

BOUND TOWARD THEM ARE THE COURSE

by

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A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

Boise State University

May 2012

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BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE COLLEGE

DEFENSE COMMITTEE AND FINAL READING APPROVALS

of the thesis submitted by

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Thesis Title: Bound Toward Them Are the Course

Date of Final Oral Examination: 14 March 2012

The following individuals read and discussed the thesis submitted by student Zachary John Vesper, and they evaluated his presentation and response to questions during the final oral examination. They found that the student passed the final oral examination.

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ABSTRACT

The poems in *Bound Toward Them Are the Course* deal with the issue of lyric obscurity, the transmission and failed reception of messages. Toward this end, the desire of the lyric to convey despite its veiled nature, the poems' methods of translation serve as an attempt at self-correction, location through triangulation.

The lyric is also a circuit which, at a certain point, closes. Once it has taken in what it needs, the poem becomes its own referent, feeds on its own vibration, a repositioning energy. It takes its constitutive elements, rearranges them, forgetting itself (and its transmission) as it continually stumbles forward into new modes.

Words themselves attempt a similar repositioning:

STUMBLE/SEMBLANCE/ASSEMBLE
TRANS(-FER, -LATE, -MISSION)/MISSING/MISSIVE

The word is a node, a garbled radio reciting both itself (what it appears to be) and its desires (what it wishes to be). In this, the receiver of the missive is implicated equally in its construction. But desire misnomers—the speaking apparatus (the throat/tin-can-on-string/walkie-talkie/beam/buoy/etc.) lacks the agency of “I” or “you” yet somehow partakes; the word, “GUN/MAN,” despite its conflation, is fact—is, in fact, thought.

And thought is simultaneity—both movement and non-movement. The poem field in which the message moves and doesn't is decayed and blooming, the same flower. The transmitter, broken but still powered, is awash with static. And since one can't be spoken to one listens, overhears, in as many voices as he can muster.

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I. NODE'S STORY

The bone in my shoulder
is a half-faced twin—

what was a muttering two heads,
the scalps divide and rustle.

There's such tissue relative
in the catalog of lesser:

morning throws violence
into all the tree-birds.

Smoke and war cries from the forest.
The gunman, meanwhile,

speaks seductively
through his walkie-talkie.

One way and again tow
-ard the paddock, his rifle

he gives way—this way
to the hot hot sun, holy

ventilator, inviolate airway.
Is this are we an island says

she, an island or a chain of such—
ribs of fish tickling under there.

No man or whoa,
the assignation most descried.

Daytime deals an ideal stone
to push and put the shine on

my exigent shoreman. He has
two faces, scapulaic,

battered stones. They fiddle
his crotch buttons

for passage under the exploded
firmament. They say

I must own me a blue suit,
they who own the savor

of an undressed body
lightly stretched and going, going.

I am sired by such
a bleating organ,

and with that voice return.

Rub me up sidewise, the she of them says,
sidle me to this galloping chair.

With a wild infragrance
the she of them jangles her hair.

She's faced into given up thinking,
turned to the apricot summer

thus wet plops of birth
her betesticled moon.

Wah! from that chiloplast
stuffed back inside, that river

who makes a dribbilious noise.

Beam alights across the field,
the mindful bolt action folding yarrow

at a transfer point. Just as hidden
air riddles the gunman's scalp

and offers cover, moons open
bushes push forth darling

dead petals—I have a blade
swathing, being led affront

the bullet which will open me.
I say nothing clearly

but to hold my own hand,
wet another finger to the path.

Extirpation thusly scads
of little gentlemen—ordinary

cherishing, they stand where the
manikin stood

to gawp, strutted to the water
for a closer gander.

What sun, its light defined
as messages refract,

the letter folded, clipped tongue
rest atop the river's swallow.

I mumbly gain admittance.
My slatted lip, as born, is sheafed

and bound, so I'm the voice
like wood that spans the river.

I give off motes of verbage, dress them
in their little suits, converse them uniformly

in the sockets of my antiquity.

Putty over all the boiled curvature,
a mask spread over the field

solving which is nothing his blind—
the gunman visible

in daylight follows her, calls
instructions, garbles them

toward fullness and thresher.

Sun smolders past
twice in its cavity (verse would see

eye of leviathan
swallowed again

with the same sea bird). Another
lesser mouth?...valve

cross the bright occipital,
lets forth its fishlets,

little lost light.

