Body of glass| [Poems]

Grier Phillips

The University of Montana

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/1696

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.
Permission is granted by the author to reproduce this material in its entirety, provided that this material is used for scholarly purposes and is properly cited in published works and reports.

**Please check "Yes" or "No" and provide signature**

Yes, I grant permission

No, I do not grant permission

Author's Signature: ____________________________

Date: 27 May 2004

Any copying for commercial purposes or financial gain may be undertaken only with the author's explicit consent.
Body of Glass

by

Grier Phillips

B.A. Roanoke College, USA 2001

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Montana

May 2004

Approved by:

Chairperson

Dean, Graduate School

Date
An hour of waiting climbs the sky,
empty, out of the sea that's turning grey.
A cloud tree grows on the water,
then crumbles like ashes.

Abent one, how I miss you on this shore
that conjures you and fades if you're away:
you're gone, so each thing strays
from its furrow, topples, vanishes in haze.

- Eugenio Montale
River Well

Hooked by hooked knot of bale, the light-rope pulled taut, still sounding inside the eye (admirable halt of concern) the living horse trembling, guddles for light beneath its own skin. We enter (that other world daily) death and return.
The Equation of Hands

Toward the other
hand is a space
where clocks break
from existence, the
disappearing, now
invisible zero since
you were counted back
to me like a fugue,
keys of my spine fused
to your finger-tips, the
skinned space between
white and raised-up-to-
meet-you, becoming voids
of air or boundary – you
took your hand through
my body the way
a wandering child runs
its hand through the glass
top of a lake, casting
its silver-skinned palms
into gold oblivion of self –
you ran your hand into
the harmony of returning
the scales that once built
and weighed you
as a separate thing.
Crossing

The chandeliers are shaking and coming up from the sea, the horses running water from their backs. There is some gold light building a wood house upon the beach. The windows wait there, speaking up the house, and when they arrive there is only the sound of them shedding their exertion, settling around the house like lantern-flames, their head’s sway sweeping down. Occasionally a young girl’s china-boned ankle lifts a hoof like a bass line, then places it back upon the sand, the way a figure very heavy, very fragile is placed back upon the mantle.

Out from the windows the heavy drift — light swells upon their backs like barnacles. They lift their hooves like they lift their heads, knowing there is an army of water and one idea.
Viridescent Window

The green house is green all-around. Green from the outside in. Like living within a green house of clear mirrors where green reflects in two, three, five, eight (pane after pane of pane-of-green), makes after itself, infinite-green. Standing, all-around, the house: Green. Still. Green lamp of green glass turned on in a clear forest.
The Abandoned Lake

By the abandoned lake,
a saddled horse stands,
waiting for the return
of weight and reins, the air
from its nose is snowing.
The world in an ancestor's
chalice, the inhabitant sips in
morning through bells, dark
coffee, air of knives, while
white waits in a glass
beyond the wood door.
Snow beneath snow
speaking much more
in silence, something new
and familiar falls upon
the slanted roof. A fresh
thump, from the tree
above, recalls a green
leaf. It undoes all growth
and tenderness inside
the mind, it palettes white
with green, fireflies thought
with viridescence.
Gradations of Light, Band

Gradations of light
band around you as
you move from tree
to tree in the orchard of
what-we-were and what-
still: being that you move
from pungent to pale, the slow
removal of sea, the more
increasing slow of forgetting
how you came to each
tree (path expunged), the
needles that tucked you
so neatly under their guide,
waver the pallor of sky
as it lifts from the sun,
waver like the eye of
I who looks back upon
you, the same as when
the trees collapse into the
ground we no longer know.
The Root of Hands

The white root, bare and downward, grows toward the rend from which you emerge, the once-toothed seam opened now by a finger, steady, then a hand that pulls up lanterns and signs to split this body of darkness that once was an arrow, and now is the arrow split. This air, pulled back, large enough to fit the body in, is exhaling its breath to fit the small, diminishing size of you: To the geode of green at night, you go, white roots strung up around you.
The Still-Of-Yourself

