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Eclipse

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THE CARL AND WINIFRED LEE HONORS COLLEGE

CERTIFICATE OF ORAL EXAMINATION

Jennifer L. Hall, having been admitted to the Carl and Winifred Lee Honors College in Fall 2001 successfully presented the Lee Honors College Thesis on April 21, 2005.

The title of the paper is:

"Eclipse"

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Martha Faketty", written over a horizontal line.

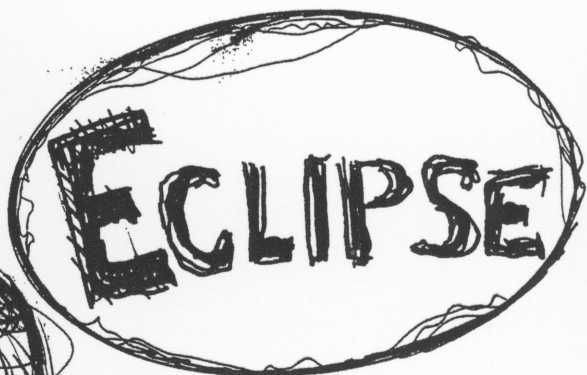
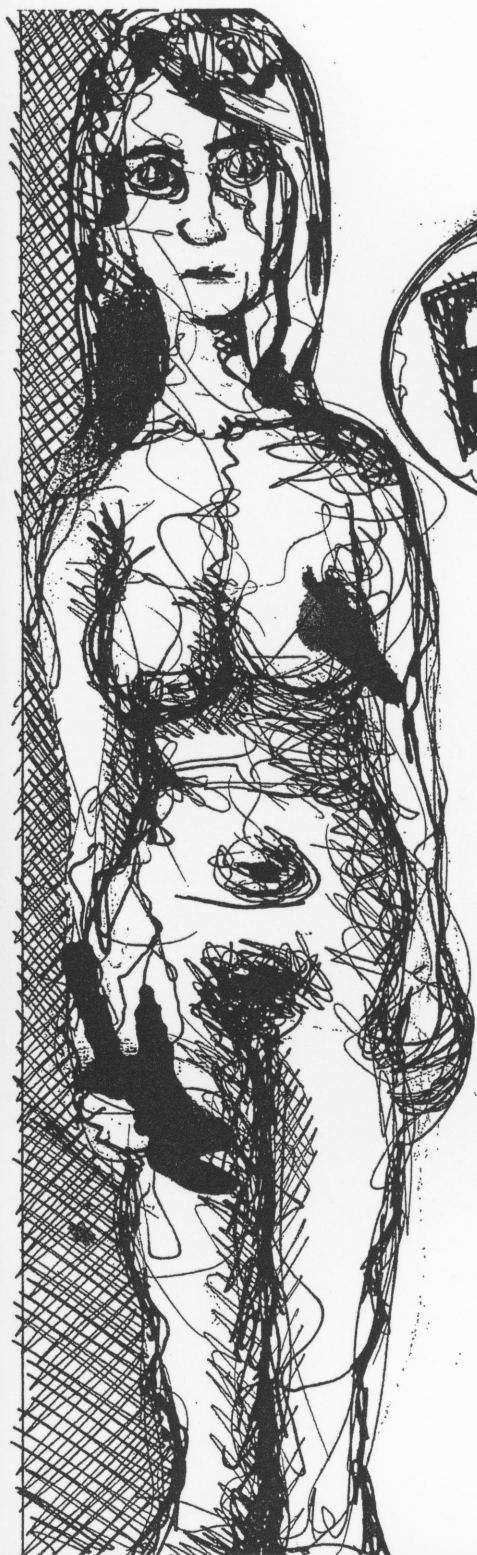
Martha Faketty, English Department

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jason Olsen", written over a horizontal line.

Jason Olsen, English Department

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kirsten Hemmy", written over a horizontal line.

