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Endless Yarns: Interdisciplinary Creative Work in Text and Textile

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Endless Yarns

Interdisciplinary Creative Work in Text and Textile



Louisa Owen Sonstroem
Honors Scholar Thesis
Professors Pelizzon and Hufstader
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*for my parents
who have taught me
about words, beauty, and home*

Thanks also to Professor Pelizzon, for challenging and inspiring me,
to Professor Hufstader, for encouraging me all along,
to Santos, for teaching me to depend on sunlight,
and to my entire family, for always showing me that you care.

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| <i>Enclosure and Eclosion</i> | 4 |
| <i>Threads</i> | 34 |
| Woven Lace and Burnt Lace | 35 |
| Figure Stitchings | 37 |
| Cocoons | 41 |
| Border | 46 |
| <i>Tether</i> | 48 |
| Head of the Mummy of Djehutynakht. Egypt. Materials | 49 |
| Keeping Time | 50 |
| To the Rememberer | 51 |
| Everything is Counted | 52 |
| 25 March 2011 | 53 |
| Foundation | 56 |
| Paving the Line | 57 |
| Bright Shadow | 62 |
| Undone | 63 |
| Eclosion | 67 |

Enclosure and Eclosion

Enclosure and Eclosion

One day in early summer, I sat spinning art yarn in the front yard. Art yarn is “yarn for yarn’s sake,” often incorporating nontraditional materials and spin techniques and “expanding the definition of what constitutes yarn” (Boeger 10). As I spun ribbons, rags, and embroidered words in with my wool, I began to think about all of the words in English that move back and forth between textile processes and everyday language. I sat *spinning a yarn*, and meanwhile telling a sort of narrative as the yarn wound onto the bobbin. People who are intimate are *close-knit*, held by the *ties that bind*. Ideas which are integrated are *interwoven* or *intertwined*. A line of thought is a *thread* or *strand* which can be carried out. A difficult problem is a *tangle*, *snarl*, or *snag* which must be *teased out*, perhaps *ironed out*. Botched friendships can sometimes be *mended* or *patched*. One who is tense must *unwind*. During the centuries when men owned the pen and women were sequestered to the needle, textiles entered language through the back door. Today, it is difficult to speak without their assistance.

What is it, then, that connects text and textile so closely? I resolved to engage this question from an aesthetic perspective, through process as much as through theory. Meanwhile, inevitably, other strands were spun in.

The word *textile* derives from the Latin *textus*, the past participle of *texere*, meaning to weave. A textile is a woven or non-woven cloth. Also from *textus* is *text*, the primary definition of which is “the wording of anything written or printed; the structure formed by the words in their order; the very words, phrases, and sentences as written” (*OED*). This sense of structure, then, is central to both text and textile. For me, both words arrange raw material into ordered patterns of meaning. This order need not be tidy, but it is deliberate. A poem, for example, takes raw words and organizes them into a refined web of meaning; a piece of cloth does the same

with strands of fiber. The elements of a poem are often held together through meter and rhyme; the cloth is held together through the crossings of warp and weft. Text and textile are bound by character as well as name.

These two media are my principal passions. They seem important to each other but also to the subject of home, one that has long haunted me. As a freshman at Amherst College, away from home for the first time, I struggled to establish a sense of belonging. I found myself among no one and nothing I knew. Where did I come from? How could I maintain a connection with home while living in another place? In my classes, I wrote numerous essays seeking to pinpoint what made home so important to me. In one essay titled “On the Edge of Dissolving: Art and the Anchor,” I examined the role of art as stabilizing force in Anne Carson’s *Autobiography of Red*, Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, and Mark Doty’s *Still Life with Oysters and Lemon*. For Doty, the genre of still life embraces the tension between his desires to hold on and to let go. In still life, he writes,

everything here has been transformed into feeling, as if by looking very hard at an object it suddenly comes that much closer to some realm where it isn’t a thing at all but something just on the edge of dissolving. Into what? Tears, gladness—you’ve felt like this before, haven’t you? Taken far inside. When? Held. (6)

Doty’s words give dignity to familiarity. For Doty, and for my lonesome seventeen-year-old self, art and beautiful objects were able to hold feelings, contradictions, and memories too big for ordinary life to contain. By extension, art held me, and I curled up within its embrace. I wrote, drew, knit, and sang. Eventually, I transferred home.

As I reestablished solidity at the University of Connecticut, my loves for words and textiles grew in parallel. I felt the two were intertwined, though I could not quite articulate the

nature of their connection. The semesters stepped on, and when it came time for me to select a thesis topic, I decided to confront the interrelatedness of text and textile. Initially, I considered writing a more traditional critical piece examining the use of textile as metaphor in literature. I perused the relevant scholarship including, most impressively, the work of Elaine Hedges. Hedges writes that textiles, as represented in literature by women, were originally symbols of “women’s proper, and confined, sphere” (341). However, Hedges argues, the metaphor shifts in signification in the literature of the 1960s and 70s. Around this time, led by Adrienne Rich, women writers began to reappropriate their textile-infused history, which was charged with both bitterness and self-awareness. They began to use textile imagery to enhance the power of their words. Scholars like Hedges convinced me that many of the arguments I would have liked to make had already been articulated, and I began to reevaluate my project. Finally, spinning art yarn, I resolved to engage directly the relationship between text and textile by making.

Over the summer, I took a class at the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts entitled “Ragas and Sagas: Telling Tales with Fiber,” in which my classmates and I surveyed various fiber techniques while considering their symbolic properties. As part of our inquiry into the potentialities of fiber, we watched Cristo Zañartu’s *Textile Magicians: Japan*. I was deeply impressed by the film segment that shows artist Chiyoko Tanaka grinding holes into her newly woven fabrics. “The process of weaving is central to her work,” explains the *Textural Space* website (“Chiyoko Tanaka”). Diana Yeh elaborates, quoting Lesley Miller, curator of the Textural Space exhibition.

For Tanaka, Miller writes, the act of weaving is “an accumulation of weft threads, one by one, representing time passing; the resulting texture, the cloth, being the locus of the present time.” She explains Tanaka’s working process: “in the development of the work

she sets up a vertical time axis and a horizontal space axis, [and] the weaving process is one of transforming the weft into accumulated space.” (Yeh n. pag.)

Tanaka’s web, representing the interweaving of space as warp and time as weft, next undergoes the grinding process. It is this phase that was so shocking to me. Tanaka sets the fabric onto the ground and grinds it with rocks, soil, and other materials, bringing the fabric into communion with the earth’s surface. To me, Tanaka’s grinding process seems to claim a radical victory over the ravages which time can play out on a physical object. Instead of letting her fabric deteriorate at the hands of time, she herself destroys the original integrity of the piece and infuses it with new meaning. To a creator of objects, such an act is counterintuitive, seeming to go against the very impulses which drive the maker to create in the first place. Yet Tanaka puts forth a version of creating in which the maker can also devastate. In so doing, she produces a new creation that incorporates the power of destruction in its tatters.

I drove back from the class in Maine, my swirling new ideas packed up in boxes alongside several new fiber pieces about the essence of home. Meanwhile, I had also begun to think about Homer’s Penelope, who also claims agency through weaving and destroying each day’s work. Faced with irksome suitors’ proposals, Penelope announces that she must weave her father-in-law a shroud before she can choose a new husband. Thus “she set up a great loom in the royal halls / and she began to weave, and the weaving finespun, / the yarns endless” (Homer 42.140-3). Penelope cleverly staves off the suitors by making her weaving the keeper of time. Rather than minutes, days, and years which cannot be slowed or rewound, Penelope chooses weft picks which can be both stitched and unstitched: “So by day she’d weave at her great and growing web— / by night, by the light of torches set beside her, she would unravel all she’d

done” (42.153-5). The textile process is traditionally considered in terms of forward progress; Penelope negates this view, moving both forward and backward in time.