Called yourself, you hold still while the still-of-yourself is holding in round repose. Early sunlight calls itself through, like bending down to the well, drawing up from the bottom, like your own voice waking you, clear light rising from the well, seen to the bottom through. You, shaped by the haul, a rope runs through, brings you (to where is light traveling?) to you, filled with the clear scent of pines, diamond-round of water.
Out-Around

Striations fan out-around the black well. Pines around the corridor, corridor of your eye moving. (Light, you approaching the shape of your looking: Hall of eye, your eye.) Behind your gaze the trees are moving.
Toward An Identity

Grey wind, sky tied in smooth. Grey, blue, soft white, knot above me.

*

Yarn moves through, telescopes through, pulls: what did you say, once, about them.

*

I found a red tree, half green, green nestled among the green of a neighbor tree, the other side with limbs tipped in yellow. Not far off, a slender tree cannot decide between green or yellow. Three, four yards away, an entirely green tree, flat-hanging leaves. Behind all of these, a very tall pine, needles too dense, too green they are almost black.

*

Taken as a type of whiteness, white marble marking a period of time: when. Am I rendered dim now, by leaves of the laurel, where once I stood –
but what is abandoned becomes
abandon: was, articulated.

*

I weave a sense of time through
my hair I weave a sense of time through
my hair I weave a sense of leaves through
my significant hair I weave the laurel leaves
through my hair I weave a whitening marble
through what you did how you said who I was
I held my own hand once when once you were
gone I wove a sense of time through where you
were you a memory before I was.
March. Monday.

Big as a ship some nights,
her largest window
when she wanders toward it
like a captured siren,
and later remembers as though
it did not really happen,
cannot hold the moon it is so large
over the ground, like standing
beneath a maple leaf.
This fissure in her night-
time cannot be grasped as
she grasps herself — this, no
reason for the red to be so
pronounced in its coming
forth from the grey-green
of the leaves beside her.
One, cupped toward the edges
of itself, like a folded hand
folded out in sleep, the twitching
of unconscious wings, falls
like the light of a passing
car, and the time it took
between sounds of breaking and
ending was the size of thought
in her mind, the balled up scarf
of possibility stuffed into the purse
of her tongue with no one there
to loosen it — no reason, she tells
the dark-wood bed-stand that lifts
the plant above its leaf,
no reason to speak.
Tuesday.

The sky is sealing over
into a fur of grey. A core of
cold lining the air. Someone
mentions rain upon the grey
walkway, the whole city, pulling
fur collars closer to unweathered-
white skin, prepares and does not
notice the glass drift shard by shard,
the sun falling vertically down,
like a woman fainting into the ocean
of planetary moons. She drifts
like a piece of paper dropped
from an airplane.
Wednesday.

Pressed against their own skin, bruised by opal stretches barely noticeable, the violence to become violet; the grape trembles against the grape, full of moths, full of gasps as mouths are. At night an ermine light holds amongst them. They sit within themselves as sleepers do. The open window draws the blanket higher, draws dream up like water – she still is catching, light in her dark nets.
Thursday.

Her body dusky, she tries to shake from her skin this weight like tree bark. She the thin, unlit wick, inside the scree, wax, mountain, avalanche a forest of trees upon her.

One by many the green limbs like finger tips whisper along the inside walls of she who is sleeping.

*

Every bird around her is the color and shape of curtains, the pulp of an island sunset, seeped through with the liquid feather of flamingoes, water wafting streams slowly up from silk. Orange wakes her like a sturdy breath she had been cultivating for quite some time in the pink and sleeping orchard of her lungs. Her sight is marked by it, especially the pale moons that settle beneath her eyes the color of lampshades, the pale moons that settle above all the fire that may emit from the air of gas-soaked rags coming from the throat-torch, like a pine bursting out of its green body.
Friday.

