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Still point | [Poems]

Clara Emily Everts
The University of Montana

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Still Point

by

Clara Emily Everts

B.A. Hope College, 1999

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Montana

May 2004

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“Lullaby” in *Manzanita Quarterly*

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The moments of the sonata, the fragments of the luminous field,
adhere to one another with a cohesion without concept, which is of the same type
as the cohesion of the parts of my body, or the cohesion of my body with the world.

- Maurice Merleau-Ponty

I.

Still Point

Place at once

instinctive:

 the dappled trees,
the needled air,

the source – bare,

in spite of, just –

inside the body

what we can

and cannot give: the weeds' dew

not a drink offered

but so sifted by the sun – here,

each diamond aches –

the buckle of cloud

 not the beginning

but a hole that in

the rousing admits

little room

for accident,

what we choose

to fill our spaces with – be it

prayer, flesh, this air

gravity bears

 against us.

This Far South

Believe me, we
will not always be
this graceful,

the thing that ought
to make the heart
beat will cave

under our refusal,
in this place, to
stand and know

it, our body's
veil delirious
under the sun's

riot of stars.
For this far south
they irrigate

graves our lives
a mist each
limb's run off

pushed beneath
the fields, marrow
fodder for

the chili plant's
rustle, vacant,
the incessant

quake if we
do not praise
the rocks, trees

shall cry out –
and you, do you trust
that something

here is not
capable of you, we
could not have

bought this storm
that has come
barren, indecent,

this place buckled
beneath a debt
you have no part

to owe. In distance
we must believe:
surely, our dogs

whine in gentler
tones, our tombs
quite still – here,

the fires hissing
alive not from
our own hands.

Appearance

Like fog
stirred over a river, a cord of
smoke ascends
the mountain or instead,

the mountain unties itself
along a gully, deep vapors or
a sleeve of ghosts
slipping from their trees
(on the pine's top spire
a magpie, bobbing,
the tall now taller) or is this

an arm pulled from a pool of
ash, ash curling down, limb's
silhouette, then stealing
inward, fleck against fleck, grey plume
collapsing to the earth or – here,

water sheeted
across branded skin (we
fevered ones) or here, a ribbon of
sky shed like a scab –
the river
at our backs, this smoke
binding itself – feet
testing the earth.

Night Walk in the Mountains

And none
save me in
shoes, arcing

crickets, kernels
from the grasses
cracking waves to

the pines, wind-
stirred, across
distant hills,

the fire – a ruby,
an invitation –
the only match

to see by
in this dark room
and to take off

over the moon,
threadbare,
under smoke

trapping the stars
low enough
to pull down,

handful of glitter
should I forget
my own

tracks while
on this mountain
pass, a dog:

breeze-stolen,
pink-tinged
ears, white

flame before
me, unfastens
the field.

Appeal

And the river. And its banks skinned with snow,
the house plant on the sill petaling down,
I can so easily walk on
my first Christmas alone.

As witness fog glazes
each limb overnight, silver
butterfly chested
on your black dress. Stunned still

we are all in our own snowglobes
praying down. I didn't want to
join in turning away.
Nevermind the porch light,

the snow taking over, our breath's
pattern for safety through
the night, lengthening, how you've,
I won't believe, walked out

over these frozen roots seeing
your body sung I
can't make out the speed of river
below me, for all this fury, the ice and the light.

Small Procedure

Harvested from the body
like a pearl, a piece

of myself: sheer,
moon-white, circling inside

a darkness broken open as
my own. How should I

give myself so boldly
now, in another's hands,

portioning out the unwanted
held up to the light –

and entering sleep, raindrops
like coins, like the sky

had nothing to lose,
nothing but its own unfolding.

Where could this be?
That moths, marble-winged,

thread the air around me
as if to bring a message, here,

in a space kept hidden
until the body tucks away,

band of mercury
as the ocean burns into the sky.

Pines and Rocks

Cezanne, 1904

Blue sky but insufficient
through the trees. Imagine

a mountain, distant, its line slicing up
beyond, a race to the bluest instance of
sky but the mountain not

here. Instead, boulders
boil up the trunks of trees, fog
into oranges, greens. What is this

and that no longer. Each thing
lurches blind against another,
 against the frame of

our eyes, desperate for edges, lit with

a misted forest.