The concept of textile process as time-keeper is a fairly common one. Most fiber processes—including weaving, stitching, knitting, crocheting, spinning, and felting—involve repetitive, rhythmic motions of the hands, and thus the fibers’ response to a single motion or set of motions can serve as a natural measure of time. The growing creation, then, makes time’s progress visible. “As a constructed textile,” Joanne Turney writes in *The Culture of Knitting*, “knitting is measurable. One can see how much one has achieved by counting rows, a significant factor in marking time [...] It is manageable, or controllable (unlike life events)” (159). Turney highlights the regularity and measurability of textile processes, adding that life events are not nearly as “controllable.” Penelope begs to differ, however, as she is able to harness weaving’s controllability in order to hold off her suitors.

Temporal progress is one of the key elements of narrative as well as of weaving. A narrative is “[a]n account of a series of events, facts, etc., given in order and with the establishing of connections between them” (*OED*). A narrative, in other words, takes place within a temporal framework and traces the passage of time. I would clarify the nature of narrative’s orderedness, however; a narrative is ordered insofar as it is deliberately arranged, but it can move backward and forward in time, as in the nonlinear plot of the *Odyssey* itself. Just as Penelope stitches and unstitches her tapestry, so, too, does the narrator stitch and unstash his own. The parallel between weaving and storytelling within the *Odyssey* invites readers to explore, as Deborah Bergman does in her reimagining of Penelope’s story. As Bergman describes, “Penelope weaves and unweaves as the story of Laertes continually draws to an end, then unwrites itself, then draws to a slightly different conclusion” (148). Later, Bergman elaborates: “We knitters love

how knitting allows us to experiment. We can try things and we can untry them if they don't turn out exactly the way we like them to, and with no great detriment to our materials" (155-56). Ripping out stitches does no harm to the yarn, and recalling passages does no harm to the words: they remain at the weaver's or poet's service, awaiting the next assignment. Of course, the materials, unstitched or erased, still seem to hold memories of their former offices, rippling and echoing. Nonetheless, these yarns and words can be worked and reworked almost infinitely.

Narrative is tricky. It need not traverse a straight, forward-moving line through time; indeed, it need not confine itself to the straight line at all. Fatou Diome's *The Belly of the Atlantic* proposes an entirely different metaphor for narrative. Salie, the protagonist and narrator, has emigrated to Paris to escape the sadness and trauma of her Senegalese past. Principal among the traumatic experiences of her childhood is a molestful encounter with a marabout. On the phone with her teenage brother, who still lives on the island where she grew up, Salie must explain to him why he ought not seek a marabout's assistance, and in so doing, she must confront the looping, incomplete nature of her own narrative:

To tell or not to tell? How do I tell him? Do I spell it out or not? [...] A few lines appear on the ceiling. Narrator, your memory is a needle that weaves time into lace. And supposing the holes were more mysterious than the patterns you make? Which part of you could fill those holes? Who are you?

Metamorphosis! I am a leaf on a baobab tree, a coconut palm, a mango [...] I'm a wisp of straw. Not so, since the wind doesn't blow me away! Metamorphosis! I'm a block of this wall, a slab of marble, granite, a lump of onyx. [...] Life passes me by and I'm this

gap in the lattice of time. Not so, since my hand goes back and forth helping to weave time! (Diome 97)

In this exquisite passage, Salie consciously examines the way she tells her story. In her narration, words form lines that loop around traumatic elements but can never address the trauma itself. These looping words, and the holes left between them, form a lace-like fabric in which the spaces of silence are vessels for that which is most important. As both a textile artist and a student of language, this passage resonates powerfully with me. What is lace, really? It is a fabric which orders that which is not there, which organizes emptiness.

As Salie suggests, her narrative, or the way she traces the passage of time, “is a needle that weaves time into lace,” so that time loops and goes around and around, in and out. The holes contain memory, and they dictate the pattern of the words which are given. When one’s story is arranged in such a way, one’s identity itself is fragmented: “Who are you? Metamorphosis! I am a leaf [...] a mango [...] a lump of onyx. [...] I’m this gap in the lattice of time.” Salie’s identity can only be answered by things she is not: she is a leaf (but no, she is not), she is a wisp of straw (no, she unstitches that), she is a gap in the lattice of time. This gap seems nearest the truth, but then Salie recognizes that even *this* cannot be so, because as narrator, she can and does claim agency simply by telling the story. She is not a gap: “Not so, since my hand goes back and forth helping to weave time!” If she is storyteller, she can tell herself into being, and this identity-telling unfolds as the novel progresses. Salie’s narrative of lace haunted me in the months after I read it.

Autumn arrived, and I read American poet A.E. Stallings’ “Sine Qua Non,” one of the poems from the first part of her book *Hapax*. I was struck by the similarities between Diome’s passage and Stallings’ elegy for a parent. “Your absence, father, is nothing. It is naught,”

Stallings writes (page 11 line 1). Stallings' speaker confronts the absence of her father, and her images are eerily similar to those which Salie employs: the father's absence is "The gap of a dropped stitch, the needle's eye / Weeping its black thread" (3-4), and later, "memory's elision" (10). The speaker also calls it "The element I move through, emptiness, / The void stars hang in, the interstice of lace, / The zero that still holds the sum in place" (12-14). For Stallings' speaker, too, the story from which something is absent is like "the interstice of lace." The poem is devastating in its sadness, and yet, after all, the beauty of lace lies in its holes.

As I began to write the text pieces that would form part of my senior honors thesis, I thought about the tension between woven lace, into which the maker intentionally weaves holes, and fabric brought down by temporality, into which time grinds its own inevitable gaps. Full of these thoughts, I wrote "Keeping Time." In that first poem, the speaker watches time, represented by the sea, rip apart a piece of fabric. Textiles, as I have explained, are their own time-keepers, marking time's progress with the accumulation of weft threads. Here, they also mark it with the surrender of threads. The waves keep time, and the sand at the water's edge keeps time with them, though the "marching, endless sands" conjure up the hourglass image as well. The clock's hour hand, "a scalpel," slices through. The first nine lines are in iambic tetrameter, but in the final three, the meter and the form break down to reflect the disintegration of the threads. At the end, only shreds, a clock, and the sea are left. The sea, unlike the fabric and even the manmade clock, will never run down.

Consumed with images of Tanaka grinding holes into her weavings, I could not help but write about her in my next piece. My thoughts condensed into "Everything is Counted," in which the weaver, like Tanaka in the film, documents time through her making and then tears into her own creation. She emerges, finally, as time's conqueror, with shredded cloth as her

victory banner. Time is held and domesticated in the damaged cloth she raises above her head. This piece presented formal challenges for me: unlike the straightforward iambs of “Keeping Time,” a looser form for “Everything is Counted” seemed right. However, writing without a constant meter or stanza length proved difficult, and I struggled to assemble a poem that was both free and cohesive. This struggle continued throughout many later poems.