This row of bones made necessary for the carrying of bones beyond the bed. The clock, off the wall somehow. Sun heavier than sheets through the open window. Complex mouth, cemeteries measured by measures of relation. The carousel of this-and-that the same as the desire to close the thought and sleep in abstraction, their purpose in this, encased amidst soft pallets, controlled by hard teeth, these composite, unmitigated barriers, voice of no retraction.
Saturday.

And all the twitterings of air could be
his voice, like light moving through
the throat of a window, as though the only
frame of existence were perfectly clear, perfectly
full of him, like the gold ground of leaves
in the time when all the world is calling
back to what it is falling into, the brief slant of
corridor between thin gold like a tremoring bell
and bars of gold cast into his hands
as he reaches.
Sunday.

The blue parts of the mind like a melting cup where memory is traced by a wheel, the laughing cart of your having-been-there with heavy foot pressed, all air beneath given up to your tools as you roll away, her life passed as your wares: She has stopped on the street corner like glass in a window, people all-around her spread like cracks. You return with the person reaching from behind her now to say her name, for he has been following for blocks and just arrived without a breath to greet her, but a word, a hand to cause her entire body to turn, a moment in gust when strength folds and returns.
Monday.

She could spend all time here as the balcony. Both ground and sky, she moves closer to the mouths of trees as they murmur what she aims to hear, understands already as a lover beside her -- it is an act of distance. From here she sees the blue-blue of the longest stars, small lanterns the size of her hand looking down the ebbing tunnel -- you so vast and she so far, holding the lanterns that have long unlatched their tiny black hasps and gone out of their glass doors, left in place of themselves.

Always the body before the name, and from this always the dark absence before the word distance -- you recall my entire life to me.
The Horses With Their Pearls

The horses, with their pearls, have stepped out of my mind, the pearls working beneath the black lanterns of their skin, bringing light from motion, as though the smallest moths to exist and still be seen, had gathered white within the pearls inset throughout the interior of black horses, and emerged through a breaking that caused muscles wrought from hooves to move toward me, like the ocean breaking above itself, away from the sun. You may have seen, as you stood like someone who is wanted, looking after the back of the person who wants you, me standing there, (without knowing you were there), the horses that circled toward me before they ran. The moon fell then. I could not see the dark hooves before the clear blue strain of day escape from the landscape I had built around them. Tonight it is as though these pearls that fill the horses are waiting, as though they, all the horses, are waiting upon your sleeping lip, trembling like water, waking you to speak from my memory, rupturing the cold case I had put you in, un-knowing the place where I had you next to me.
Resurrective Ear, Memory

Resurrective ear, memory-tome, tomb open, I remember the un-done – lettered tongue heavy, sea to shore I wait for. Air un-lift this need, anvil it down to a place more tangible, letting lettered breath, full, murmur up to your ear, as air inside the bones of a bird. Water-boned, breathing like a broken tongue, I am inside haunted sails, haunted by air, bone, smell of bone, I move through myself like ships move through water, like ice moving through water in heft, bodies of ice, ships of water peeling back the ice. Out of water-air, ship of air rising where I once was, where I still, my hands part my body, find I am as I felt, full of the susurrous sound through seashells, full of the shells themselves.
Flood-Well Of Where-You-Were

Flood-well of where-you-were
I kiss your dark forehead and still
there is rain in the center like liquid
air inside a prophesier's bowl of
glass, hands around the glass (I hold
your glacial irises as though
I held petals of water and
the light they held was held
in your eyes as they grew
there), as fire turns the gaze
clear, as fire in the water
fire brings may play out in
your eye, the way my hold
does, the way glass tells
its time. Walls of ash, bed down
around my ankles – I wade
where it all once was before
the silver within the flame
came bursting out of its
center as blue-white
chrysanthemum.
When Held Up To The Light

When held up to the light, slowly you are the end

that fails, spooling, out like ribbon undone from

your hair, wind – like thick-opaled fruit, your body beneath

warm water clear. Scribed, testaments around you, collected swan

of God, gold-edges seeping like water away from day, until

all this is swollen by the dark river of trees against the ether – you are un-

blank paper folding, whisper of surrounding centers, orbit and

(occurring void, centers open) time scaled just to reach you –

You tremor into morning as though you were already waiting there.
Through The Telescope

