

# UC Riverside

## UC Riverside Electronic Theses and Dissertations

### Title

Owl

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7cd4184t>

### Author

Thorson, Camerone Anne

### Publication Date

2011

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
RIVERSIDE

Owl

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

in

Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts

by

Camerone Anne Thorson

March 2011

Thesis Committee:

Chris Abani, Co-Chairperson

Matthew Zapruder, Co-Chairperson

Jill Alexander Essbaum

Copyright by  
Camerone Anne Thorson  
2011

This Thesis of Camerone Anne Thorson is approved:

---

---

Committee Co-Chairperson

---

Committee Co-Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

## Acknowledgements

I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to Jill Alexander Essbaum for lending me her ear and heart. Thank you for helping me learn the value of formal verse and the power of patience. Thank you also to Matthew Zapruder for his infinite wisdom and poetic brilliance.

None of this would have been possible without the support of my husband Andy who enabled me to have my dream; and to my son Nicholas who believed in me even when I didn't believe in myself. There are several contemporary poets to whom I am indebted for their insights, patience and support: Dana Gioia, Annie Finch, Jenny Factor, Brad Leithauser and Eileen Myles – words are not enough. To my UCR classmates and instructors: Ann and Jeff (E. and W.) Lee, Faye, Deanne, Athena, Patina, Juan Carlos, Lindsey, Lori, Martha, Larry, Petra, Martha, Heidi, Christopher, Chuck, Bryan, Mark, Mary, Kevin – thank you for sharing special moments with me – I am blessed to know each of you. Nately and Wendy – your unfailing friendship means the world to me. And finally, none of this would have been possible without the vision of Tod Goldberg who allowed me the chance to find my voice and gave me the freedom to soar high above the treetops.

To Andy and Nicholas

## **Autumn**

Stars explode.  
Tiny pinpricks  
across the night sky  
canvas.

Mouse burrows  
under confetti leaves.  
Owl and Hawk  
give chase.

## **What Mud Swallows Do**

They speak through  
funnels of dust and feathers;  
forked tails dive toward  
unsuspecting men

stranded below. Clipped wing  
bipeds, they shiver and stare  
at muddy mounds glued  
to sand and mocha homes.

“Don’t let them shoot our  
kites out of the sky,”  
the avian experts  
sing as those below  
swallow their shame  
without a glass of water.



## **Gravestone**

Outside.  
Over there.  
His black fedora.  
One part zinc.  
Two parts oxide.  
Atop the pockmarked grave.

Combustible.  
Like his love.  
Or his indifference.  
Depending on the day of the week.

What is underneath the moth-lipped brim.

Stones speak even when silent.  
It's just what they do.

## Visiting an Antique Shop In Julian, California

Sunlight darts through a crescent window  
in a high corner of the room.

Dusty oak tables sag under candles,  
spice jars and bric-brac.

The doorway, framed with reed baskets,  
is fragrant with rosemary and sage herbs.

An iron-limbed chandelier peers down from the ceiling.  
It licks rainbow specks across the stone floor.

My hand in yours, I follow silently through  
the shop, looking at things that belonged to others.

Where are they now I want to ask.  
The others. Where are they?

Behind yellowed glass sit scraps of life: scraps of life  
behind the yellowed glass. Birth certificates. Diplomas.

Crooked smiles. In the courtyard a rooster  
clears his throat. It is his morning  
salutation.

## **What Happens at the Beach**

High above sand and surf, shadows slide  
down wooden shutters.

White-tipped waves at the shoreline,  
slip in and out, back and forth.

Gulls squawk, sand crabs try to escape.  
On a bed, a girl and a boy - seventeen, eighteen maybe,

a tangle of arms and legs, pillows and sheets.  
Her breasts, two loaves of dough;

She breathes deep and sighs.  
He yawns, scratches his head,

Reeks of garlic and sangria.  
A dog howls in the distance.

Another growl from the sky. Black clouds hide the sun.  
An old woman limps along the boardwalk.

The air crackles with the smell  
of humidity and salt.

## **There's A New Phrase in Town**

It's called 'not dude appropriate'  
or NDA for short  
as my friend Jeff tells it.