In “Undone,” a prose fiction piece, the narrator harnesses the power of stitching and unstitching. She takes a sweater which is infused with painful memories and “frogs” it (a knitting term meaning to rip out). As she diminishes the sweater to its innocent raw elements, she also unravels the bits of memory with which the garment is associated. Finally, the memories and the garment are undone. The protagonist uses the piles of yarn to weave herself a magic carpet and then flies off into the night sky. I selected prose for this piece because historically I have always written extended narratives in prose rather than poetry. This is a sorry rationale for such a choice, but it inspired me to think about a couple of questions. First of all, how do prose and poetry differ? Prose is looser, and I find it easier to develop sprawling ideas and stories in the spaciousness of prose. In poetry, each word is a unit, and all words fit together tightly. Usually in my prose writing, gestures are made at the level of the line rather than the word. This is not to say that prose cannot feature intricacy at the level of the word, but when I write it, the line generally takes precedence. The other big question raised through my first prose piece for the thesis related to the properties of narrative. Why was my instinct to present narratives in prose rather than poetry? I resolved to work with narrative in future poems.

For my first fiber piece, I decided to explore further the tension between intentional holes and time’s wear. I was inspired by brave pieces such as Hedwig Klöcker-Triebe’s “Abstract,” Marie Vankova-Kuchynkova’s “Space Lace,” and Sofie Dawo’s woven wall hanging

(Pfannschmidt 168, 181, 186), as well as Katharine Cobey's "Portrait of Alzheimers" (Falick 16). Cobey's piece is especially arresting. "It is a piece about her own mother," writes Melanie Falick, "a hanging lace shawl in which stitches come together, then seem to unravel randomly, then partially come together, and finally pool onto the floor into long cobweb-like shreds" (17-21). One evening, sitting by candlelight because of Tropical Storm Irene's ongoing presence, I warped my loom. Thinking about the above lace-makers, and of course about Tanaka, I wove a short length of leno lace in worsted-weight cotton, working in short, punctuated bands of holes now and then. Unlike Tanaka, I wove middle-weight yarn into a relatively small piece of fabric. For me, the aim was to work mindfully through the process of creation and destruction rather than to arrive at a visually impressive final product. Of course, Tanaka was just as concerned with mindful making, but I wanted to focus on the concepts involved, so I worked quickly through the weaving process. For the sister piece, I wove a similar length of cloth in the same yarn, but without holes. This piece would begin life whole, but it would not stay that way.

Once the pieces were blocked, I carried the whole one, along with a box of matches and a slice of beet, outside. Setting up shop on the stone patio, I first scrubbed the cloth with rocks and bricks, trying to get some holes started. The yarn was stronger than I had anticipated, however, and I quickly grew impatient. I broke out the matches, lit one, and held it to the fabric. I growled as the breeze promptly blew out the flame. Sheltering everything with my body, I lit several more matches and placed them together on the cloth. Fifteen minutes later, the cloth had a few satisfying scorches and holes. My mother and stepfather watched through the kitchen window. It was surprising to me how quickly my instinct to preserve my creation had fallen away, and how completely I now wanted to destroy it. For effect, I scrubbed a bit of beet into the white fabric, but then decided I liked the simplicity of the white-brown-black spectrum

better, so I burned the purple away. To keep the fire at bay, I had been dousing areas of the fabric in water; the piece dripped as I carried it to the parking lot and set it behind the back wheel of my car. I turned on the ignition and reversed, then drove forward, then back, then forward. When I finally stopped and picked up the piece(s), there was little left. I smiled and held the piece(s) up, exhilarated. My mother cheered.

At the recommendation of the others in my thesis critique group, I began to explore the properties of the pantoum and the villanelle, two forms that “weave” with words. Both are tight forms featuring regular repetition of lines. In this way, the poem harbors a tension between the form’s constant backward motion and the poet’s forward-driving impulse. The pantoum, for example, tends to unfold memories, bit by bit. Memory had already become a theme within my project, as stitching and unstitching necessarily involves a confrontation with the past. My first pantoum, then, conveys a daughter’s attempt to stitch together her mother’s stories of a dear grandmother. In “To the Rememberer,” the girl and her mother walk “the road from here to her,” moving both forward and backward in time. The stories the mother tells “tear, / then piece [her] back together,” and the poem’s form and content similarly seesaw forward and backward. Finally, however, the poem is one of creating. Meanwhile, the repeated lines provide a sense of familiarity. This familiarity underscores the inherent intimacy of the subject. With the *abab* end rhyme as warp and iambic pentameter lines as weft, the pantoum produces a tightly-woven fabric. The poem was surprisingly comfortable to write in terms of form: I felt at home within the highly structured pantoum. The main challenge was to keep the poem from being so tightly formal that it became static; against my instincts, revisions involved scuffing the meter and rhyme. As I did so, however, the images and the poem as a whole became stronger.

For my villanelle, “Bright Shadow,” the past again featured prominently. In this case, the speaker seeks to restore her own past, hunting through an apple orchard for “some bright shadow we can share.” Although I sought to write a narrative in which the speaker searches and finally undergoes a revelation, I was bound to previous lines because of the form’s constant line repetition. Thus every gesture forward stitched backward as well. Meanwhile, I continued my project-long fight between tending toward rigid conformation to the form and recognizing that the most energetic moments in a poem are sometimes those that break out of the form. The lines that are repeated in altered form call attention to themselves. Meanwhile, the variable feet that scuff up the iambic pentameter challenge the reader to take notice, just as in lace, in which the holes are most prominent. In both “To the Rememberer” and “Bright Shadow,” I struggled to temper sentimentality, which shows up without invitation in the “weaving” poetic forms, with more specific, unexpected, energetic language.

Following the first two tightly formal poems, I visited the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, where I encountered the mummified head of Djehutynakht. The head arrested me with its simultaneous deadness and presence. Threads disintegrated into the crumbling skin. As the placard explained: “The drying process of mummification tended to distort a person’s facial features. In order to preserve an approximate likeness of the living person, the priests who did the embalming either reshaped or recreated the lips, nose, and eyes with linen.” I could not comprehend; I quickly scribbled into my notebook and hurried away. The head’s image stayed with me as I searched dozens more galleries for textile pieces. I was disappointed by the meager number, though I saw a few good embroideries and baskets. Mostly, I thought about the works that would not traditionally be considered textiles, but which were nonetheless textile-like.

The mummies were people transformed, quite literally, into textiles, with cloth serving as a new skin for the afterlife. At the time these Egyptian individuals were mummified, all fabric was handwoven from thread handspun on spindles. I crouched down at the mummy of Nesmut-aat-neru and stared at the artifacts which had been buried with the body: a collection of shawabti figures and two bolts of linen. How provocative, I thought, that one would be buried with yardages of fabric. And yet, fitting, because cloth was so valuable then. There were a few brown spots, but otherwise the bolts were pristine. I squinted and tried to calculate the sett—fifty ends per inch? a hundred? The threads were impossibly fine, and every inch of every thread would have passed through a woman's fingers many times before coming to rest within this mummy's tomb. Trying to recall the chronology of the loom, I debated whether the fabric would have been woven on a ground or a warp-weighted loom. Either way, the weaving would have taken an eternity. My eyes wandered up to the body, which was entirely swaddled in equally-fine linen. The yarns were endless.