Through the telescope
there is a rose – I am
long from you
in this quick change
of petals within a breath.
(Is it the air from
your tongue or hand
by which I am touched?)
Fragile curve, weight of
vanishing, pricked often
enough and this sky could
shatter and shatter around
us, like a broken beaded dress
of red. (Will we climb toward
the air hovering above us?) How
to leave the dry sea
bed where lava rose. We
unpeel, petal by red
petal. Mare rose. Clear
in our vases. Green
stemming from my iris. In
you, I may magnify.
Inside A Clear Globe Of Clear Glass

Inside a clear globe of clear glass
there is a blue rose, which rests there

like an open door with no breeze
to move it from the sun. There is a blue rose

in a walled garden tended by
crystal muzzles. The horses breathe

so gently upon the blue rose
many say they have seen the blue

rose at night in the hair of she
who tends the breath of horses, she

who wove her own hair into
her silver skin from the light that hangs

down from the moon, there is a blue rose
that opens behind you when

you come to me from a place un-
seen, un-done. We speak

roses from thorns. Our hearts the rolled up
pits of gossamer on the garden wall.

Yet the wind still throws the blue
rose about itself, we still

look to the center of the rose, wait
to see the other’s eyes open,

a blue nest of breaths caught
at the sight and opening.
Where The Eye Exhales

Where the eye exhales,
the tangled web diminishes,
and we breathe, unobstructed,
all gossamer and rain
between us broken
out of, and lifted. We wait
no more inside the white
breathing, warm clouds
that harden into a throat-
string of small words choking
as they cool. You hold each
pearl in your mouth to warm it,
the way you hold each hair
of mine in your hand under
the moon to weigh me by.
I wear you in a planetary
manner of measured distance.
The whole occurs between us –
seamless, I am an altered mirror
in conversation as you are.
I Took You As A Rose And Kept You

I took you as a rose and kept you
petal by petal, the dwindle of long
distance between you and me. (In that
thorn-thick space, insurmountable
desire, hands that must continually
touch, as a point of reference, as words
build excited in the throat, and let go.)
You have a bird in your throat, and
it batters, frenzied, the chords – you
cannot speak. Our hair flat like petals,
we have been in this rain of light
an incalculable pirouette of hours.
Now we are pointed and do not
fall down. We send ourselves back
to air, an eddy unto our syncopated
selves; and if we turn to see each
other in mid-air, were we ever
on the ground.
In The Wide-Blade Wind

In the wide-blade wind
the grasses sharpen
themselves, the slow-
swing sound of time
sawed by the second
hand sawing into our
hour of hours you must
believe in, the sky of
wing upon wing
couched around you,
speaks behind your
ear, a hand coming
to reach you, a wind
in the house of where
we stand, forceless
against it. (Once was
held in your ear
like a wing passing,
once was a word in
the ear of your looking,
where we were welded,
where you saw, and looking,
said, in the middle of
my gaze, I exist.
Body of Glass. The Paperweight.

Snowmeadow-sky, caught eternal, caught up
in a white tree, a white kite, tangled in the white armed
avenues, bones of the tree, spread out, a landscape within
the white-cased land, no escape of white but the smoke of
smoke that the tree becomes, moving as if it were
silver twisting uninvisible into white, becoming a part
of the meadow curved vertical between ground and sky.
You are all around, (how invisible the boundary) a waking dream.
Also beyond, into a place this place knows not, preface to perfection
only dreamt of. Contained, you are a bottle of stars
across the black sky, soft white
becoming blue, your gaze
a canopy, laid down.
How like a woman you are, full of clouds. How like a clear loaf of bread, round perfectly, ready there, waiting to be taken in hand and broken.
At night you remain a window through the darkness, the cloak around you pricked in flakes, punched out in the shape of an orb.
You are the body lost, come down from the sky. Now resting removed, you are the door to see through, never open. Tiny vault, inviolate.