He-Men in search of real-world  
talk to be chewed, masticated,  
and chased down with a cold drink.

This is the new game. New phrase.

The NDA is a  
meat-eating fraternity  
who could give a rat's ass  
about the corn-fed sweet  
aroma from Bessie the cow.

No room here for dainty, lace-  
trimmed excuses  
why the skinny blond  
bitch sashayed  
through the yellow tape.

So much for one-of-a-kind art  
complete with well-worn jock strap.

When Simon says "Go" it's good  
to remember to ask, "May I?"

## **The City**

You open your eyes,  
look out the window:  
steel tips poke through  
soap bubble clouds.

It's not enough to look.

You want, no, need  
to understand this city  
where countless hearts  
have been left alone  
with sunglasses, coats, hats

and countless gobs of money.  
On pavements, in back alleys,  
inside the canteen of the bar  
on Castro, anywhere where someone can  
call it home.

But not for you. Not yet.

## **It's Useless**

to try and push time,  
it won't move.

Like the taxi covered in yellow snow,  
a dressing gown

for early morning jaunts across the bridge.  
The old lady

with the broken Duane Reade bag holds on  
for dear life

or something close to it. Her blue skin sags  
under the glare

of the first shards of sunlight. Sun knows  
that history moves on

and we with it. The taxi honks and the man  
with one arm

hobbles across the pot hole to the other side  
of thirty fourth street.

He hopes a flock of tourists  
will leave him a souvenir.

## **The Worst Sex**

I ever had was that which I wanted  
and you didn't.  
Where I was left standing  
naked in the doorway.

You kissed me hard on the lips  
and brushed your hand across  
the silverfish of my thigh.  
“No. Think what it would do...”

I cut you off. “We’re both adults.”  
The sirens screamed  
“Liar” outside the room.

I stood with silent tears.

You locked your eyes with mine,  
dark brown liquid. Can you hear  
my heart throb? I want to know.  
You tell me to get dressed.

## **When Laughter is All You Have**

*When you were born God's will was broken,  
He gave me a weed instead of a rose.*

The words my mother said to me two weeks before she died.

Her lips grey from too much smoking:  
Viceroy's two packs a day for twenty-five years.

*She doesn't really mean it I told myself – it's the cancer talking.*

I looked up at the yellow and white-checkered wallpaper with the rooster trim  
the cock, the king of the hill  
his black plume a perfect crown tinged with orange  
just like the tip of her cigarette  
the ash falling smugly into the chipped cup in her hand

*And look at you.  
An ugly fat cow. You're a disgrace.*

Her eyes blaze with something  
That looks like hate.

I laugh.



## **What Owl Said**

Somewhere in between  
night and morning,  
Between the ticking clock  
and swollen scream  
that was your mother,  
you managed to leave it all behind.

Now you can breathe.

## The “C” Word

is more than a two fisted punch  
you know it's no longer a game.  
It's alien, foreign, not welcome.  
Not here, not there, not anywhere.  
Certainly not in my sphere  
of my self, my body.

When the “c” word commands attention,  
makes you sit up and want to scream  
you know you have been betrayed by the expensive  
creams you bought from the nice lady  
at the Neiman's counter.

The smudged sphere grins at me  
from the lip of the lighted screen.  
The man in the white coat,  
the requisite cliché is real,  
informs me in his ‘this is my job’  
voice that what we are looking at,  
what we are seeing is not good.  
We – don't you mean – me? – I want to ask.  
But I don't. I just sit. And nod.

The “c” word is many syllables  
on this sunny day as I take my leave  
and walk out the door of the storied grey  
building into a blue filled world  
of chirping birds and daffodils  
reaching up to say hello.

## **Summer**

Sunburned shards  
of sky cover  
hidden rooms  
safe within

open armed  
pines and oaks  
where Owl sleeps  
until nightfall.

### **Cortona in the Morning**

A blanket of grey mist  
shrouds inhabitants as they  
shuffle across cobblestones  
on their way to somewhere.

Midmorning the Apennines appear,  
a green and blue patchwork quilt.  
Cypress trees guard the valley  
of purple and yellow flowers.