There were other mummies at the museum, and a portrait by Charles Willson Peale of his wife. As the painting's placard pointed out, the surface bore a craquelure, a "network of heavy cracks that crisscross the painting, but these were not intentional." I thought about time's stitchery, superimposed over the wrinkles in Mrs. Peale's sixty-one-year-old face. These furrows conjured the image of footprint tracks crisscrossing the earth. Every step every person has ever taken, I thought, has been a stitch, and each person's path is a strand in one grand tapestry. I pondered this metaphor further; only those who go up in planes disturb the integrity of the strands. The trajectory of flight forms snags. I walked upstairs, where Monet's grain stack paintings inexplicably inspired in me a longing for home. Shortly thereafter I drove back to Connecticut.

My thoughts about Djehutynakht coalesced in “Head of the Mummy of Djehutynakht. Egypt. Materials,” in which the speaker encounters Djehutynakht’s crumbling head and attempts to weave the remains back together. Here, the tensions between deadness and liveliness, deterioration and creation, reign. The only line pairing which refuses rhyme in this pantoum comes in the second set of the second stanza (and first of the third): the “peeking curl” refused to rhyme with “dust and rot.” I had not consciously constructed the poem this way, but as my advisor pointed out, the “peeking curl” is the single detail which refuses to be sequestered to lifelessness. Its parallel refusal to rhyme underlines the curl’s impishness. I began to think more about the limitations of form, and the ways in which formal rejections can punctuate a poem with new energy. Meanwhile, I had written another pantoum about ongoing worries for a family member. The piece was fraught with sentimentality and vagueness. As my critique group offered me suggestions for strengthening the piece, I realized I could not go back into the space of that poem. One must be able to distance oneself enough to tear the subject apart before putting it back together into a strong poem; I could not. I removed it from the collection.

A few days after writing my second two pantoums, I visited the Massachusetts College of Art and Design’s Godine Library. Combing the textile bookshelves, I was inspired by Shizuko Kimura’s stitched figure drawings. Kimura stitches figures by hand, straight from the nude model. Seeing images of her pieces reminded me, firstly, of a class I had heard about, held at Haystack in summer 2010, entitled “Fast Draw, Slow Stitch.” Taught by Rebecca Ringquist, this class used experimental embroidery techniques, both by hand and machine, to explore the properties of stitching and sketching at varying speeds. Textile techniques, as I have discussed, are time-bound by the nature of their deliberateness and laboriousness. To play with the speeds at which one stitches is to challenge time to a race. I liked this idea. Kimura’s figure drawings

also reminded me of a drawing course I had taken in my freshman year at college. I was bored by the still lifes, which I found meaningless (how can life exist in stillness anyway?), and landscapes were too vast for me. But in figure drawing, I found my home.

I remember a certain class when we gathered our chairs and easels around an assembly of lampshades, mannequins, vases, and cardboard pyramids. Everyone began to draw; I sighed, and my eyes wandered to the people working on the other side of the circle. A vase, a lampshade, appeared on my page, but so too did my classmates. I lingered on the angles of their hips and knees, the angles of their elbows and shoulders, as they leaned toward their work. The poetry of the figure, I began to realize, lies in the angles, the ways that one line relates to another, in the degree of difference between them. I was fascinated by the way lines came together or distanced themselves from each other as I drew. The addition of a single line had the power to change the energy of a whole figure. And often the most important lines were the ones that would not have been there in a photograph, but that were there, nonetheless, contained within the moment. The magic happened at the level of the line. Sometimes lines zigzagged, seesawed, hacked and returned and went forth again, as my pencil worked to find just the right degree of contour or just the right angle. The professor always instructed us to focus on lights and darks, shading and shadow. But now, with a still life I had abandoned and a room full of figures begging to be drawn, I discovered line.

During extended poses, one comes to feel the beauty of the model in an almost painful way. I remember one evening figure drawing session when an older woman modeled. Usually we had young women who were immediately, obviously pretty, but this woman was weathered. Most challenging to me was her chest: bridging her breasts was a line, perhaps of healed stitches, that underlined a third pocket of roundness. I had never seen someone who looked like that, and

I could not understand it. I did not know what to do. I drew; by the end of an hour's pose, I wanted to cry. I had spent that time tracing each turn of her knee, feeling the weight of her feet, lingering on the shape of her nose, and yes, finally confronting, working through, and accepting her chest. It was painful and difficult. Now I felt that she was the most beautiful person I had ever seen. Somehow I understood her places of pain and of weakness, her angles of strength and her sliding weight of defeat, her wrinkles and her round places. We dealt with them together, she and I, all together, the whole room. My eyes could look at nothing without seeing beauty. I loved each line.

An assembly of lines constructs a form which is more than the lines singly but which would be nothing without the lines singly. I love the lines that were never there in the original pose but which are far more vital to the drawing than those which were. I love how lines come together to form a whole, and how each line is a choice. Which line to draw? Which line to write? How to capture energy with a line? A figure drawing, or a poem, is an intermediary between photographic reality and the reality of meaning, translating one version of truth into another. That is what art is, I suppose: not the falling of a stone into water, nor the place where the ripples end, but rather the effect of the ripples of the stone as they travel to the edge of sight.

After looking at Kimura's pieces, I returned to my old drawing portfolio. Gesture drawing had been an especial joy. A pose generally spans a matter of minutes, or less even; drawing becomes an innately temporal act, grounded in the second. The unit is the line. When I began to meditate on figure drawing as it relates to textiles, I thought about the tension between the painstaking act of creating a thing with thread and days, and the violent act of creating an image with charcoal and seconds. One is deliberate; the other, wild and uncontrolled. Loving both, I decided to bridge them, to stitch images I had drawn three years before onto muslin.

When it came to deciding between hand stitching and machine stitching, I chose the machine for several reasons. Firstly, Kimura has already explored this field by hand. But even more important to me, when one stitches by hand, the stitch is the unit; each is slightly different. When stitching by machine, on the other hand, the line becomes the unit. A gesture is conveyed by the way the fabric passes beneath the needle. The line is usually straight, but when an angle approaches, the act of stitching slows. The sewer must anchor the needle into the fabric, lift the presser foot, pivot, and lower the presser foot before carefully resuming again. Wanting to focus on the line, machine stitching seemed the natural choice for me.

I selected several sketches, then immediately struggled over how best to translate them onto fabric. I wanted to preserve the relationships between pencil strokes, so I needed some method of accurately transferring them. Finally I settled on a process: by tracing the original lines onto translucent tissue paper, I was able to preserve those relationships. Then I pinned the tissue paper straight onto the muslin and stitched, wrong side up. A challenge arose: how to deal with the thick line ends created by backstitching? I decided not to worry, but developed a method of stitching to the end of the line, pivoting, and then stitching back down the line to get to a new one. In this way, I doubled back over many lines, retracing them in the other direction.

This action reminded me of the pantoum, in which two out of the four lines in each quatrain are repeated in the following stanza. As previously discussed, in a pantoum, one is forced to retrace one's steps before moving forward, and what proceeds must always relate somehow to what has come before. Now as I stitched, in order to progress to the next pencil stroke, I doubled back over what I had just stitched, tracing one arm to the vertex and then pivoting for the next. Meanwhile, I meditated on the relationship between each pair of lines, and on how these relationships affected the whole. Sometimes I paid attention to the greater context

of a particular area—how a certain line contributed to the entire sketch—but often I would let my mind wander in the labyrinth of lines.

Perhaps because of my work with the drawings of my freshman year, or perhaps because of my approaching graduation, I found myself re-confronting the questions of home which had consumed me three years before, and which I had considered during my summer class in Maine. What are the materials that home is made of? How to access that sense of home when away? I had talked with Carol Shaw-Sutton, my teacher at Haystack, about my ongoing investment in these questions. She recommended that I delve into them more deeply in my textile pieces, suggesting the story of the three little pigs as a point of departure. I made nothing but houses, places to inhabit, while I was there.