Perfectly, light casts from your unbending head.
What if, set out in the rain, a neon overcame you
with shining, as though before, but not knowing before, knowing
now, you had been covered with a thousand thin veils, transparent,
pressed with one hundred round palms, shaped
by all the hand that held you once, then went
aching towards another, smudging
your otherwise glistening surface, the distance
from here to the end filling up with the words
to want, need to touch.
How would the rain feel along your spine? Cool as glass
or cooler. Would the effect be
your breath, taken sharply as pines
pulled taut in colder weather, the way you straighten,
press into your desire the moment it touches you and knows
it has you, knows the you of you has become
mine. Your solitude mortal.
The ink recedes, decrescendos, disappears
like the back of someone walking away, someone
walking out the door, not coming back the same,
coming back different, not the original idea, but altered,
blurred (like vision), significantly less. This is memory.
This is the end. Because everything before was wasted.
Here, later and soon are the same. Inside here, here turns
upon itself. How long before the atmosphere allows patterning
beyond the outside whim of hands? How long before
what falls may gather? May not only gather but
gather once and one hundred times more to build
a snow man, an ice field, some deep ore to tap.
How long until what is wanted is unhad? Until all this.
Until all this reveals, emerging out of the heritable moment
happening upon the heritable moment, smothering and
smothering, until life turns blue, rapt in the following.
How long will it last, how long is it until
the answer disappears with the question?

There is the white noise of snow like pages.
The dream each time, serial.
Inside the mind of the blind, something moves the way they imagine
smoke moves across a black sea, a vast, mind-vast, glass black sea.
It traverses, blown with the same air that may set sail to ships
whose sails are the same color, that same color of smoke no one here has
seen. It blows towards. Towards the blind bears snow lifting as smoke
from the lifting head. Empty wings (what they carry invisible) come quickly
across the black sea, photographic negative of non-
existence. Blind-and-snow felt,

that silence in their ears is the silence of what could be there,
held in the corridor, like a glass ship sailing
back off the edge of the world.
The Glass Paperweight

White hung from
white sky-of-sky, sky
tapped from the outside.
Source encountered
for the innumerable-
numbered flakes falling
like the second hand upon
the clock tower, face covered,
other two hands taken
by ice. This small hand passes
over in measures. By measures
the city has been translated, green-
numbered needles shortening to
a system of science or heaven.
Those sleeping wake. They will try,
since words try, to arrest
apprehension from white.
Light comes spinning gold-
white scatters across the white
ground. (Not the precious glass
over the unrelenting floor. The air
before it happens. The corridor
of waiting inside the eye.) Broken,
the light, and through itself unified
by its brokenness: The light in sheets
prowls lateral, then moves as
realization up to the white-
faced bringing those awake
looking out their window
from a timeblack ore
gold to build the basis.
Benthic

The graves in grumbling truce
approach in stolid steps the shore, the cliff waves
snowy on their precipice before falling. Grey cornets flock themselves
across the grey sky, over the grey mash of compounds.
There is a murmur that comes again, and draws back slowly.

Fishermen are pulling in their nets,
the muscular sun clenching and unfolding
as they haul the water through. All the rest
remains unsettled, and settled by this alone.
Through the air, perfect with their concentration, they cannot see
the specific strangers, down the shore, on the sand.

Red horses heave their hooves of ruby.
Down shore, the strange scurrying, fishermen laughing
as their nets slip away in their laughing; they in ash
with red hands; the red horses, in their tide, being finished; and
the golden carousel of noon continuing its approach.
Still It Was

Still it was
unfinished, still the sky
stood moving

the sky. It hung
hanging traces,
an engram

remaining –
the center
grasped (knob
turned), it opened
its hand
and still

the color rested
in its palm. It reached
as when

you touched
my spine and I
turned to see

the silhouette
trees, space
receding (and form
came), the stars
flushed from
their spaces, un-
folding
a startled flock
inside your eyes.