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IRVINE

Crossing / Running the Waters, Song from Arkansas

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in English

by

Joel Weston Wood

Thesis Committee:
Professor Amy Gerstler, Chair
Dr. Virginia Jackson
Professor Jeffrey Schultz

2019

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Crossing / Running the Waters, Song from Arkansas

By

Joel Weston Wood

Master of Fine Arts in English

University of California, Irvine, 2019

Professor Amy Gerstler, Chair

The poems that follow loosely collect and investigate place and displacement, ranging from suburban California, to rural Arkansas, to places imagined. These poems also interrogate place as it relates to language itself. Where does language belong, and which kinds? How (and why) is everything where it is? Using found text, allegory, ekphrastic, and memory, this collection weaves a collage of misplaced language - and by extension, poetry - across the disparate but deeply connected sense of where we are, who we are, and how we cope with the fallibility of description amidst global diaspora and impending displacement on global and spiritual scale.

Console Player Piano (Aliso Viejo)

<https://orangecounty.craigslist.org/zip/6136376225.html>

This console
Player piano
Comes with a full
Box of music rolls

The piano plays fine
The player does not play
The piano is in a warehouse

And can be loaded in a truck
With
No problems

The Poem Without Qualities

I promise,
this won't be as long.

No mathematicians here.
No trials.
No Bonadea
(unless you).

No mathematicians
but maybe some math:
(sorry)

1. Like, how many qualities shone through Austria's
lavender in those years
2. and at what intersecting angle did it glow the best?
3. how many how many dividends did Moosbrugger
carry on his broad shoulders into the chambers and

what is the remainder?

I promise,
this poem doesn't end in war.

Dream with Praying Mantis

On the porch again, you – in a state to face
the trees with your mug or smoke
between eases, the complex just below eye level
is recessed but in noise – tires pivoting on gravel,
keys and footsteps at the illuminated
mail kiosk, tiny round key turning.

Overhead, the sound of planes blend with the soft swirl of an unseen highway
aircraft blink their underlights, extending their spinning wheels over
an airport named for a white supremacist and TV cowboy.
Some say the spirit of John Wayne still haunts the place,

Last week, an air traffic controller swore
they saw him saddled upon the white barrel
of Southwest Airlines Flight #6894 DFW ->
SNA all ten gallons of hat rippling over Newport.
In January, a pilot thought he heard Wayne
callin the doggies and crackling all six
rounds from each hot revolver during a midnight charter landing from Vegas.

For his birthday, the security agents dress up like ranchers.
They walk from their hips down and lasso line waiters for extra screening.
Vented saloon doors swing between the metal detectors every year. Today,
Even their badges are re-engraved on a gold flattened star

In the local library, Wayne's photos hang between the entrance
and the stairs in. The room fills daily.

84. Teenage Society

“More specifically, we believe that teenagers in a town, boys and girls from the ages of about 12 to 18, should be encouraged to form a miniature society, in which they are as differentiated, and as responsible mutually, as the adults in the full-scale adult society.” - Christopher Alexander, et al

You are lying next to me,
and we are in your parents' old bed
at their house in the too-brightness of January.

Your heat fan is whirring.
Your dog is asleep and walked.
The bed has been moved to your room,

and every night, I set an alarm
so that before the morning comes I can tiptoe
and turn your hallway knobs on gentle axis,

(little antique globes) when no one is up and sleep again
in your old twin bed (now in your brother's room),
where I keep my bags and let go my morning dreams.

But before all of that, and before the romping
belly of sleep (Noah),
before turning from Nineveh

I am scribbling next to you about our own hubristic
and pre-sleep dream of carving our own
little idle spaces.

Collectible

(found in eBay listing by user johncolacone)

This is a real
28 year old peanut m&m from 1989
with a piece of wood inside of it instead
of a peanut.

Comes with the original wrapper.

When I was 20 years old back in 1989,
I bought a pack of peanut m&m's from a vending machine.
I noticed one of the m&m's had an unusual oblong shape to it.
(just over an inch long).