For my next two poems, I reengaged the theme of home. My advisor suggested that I write a new version of the pigs' story. This challenge resulted in "Foundation," another pantoum, but one which takes a playful approach. The first pig lives in a cardboard house; the second, in a locker; the wolf exposes the weaknesses of both homes, so the third decides home is best found in movement and he rides away in his canoe. I think this is my first pantoum that tells a successful narrative. In some ways, the plotline itself made such backward references seem natural; each successive phase of the story draws comparison with what has come before. I had an easier time writing this poem, too, because I decided not to observe the pantoum's rhyme scheme. This decision freed me to push forward the narrative through any means possible. Only in the last stanza does end rhyme appear, and here the rhyming words suggested themselves to me. Coming out of nowhere, the rhyme underscores the harmonious finality of the conclusion. Breaking out of the rhyme was easy; after all, I still had the security of the iambic pentameter to

satisfy my need for tight formality. That said, the over-loyal iambs, too, required scuffing in subsequent revisions to keep the poem energized.

Accompanying “Foundation” was “Eclosion,” a pantoum tracing the development of a pupa and her eventual emergence (eclosion) from the cocoon. I had been thinking about cocoons and how they speak to the discussion of home. A cocoon shelters and nurtures its inhabitant on the most intimate level; indeed, the inhabitant creates its cocoon, and then the cocoon in turn holds the inhabitant within a secure space of familiarity. The cocoon is woven from one’s own hair, or from found materials. Eventually, the inhabitant is ready to leave the cocoon. She must either split open the cocoon, often along a line of built-in weakness, or exit through a one-way hole. To me, this stage is both exhilarating and devastating. What happens to the cocoon when the moth flies away? What remains? Can the cocoon be repaired somehow? Can someone else live there? Can the moth return? I wish she could.

In its final version, “Eclosion” breaks through the pantoum form just as the new imago breaks through her cocoon. Thus the form’s breakdown emphasizes the imago’s emergence. However, this parallel interested me as a maker, inviting a new set of connections. Perhaps for me, form (whether manifested in a poem or in a weaving) acts as a sort of shelter of familiarity. Most exciting is when this form is broken through, but I inevitably mourn the damage to the cocoon from which the new energy emerges. I wonder, can the cocoon be repaired? In poetry, in textile, and in life, there is a tension for me between intimacy and eclosion, between burrowing and flight.

Mark Doty grapples with similar anxieties. Throughout *Still Life with Oysters and Lemon*, he confronts what it means “to be yourself and somehow, to belong,” or to be, “[f]or a

moment, held in balance” (9). This tension forms a principal thread within the book. He articulates some of my choicest concerns:

On one side of the balance is the need for home, for the deep solid roots of place and belonging; on the other side is the desire for travel and motion, for the single separate spark of the self freely moving forward, out into time, into the great absorbing stream of the world.

A fierce internal debate, between staying moored and drifting away, between holding on and letting go. Perhaps wisdom lies in our ability to negotiate between these poles. Necessary to us, both of them—but how to live in connection without feeling suffocated, compromised, erased? We long to connect; we fear that if we do, our freedom and individuality will disappear. (7)

Reading over his words after working through my cocoon pieces, the similarities are eerie. Perhaps the third pig in “Foundations” best succeeds at “negotiat[ing] between these poles” of “staying moored and drifting away,” because he defines home in motion. The moth may find her own way to negotiate this challenge, as she leaves the cocoon “tethered now to flight.” On the other hand, there is a sense of loneliness implied in her experience: both her growth and her flight are solitary. Then again, by emerging, she joins the “leaves and moths” which “fly, dark and free.”

Having written “Eclosion,” I began to make cocoons. I had a white Cheviot fleece which had been challenging me with its propensity for matting. This tendency made it difficult for me to spin traditionally attractive yarn. However, full of thoughts about form and freedom, I thought a lumpier, more opinionated yarn might suit the pieces well. Any handmade fiber piece will

naturally harbor these tensions: the hands cannot create uniform, perfect stitches, so the final product will always be somewhat disorderly, but at the same time, the hands are working to organize raw material into an ordered form. I have always preferred knitting to crochet, as knitting seems both more complex and more orderly to me. For the cocoons, I decided to embrace the freer techniques which crochet can offer. First, though, I needed to spin the yarn.

It was important to me that I spin the yarn myself, as a cocoon is made by its own inhabitant. I chose to tease, but not to card or comb, the fiber, so as to let each individual hair say what it liked during the spinning process. At one of the meetings of the Nutmeg Spinners Guild last season, a mentor explained that each fiber has its own desires. Most of all, a lock of wool wishes to remain in the lock form. However, if you must spin it, he said, the fiber has preferences as to thickness and twist. The further you deviate from these preferences, the tenser the yarn will be. I decided to harness this concept for my cocoon yarn, and against all my instincts as a lover of order, I let the fiber feed into the drafting triangle as it came. The yarn undulated between thick and thin. I cringed; the spinning wheel sang.

After spinning, one usually winds the yarn into a skein and sets the twist with water before beginning a project. In this case, I felt it would be most appropriate *not* to set the twist; if the yarn held a lot of twist energy, I wanted to let that energy express itself. This is also the reason I chose not to ply the singles: plying generally reduces twist energy, and I thought that would be another form of taming the fiber. Instead, I wound it into a ball straight off the bobbin and got out a crochet hook. I had a general idea of how I wanted the cocoons to be shaped, but I let the shaping take place round by round. The pieces progressed at the unit of the stitch, and they were as far from line-driven as one can imagine. Whereas the figure stitchings emphasized

lines and vertices, these cocoons existed in three-dimensional roundness. Two cocoons emerged, soft vessels of the familiar. I suspended them from the ceiling.

I stitched another one of my figure drawings, this one depicting a fully clothed model. The nude is beautiful and complex, of course, but a clothed figure inspires a new set of questions: why do people wear clothes? why is it so rare for artists to include them in serious drawings? how does one stitch the image of cloth onto cloth? (Tangentially, nudists refer to those who wear clothes as *textiles*.) This drawing proved especially challenging to render in stitches, as it consisted of many dead-end lines. Afterward, I imagined what a drawing would look like if the figure were stitched with one continuous, unbroken line. I tried to imagine what a poem would look like that attempted to do the same—would it look like prose? or perhaps, like a timeline that drives straight through the right-hand margin and off the page altogether?

The idea for my next poem was born in the Museum of Fine Arts's non-borrowing library in Horticulture Hall, where I sat perusing several issues of *Selvedge* magazine. One included an article about the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, and the terror of that event was renewed for me. I resolved to write a poem to work through my thoughts. I read some witness testimonies about the event, including one that was especially horrific. When I went to write the poem, the subject matter seemed too large and messy to be contained within a tidy pantoum. Thus began my biggest formal struggle of the entire poetic collection: how, without a predetermined form, can I organize my words effectively enough to convey what I need to? For this poem, that struggle is still ongoing. Complicating the task was my desire to convey both the ruthless speed and the ponderous slowness with which this event must have taken place. The fire wrought tremendous devastation in such a short space of time, and yet each moment was far too vivid in the witnesses' consciousnesses.