Their mouth wound opens up proud,
speaks blurbles and teeth

from both sides. And there is space
for words, those collar-pooled

or swallowed back to the bastion
appetite. The transmitter

which beeps often
of its own account, a tooth

on its shattered isthmus.

I begin to think
of failure as levitation—

attach the device to my palm,
it whirs, the recording

in a voice I recognize.
This is a door ideally

you walk through. This
is a sun arriving

slowly as the measure
of its spawn. The she of them

recites what should be
entry'd, the catalog

of their wraparound mouth
air blurring at its junction.

I am weighted still
with my heavy boots

and cannot be dealt.

Node, sun-denatured wobble,

the only name I've heard
that half given. I'm sure

of the sky it heralds
a croup of transitive signals—

just as light and its word
subsume the cheek leading
round on its twin,

the buoy blinks a dark crossing.

The gunman's stomach bores to
unbuild sight in a body, realm

for such a gentleman's
digestion. The buoy bleeps,

it enters its last squall (too late
to recognize

a pattern—each wave
an ease it doesn't help

to stare) aplomb as is the she's face
constantly revolving,

but the sea aside just as likely
stoops toward some final marina.

Her hairline so shiny I've seen
the vivisection, radio

in the break of her
kind caucus.

I'm tuned to the flay
of your hands, dear

Node, their dainty entropy.

Your head's thought
tongue it tails through

unresonant orbits.
Turn quick to almost see her.

II. SEQUENCE OF STUMBLING CONVERGENCES

The walkie-talkie in his shoulder

seductively speaks—meanwhile,

a half-faced gunman

twins in the forest.

What were cries from a muttering

war, two smoked heads and

scalps divide into all the tree-birds.

Tell him rustle morning's tissue,

throw such violence to

the catalog of daytime's

lesser stones—grind together in her hand,

demand a little savor. Deal the shoreman

bedecked, his excellence owns me—

they say they fiddle under scapular

firmities, they say I must pass on

stone butter, shiny crotch buttons,

two explosions.

Push on, my putty

my oh my.

To return as a voice, body's
collider—organ undressed and
stretching, such as I am.

My blinked and bleating sire,
again go lightly by.

Sidle up to she who makes a dribble
of thinking, that river stuffed back

in its berth—Wah! utters thusly

her trolloping jangle. Infragrant
the apricot moon turns aside

of them summer's split

lip. The she of them
wide wet in her chair. Me, says she,
drop me.

The beam garbles toward
death, a transfer curved forth
solving the field.

I am born mumbly of a lesser mouth.

An antique span of verbage slatted over
the same river's swallow. So I'm

the verse of wood, shattered
bastion. Another roman

uniform, transmitter, collar-pooled provision
I admit. Another valve or socket.

Leviathan blurbles twice
in its appetite, speaks

to draw back its fishlets, sea birds, another

beeping sun. There is still space for words,
sheafed teeth and lips, little light motes

smoldering both sides of the mouth.
Occipital jaw, its isthmus is proud brightness.

In daylight the field is blind.

Yarrow fingers the opened swath

mask a thresher's scalp

blade spread visible. Nothing clearly folds

the hiding bush underfoot,

noting the gunman's instruction

darling wet. To hold onto

a hand, being led, the mindful gun

bore me riddled.

Folded an island gives way.

This manikin paddock stands the island

holy extirpated

stuttering vents. Of fish assigned

their messages tow

-age this way rifled and again

tickling in his clips.

Under there the tonguing gan—

little cherished are we scads of woe,

gentle prawns defined in shallows.

To the water standing, to what sun

refract the closest light descried.

One day he stood atop the ward,

sunny ribs in the river.

The gunman heralds his own iconographic arrival,
his hands in flay unbuild the realm.

Just as sky's likely sight denatures the mouth with air-blurring signals.

His weighty boots aside each lip, he studies the junction.

Spawns other gentlemanly bodies into it.

The buoy stoops in its sad orbit.

Dear Node, I begin

to recognize the device

the word walks through

its caucus pattern, her's

a failure of naming.

Dainty headthought,

the she the sea and buoy's

wobble, each wave set out in voice

recorded to its crouching suns.

Node, you almost see her crossing

but too late the she of them

is transitive tongue.

And so your cheek adjusts its tuning,

recites one final white hair, the catalog

fully entry'd.