 Should I prop you up
between these pines and rocks, blue sky
trickling above?

 I could walk backwards until
I know you
and stop, in this place.

If we come here then deeply.

Rock Climbing, Lost Horse Canyon

Like a birthmark. Lichen skips
across the rock, lime on grey, tide pools

trapped from their ocean, burning, or a chart
to recover you by, pale limbs diminishing
like a key between the shrub's branches

splitting out of the cliff: a dancer,
palms breaking for the sky,
slender shadows dividing me

into flickers of metal and flesh. And now,

the drunken bees, looping about
these last hot spots of autumn –
pure flurry,

weaving and weaving...

And in this plea
of continuous movement,
what do they understand of faith?

That the lime on this cliff will keep
with the sun, expanding over the muting
earth? That my shoulder might bring

safe passage? And in this passing,

a final sensation: oil's disappearance into paper,
a cry from scattering trees.

Trapper's Peak

I could brush my hands over
these trees, mountains,
 your jawline
 three days deep
in hair, the needles
forgiving under the sweep of my palm.

Exhausting themselves to the peak, clouds,

a place we'd finally know, offer
the boundary of our bodies
 (on our cheeks, a bit of
 cloud, pockets
 steaming), an open

invitation to fill
what we are trying to fill,
our eyes straining for a star, each hand
clenching or these rocks:

 patient tutors
 huddled beside us.

Blackened by the dimming sky,
behind the mountains, for seconds,
a double exposure:

 dim cave of drapes
 this morning, your body
 saved from the sun,

the shadow's border
only finding me in part.

The Attending

Are we not, then,
broken, the way
we feel in our knees

the approaching
rain, the wind
entering us

as dry stalks
in our throats; or
as in a dream,

a glimmer
we cannot name
for the leagues of

sea beneath us,
some thing waiting
for our limbs to

exhaust; or
is this shine at
our feet a door, lit

with the promise of
all that we have
lost and keep

looking for: fingers
scraping low in
pockets, under

our pillows,
maps caught up
in the stars.

Descending, if we
pass through
what we discover

behind closed lids
do we ever
return, and how

can we trust
what comes for us
here, never answering

our questions like
a parent worn by
an aimless child; how

should we commit
such an act of
faith as to submerge

ourselves in sleep,
the specter's
certain approach

like the heat of
summer's siren?
Even if we

are beyond clarity,
can we deny it,
as pulling from

the water we are
blinded by
our own bodies'

capture of
brilliance, covered
in such light.

Spider In A Water Bowl

On the water's still sheet,
 willowy, ashen,
a warrior rendered
 mere. Puckered scar
I return to
on this clean skin.

 I touch
one sickled leg, and then
the body, chattering, the water
plumed.

 Two scallop-toed legs
clawing up
like bayonets, too slight
to chance upon
 boundaries in this
 bowl, this cry
for loam mute by visitation –
 Spider,

I come to you,
 having no greater range
than these murmurings, feeble,
 my slim soft arm
fleshed out next to yours,
 my spine, stooped,
 racing blindly
up my back, intent before you.

Feral rogue rendered
holy, I am hushed,
small,
 as of a child
 saying amen.

Chandelier

Because in this way the rain could
stop: pieces of water halted
mid-air, hovering
torrent, our world suspended
in chandelier. Touch a drop

and a sheen on the skin, gripping,
single bead passing into
burgundy and bone – feathery cracks
from the strain of ivy shooting
toward the roof. How then
should we trust it? What it must know of

friend, enemy. To walk out
among these shards – vision
wet-warped, trees and roofs and faces
slurred – is to decide:
some thinning themselves between
each flicker, tuck and side-step,
some abreast and pushing

through this rainscape. Our bodies
leaving tunnels from door to car,
driveway to stoplight, up over
hills, to the edge of our city, the rain
finally re-slashing across
our tracks; what relief in this

plurality, where buckets flood over, fields
spill ringlets of weeds and dirt
into streets. Sticked together
our hands collect a drink, two thumbs,
each to its left and right, stretch up

like stalks for the sky, fleet of violent drops
coursing down; where puddles swell
and lock our ears against
each note.