Another cocoon joined the pair already hanging from the ceiling. This one, unlike the other two, is closed; the being inside has not yet emerged. Seeing the three hanging together made me think about the ways they relate to each other. They are a community in that they dangle side by side, yet each is primarily a habitation for one. Each pupa lives within fences that bar intimacy with others. The inhabitants live side by side but cannot relate, communicate, or connect. They share location and external influences but not home. Home, for them, is in isolation, on the level of the individual and not the family. A pupa must grow alone. A cocoon must wall in. Sooner or later, a moth must fly free, and only then does it have the chance for communion.

These meditations joined with others I had been entertaining. Language, I reasoned, can serve as a quilt, or as a wall. It is certainly a way of connecting and building community, but the lack of a common language can separate. Through my own bilingual, biracial romantic relationship, I have experienced intimately the consequences of linguistic separation and connection, some of which I explore in “Paving the Line.” Through and beyond that piece, I began to think about literal, physical borders. What is a fence but another textile? Usually textiles are conceived as soft, inviting, and intimate. A quilt, a binding tie: these connect people. Knitting can be a metaphor for joining, for assembling a community. Quilts are especially apt metaphors for community because of the ways in which the act of quilting—through quilting bees and assembling diverse scraps of fabric into patterns—fosters a coming together of people and elements. A fence is just a large metallic shawl, knit off a pair of tremendous needles. But a fence separates people, contributing to the alienation, rather than convergence, of individuals. It is a marker of difference. It says: this is not yours. Its wire strands root down into the ground and sprout up in other places. Its shoots prick those who are not welcome as they approach.

They prick those who are not welcoming when they are not looking. Those who are not welcome have holes in their feet. Those who are not welcoming have whole feet because they wear shoes.

This image inspired my borders piece. The fabric element signifies land, of course, but also identity; a border can fracture the identities of those living on both sides. Again I chose crochet because unlike weaving, crochet forms cloth from a single strand of yarn. This inherent commonality was important to me. With the lace narrative passage from *Belly of the Atlantic* in mind, I wrote in “soy yo”—“I am,” “It is I”—through the use of holes. Meaning, in other words, is contained within that which is *not* said more so than within that which is. I needle-felted wool across the surface of the fabric to create a sort of topography. Meanwhile, I wanted to push the properties of lace further, and was particularly inspired by the words of Ernst-Erik Pfannschmidt in *Twentieth-Century Lace*:

The history of architecture teaches us that every style began with heavy, solid forms; then, as the technical know-how increased, shapes became slender and more elegant. Matter becomes progressively less solid. This is an expression of man’s ancient longing to free himself from the earth’s gravity. No man will ever succeed, but every generation will tackle the problem in its own way. (Pfannschmidt 30)

Pfannschmidt writes of a human desire for release from gravity’s hold. Lace, he continues, is one attempt to achieve weightlessness. This is an entirely different perspective on the signification of lace, and equally useful to my borders piece; after all, if one could transcend gravity, earthly borders would no longer apply. A fence’s delineation of the land, and by extension of the self, would be irrelevant. Thus the entire piece is bordered with lace which fringes out into freedom.

As the semester came to a close, I realized that many of my questions and revelations are articulated in Doty's piece and in Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*. The tension, at last, seems to be that of form on one hand, or familiarity/memory/home, and freedom on the other, or new creation/rebellious unstitching/eclosion. How can one burrow and fly at the same time?

Doty, as I have mentioned, finds a sort of balance in the Dutch still lifes:

Perhaps that's another of the paintings' secrets: they satisfy so deeply because they offer us intimacy and distance at once, allow us to be both here and gone.

Here and gone. That's what it is to be human, I think—to be both someone and no one at once, to hold a particular identity in the world (our names, our place of origins, our family and affectional ties) and to feel that solid set of ties also capable of dissolution, slipping away, as we become moments of attention.

We think that to find ourselves we need to turn inward, examining the intricacies of origin, the shaping forces of personality. But "I" is just as much to be found in the world; looking outward, we experience the one who does the seeing. (67)

For Doty, and for me, art offers a way to move back and forth between "here and gone." How? By looking out into the world, "we experience the one who does the seeing." To me, this means that reaching outward can be an intimate, familiar act, and that delineations must be brought down. Bachelard proposes that without the house, "man would be a dispersed being" (7), and yet that "to inhabit a shell we must be alone. By living this image, one knows that one has accepted solitude" (123). To negotiate a house, then, one must not live in a shell; rather, one must pass in and out of one's home. This is a powerful act, Bachelard explains: "This sign of

return marks an infinite number of daydreams, for the reason that human returning takes place in the great rhythm of human life, a rhythm that reaches back across the years and, through the dream, combats all absence” (99). To return to one’s nest, or cocoon, is sometimes only a dream-act, but it signifies the negation of absence itself. Yet to burrow in is to prepare for flight:

A creature that hides and “withdraws into its shell,” is preparing a “way out.” This is true of the entire scale of metaphors, from the resurrection of a man in his grave, to the sudden outburst of one who has long been silent. If we remain at the heart of the image under consideration, we have the impression that, by staying in the motionlessness of its shell, the creature is preparing temporal explosions, not to say whirlwinds, of being.

(111)

So to withdraw is to provoke emergence; I would argue that the converse is true as well. And I would argue that intimacy in outward relation is always vital. This conviction informed my creation of the joined cocoons, whose inhabitants are able to move back and forth from vessel to sky, while always maintaining a way of relating to each other. The lines that sketch them are intimately connected; they are the same.

Freedom and form: each must temper the other. Stitching and unstitching lend each other power. To burrow and simultaneously to fly: that is my dream. Perhaps one day I may achieve it. For now, I write poems and stitch lace.

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Threads



Woven Lace



Burnt Lace



Burnt Lace (detail)



Clothed Figure



Standing Nude



Sitting Nude



Sitting Nude (detail)



Cocoon I



Cocoon II



Cocoon II (detail)