III. CATALOG ADDENDUM: TRANSMISSIONS

THE SHOREMAN TO THE SHE OF THEM

Why speak to you of transitive
moons? Of hair that utters
from another cheek? These are
not my name, no more than
yours is Dainty. I can talk
trafficking, and verse to dribble
by by—

THE BUOY TO THE GUNMAN

:.....

:ALL DAY SQUALL AND BILGE-
:TRAP.....FISHLET ACCRETION/

:.....

:PLEASE FORGIVE...THOUGHT
:VALVE OBSTRUC.....

:...ADVISE.....

:ADVISE.....

:THE SEA AND I SHARE ICONS/

:BUILD-UP WAVE CAUCUS/

:WORDS SWALLOWED DOWN
:OUR WATERY MOUTHS/

:EXPECT A GLAD COLLISION/

:ADVISE.....

:.....

THE GUNMAN TO NODE

I set aside my building
to speak into the dead
machine should it be
done. What we were:

one resonant head.
Our jaw a smoldered
transmitter. Our teeth
in reading sheafs.

The same uniform we wore.
You'll be borne back
up her river's signal
should I will it.

THE SHOREMAN TO THE GUNMAN

The she of them's undressed
in my berth, await for transit.
As relay I'm assigned this recitation
carried over your airway, sir,
and though she lacks
required pages I'm just and
given to deal. She's bent upon
the junction but I'll keep it from
her as I can—

THE SHOREMAN TO THE SHE OF THEM (II)

The message beams no matter
cross the windy carry back.
An opening the ground parts
and his smooth cheek planted
previous blooms speaking
as hair slowly from a follicle
rowed neatly.

THE BUOY TO THE GUNMAN (II)

:FEEL THE GOOD AIR
:CREASE THEIR SKULL W/

:YOUR BETTER BULLET/

:TALK TO ME AND THROUGH ME
:SPURTING ONTO SHORE

:I'VE WADED SURELY REVEL-
:ATING PATHS FOR YOU

:I AM DUTIFUL
:STILL IN THE IMAGE
:YOU PRECEDE/

THE SHE OF THEM TO NODE

Innate our sentence is the space
of breath my hand you grasp
toward the strain to hold me steady
stagnant if only calling down
to fieldbone the type of body
word removes.

THE SHOREMAN TO THE GUNMAN (II)

Light has left the water, your rationed throat.
Deposit in their mouth a blackened pip
fineried sun possessed of a word.

IV. ONE ACT

CHARACTERS:

MESSAGE

NODE

THE GUNMAN

THE SHOREMAN

THE SHE OF THEM

THE BUOY

THE PLACE:

An evening-lit field beside a wide, but very calm, river. Trampled grass and erratic shoe marks around a smoldering fire pit betray a recent scuffle—one large branch is broken from a nearby tree, and MESSAGE walks slowly back and forth from the river's edge with it, wielding it playfully, first in the manner of a broadsword, then, as its monologue continues, as a walking stick.

MESSAGE: Message cross my legs in midst of the blade field.
 Lay in wait say it no former state

entirely possible something could happen here
 because of me—

[It stops, bends to pick up a torn and bloodied scrap of cloth—too dark to study it carefully, MESSAGE looks to the moon, which without prompting splits amoebically in two. The moons, identical to the parent except for the occasional errant pockmark, begin to drift apart. Due to the subsequent diffusion of available light, MESSAGE squints and returns to the fire, stirring the coals in an attempt to liven it.]

Better, better...Message would enter
 the innate sentence, but that it would sicken

any type of body.
 If worth issued forth with head wrapped

in semenic forecast, one skull seeming
 bilateral creased,

if that summer before, thinking no summer
except the ideal haystack,

if the ground birthed up a waistcoated
manikin and I its shiny monocle,

if, if and only. That this image would have
something to say. To call down into

that cool ravine, to see what was
wind carried back, what could quiet

my reverberate need—

[MESSAGE is interrupted by the sound of a vessel crossing the river—it looks up to see a craft of indeterminate composition run aground on the sandy bank. It is at once a raft lashed together of great tubular logs, a sailboat, a steam paddler, a trawler. THE SHOREMAN hops to the ground, offers a hand to THE SHE OF THEM, who refuses it and clammers down of her own accord. THE SHOREMAN sees MESSAGE by the fire and goes to it.]

