HOW MANY HEADLESS TELAMONS

by

Torin Jensen

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing
Boise State University

May 2013
DEFENSE COMMITTEE AND FINAL READING APPROVALS

of the thesis submitted by

Torin Jensen

Thesis Title:  How Many Headless Telamons
Date of Final Oral Examination:  14 March 2013

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

Martin Corless-Smith, Ph.D., M.F.A.  Chair, Supervisory Committee
Janet Holmes, M.F.A.    Member, Supervisory Committee
Edward Test, Ph.D.    Member, Supervisory Committee

The final reading approval of the thesis was granted by Martin Corless-Smith, Ph.D., Chair of the Supervisory Committee. The thesis was approved for the Graduate College by John R. Pelton, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate College.
ABSTRACT

The poems in How Many Headless Telamons initially seek the impossible: origin.

This attempt begins with an examination of the metaphor and, by extension, the image.

In Works on Paper, Eliot Weinberger writes, “Metaphor: to transfer from one place to another. In Greece, the moving vans are labeled METAPHORA” (9). While granting the utility of metaphors in poetic language and thought, How Many Headless Telamons attempts to explore the dilemma of movement itself; that something is to be moved not only pluralizes location, but means that that which needs to move is not where it needs or desires to be. In this, Metaphor houses the erotic tension that comes from separating words and names from what they point to, from separating I from You. This separation creates distance, between words and objects, self and other, meaning and origin. If the task of the poet is to transcend human experience, then it follows (in this book) that this distance should be collapsed; the trajectory of a metaphor, of an image, of language itself, drawn back to its starting point, its origin.

This, of course, is impossible. As failure becomes more apparent, as How Many Headless Telamons succumbs to the image, a choice presents itself: movement is inevitable, where then to go?
The answer begins and ends in the symbol of the cave, which brings to bear on the text many levels of movement, both that of the multi-faceted symbol itself, and of the directional implications of its “physical” structure. That cave as a symbol can be seen to be the location of the dawn of human consciousness, be a metaphor for the mouth (and thus the location of eros and speaking/poetry), be the location of and metaphor for knowledge (via Plato), and that simultaneously its “physical” properties allow its metaphors and notions of interiority/exteriority and direction to intersect, provides How Many Headless Telamons with an impossible task. To collapse that metaphor would be something special indeed. But it also allows the book to attempt the impossible, to begin to hollow out and collapse images and their metaphorical distance by placing them in a dark interior and pointing them at each other, even if that interior is not an interior at all.

Many of the symbols and images in How Many Headless Telamons are common throughout the history of poetry, but this book takes into consideration a number of influential books in particular: Paul Celan’s Breathturn, trans. Pierre Joris, and the notion of a poem or poet being denied his own interiority. How Many Headless Telamons was particularly interested in the final stanza of “Ashglory”: “Noone / bears witness for the / witness”; Octavio Paz’ The Monkey Grammarian, where the impossible-to-say meets what-is-said amidst a lush, imagistic landscape; Clayton Eshleman’s Juniper Fuse, where the poetic possibilities of locating the first instances of humans creating art in paleolithic caves provided much of the inspiration for this book; Xavier Villaurrutia’s Nostalgia for Death, trans. Eliot Weinberger, and its terrible vision of the self continually being denied
interiority; Alice Notley’s *The Descent of Alette*, and the protagonist’s journey as movement through its own metaphorization.

The word *telamon*, and its thematic import, was first glimpsed while reading Paz’ *The Monkey Grammarian*. A telamon, in architecture, is “a male figure used as a column to support an entablature or other structure.” The Merriam-Webster dictionary notes that *telamon* is “Latin, from Greek telamôn bearer, supporter; akin to Greek tlēnai to bear.”

The image of a column in the form of a human, minus the head, places *absence* and *construction* in the same structural realm, a realm in which what exactly is being supported by the telamons, and how being headless affects the support, is as equivocal as what kind of burden this places on the poet. *How Many Headless Telamons* proposes answers to these dilemmas.

The title reads like a question, which can be said to be “the only complete grammatical structure that cannot exist by itself—it must always take us somewhere else, to another sentence or to an unspoken (unspeakable) unknown” (Weinberger, 66). But it also reads like a statement, a declaration. That it commits to neither direction lends some small success to a book about failure.

Images, metaphors, poetry, cave, mouth, I, you, *palpitating black sails shiplessly adrift*: the failure to reach their origin becomes *How Many Headless Telamon*’s origin. A poet’s consolation, in the end, is all he has.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................................ iv

How Many Headless Telamons ............................................................................................................... 1

   The attempt ...................................................................................................................................... 2

   To be ......................................................................................................................................... 3

   And the image is ....................................................................................................................... 4

   And the image is ..................................................................................................................... 16

   And the image is ..................................................................................................................... 28

   And the image is ..................................................................................................................... 37

   And the image is ..................................................................................................................... 47