Midnight Snow Angel

Scarcely-limbed,
hovering,
wings crumpled arcs –

 the moon
a fingernail sliver caught
in a black cape
 (and how

do children draw
the sun now,
 lines detonating
 out or
listless,
milky swirls)
 the moon

a cherry stem
 I could pull, a thread of
 color curling in a marble –

all you white ballerinas
 toeing down
slight with tremble, take
me up.

The Cave

into the thinning sun
a puff of bugs lights

into boiled water shivering
the river sheets off rocks

magpies feed on a deer
the ribs risen clearly

an atrium opening beneath the fan of bones
everything in strips and silver

all outside of where
the last berry rests not on

the slim tree but leathered and
red in my palm in the wind

*

the crow striking up
sunlight-slicked

wheeling joins
the cloud of green light

above flashes I am
where the sky lingers

close a thought
descending in the cave

of a lake the lungs
sleek and taut swelling

the slow breath I
cannot see the glow

of the forest wait
for me the aspen's

white robes the bright yellow
vibrato of leaves

Suspension

A pheasant's

feathers, scalloped,
spray out, purple
teeth of flight,

your hands
tuck the head
beneath wing's

bend as the tail
thwaps twice, then
still.

A pendulum, you

rock the bird,
languid arcs, sleep-
nosis injected, each

cusped breath
from the lax fowl
lifting in me

speculation:
why am I
envious, hungry

for his iridescent ex-
posure, this melt of
hesitation, belly

arching for the sun,
puffed and softening?
Eyes no longer

called on
for understanding
in this lullaby as

dust swirls up
from the blistering
farm step we

sit on, masking
the glimmer of
bird into something

we might call
real.

 The pheasant loses

his bodily functions,
(he's that deep in
suspension) and you

still hold on
to this hooked
creature, the only

platform,
 difficult
dice of air.

Lullaby

Across the yard,
the stars
chattering and

bright. 5am and still
alone. My spine
a whisper

among this flesh
I was warned
to temper, crisp

silhouette –
maybe

I am
having all the wrong
conversations, maybe

when I offer
myself to the whimsy of
the mind, certain

parts turn
inside, and what
will they do – the body

rabid, keen – to be again?

Why
can't I remember
anything but
your mouth,

its spark and how
it chose me
like brandy,
like the red

strewn across cliffs –
a place

I recognize. Here,
we could never
name this but call it

anything we want
until we believed

it real, until we put

on these bodies
we've laid down.

Sharp Night

It begins

 this way – or,
with any scene, it begins
where it needs *were you to be here,*
 with me – the white dog

stretches like putty beneath
my hand, each rib drummed

what strange soldier
is this a single bee
curls on the window's edge,

I am listening

for you *this is soft, how*
my mouth wants

something still
begins here, in
the smallest space of
recall, I return – or

deny? – or, like
the moon – fault? –

so that lacking, suspect,
the moon tires itself
to the city

lights: sequins
on the mountain's hem.

II.

House Frame In November

Snow passes through
the living room
like sand spilling

from an unfolded
hand. The upstairs
closet tucking

its white linens
deep in each corner.
From the crest of

Lincoln Hills, trees
dyed with the last of
autumn pour down,

host of barked wood
shivering behind
these smooth beams,

a canvas for
each room, browns,
grays surfacing to

orange, the rafters
unable to quell
the fire of

leaves taunting
the gauzy dome
above. If we found

the room where
first prints
might rest, palm

the gathering snow,
our flesh's heat
taken in by the floor,

the space left above
our chapped hands
an echo of

what we once were,
we could rise
from this much.

Paragliders

But my body won't lift
with these strange prophets,
 strung in a fan of floss
like puppets
from scalloped moons; or
 could these be slices
 from the earth – red clay,

blue volcanic glass –
 each flyer enticing
 a single instance of
 land up into the air, billowing arcs
to wheel like birds over
 this city, knitting rooftops, maples and
 clouds to their peaks; how the wind
so easily cups these creatures

 rushing over the gathered pines,
 in the valley, the same wind
 feathering the river, white petals
stolen from the flowering
fruit trees.