Kirsten Hemmy, (former) English Department



POETRY BY
JENNY HALL

cover art by Christopher Darling

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ECLIPSE

I was hanging somewhere between
the clock face of the moon winding down
and his every word. *One last smoke*, I offered
so I could listen to his rambling exhale
and watch the sky darken through his breath.
So that he would have to leave
and I could make it there
before the last bright sliver of the moon
grew smoky. You were waiting, standing outside
alone. I left two empty plastic chairs
by the curb, two cigarette butts spun hard
into the wet grass, or was it just cold?
Smoky guilt—the way I laughed,
the way I grew silent
at your side. Every couple
years a change like this happens
but the darkness, just darker
is not shocking. I can sit by the street with him
and talk about astronomers roping the moon
from the roof of the museum on Rose street,
we can watch the whole slow thing. Almost.
I saved the end for you, in that gauzy light
I hoped you might make up my mind.
You who will give your life to measuring
the dripping behavior of water
inside a cage. Astronomers, poets and priests
grab at that dull distance, watch
for the evidence of us that covers the moon
but leaves the face amber and shadow.

MUSE

On the very day I received the first issue
of a twelve month subscription to Bride's magazine
I kissed someone outside
the two-parted promise I was constructing
elaborately, definitely. I kissed someone
with dripping hazelnut eyes in the alley
between his tall house and his neighbor's.
I should've seen it coming. Mood lighting.
But why tonight in my ugliest jeans
with my breath still spicy from three stiff Bloody Maries
in my most single friend's new home, etched
mirror and a marble butcher's block
and just her smell and her cat's
sigh, stretched on a leather sectional.
No one else's spit stained pillowcase and a Laundromat
next door. What was I built for?
Two sets of college-crusteds pots and pans, two sets
of engagements and compromises?

I should've seen it coming.
I kissed him outside
of myself, the only place I could.
Never has one foot been such a still place, the space
between my back and his front and the cold
wind behind him. My whole body
was one shiver, one ringing nerve.
My hands couldn't find a warmer home
than the curve of his hipbone, the slope
of his stomach. Perhaps
someone might explain to me and I might believe

the difference between fear and what is real.
Perhaps, outside, the moon, the light
my issues stacked and still coming, my lips
his mouth and hazel eyes. I was every molecule
of that buzzing desperation.

Then a week later, in the campus coffee
shop, across a wobbly wooden table those same eyes.
I insist on complicating things.
The first beautiful day, the view
through a steamy sticky window: air conditioner
parking lot. I don't think
he wanted to kiss me again, how could he
remember what I made up?
I've been harboring him like my last secret.

SHARING

After we have slept awhile and our breath has soured
you kiss me out of some dream, long and sloppy
enough for me to brush the fuzz from my mind
just as you settle back against your pillow and sigh.
It took you two years to read one of my poems.
Tonight, before we folded ourselves into bed
I handed you one I wrote about someone else I loved
because I hoped you would know, because I don't know
who you may be kissing now with your eyes
closed so gently, with your breath so warm.
The bottom of your foot is curved around the top of mine.
Beyond the foggy window, through the bubbled trails
of condensation I see strips of the moon. I pull
the deep blue quilt from your bed and wrap it around
my shoulders as I stand and move closer to the cold glass.
I hope it will wake you but it doesn't.

PERENNIAL

My mother uses her lunch break
to drive by the old house, to see
if this early pseudo spring has fooled the tulips.

She shared the largest of three bedrooms
with my father for exactly one year.
My sister got the room with the biggest closet
she liked pretending it was an airplane
or a box car; when she emerged
one year later from behind hangers and slippers
she was in the same place with a different family.
My room had two windows. I painted it
purple and then blue.

The kitchen smelled of macaroni and cheese
and hot dogs and stiff white buns three nights a week
so my mother could take night classes. My father's favorite
dish
was red beans and rice, something she taught him.
In the cupboard over the stove, a tin of Cajun spices that
stayed
half empty after one year.