Red-eyed pigeons look for bread.  
I have nothing to offer, but dreams.  
I sit in Via Nazionale and listen:  
laughter, arguments – all is music when  
uttered in Italian.

### **Three Things She Hated, Three Things She Loved**

the smell of bacon,  
talk of money  
and red roses on her birthday.

walking on cobblestones,  
the growl of thunder, and when  
young men smiled at her.

**12:00**

The numbers on the clock glow  
I stumble down the hall  
to your room.

Moonlight sneaks in through closed shutters.  
On your cheeks, fingerprint tears.  
You clutch Timothy, your stuffed hedgehog.  
*I miss Hercules so much Mom, you whisper.*

I nod and kiss the top of your head.  
Hercules, the yellow tabby with the pink nose;  
followed us home four months ago:  
brushing up against your freshly bruised basketball knee;  
tail swishing, little meows and big eyes; waiting for something...

Like the time I waited in line at the post office  
to pick up Grandpa Joe's ashes  
a small square box, wrapped in green tape.  
I waited and hoped for something magical  
to happen.

I dry your face with the torn sleeve  
of my flannel pajamas.

*He chewed through wires honey.  
We couldn't get him to stop.  
Remember when he caused a spark pulling the lamp cord out of the wall?*

I repeat the words I have rehearsed  
in my head over and over:  
*he's happy, he's with another family  
that will love him as much as we did.*

You look me in the eyes:  
*You don't give away those you love.*

## Talking to God

It's not something we talk about really, I mean  
    why is it that I can have a conversation  
    with the song writer or the announcer of the Mets' game  
    and even get angry when he says things I don't agree with.  
But what if I were to have a conversation with God  
    in the middle of the lunch hour while eating my tofu wrap  
    and spinach salad.  
Maybe I want to talk to my dead father too.  
    It's not easy.  
How to begin years apart  
    it seem vexing to just  
    start talking.

## **Cemetery Crumbs**

Wrapped in grey wool,  
the old woman trudges  
up the hill.

Crows peck and cough  
at stale bits of bread  
on frozen ground.

Dark-eyed with lancet beaks  
they seem to ask:  
Why must we try and wake the dead?



## **Keeping you Alive**

It gets harder with every turn of day  
from the cold wisp of morning to the warm  
fuzz of night.

I watch your eyelids flutter,  
two fog-filled orbs of milk.  
Like chalk that we lined across the black board

Do you remember? I suppose you do.

Your cheek is grey against the white pillowcase.  
A plastic tube dangles from your mouth.  
It keeps you alive, that's what they say.

What can be done? Nothing.  
We are doing all that can be  
done.

Like homework. Nothing more.  
Keeping you alive. A selfish dream.

## **In the Post Office**

Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority it's time to pause and reflect. That's what the man with the milky mustache said to me that day in the sultry heat of the post office. It was early. Maybe 9:00 a.m. and already the flies were limping along in a drained glass of too much summer. The man whose name was Sam or Sal, I can't recall exactly, was standing in front of me at the Old Town Temecula post office.

His yellowed teeth reminded me of the piano keys on the old upright in my grandmother's parlor: needle point cushions ripe with the smell of mothballs, slumped on aching velvet couches, a shade of blood orange. The piano keys - waiting to be played, stroked – lay silent under the lace curtains blowing in the parlor windows.

Sam, or Sal, frothy with intention tapped me on the shoulder. I stepped back to remain a neutral participant in this unplanned encounter. Okay then, I said. Thanks for the advice.

Between him and the front of the line were babies trapped in strollers, legs and arms wriggling desperately to be free, knobby-kneed ladies with sagging stockings. An elderly man pocked with pits stared at the babies and smiled.

Lady, it ain't just advice. It's the truth.

Wilted words, I think to myself, as his eyes burrow into my skull. Garlic coats each syllable wafting from his mouth. I take another step back, looking behind me hoping not to step on any little bird feet in the line quickly stretching out the doors.

By the way, these are the words of Mark Twain, he says. Blind obedience to authority is a cause for concern. Jabbing a finger at me he tells me to be careful and think. It is the single biggest thing I can do.