 And above this peak,
one hovers near a jet stream

 as if to land, walk
in the sky and when he reaches its end
 what worlds will he find
 in these channeling thermals, sky roads
 not yet discovered. What is possible
to understand in air and should I

follow, drape my arms on the lift
 off the ridge, the wind's push
 at my back belief
enough, these useless legs
 taken up in
 the breeze I cannot see.

Airplane

But soon we'll see the city,
our neighborhood, the roofs (scribbled
fleet of children's doves) and
if we've ever thought up here

our house is like another
house, locked houses leaking light
a little like the light of
clouds, grey, don't worry

if you cannot smell
the raindrops left behind,
young ones blown down,
leaking light – the exits, blinking

wings – all afloat: ice cubes,
pencils, buttons, eyes, and the light
(less white than grey), the metal
dipping – vibrations – elbows tapping

elbows, utterly small, and
the light (less here than fading) of
this cloud, touch of drops
against metal we cannot

touch, of grey shifting –
the cups, bags, bended bones
rapping, like these clouds, under,
we will slip, like a private joke

between lovers, we will slip, our gaze
passing through – will there be time – heads
shivering – the sound you cannot
hear – for prayer – of metal slicing cloud.

Black Corridor

Rock Climbing, Red Rocks

And to pause here, mid-dive, falling
out from the black band of rock,

whisk of rope, metal chinking,
the winged clap of swallows accelerating

low through the corridor. To understand
every instance in this strobe light of

reds, oranges, sun and skin,
purple petals from the locust tree stilled

at my feet in their break for
other worlds, scurrying

from the white branches below me, a mouth
opening, visible breath

from my chalk bag, each small flake
a star to catch myself on –

won't you rise, then, for this body
framed in sky, the weight of bones

unable to comprehend anything
but down, the parting of

the earth in so many penny-sized arcs
for the beetle's front legs, incessant,

ambitious, swallows lifting once again
between these planes of scorched stone.

From the Barn

Peering through
these rotting planks, this flurry of you
an occasion of some weather from
another world or
a thing beyond, insisting –

with each lift
the horse closes in
on the sky, further,
you, then, with him,

what seems beyond repair
finding itself,
in this spell of
dirt and horse, pieces of fence
splintering –
each hoof

cuffing the dirt in
a song made
visible, rising,
a veil off the dust,

a fierce
showing of tail,
glimmer in his brown coat
calling to
the radiant field

he breaks for.

Horses

standing, and in the standing,
melting, two-headed creature fused
without tail. Left to themselves
this might continue, flanks, haunches

giving way to the other, legs
buckling like the last snap of cards
shuffled or a man bending
a final prayer to the sun; or,

will they pass through the other
like molasses through oil, extracting
their own bones, amending the delicate,
signature face, this settling back into;

that their bodies might deny
the journey but for a spot on the coat
misplaced, the low whistle of
a chipped hoof, lifting, wisps of hay

in the wind, shedding from the bales
tense against their ties, the labor of green
as it exits each cube, rushing to the safety
of pines, some caught up in impatient

mouths; how slow the transformation
here, of green and yellow, bud and stalk
between teeth, turned over and ground
into treaty, and what they must become.

Blue Whale

To lay this body down
would mean finding a space un-
interrupted, shimmering and vast,

beyond our hallways and passing through
walls, the fence at the edge of
our land collapsing under

a fin, rigid shield to
canopy by. And when
it speaks to hear its own breath,

a voicing bound to a mass
not our own but, in our throats,
a call reflexive. What, then,

is the matter of us? That we
should comprehend the tenors
yawning from the sea

as a moan we give
to the end of things, our faces
lit back to us as the sun

curls silver into each wave,
folding smooth and then
around our legs, compelling us

further in, descending, clouds
in scaffolds from the cliffs, our breath
fixing itself to sheets of

fog, fog crossing back as vapors
in our mouth, ears, a whale's note
resonant as crystal glass.

Apology

for my grandfather and our search for coins, Lake Michigan

How should I now be kinder?