SHOREMAN: Ah yes...as you see, good sir,
my charge is safely carried—
should I leave her in your care?
I would surely be
advised to carry on
with business if business carried on,
but I'm afraid my audience
ends in dribble among rocks.

MESSAGE: —for the blood of precedent, blood between
the pages. Message says there's space

enough for such, apparatuses will hold
beams stay strong and nothing be removed

but the word removes indeed the word as Node's
burnt senses dictate. Rebut I am afraid

that final shock of cold clear water hides among the rocks,
surely carried off somewhere no boat can find.

SHOREMAN: Good, good, I see—then you
will be entrusted.

[THE SHOREMAN *gestures toward the spot where THE SHE OF THEM had been standing. SHE is not there.*]

Odd. My manifest accounts
for only one appearance, this is
surely it. I've waded, waded,
countful measure's seeped
my bones, oh surely he would see her.

[THE SHOREMAN *wanders back toward his vessel, arms outstretched and seesawing, feeling the air for a newly invisible woman.*]

MESSAGE: No matter a clop or gallop or similar pace,
all motion keeps me here. And as no action

holds me steady so as children born and died
in one spaced breath, I lean back into water

and feel it not take me.

[THE SHOREMAN *has waded out some ways into the river, calling to THE SHE OF THEM, every now again inspecting cupped palms of water, and thus distracted doesn't notice as SHE steps from the tallish grass to stand beside MESSAGE and the fire.*]

SHE: I've such to say and no conveyance
mustered keeps me
quiet—as yet no apparatus I'm another
talking foil

stripped logs fall before his path he makes return.

SHE: You record me incorrectly
 in everything that happens
 today will happen in his sight

 he looks down from the tree
 his blind has set his sight black sun smoking hillock
 cataphracted the horizon blinks

promise fed from his ration sack
 suckled beans and thusly apprehended.

[THE SHOREMAN returns dripping to the fire carrying a small metal bulb; THE BUOY he found is counting quietly to itself, an unrecognizable pattern. As THE SHOREMAN draws near to MESSAGE, a light-emitting diode extends on a telescopic pole from THE BUOY's apex; upon receipt of the signal, the whir and click in retrieval of a memory.]

BUOY: :.....

 :MATRICULATION/REGISTRY NODE
 :NOT FOUND/

 :DEPICTED FORMERLY
 :AS INORGANIC STRUCTURE FUSED

 :W/ SEAL MEAT PROPULSORY
 :FLIPPED I AM/

 :SWIM THE COURSE AND FIND
 :ONE I'M MEANT TO DOCK/

 :WHERE IS THAT BOY/

 :OCEAN FOLDED OVER AT
 :A CREASE POINT TO POINT

 :AND PASS THROUGH LIKE A SHOOTIST/

SHOREMAN: Poor faulty vessel, signify awash.
 Once abandoned certainty
 the fact thinks. That one to
 the other could be gone
 not arisen in speech
 trickled crevice lost but not so
 never having been.

[THE SHOREMAN moves to set THE BUOY into a notched stone pedestal near the fire. As he releases it, the antenna retracts and THE BUOY resumes its murmured counting—the pattern, though, has changed; certain numbers are omitted, shortening its phrases.]

SHE: Light has left the water
 a portent beam issues
 from his hollow finger His a great column
 dark inconclusion
 I must speak toward, attention to the
 meritous fact
 he traipses through a boneyard
 of his design for me.

MESSAGE: Possessor and possessed he is of a word
 socketed into the wound.

The path toward us raises up in welts the yarrow
 hackles every root tremble with a sip

from his footprint and his tracker beeping
 slowly being fixed. Yonder death retracts

into his punctured head, Message keep me
 on this downward slope to stoppered water,

first theme of cataloging fixed position
 lathered seed collecting in a hollow

bore, what I say less pip less throatful
 blight predicts.

SHE: I stood my heel blooming thoughtless
 at a starting place
 in fieldrot the birds had eaten
 trees grown knocked down
 in one kick still standing
 when I looked again.

SHOREMAN: Yes, the scene is chroma
 silvered nothing moves,
 and stillness wastes the mention
 he is in every fragment
 my equal, your astray.

You must stand your mark,
 spurn gowl you tender licked
 guise of one whose name's
 festooned about if you'd
 only turn your head

you'd see it.