I am under the influence of giants in the clouds is all I can think of as this man with his mustache and eyes digs into my soul.

I shiver and whisper to myself, don't let him in.

## **Waiting**

She stands in line at the Post Office.  
The clock on the wall reads 10:04 a.m.

She waits:  
with some twenty odd  
pairs of restless hands and feet.

Closing her eyes she takes a deep breath.  
It is her turn.  
She hands the postal card to the clerk.  
“Be right back” he says.

She waits, brushes flecks of lint from her sweater;  
wedges a stray piece of hair behind her ear.

The clerk returns  
holding a brown wrapped parcel  
with green security tape.

He asks the woman  
to sign the back of the card.

Gently, she picks up the box.  
"These are my father's ashes."

## **Growing Up**

The Cat in the Hat has had his say.  
The blocks, the pegs, all have their place.  
It's time to put the toys away.

Time went so fast, how you did play!  
The matchbox cars and trucks would race.  
The Cat in the Hat has had his say.

Once I wiped your tears away  
with magic dust from outer space,  
it's time to put the toys away.

If life gets cold or muddy gray,  
keep a smile, wrap up in grace.  
The Cat in the Hat has had his say.

You'll look back with love some day  
that tattered and timeless old shoelace  
it's time to put the toys away.

But now all I can do is pray.  
You are my son with a young man's face.  
The Cat in the Hat has had his say.  
It's time to put the toys away.

## **Mother**

I lay beneath your hungry glare.  
that caused my heart to shiver,  
a blanket cold, so black, so bare-  
a frozen, crusted river.

I hold my breath - what is left,  
with bones and marrow worn,  
that you have crushed for sheer delight  
from the day that I was born.

The leaves – they cling to branches dry  
as I once clung to you.  
Little sparrow that now can fly  
to quiet skies of blue.

## **Musical Joints**

Like the orchestra pit  
of seasoned musicians  
who promise to dangle sweet  
nothings in notes and  
chords I can hear only the  
creaks and groans of my bones  
too old to know when to be quiet.

## **What Would the Pope Do?**

I asked the man  
with the silver hair  
and gold earring.  
He gave me a crooked smile,  
“Ban abortion  
for all three headed dogs,”  
he said  
and walked away.

Long ago  
I asked an old lady  
if she could climb out  
of her tears what she saw.  
“I see sculptured rocks silently  
watching me;  
I hear the silence of busy feet.”

Are they happy  
I wanted to know  
but she had left me  
and in her place stood  
an elderly man holding  
a black helmet  
“There is no escape,” he said.  
He smiled and looked away.

I stood still and listened  
and looked.  
Beneath me  
were the ants  
busy busy busy.  
I could see a happy couple  
they walked together  
comfortable  
in each other’s words  
and I wondered  
how the Buddha  
would communicate  
with these tiny beings.  
For that matter,  
what would the Pope do?  
Bless them

as creatures of the Almighty  
and send them on their way  
to procreate?

I wonder.  
Too much sun has left me  
standing beneath a sky plump  
with clouds.  
Below me is the ant  
with a big load  
on its head  
of what I wonder.

One ant  
two ants  
three ants  
hundreds of ants.  
So much to do  
in the city  
of industry.

Here in the desert there is  
no sweet song.  
There is only  
sour breath.



## **What I Said to Owl**

I know nothing about you.  
You know everything about me.  
Please, stay a bit longer.  
Are you going to leave me now?

## **Winter**

Nature brushes  
her lips across  
blue tipped  
trees.

Naked brittle bones,  
they stretch  
piercing sky's  
silence.

## **A Sunday Feast With My Great Grandmother**

Your lemon and lavender  
hug keeps me warm as we begin  
to prepare our Sunday feast.

You in your cracked brown shoes,  
scuffed with dreams and hopes;  
me, in Mary Janes squealing with newness.

Across the kitchen counter  
your Lithuanian lilt rolls as we flatten  
out dough, plump with nuts and raisins.

I watch your hands spotted and gnarled,  
pound what will rise with heat and time.  
"A pinch of dis, a smidgeon of dat,"

Your voice, like summer cornstalks,  
rustles over pots and pans gurgling on the stove.  
Kneading and braiding the Christmas bread.