These past years, folding your dismissals
along a shore that steals behind us,
cleated prints taken under, my words
useless to you now, heaps of
copper rimmed in dirt.

What would it take to find
the coin worn by the tide, long ago, the sand
scouring the face but leaving the penny?
How then should we name it?

Or now, as you pull back from water and sky, the dazzling slur
between, into the hard earth waiting – is this
what tends me toward you?

For there are minutes
in each day when we both look to the mirror
for understanding, the veil of
solitude insufficient as the sand's
migration beneath waters.

For this, not knowing
what you'd have me say, reaching out
across the lake, for the ship
your finger tries to thread, walking out to the end of
the dock, our mere lives suspended
above something that would take too long to contain,
a million glasses luminous with lake
and only the beginning, and where would we keep them,
and for what.

Translative

We can bury as well as plant.
 We can print ourselves
into the ground, catalogue
 dirt and sand filling, water,
 but the blue cloud still steals down
the mountain as a cat hugs low
 his grasses, the leafless trees
 slouched over the thick deer, feeding, ice pulling

away from the river like skin cracking over
 a wound. What to do with these intricate
 ends, brown tips harried thin
on a frond, before you, fisted, then
 expanding as if thumbing out

the moon were a solution, as if clearing the yard of
 snow might bring us spring, white cowering
 in, out of numb, staggering nerves, brittle
needles of icicles thawing into
 mouths, open in liquid prayer.

II.

Never needing
a name, the grey bird fretting
on the pole, wisps of straw and twigs
casting from the nest as it slices down
but for the bent wing spiraling, iron helicopter
small and plunging, a call
mid-flight, that these arms

cannot extend enough, even taken
from our bodies, stitched
shoulder to fingertip; but the crocus
you broke from the yard is opening
in the water glass we left
on the porch, on this bridge, the vine of smoke
still rising from a cigarette long
abandoned, beating the last of its air,
the bird. And if this is the end of

our beginning, let us not be fooled, for dropping
to the river's edge, the pine needles
we took for dead are roots, fingers jungled as
we search each eddy, the bird lost
but the mountains still lifting.

III.

Closer still yet
not enough, into the cloud haloed
full by the moon, past the streetlight
steeped in haze, around the uncollared dog
ghosted outside this door, so many

entrances known, so many hands
put back into these, here,
deeper still into these palms, sweet tools
traveling blind and personal,
rising for you like the scent of rain.
They are calling for you, an owl's faint blue-note.
We must know this, so small,

believe; we don't know when we
let go, the stitch between mountain and sky
forgiven, the flower wasting in the vase
no longer loss but discovery,
line between the living
and the still so fine it
echoes.

Two

Rock Climbing, Kootenai Canyon

Between you and me: refraction.

Such song
inside the yellow flower, the bee

so lost in purpose, his buzz
in this smallest space
turns to tinkling.

A spoon stirred
in a china cup, though I have never owned one.

Which you might have been, then, hanging
off some tiny ledge and quiet for all
your detail.

Looking up, birds
swirl in eights between us,
rain traces my face,
each clear torpedo,
diamonds shattering

in this strange marriage of
water and sun,
skipping, tucking bright
across the rock, the rope:
at the other end,
your body.

So gentle for all its coming.

Ruins

Trees, many. Bull's snort, the smoke
lifts, furiously, green left to

memory.

How should I
enter, come together as if,
in your own hands, equally
suffered, having set aside –

the unforgivable said.
Soft, were I
to graze my palms before
the sky, swollen taut, each plume of
cloud;
your body, both,

and still with me, ashen,
who's to say you now
hold nothing.

Yet, I
have found; how
you flash.