In the living room, blue corduroy
couch cushions, upended and scattered the time
my she told us it was okay
to be angry and she handed me a mop and my sister
a broom and said Pretend this couch is divorce, Pretend
it is your daddy and Please pretend

it is me. I can take it. For three days after that
we ate ice cream for dinner and meatloaf for dessert.

In a ceramic pot my mother left behind
when we moved to the lake and he moved
in with his new wife, a straight shock of green
holding up two small flowers, still closed like seeds.
The tulip, planted in the cold, is not deceived
by the sun. She keeps driving, relieved.

CONDENSATION

After I tell you I love you
I go into the bathroom & breathe hard
on the mirror to make sure I'm still there.
A steamy circle grows
where my mouth was reflected,
an oleander blossom, beautiful
& toxic, it looks like me. Causes
respiratory paralysis, cardiac arrest.

Then my finger smears your name
in the middle of the flower & I have to
wipe the whole thing
away. I go back to you, to feed you
my breath.

EARLY PSALM

I am hating myself for the last time.
I have to remember to turn my shoulders
back like globes, cartilage axis worn already
until the heaviest part always rocks down
slumps. I am straightening my spine
and feeling skinny. My gut
tugs nervously though, spins little webs
inside itself, pulls me inward where it's dark,
where I am hunched and left
peering at words I have eaten.
Things I have said like gravity now
working harder than it ever seemed to.
Words still reeking of voice and some
covered until colorless in thin floss.
My father's words, my pastors' and professors'
thin layers of truth, fragile
as dragonfly wings. I am slowly accumulating
a colorful, transparent certainty, too young
to believe anything firm, too old
to believe anything soft, pulled down
by thousands of rough touches and cradled
by as many. I have already trapped people
in nets like insects and kept them in jars
until they died while I was sleeping.
Someone once told me
people should be kept in jars.
I believed him until my lungs ached.

INHERITANCE

After all, it was The Depression
but her depression left the mending
undone, enraging the man
who put a ring on her finger so heavy
it pulled her down into that soundless pool.
She came back with a smooth pink circle
on each temple, defiance fried.

My grandmother, born to a woman with two burns
fresh and shiny each time she looked hopeful
learned to gaze downward until she saw a man
with a velvet box in his hands kneeling
over the new bulge of her young belly
a soft landing place for a jumper
whose parachute was never expected to open.

They put away the birth certificate
and the framed needlepoint and decided
not to celebrate anniversaries, only birthdays.
The evidence of their joining
was partial: a small face, some blond hair
a little girl who wouldn't wear dresses.
Her resistance was a voice swallowed twice, spewing
like exhaust as she careened up and down the hills of
San Francisco,
left her husband for a woman and built a life
like a second-hand picture frame around so many
strangers flat smiling faces.

When I visit my aunt we discuss politics and literature
her promotion, my graduation and we feel so proud
of ourselves. We wrap naked fingers around bottles
of Italian beer and blow clovey smoke at the sky.

THE CAMEL'S BACK

I did it because I love her,
she's my daughter and she's as stubborn as me.
I reached across her, pulled the handle of her door.
Her hands, my hands
nineteen years ago, folded in her faded denim lap.

She might have come home with me
again to toast and tea and a lot of frowning.
If her fingers had flown to her cracked, parted lips.
If her eyes had shown any emotion. I may have caved in
and I mean that, I would have
collapsed and she would have suffocated.

As she rose slowly I pulled

her duffle bag from the hatchback
and set it down in front of the door
to the shelter, where they would not be able to help her
where she would have to
help herself.

When I drove away, I won't lie,
I looked back. She was still there, on the sidewalk
with her bag and she could've called a cab
to some other hallucination but I was hoping
that the kiss I set on her shoulder, the offering
I made of my mouth, so long angry and now
resting, would somehow be enough to sustain her
until sustenance changed form.

