from inner well.
Let my speech be a stroke so perfect
as what is inner is drawn to outer
and shaped from one dimension to the next.

Sometimes I pause amidst my labor
stepping back to find some answer
aching from this steady posture on this rigid stool.
May I not resolve to trade this unfinished work of yesterday
for some polished piece for sale.
For when one stops and stares beyond
a picture’s still no more at all
than strokes
and specks
and smudges.
The miracle’s upon the stool.
WHAT IS DEATH

But when a steely cloud bows
and the winds of the worlds cease
to see the final trickle from a great river
never before felt in its deep rushes and thrills
a drop thrust through corral and gill
some salty pellet on rocky coast

Or when vibrant bouquets no more upheld
and limbs take root as fleshy worms
to move, tasting nevermore
a tunnel of must around a seed
some shoot slicing richness

And when the cavern’s centurial ribs fill the neck
putting to flight the chattery darkness
a pool froths to invite
some other vim from below.
DEVELOP MY INWARD ORGAN

develop my inward organ
that which I never could name
for eye and ear set before me
limits from which they came

but I know a thing that's suspected
though theorem and law cast away
the awe of such impossibility
as absurdity under its sway

yet why should one fear all the seeming
since seeming has never upheld
nor brought new breath to the spirit
a fire that normalcy's quelled

So You speak and I feel my foundation
You touch and I hear inner peace
You smell a fine offering; I bow down
You feel and my spirit's released