Finley Creek

Ice Climbing, Flathead Indian Reservation

Given to the lead smudges of trees,
capped in a struggling river,
 white, like a sponge,
collecting a bit of rock here and there, sucking
in our limbs, parasite of the secret moon
as ghost. Into the far rebel pieces of cloud,
we advance –

 through lush sound, snow,
as trees shoot down their stars,
 curtaining our view
like splotches on an old photo –
 when this glass fortress

~

 was never ours, never asked for
our arrival, slung from packs, the tools, our steps
chopping through the snow, and above –

 a mountain spring stunned still
 like baleen raked from a mouth,

the wind wheedles through
wind, scarleting our cheeks, bloody chutes of
alder shrubs grazing our backs

on the rope,
iced sap around

~

some winged thing –
 arms pale-blue jacketed blades
pinwheeling
into dimples, depressions, dents,
would that we advance

up the rippling limb of ice,
hammering,

bright and boundless
as the metal cranes of axes

pocket the face, spate of scars,
the screws splintering spider webs

white beneath the ice's
surface, dripping –
the bleached sun the snow
expanding like the sea

~

and even breath has silhouette,
water charming
just below the planked river
as we search for what's good,

green ice, blue,
the snow the iridescent skin of
fish,
crowding up, the haunches of deer
flashing, snow-clutched
to the knees –
at home, the dog's water
quartzed, the porch door
stitched in glaze –

under the impression this mirrored dome
is on our side,
the loom of ice
like a ship's hull we might reel in or
an arch reaching
past the clouds, we try
to name this – ice
so vast
it is a ballroom –
what can we
name this into.

Last Snow
for R.H.

On the cement step,
willingly, a paw print
holds on. Tiny spheres of
winter gloss, how long
have they been waiting
for testimony, not hurrying

away with the flocks of
clouds coursing over
the nickled moon,
the sky shaking
itself clean. Everything
begging relationship: balmed
in vapors, the mountain, the tree
collecting white lace.
Blue and white and shadow –

night, keep here,
where no birds dare
give voice, where
my breath finds the moon,
peeling its edges away
like a glass shuddering

loose its waters.
And if this is the last of
our forgiveness,
the cat stealing away
but for the tiny holes
pattering out
across the yard,
the thermometer's red trigger,
my name
from your lips shooting
out across all this

white but for its joy
any interruption
lost; if, then, we

should find each other
now, in these last minutes, send
a white bird arcing into night,
the tight beads of stars
breaking in and out of
its body, invisible

in the clouds but
for the agitation of
wings, white mark
reaching above us in a line
never concerned
with its end.

For the Waking

Careful, divided,
the fire that waits for you –
flickering necklace

searching for its other
end among the hills,
breeze and its complication –

somewhere in this
dream, not running from
but into, the open window

you claim in the midst,
to pull your body
through, where stars

rest eye-to-eye,
numerous as the grasses,
the moon gone

because you never
loved it – spring bulb
refusing to open, such

luxury – and the eventual
wither, to wake
to a bed scattered in

sheddings – shingles
of skin, teeth
ground to dust, a lash

for wishing – the sun
emptying into
the fish, gold and silver,

caught up in the body,
circling in
small disease – the sparing

into tomorrow
as if this eased
the possession, bones

curled and the last grace of
the heart – why
shouldn't it? – taking off

in small waves
like a call – slight,
fisted – in the open

field, expanding,
paring the exhausted
weight of air, at last

put into motion – and we
will not fault it,
belonging ourselves

to translucence.

Notes:

Epigraph

This quote is from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible*, Chapter Four, "The Intertwining – The Chiasm," page 152.

This Far South

"If we / do not praise / the rocks, trees / shall cry out" is a phrasing of the line "He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out'" taken from *Psalms* (72:12). See the *New Revised Standard Version* of the *Bible*, published by the Oxford University Press, 1977.

Pines and Rocks

Cezanne, 1904 was written in response to his painting, "Pines and Rocks"; the title of the poem shares the title of the painting.

Spider in a Water Bowl

"I am hushed, / small, / as of a child / saying amen" is a phrasing from the *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of *mere* (adj.).

Blue Whale

The lines "it speaks to hear its own breath,/ a voicing bound to a mass/ not our own but, in our throats,/ a call reflexive" is a phrasing from Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible*, Chapter Four, "The Intertwining – The Chiasm." His words read, "My voice is bound to the mass of my own life as is the voice of no one else. But if I am close enough to the other who speaks to hear his breath and feel his effervescence and his fatigue, I almost witness, in him as in myself, the awesome birth of vociferation"(144). This poem is a reflection on an experience in fifth grade: my class measured the length of a blue whale in string along the school hallway. We ran out of room.