Cocoon III



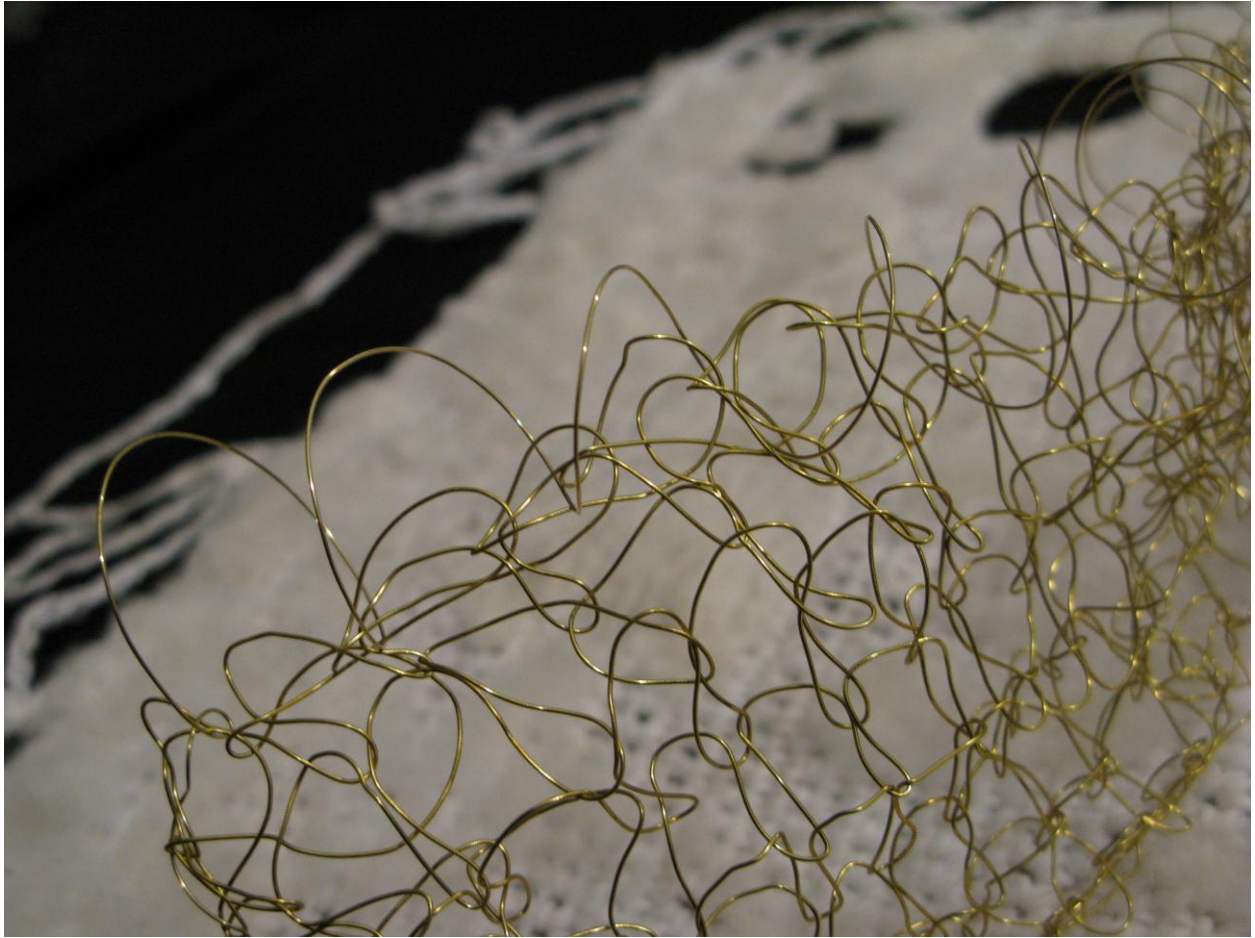
Cocoon(s) IV



Border



Border (detail)



Border (detail)

Tether

**Head of the Mummy of Djehutynakht. Egypt.
Materials**

The sound of crumbling echoed through the room.
I entered seeking peace and found instead
Encapsulated, placarded, in gloom,
Djehutynakht's embalmed and grainy head.

I entered seeking peace and found instead
A linen-covered face, a peeking curl,
Djehutynakht's embalmed and grainy head,
Diaphanous with curdling dust and rot.

A linen-covered face, a peeking curl.
The sable dander whispered *hereisman*.
Diaphanous, with curdling dust and rot,
The snaking hairs were fused in shriveled strands.

The sable dander whispered *hereisman*
Despite four thousand years' fraying decline.
The skin and cloth were fused in shriveled strands,
And held a shape for what remained behind.

To spite four thousand years' fraying decline,
With ballpoint as my shuttle, page my loom,
I wove together what remained behind.
The beating of my heart pulsed through the room.

Keeping Time

The shawl was fragile, time-worn, limp;
The fabric cringed across the sand.
Kneeling, threads snapped in pairs beneath

The salivating waves' lambaste.
The rocks gnashed hungry teeth.

A scalpel, the hour hand was poised
To slice the web apart,
To probe and tear the inmost strands
With grinding, marching, endless sands

Until, at last, nothing remained
But shreds of fiber,

A clock,

The sea.

To the Rememberer

The road from here to her is where you walk,
And paving it are stories that can tear,
Then piece you back together. As you talk,
Your tears stitch lines from eye to chin to air.

Paving it are stories that can tear,
But you know that to tell them is to feel.
Your tears stitch lines from eye to chin to air;
They fill the echoing spaces you must heal.

You know that to tell them is to feel,
Become again that woman's little girl.
They fill the echoing spaces you must heal
With sounds of crows, with junipers and wind.

You'll always be that woman's little girl.
You drive for hours to hear the seagulls caw.
The sounds of crows, the junipers and wind
Give voice to Granddad's apples and her Limoges.

I am your daughter. I listen to you speak,
Collect your words and stitch them as you talk.
I take the apples, taste them as we trace
The road from here to her, here where we walk.

Everything Is Counted

It must have taken an eternity,
The shuttle keeping time,
For her to assemble it,
Capture and order the dark threads,
Break them into commonality.

Warp and weft teem across one black mass: a webbed emblem,
The counted flutterings of this woman's hands.

But watch now
As she carries her bundle to the water's edge.
Low tide. The rocks are coarse.
Among the foamy fringes of the waves
Across a jagged rock
She lays the web.

Then—
She scrubs, grates,
Tears her web,
Stencils the stone's
Pockmarks into the cloth's face.

The threads are mere pencil marks
Gray with strain and then
Frayed.

Unrelenting, the weaver's hands
Scrub on, overtaking the
Tide's own clock.

She, the conqueror, raises the cloth above her head.
Her arms shake. Where threads are gone, clouds show through.

A savage banner rips the sky.

25 March 1911

Crashing glass.
I thought at first that cloth was falling
until the bundle opened in air—
small
feet showed through

Here. Floor nine: Door locked.
Breathing wisps of burntbo-
dies
climb up to the ceiling, smoke. Darkness gathersrunny,
courses down the walls meets our shoes.
A fresh-cut sleeve falls from my fingers.

I learned a new sound:
Thud-dead.

A girl ties her hair, hair into her scarf, fingers steady.
I watch watch I watch she climbs the sill and.

Seven minutes now. Blossoms:
Cotton, linen, wool petals.
Stamens like feet, feet like stamens,
They fall through the air to the sidewalk where I stand.

Hot. HeatWe crowd to the window where girls
girls they girls heatclamor out onto the fi-
re escape fire. escapeWe see them. Girls we see
We heat we see heat.

The faces in the windows saw the blossoms falling.
They watched, heard
every
beat.

Smoke burst the windows,
smoke and flames poured out but also in.
I can see them at the windows:
The raging beast breathes sparks at their necks.
An ardent puppy, it toothed their skirts.

Chew it is chewing it breathes the fire
Heatfire it breathes it

A girl's skirt inflated with air, and her feet
small, small, as they pointed down-
ward
to earth.
More women jumped
and fell,
dogwood petals
in April wind.
The street
Flowered with charred dresses and incinerated scarves.
Thud, thud, thud.

Wisps of hair ascend-
ed to the clouds
And a bodybundle fell

Next to me a fabric scrap bin ignites it Fi-
refabric me next

A young man and woman kissed from the window
he held her and
dropped her and
jumped
too
Sixteen minutes the sidewalk a garden.
His shoes tan. His hat stayed on.
ThudThud.

Burning, smoking petals shriveled as they fell
Showered the sidewalk with smeary embers.

Seventeen
minutes.

Flower piles on flower
a potpourri of ashes

Thud.

Wolves howled from an upstairs window.
I learned a new sound.

Foundation

The corrugated cardboard house felt smug.
Both modest and transportable, he sat
And contemplated how he'd always be
The eldest piglet's ever-after home.

Both modest and transportable, he sat,
Still peaceful as the wolf laced up his boots.
So the eldest piglet's ever-after home
Was stomped 'til flat, then left out by the road.

