

HOW MANY HEADLESS TELAMONS

by

Torin Jensen

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Torin Jensen

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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 *telamōn* 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.

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## How Many Headless Telamons



The attempt  
to remain  
ordinary 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

*cave*  
*painting*(animals)  
*breaths*

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 ful-  
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  
true.

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

death 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 my-  
self. 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.

--

Images

--



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.