I bit into it halfway
and saw that the other half of the m&m
had what appeared to be a piece of wood inside of it, instead
of a peanut!

Just recently
in 2012
I decided to notify the MARS M&M Company and tell them my story.

After describing what was inside the m&m,
the representative
without hesitation
agreed with me and said
it sounds like
it is a piece of wood inside of it.

Thank You for inquiring.

S

$$A$$

S
A

T
B

S
A

T
B

9



(Won't you come along) and join me on that Heaven's road
come along and join me on. Heaven's road

(Won't you come along) and join me on that Heaven's choad
Please come along join on Heaven's road.

T

You want Zach to know these are saved for you both and you write myself into them next to you because they are all you have against an eternal present is so on top of you both. You know you weren't scared about your edits making it to God's ears in front of the rows of folding chairs because you think perhaps you believed some of the beatitudes still then that you somehow would be the ones to really see God because of the purity of your spirits deep down. I tell you this, not because I know there isn't, but out of my utmost fear of the eternal present. I am scared of brick and metal. I'm scared of all the crooked jags of keys how they lock through margins thin as wax paper water cones or the pages of hymnals light enough to dance so heretically on the draft of a sundown through the screened cabin windows and it is a fear none wiser than a fear of Hell, bright stageglow red - it is the talent show night of this kind of camp. For some reason, every group makes a skit besides the the counselor of the fourth-grade boys who performs an acoustic rendition of *Wanted, Dead or Alive* year after year after year.

Satan is a sunburned sixth grader. He folds his arms at the edge of the pulpit while the song of God gives the protagonist good advice. He later asks the protagonist to try drugs or perhaps disobey one or more of the Ten Commandments. In the final act, the song of God eventually returns and pulls Satan down the pulpit stairs on stage left. Satan has a lot of attitude but his struggle here is unconvincing, there is no wailing, teeth all stay ungnashed.

Before you're dismissed for the night, it's of course time to sing again. Sometimes these things get so out of hand that someone winds up getting baptized.

B

At the end of the night, someone
gets baptized. They will stand around
in their wet hair taking pictures,
aflash in the glow of disposable cameras.

As they towel off, it sounds like this:

Love one another for love is of God he who loves is born of God and know God
Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart. With all thy soul. all thy strength
God is love God is love. God is love God is love
Love bears all things Be- lieves

He who does not love does not know God for God is love God is love
Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart for God is love, God is love, God is love
God is love God is love God is love God is love
all things Love hopes all things en- dures all things

Then, you eat watermelon
after sunset and spit seeds against
all another's feet. I could here
go to the vines that never came
or talk of the tan and moonlit dew that
never came of them. We weren't
thinking of that so much. Tomorrow,
we'd think to rewrite all the songs again.

On Pain

Leave Jünger alone.

- Adolf Hitler to Joseph Goebbels, 1939

“ ”

- Bertolt Brecht to the Communist Party of Germany, 1945

First, definition:

Ergo(t)

1 - Therefore

(2) - The fungi of the genus *Claviceps*. The neurotropic activities of the ergot alkaloids may also cause hallucinations and attendant irrational behavior, convulsions even death.

The masses run at sight of [REDACTED],
therefore,
unable to face pain.

A human torpedo moves through saline water
just how an eye
moves through its enclosure of sleep.

You had a dream that
Hitler
gave you Christ's temptation.

I wonder if you thought about it with Hoffman.
If you saw the gates of paradise
become unhinged.

“Strength over all
earthly kingdoms,”

(your notebook,
October 1943)

as if it were Lucifer who led the way
to Christ's Gethsemane hands.

Well Being for All is Not a Dream

(after Kropotkin)

Although the pigeon becomes a ready mother
upon seeing herself, head tilted and standing
in front of a hand mirror or a cut-out facsimile

And although the migratory locust
sheds its forlorn solitude and calms its
beating hind legs upon gazing at the shape

Or all to familiar gait of another,
well being for all is not a dream.
It is not the still-life of unripened stonefruit

Behind hand laid lines, beneath a windowsill
or frozen breeze breath. It is not a map of the body,
bigger than the body, that gives our organs names.