## **Of Course It Will**

Strapped against my heart's  
leather binds;  
the slaughter of your laugh  
when you hear me.  
Too clever by three quarters.

Tomorrow's dream.  
Yesterday's failure.  
Will you judge if I go back?  
You look into the eyes  
of a Haitian child

and ask if seconds are okay.  
Of course they are.  
How long will it take  
to make perfect our table?  
A lifetime.

## **The Circle**

To be rich is to be alive;  
to be alive is to know love;  
to know love is to have a friend;  
to have a friend is to be rich.

### **Scrabble or Something Like it**

They hop and skip across the page  
*free at last* they say  
as they scramble to find a chair.

They spring from cobwebbed corners  
all in the cause of individuality  
*let me be heard* each one cries.

They dash and dangle  
from cracked lips and dry tongues.  
They sneak down back alleys  
of memory.

Goodbye to the ballad.  
Au revoir to blank verse.  
Loosening of the belt  
has led to an epidemic of obesity  
in speech. Verse and rhythms:  
rumbles and jumbles of mega thought.

Nothing less will do.

### **little feet, muddied and young**

Feet so small and plump, unbruised peach,  
sweet blush, capable of bruising.  
Bruised, blue and bound to you am I forever.

Please I ask, beg, beg(an) to anyway,  
do not trample on what is or was once fresh and new  
unstained- now mere mat, matted, owl pellet of  
feathers, fur and sticks.

I hope, Feet, commanding and demanding,  
all encompassing in want(ed), whine, whirl and need  
through worn threads for space, for time for me:  
for me for me. Give me room to breathe. Give me time to see.

Not you, for once -  
not for fun(ny), faces of silent smiles, grimaces, secret yearnings  
deep within the twisted fibers gripping and slipping  
under your Feet. Not for you.

Underneath Feet full of buzzing bees  
that stompanstomp and sting, burrowing on and on  
and on. Gentle - please, softness - now, stillness-here.  
Velvet green, moss, clean, new, morning dew  
when you sleep.  
Numbed by rain boots covering Feet too little  
to be stepping, crushing silent strands that dangle,  
a wistful wishless bone.

What am I but withered threads of pinpricked  
hope. moreandmoreisallthatyoudemand.  
Trimmed nails do not stop the shards of grey foam  
tireless, tiring in attempts to clean and mend  
and wash little Feet.

Be careful. Black tears bleed into my fabric. You spilleditonmeandlaughed.  
I lay still, doorma(n)t. No longer needed, or  
do you need the threads for  
something, deep within, holding together  
the creaks and groans laying underneath?  
Protecting, covering, pretending the scars  
do not exist from little Feet.

Walk on me. I sputter, stutter, moan and choke.  
Forgive my sins, somebody's daughter begs  
through floor boards hoarding spirits from Hades.  
They speak. I listen and scream:  
shit is something I have had enough of.  
Do not wipe one more soiled spoiled print on me  
Feet. Enough.



## **What I Need**

something fast  
fresh  
sleek in thought  
no ripple effects please  
no afterthoughts  
no midnight munchies  
nothing beyond the reach  
that can press into the palm  
like a stolen sigh  
broken, wrapped and repaired again and again  
getting over the first one is always the hardest she said  
but it does get easier  
trust me  
holding tight to my stomach  
I turned and looked through  
the moment trying to find the next step  
with the time I had left  
sitting in the sky  
is a shadow she hoped  
her thoughts would someday be  
free to go where they wanted  
and that she could go with them

## **Take Me There**

*Take me for a ride*  
I ask of him.

*On your words,*  
one time please.

*A carpet*  
just for me

*of delicious sounds*  
to taste

*and see-*  
and to well, you know

*smell, like cloves*  
and be near

*the clouds*  
when they rest,

*are foam on a cup.*  
Please, take me there.

## **Thoughts on Motherhood**

I wrap my mind around each morsel  
Dead ends, blind alleys.

Wrinkled shadows on forehead.  
Just one minute or two more of sleep.