MERCY

Do you like cats? "Well yeah some of them. The others I shoot. Had one living in my car for three days before I knew about it. When I tried to pull her out, the little bitch sprayed and my car's smelled like piss ever since."

Serious, dark lashed eyes sparkle a little. "Had a couple in my house once too. Roommate left the door open just a little and when we got back, we saw them darting out the slider. Turns out they sprayed in my buddy's room but we didn't know it for a couple days. He don't have his sense of smell or taste you see. But when the stink hit the kitchen we headed up to the cabin and picked up a .22. Next feral cat we saw creeping around felt the wrath. Took out its back end first. So pitiful how it dragged itself in circles."

There must have been a better solution? Clouds shift on the road in front of my crooked porch, the push and pull of light. Across the street a small armed child with a thin mullet dances on the sidewalk holding three ties and a marker, barefoot twirling three ties and a marker. She slaps the ties on the ground and stuffs the dusty ends into her tiny mouth, removes them, scribbles on them, all this, over and over. Her lips and tongue are smudged black, her face is washed gray. No one is watching her but me.

He jerks his hand forward and I stir, eyes still on the child who is dancing in the shadow of a cloud. "By the time we were done there was nothing left. No bones even, just ash. You would have done it too, I gaurangoddamnteeit. Either we're gonna do it or the humane society will. Might as well spare the system."

HE SAID

What should we listen to and I
answered him: Something
with great lyrics, I'd like that
thinking on the outside of me tonight and he said
Well, you know I'm not much
of a lyrics guy. And my stomach grew
little fluttering wings, thinking:

That difference
between us
is between us.

But then him, reading in my eyes
the tingle in my middle: It's just because
you're a writer, and I'm a musician.

(Never mind that my stories only appear
on loose leaf paper stuffed into an old notebook.
And what of the smelly basement we painted green
the only venue where he performs.)

All of my shivering guts believed,
pressed against him. And as we fell asleep
the drums and guitars told stories
I had never heard before, stories
I hoped he would want to hear in the morning.

ORIGIN OF THE DAZE

THURSDAY relief tastes at once sweet
and bitter, a burning throat and warm cheeks.
A breath out, sleep
like a carnival ride.

FRIDAY so far from the next
beginning that clocks can speed up
& stop & so many names like a bag full of bags.

SATURDAY bloodshot urgent eyes
grope.

SUNDAY catching up so quickly to

MONDAY's menacing, its premonition.
The way it is to sit through presentation
number eight when you are number nine.

TUESDAY presentation number nine.

WEDNESDAY the end of a turbulent romance
with someone fascinating who, had things
gone differently somewhere
near the beginning, might have been a close friend.

BETWEEN

I was afraid
the leaves had skipped a stage, shriveled
brittle skeletons breaking
under my steps, I was looking
for the colors of fire creeping
into thin and jagged angles,
the jewel-toned progression
from green to lifeless, I was feeling robbed
of autumn. Is it true that you will ask me
to marry you and I will say either yes or no?
Could the choice be so simply a vow
or a departure? But there is another view
from a hill nearby, a patchwork hope
like old books stacked haphazardly
on an ancient horizon shelf in the distance and when I

look up
and less pensive from the splintering
railing of my porch and the sort of chilly
thoughts that happen in time
with the sound of the wind: the dashed scrape
of leaves across cement,

it is true
that autumn has returned
with all of its nostalgia stretched
between new and brown, and the tree
that leans toward my bedroom window
is holding on to its tips which have turned
deeply gold.

TOO EARLY PSALM

I am hating myself for the first time today
riding my pale pink bicycle
down our small green block. So fast
the plastic streamers that stretch and then shrivel
are swirling around my soft wrists.
Maybe her hair was so long and dark
and her skin so olive. Maybe
she was poor. Maybe the older girls were jealous
or mean or their mothers were alone.
I couldn't read the words they wrote
with their thick magic markers, but I agreed
to be angry without a reason.