Although Augustine of Hippo pales
in white envy at the sight of foster brother
at his mother's breasts it is not at all a

dream. In the last resort,
they write, we must begin to love
in order not to fall

ill.

rosemary cuttings, spider plant, more (Capistrano Beach)

I put
some fragrant , fresh
rosemary cuttings
by the curb,

along with some grey
colored bush cuttings
(they will grow if planted)

and several spider plants
(leafy greens)

By the mailboxes.

Please be gentle
with the plants
around

A Last Will and Testament

To my grandchildren John and Frances
I leave you my talking picture frame,

one kept on light wood cabinet in unstirred
office air (before the basement flooded)

that's top drawer incubated rows of metal
triple A's to restore your voices to normal grainy

speed once the last had died. John, you were probably
four when it was recorded, you yelled into its pinprick

mic so loudly so that Grandma and I might
hear you all the way in Kansas that you loved us. Little

older, Frances, you knew what it meant for something to record
thinking, perhaps even of our clients working on farm tax

and the bureaucracy for the rhythms of oil pumps
or pattering tractors - always asked if they were

drummers, setting up outside their farmhouses
ricketing out into the drying grains and sunflowers

all the cattle guarded driveways, and all empty pigpens
and the clothesline it snowed over back when your mother

rode the bus to Attica, stale smoke on her clothes,
covered her head like her sister for Easter and midnight mass

and had recurring dreams of a modeling clay.
A witch would travel down in this dream

from the top left as a silhouette, slowly
but persistently hunched over the characteristic

crook in her broom. You know how this ends.
Modeling clay encompassing metal wires

which point
in every which way.

7, Retro, XIII, Bred, 72-10, Adidas, Uncaged, Colored, NMD, City Sock, PK, Prim
basketball, shoes, Kanye, Alpha Bounce, Jordan 8, VIII, Jordan 12, XII, Retro, W
ite, Foamposite Pro, Jordan III, Jordan V, LeBron XI, LeBron 11, Kobe Prelude, Kc
er, Jordan 6 Infrared, Infrared, Infrared 23, 23, Jordan 6 infrared 23, Jordan 3 Infra
Inspiration, Kobe 9 Masterpiece, Masterpiece, Size 12, Jordan KO, KO, Chicago,
, Nike SB North Carolina, Nike SB Georgetown, Jordan 10, Jordan X, Jordan 10 V
e, Nike Air Tech Challenge 2, Nike Air Tech Challenge II, Nike Air Tech 2, Nike
ame, Supreme Foamposite, Nike Foamposite, Jordan 2, Black, Jordan 2 Infrared, J
acord, Nike SB High, High Hacky Sack, Dunk High Hacky Sack, Jordan 1 Royal,
1, Brazil Pack, Champagne, Cigar, Jordan Cigar, Celebration Pack, Future black, s
AVP Pack, Jordan 14, Thunder, Black and Yellow, Philippines, Kobe Beethoven, F
Jackson, Supremacy, Odd Future Vans, Supremacy, KD VI, Syndicate Vans, 3lab s
IOJ, HOJ6, Future Bred, LeBron 11 low gum bottom, Sport Blue, KO, Reflective,
errari, Ferarri, Ferarri, Big Sean, Adidas Originals, Metro Attitude, Pro Model, Odd
a, Pantone, Bad Apples, good apple, bad apple, baron, Slam Dunk, Riccardo Tisci,
Grey Jordan 13, Jordan 6 Black infrared, Watch the Thone, Watch the Thrown, Par
umba, Jordan 1 CP3, Bulls over broadway, liberty, NikeLab, Yeezi Boost 750, Yeez
11 12 dunks air max gift pack collezione high top countdown 8.5 retro jumpman f
s, Air Jordan, Jordans, Nike Dunk, Nike Dunk Sb, Nike Sbs, Stussy, Huf, blazers, l
, supreme, huf, 10 deep, jeepney, money cats, maneki neko, new era, fitted, nike st
any, unkle, dunkle, rogue status, kiks tyo, aki hoshino, nike, takashi 2, sb, shoehea
ypebeast, iss, cholas, xiv, norte, fat cholas, young trone, goods, Diamond, Sade, Tr
Jordan countdown package, Nike Sb Dunks, Sb Dunk, Nike Dunk, CROOKS & C
id, apple I pod, ipod, I pod, apple I phone, apple iphone, iphone touch, blackberry
360, Playstation 3, retro, fusion, spizike, spizikes, apple, dubs, HUF, urban, hip hc
tic facevalue face value undefeated, Kidrobot kid robot, JDM VOLK all-star all sta