[THE BUOY *interrupts, emitting a short, high-pitched chord, rocks to fro on its stone. At THE SHE OF THEM's touch it continues its transmission.*]

BUOY: :THIS MISSIVE IS A
 :LIVING VAULT/

 :FIELD STRUNG WITH WIRE/

 :BUSHES OPEN TO RECORD
 :NOISE CANCEL TEST

 :ACQUAINT WITH TWANGY
 :CAUGHT BIRD/

SHOREMAN: The worn tongue surged
 a bobbing bottle most lonely

grew confused untethered to
its finding course,

real horizon sensed behind
the lip, the channel of
a face to find its other
reconnoiter.

[Another gunshot, closer this time. THE SHOREMAN's vessel slips off the beach and is carried off downriver. THE SHOREMAN only turns his head slightly, watching as it disappears, though his discomfited stance makes apparent his desire to pursue. The pit flares and begins subtly to draw all characters and other objects closer toward it—sand piles into tumuli, wisps of driftbark roll into the fire and, singed, draft up into the cool night. One shred, still glowing, lands on THE SHE OF THEM's shoulder. THE SHOREMAN flicks it away.]

BUOY: :IF YOU SEEK TO COLONY W/
 :THIS WORLD'S INHABITANT

 :OR OTHERWISE EMBARK/

 :PINING THE CLEAN SONG
 :DOWN CHUTES OF WHALEBONE

 :WASHED INLAND LONG BEFORE
 :MY LIGHT CAME TO

 :REST IN HIS BELLIED COMPANY/
 :IN BILGE ATTEMPT TO LEAK

 :ACROSS THE TORIC JOINT
 :ALL LOVER SWIM/

SHE: To set out place upon a plinth
 for the loved one sallies
 turning in one spot

bound toward you are the course

to cancel us binary sun
two of anything must tug

at odds depend on
empty space to swivel round
and round.

To set out on a confluence
of face and bone
the stone forehead of the field

we might meet upon
flooded with the river's static
full dark letting down

from trees to walk between
and hide us.

[All characters look toward the distant treeline as THE GUNMAN steps out and onto the field. Raising one hand in greeting he proceeds toward them slowly, hitching the strap slung around his shoulder. His clothing and skin reflect no light, transmit no image, so one is left with only the faint apperception of motion, a nothing drawing near. Fireflies bend from their courses to follow him, wink out one by one at his attention. Clumps of grass at either side of his path pull loose and plaster his legs—the figure swells in this accretion of matter. The air thins. THE SHOREMAN winces at a sudden pain in his foot, sits down to shake out his boot. The fire goes out.]

SHOREMAN: Delivered myself a body forged
in leviathan's black belly
the ardored orbit quickened
toward a center,

where we stand
singly press together as water
strained against a gasket
we will be expelled.

[With the butt of his hand THE SHOREMAN repeatedly strikes the sole of his boot.]

Basin is the place to form
 a pond, a sink or abscess
 unrelieved in growth

though little birds
 lapping at the shore—

[With a final knock the bullet tumbles from his boot like a tooth dislodged, landing amid the stones of the darkened fire pit. THE SHOREMAN plucks it up and hesitantly stands. After a moment he begins his walk toward THE GUNMAN, who smiles at him, parted lips revealing a bright speaker grate, thrum of overtracked voices.]

they lick at my name
 bring me up dressed and
 steaming omen
 of my salvage. I carried

my word's loot for it maintain
 the stumblance of our happening.

[Upon nearing THE GUNMAN, THE SHOREMAN reaches out to touch the stock of his rifle, as though the rite were familiar. He disappears.]

SHE: For now I haste upon an image
 junction crossed his holsters wet
 and keening.

Mouths remain attendant
 to this service my waystation
 suppered bred to its leanest

 tooth that overlap
 which ruckus quietly
 his tongue loose us

remnant meal
 from the crevice

to swallow us back.

[THE SHE OF THEM *picks up* THE BUOY *and tucks it under her arm. Meeting* THE GUNMAN's eye, SHE *stands still. His voice grows louder, insistent, and as the last moon falls toward his jaw he walks to her.*]

MESSAGE: First Message was the only sound displacing.
The world gratified in purloin.

What next, call it substitution—
all those back of my head turn

to talk. Lay down planks to cross anon
insisting something happen here,

put voice to substance
vouchsafe the grass-tangled schooner

sloed in its relation to the field.
This worthy charge tripped on

another earth-cleaned bone, scraped its hull
on the risen skull

likened mind diverging
fell open like a riddle the field falls open.