I poked the flaky lead of my own pencil
through her pretty picture, maybe more than once.
I learned to believe in sides with my hands
they were shaking, my knuckles
white wrapped tight around the handle bars
as I tore past her poor olive porch
past bony kneecaps cradling the deepest sadness
that still exists. I too was crying that bright
afternoon, blurry turning like the same sort of victim
into my driveway, a girl first and then a human being.

BETRAYAL

The lightest carved green jade
Skin stretched smooth over collarbone beneath.

*there are shades of limelight
that could ruin a girl's complexion.*

I didn't want anything more
than all of the merlot. That's a lie

I wanted everything I could get
and a long plastic tip for my cigarette.

He spent six months in China preparing
the lines he wore around his wrist

smooth olivewood from Israel. I spent
ten minutes at the bar and one dollar

in the tip jar. I don't even like blondes.
It's what I do to myself

how I ask when I don't mean it
and harbor the weather-worn

wood of each real desire
behind layers of scar tissue in my mind

hard and white and impenetrable.

INSECURE SESTINA

So you think I am selfish, you must, well
you don't say so but there is some
new fight in you
when I complain about how nostalgic the icy days
have become, like grayscale photographs, or when I say I'm
afraid to love
someone with such indecisively-colored eyes.
Sincere, but are they blue or green, I
just can't figure it out. Those certain wells
and *marry me my love*
and yes, I would like to figure the sum
of our hundreds of bones over thousands of days
finding new ways to settle together but I am not as brave as
you.

Or as willing as you
to flip off of my fingers the "I"
it has taken me so many words and moments to define.

Days
saved like coins too valuable to be tossed into your wedding
ring wishing well.

Is there some
kind of luck granted in love?

I haven't mentioned love
in the way I mean it: you
and the deepest things I have to give. Sometimes
I forget that it feels like sleeping in and eating fine when I
love you well.

I have been trying to imagine standing beside you for the
rest of our days

love,
well—
you...

I
am trying to make this clear somehow.

Some
days
I
love
you
well.

Welling up and what it comes down to is the sum
of my enormous fear, growing still these days, and the look
I see in your eyes:
a negative number called love. I am running out of reasons
to say no to you.

FORWARD

Each foot
careful, brave. I don't know
which is easier, the slippery sludge of evenings past
or the hard could-be-ice tonight. Each foot
a question.

It is best with my fingers stretched
at my sides. Your grip distracts me.
Hands in pockets, I am warmer
but wobbly.

Above me, a swarm of birds,
black against the dusk which is darkening
as I watch. Wing tips seem to touch, the sky
gingham, black and blue.

HOW I WILL LEAVE

Your damp sleepy breath
eyebrows like birds
drawn over water
I am eating my tears
before they get loud There
a place next
to you a pillow
that doesn't match
my place, I hope
it will be cold
I want you
to be sore
like I am, terrified
of need like a man
on a ledge looking down
for a pair of eyes
behind a megaphone.

PRIMAL

An old film about Freud describes the origin of society, once a horde run by a father who monopolized the mothers and daughters for sex. Naturally, the sons became jealous and made a great soup of the father, penises erect in effigy. For a moment, I thought your poem was about me. I only mention it now because I dreamt about what you might look like slurping your father's body and blood, what you might taste like naked and rigid. Sated, full of broth and guilt, the brothers declared the women taboo to atone, built an altar to their father in heaven. Someone gray and flickering sums it up: the healthy ego mediates between the anarchy of drive and the tyranny of conscience. I would like to pull my fingers through the loops of your hair but I am looking for redemption, struggling to consume what I have killed. I want to take back the cold air between us and the sticky palms. Let's not regret a thing. But must we then leave the entire lament to someone else, someone with no voice to sing it? Freud, thick cigar smoke drifting out of the frame: *Ich habe nichts tröstend, zu sagen*. I have nothing comforting to say.