Poi s'aspose nel foco che gli affina

Quando fiam uti chelidon—O swallow swallow

Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie

These fragments I have shored against my ruins

Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.

Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.

Shantih shantih shantih

Pet Sounds

The other poem you could be reading has a raven or something.
Something ineffable is happening in a field as the thing lands
on its claws or talons or its fingers sink into the hay shoulder
of a scarecrow, whom we are supposed to understand is so
much like the falconer only he sewn from flannel
doesn't call. Pager lime green and rain damaged,
holstered in pleather and bungie, the triple a's look like coral. That current
was maybe too hard to write in anyways were it new, and certainly
it doesn't suit the palette here – the dead wheat
between seasons, it's almost purple if you squint. The moon
a hardly suitor has flags and inscrutable trackmarks from the Rovers tonight.
Still, such soft light should feed like a prism through that bird or thing,
somehow its dark eyes perceived to say something also between
speaking breaths and revelry. Almost like

Another poem you could be reading, wherein a man logs
and thinks about logging amid the blue Chevrolet glow
of the dashboard radio and clock, enclosed and churning
through the mists of Oregon. Car dealerships call this space
a cabin and remark on the way that the truck can "know"
when it's flipped over in a ditch, it can call paid strangers
with exact coordinates but missing the way the Skoal can
huddles on the windshield and pools nearest to the thickening leaves. Sometimes,
this poem brings in an animal to kill. Births it at the bottom of the second u on an canyon road's
s-curve
usually a deer. Sometimes an exquisite bird meeting a
bumper for only a counterpoint beat. The driver stops
which serves the narrative arc quite well (parabolic as the road). Mountains turn gold
in the afterwork sun – we get the approximation of three ellipses as the driver walks away
that have some fleeting correspondence to the sound of trees falling fast. And still

In another poem, someone is sleeping it all off.
In another poem, someone is watching light rise on the walls.
In another poem, someone talks about the way water sprinklers sound at night on the lawn.
In another poem, someone never lights a candle as to spend it.
In another poem, someone feeds Wonder Bread to geese.
In another poem, someone calls their mother.
In another poem, someone feigns baptism.
In another poem, someone holds a lantern over the backyard lake.
In another poem, pearls are turning to clay and back
and pigeons beak blank scrolls around a clocktower
while the moss sprouts like a junior high moustache
and the wind whips something soft into strong
quibbling herbs curl around a finger for light, of course
all else being equal.

Thank You for Your Work

There's a lot I like about this poem and
There are many things that are working well.

I like how plainspoken the diction is
Throughout. Your use of the adjectives

“Pubescent” and “haughty” to describe the
Protagonist/tarantula felt surprising but

Fitting. I also liked the way the moon
Dissolved into the eighth house of Saturn's

Rings while the space emperor turned to
Talk to his mistress from the volcano.

One thing I think you could improve would be to
Reconsider the centrality of the train schedule

To the rhythm of the stanzas. I also
Wondered about why the bellboy decided to

Leave his locket under the pillow
of the quarantined room, but I still do like a little

Mystery. Have you seen the new documentary on
Orange juice manufacturers in the Bronze Age?

I think you would like it. Something about the
Etchings and the vigor of the cuneiform in clay

And the way they embody a kind of removed
Sensing organ seems in line with what you're doing

In this draft. “To speak, as to
Cry in infancy, is to want,”

They say. Sometimes this poem tricks me
Into thinking its needs are somehow

Met. Let me know if I can help
Hash any of this out a little more.

All
Best,