   Images ......................................................................................................................................... 57
How Many Headless Telamons
The attempt
to remain
originary must
contract the cave
when *saying* it,
fill the space
with only.
To be
more fully
within, I must
bring you closer
here.
And the image is

\begin{center}
cave
\end{center}

\begin{center}
painting(animals)
\end{center}

\begin{center}
breaths
\end{center}

does repetition
mean failure

--
Here the cave’s mouth

Speak the apocalypse

Let me back in
let me back in.
Your breath dissolves
my you
painted on the cave-wall window

a knotted tongue
preserved.
Haunting fractured rock, the recess here for an other leads to a vestigial end for who so takes the place of lips take place.
Let you lean
back into lithic
death. I, here,
motionless.
Climb my tongue back
within you
the permeable mouth
carved in onto these cave walls
and the black vessel entire
sings the vessel.
Fingered poems lie empty on the cave walls. To wet with breath wipes clean whispered artifice. The tongue a half-buried ouroboros shimmering for its other in you.
Herein a cave
I cannot fill
fill the walls penetrated
with poems only
windows to a
dim mirror. You lie
and wait for calcified
breath to wring
my lungs cold,
eternal.
A believer’s honesty
belies the cave wall’s
glistening black-
mirror touch or
rests, content
the embers of later
words salivate.
Here, your knotted voice, unwind to sing of cosmic interiors, still witnesses always *pointing* in the dark goodbye.
You forgot
that I forget
our tongue’s origin
where it pointed
always away.
I consume is your apogee, but starving you, stamping out my tongue in the shadow of your name requires direction still heard is a tongue-toothed verb, the cave wall’s herd watching, silent.
And the image is

tomb
song

does repetition
mean failure

--
I climb my tongue back within.
Mouth your filament
traces- I remain
a tomb replete
with borrowed air.
You are entombed
shadow near the edge
of forgotten,
swallow my heavy soil
what escapes is interior.
I dig into
you into you
but the ghastly knot-
lump rooted in my
throat rests unabated.
I see what remains
and it won’t speak
our name. Origins
continue empty.
I will swallow my tongue
bury friable breath
in your silent presence.
We devour
the inverse
of direction

I mouth here
and you mouth here

the elongated later
always less
full than when

I grip your
lustful tongue
make it mine

but it points
the wrong
direction

were it
could be
ture.
Countless tongueless
words between you
and I and
restless silence
recede into a night.
All of you
is less
then it is
forgotten
in my pregnant
mouth.
I am never in forgotten you.
Cavernless, adrift,
I speak to your
sinking shadow,
and you remain
formless, pointing
to me and.
You hollow yourself
in me, written
to die on the shore
a forgotten song
dreamt.
And the image is

sadly
everywhere

does repetition
mean failure
Sing this vessel this
vessel
sings.
Mouth’s concavity cannot
will
contain pronominal
dead a word given
to breathless

unhinge my jaw
open.
I inbody you embody me

metaphor begets verb

direction-
hollow-
everywhere.
I see very little in all directions.
Where you are remains farther than this.
I am afraid
of your
own voice.
_Afraid_ already
too far
away from.
You hollow
direction, collapse
in on myself. All
this points
to failing
ending.
Song is
distance
in all
directions.
How far
until you
beget me.
Sing yourself
undress myself
I do.
What arrives is
leaving if
at all.
And the image is

salivating

*palpitating black sails*

*shiplessly adrift*

does repetition

mean failure
I rise in your throat
a stalagmite
reaching into the abyss.
I requires
direction.
Tongue-betrayed
emptiness,
metaphor
for you.
My tongue visibly
ends where you
begin. Direction
destroys us
leads us to
palpitating black
sails shiplessly adrift
receding into night.
Words’ distance fall
exhaled.

Breath in onto another
vessel but who sings
direction knowing
the tongue points
rooted, exhumed
in crepuscular noon.

Tongue - image
to
palpitating black sails
shiplessly adrift.
You want echoless
absorption standing there
with my mouth
open

whoso commands

as the pupil
of mine eye
breathes black,
pointing.
Orphans of abyss
I will to let
*salivate* speak
for itself, but you
and you in-
terminably rise
my stalagmite tongue
unyoked to
petrified thresholds.
Salivation points

to neither

of us

in what direction
to turn the

not-there-yet?
Wet comes after

breath is after

the infinitive
metaphor

lit.
Metaphor as verb
orphans all
of us
all of us
petrified
to go.
And the image is problematic.

does repetition mean failure

--
I form a silent
black scream
in your mouth

untold worlds end
crypts multiplying
and spinning away
in the distance.
The image is:
my tongue
the tip of your
origin’s direction.

Possess
inhabits neither
but still,
who’s gazing?

And others.
Tongue tied
to what
to whom

and I
salivate
in your
failure
to reach
what you
begin
here.
Image

steam climbing
out of a tomb-crack

my mouth forms
your formed me

a problematic
origin, saliva trail
or no.
My metaphor’s ruins reach
below but up

I have
to look for me

not find me

I am where
you cannot come

I have
then
sorrow.

The loss
was less
than finding
you.
Speak your bridge
back to my empty
shadow. To cross
space is to lose

let is the verb I wish you.
I am always
witness your
exhalation. *Witness*
a metaphor
for *bury*. 
*Apocalypse* is always past-tense. Deaf to screams, their after-breath must suffice.
I direct
you direct
me,
hope,
what’s written.
Failure has always
already begun
here

now,
to swallow
what had to be
exhaled

to possess
the infinitive
metaphor

not filling,
going,
could be
enough.
Verbs are poisoning
silentness
my empty metaphor
my metaphor
dies.
Stop the starting
to let
letting
to start

I say pronouns
do this

and the distance
grants no solace

sibyl silence
if colored away
from.
Just snow,  
no white.
The aggregate
of distanced failure
is metaphor.

Does the image-
hecatomb appease.
You say
I am an image
speaking,
a dead metaphor
so that you
may live.
How many headless telamons holding up your written trajectory from image to image to me to image.
The cave
and the echo
begin at the same
time-
every.
Images-
sent deaths
so that we may
here.
Cave-painted prophecy, I am always there pointing. Pointing to where I am not here, I am here.
I climb my tongue back within you.
Who sent me? You sent me. I am where you cannot come. I am here building.