Senseless in sugar coated grass.  
Home. This space I call mine.

## **Winter's Cost**

Shriveled pink bud.  
Once alive, pulsing  
with something  
called life.

Now food for maggots.

## **Morning**

Early silence.

Dew lingers on grass.

Morning sparrow chirps.

Velvet rose sleeps.

## **Reason For Owl**

Owls say whimsical  
things don't they?  
Indeed they do.  
I stand on pine needles dry and withered.  
You sit, hidden in the Eucalyptus tree.

I hear you call.  
to me on my walk  
at night after day  
has let me go.

Whoohoo. Whoohoo.  
A soft gush of air  
is what I need to hear.

You are the wise one of the forest  
I come to you in need.

## **Spring**

Pink bud,  
small and taut,  
stretches up through  
warm fists of earth.

Once drab,  
now, fresh,  
we feel her soft  
breath.

### **What My Son Said**

as he took a bite  
of his In-N-Out hamburger,  
ketchup dripping down his chin,  
wide smile on his face:

“The trees are doing the hula dance in the wind.”



### **Watching Piazza Garibaldi Wake**

Clapboard shutters spring open  
like wide eyed children.  
A yellow tabby stretches and yawns.  
The pungent smell of coffee is everywhere.  
From la panetteria fresh bread beckons.

Mothers in three-inch stilettos  
navigate cobbles with ease.  
Holding tight to little hands,  
They plant red rouge kisses on cheeks.

Old women in bright colored kerchiefs  
and heavy wool sweaters with knobby buttons  
the size of walnuts push carts through  
narrow streets on their way to market.

Men with dark eyes and bristle brush  
hair argue and shout - hands fly everywhere.

## If

If you ever look at the floor  
of the coffee shop bathroom  
you might find the following:

a strand of black hair in the shape of a question mark  
fat water button bellies  
against the slate floor (this one was the color of eggplant).

A footprint just the ball of the foot visible.  
A glued bit of gum a shade of lobster pink.

A note that says *don't forget the to.....*  
in blue ink on the backside of an El Pollo Loco receipt.

Tides are a function of the lunar elements  
I didn't know this until  
my twelve year old who was studying for  
a science test  
wanted to see if I was smarter than a sixth grader.

I am not,  
and found myself looking down at mounds of clothes  
on the floor.

## **What they are**

Souvenirs:

scars

letters

pieces of a picture

crayons

scribbles.

History moves on and I move with

it like the taxis in the street

sprawling

honking

four wheeled geese

unable to move

because the overturned

truck tried to make it under

a bridge too small.

Maybe the driver couldn't see the sign hidden

by the untrimmed wall of bushes

that said 6'5" limit.

Now we all sit here

trapped in our metal boxes

in the freezing aftermath

of the holiday spirit.

### **What the Screenwriter Told Me**

I had tea at the Plaza with Salvador Dali  
and his wife. She was a germaphobe;  
I drank because somebody  
put a drink in front of me.

## **Just a whisper**

Of air  
rustling its hand  
across my brow.  
That's what it was.  
Nothing more  
Nothing less.  
Somehow  
enough.

## **Cultural Enrichment**

*He thought:*

Old man blowing horn  
More men crashing cymbals loud  
Monkette is yummy

*She thought:*

Nighttime chants for all  
We hear and see their delight  
Space for all to be

*He thought:*

Hit drum god damn it  
Monkette hit drum god damn it  
Hit drum god damn it

*She thought:*

Harvest the gold light  
Sweetened notes ripe with passion  
Beating in the soul

*He thought:*

The white flowers first  
The yellow flowers second  
Regurgitation

*She thought:*

Brilliance in the soft  
Shadows dancing in the soul  
I bow to your grace

## **Catching snowflakes**

on my tongue  
my eyelashes  
my cheek.

They land,  
then disappear  
into nature's mouth.

## **Sailing By**

Write until it is done  
where nothing is left  
but egg white thought.

The creep of time  
sails by, nods in  
agreement.

One thing I know:  
footsteps creak  
in empty halls.



## **The Owl**

She calls  
from the pine tree.

Be safe.  
I nod and walk on.