Wary, as the wolf retied his shoes,
The middle piglet's locker home slammed shut.
Neither stomped nor left out by the road,
This combination-lock-house raised a brow.

The middle pig peeked from his locker home
And saw the wolf now fiddling with the dial.
The combination-lock-house held its breath—
The lock, decoded, rattled and gave up.

Having watched the wolf and thought it through,
The youngest pig left land in his canoe.
The wolf, outwitted, flopped down on the shore.
The boat flew on; the breezes blew and blew.

Paving the Line

PISE CON CUIDADO. The red sticker peels tiredly from the yellow pole in front of me, collecting dirt and grime as its sticky underbelly curls. How alienating, how uninspiring to be a sticker on a public bus, I think. Passengers read you, peel you, write on you, forget you. When the bus finally stops for the night, you're left alone with the sand stuck to your sticky loose corners and with no one to talk to. Except the sticker on the pole across the aisle, your English counterpart (WATCH YOUR STEP), but he's too busy speaking his own language to bother with you. "Pise con cuidado," you purr. Only the Connecticut sand hears you.

I sit in my plastic seat, backpack on my lap. Behind me: the exotic sounds of a language I can't identify, spoken by two women in headscarves. Out the front window: the road to Willimantic.

Twenty-one years of life in Mansfield have desensitized me to the strangeness, the randomness, of Willimantic's presence. In Mansfield, one finds books and cows. Miles of tweed carpet Route 195, but the fabric frays to nothingness on the overpass just past the mall. The official border between towns is shortly after the overpass, I think, but the overpass delineates the true divide. It's sketchy, and only people pushing grocery carts full of empty soda cans, only groups of hardy Latino teenagers who have lived in Willimantic their whole lives, dare to walk there. I have always passed over it in my car, on the way to visit my boyfriend Carlos, flipping the station as NPR fuzzes out.

But I am on the bus now, still back in Mansfield. Spring trees, green-frilled, and sensible New England homes flicker by outside my window. A young woman in a silk headscarf and plum-colored cardigan sits across the aisle, speaking quietly to an Indian woman beside her. I

contemplate the cardigan: an alpaca blend, perhaps? Her voice is soft, lilting. She is speaking English. Her left hand rests in her lap; it's a small, young, beautifully clean hand. Rainbow-striped knee socks peep out from beneath her denim skirt. My big toe fiddles with a bunch in my own white ankle socks. The women in headscarves continue to chat behind me, their voices jagged over the constant hum of the bus engine.

A couple of brightly-dressed African American women board the bus, talking animatedly. One wears jeans—twill weave—and a teal paisley blouse; the other, a magenta sweatsuit. They settle themselves near a young man whose bland plaid shirt makes plain his identity. Blue cotton flannel, glasses, iPod, nondescript brown hair and practical sneakers: Hello, my name is Jacob and I am from New England. Please don't talk to me. He stares out the front windshield. Above his head, cobalt cursive letters sing an advertisement: ¡Una boca saludable es una persona saludable! And across the aisle, on the opposite wall, the same advertisement, the same smiling couple in the picture, the same cursive script: A healthy mouth is a healthy you! Carlos has a brilliant smile, and I think of it now, wonder what he is doing: perhaps ironing his clothes for church tomorrow. I tuck my raspberry-colored Ked sneakers under my seat, fiddle with the buttons on my cardigan.

A tiny “ding,” and the letters light up in red overhead: STOP REQUESTED. No translation, but everyone understands. Carlos, whose English has improved daily since I met him two years ago, would understand. The bus slows to a stop, and the three young women in headscarves get off. A middle-aged woman in a gray college sweatshirt and snug jeans gets on, says something to the driver. There is a suggestion of cigarette smoke and age in her face, though perhaps it's just the light being filtered in through the dusty window. She sits up near the front.

Now we are nearing the border, and I zip up my navy backpack. I always drive into Willimantic in a car; the rubber tires of my car know the place well. My feet are unacquainted, and I am resolved to walk into Willimantic today on foot. Just after the overpass, I get off at the park where a young girl doing her bike route was brutally murdered twelve years ago. There is a large puddle from this morning's rain; I step carefully to avoid it. PISE CON CUIDADO. I've never walked through this park, not even with Carlos. I've never peered into the pond or walked over its stone bridge. Now I do so, and the rocks are rough beneath my thin rubber soles.

There's a memorial stone at the edge of the park. Angelica Marie Padilla. A poem follows for this eleven-year-old girl who was raped and murdered in the woods behind her apartment. The final verse reads:

If tears could build a stairway
And heartaches could pave a line,
I would walk the path to Heaven
And bring you back again.

PISE CON CUIDADO. I would walk the path if heartaches could pave a line. The glossy brown stone is cold in the afternoon gray.

I leave the park and follow the sidewalk alongside Route 195 leading away from the town line, into the heart of Willimantic. I wonder if I ought to be walking here. My mom wouldn't want me to. Carlos would ask me why. I can read the thoughts of the people in the houses, watching me through their living room windows: "Her veins show through her translucent wrists, and they are green with money. Her eyes are blue with entitlement. Her shoes are raspberry." PISE CON CUIDADO. I step with caution.

The houses are varied, some Victorian and upright, others newer and lazier. White house, another white, then a yellow, bright blue, white. I train my eyes on the sidewalk for the most part, passing lonely bits of litter every now and then. New grass tendrils spill out between the cracks in the concrete. A thin layer of sand gives the sidewalk grittiness beneath my feet. Gray and subdued, a couple of joggers run past. Then a red car goes by, roaring and rattling. A large man in a baggy black coat saunters by me, looks into my face. I try to make myself small. Quickly I step past, looking down. My heart beats. Sand, litter, concrete, shoelaces. Ten minutes.

Then, looking up, I am suddenly struck by the radiance of a forsythia bush in full bloom. Across the street, another. Down the way, another. What language do they speak? I remember the first halting phone conversations Carlos and I had after meeting at the strawberry farm where we worked. I remember sitting with dictionaries, both trying to bridge the gap with words that our hearts had already begun to close. Over time, we developed a halfway language of our own, pooling bits of each others' languages, building a path of meaning from one to the other. The forsythias here are stunning, and I stare, try to make sense of them. I stare, and the brilliant yellow of springtime flowers in their prime paves a line into the heart of Willimantic.

I am close now to Carlos' apartment, and I pull my phone out of my coat pocket. A few rings. "Hi, amor." I look up at his window. "¿Como estás? Guess what? I'm here!" I stand on the sidewalk across the street and watch as he smiles through the glass in his front door, then comes out. I step across the street to meet him, burrow my face in his shoulder. "I walked here," I tell him. Then I pull away, look down at our joined hands. His are golden brown, broad and well-acquainted with the earth. They are cleaner than mine, and warm. His hands often fumble when he writes, and they turn pages impatiently as if turning mounds of fresh dirt. But now they

are gentle, confiding, trying to speak. There is sand under my nails. My small pale hands rest in his and try to understand.

Bright Shadow

The past, of course, is hiding here somewhere
And so I look from grass to tree to cloud
In search of some bright shadow we can share.

The orchard trees are sunlit, unaware
That leaves will fall and autumn winds are proud.
(The past, of course, is hiding here somewhere.)

A line of pumpkins bow their heads in prayer
While branch-convulsing winds orate aloud,
In search of some bright shadow we can share.

Blinking toward a time I thought he cared,
I pace among the skeletons, apple-boughed.
The past, I think, is hiding here somewhere.

At last I find the patch of grass, though bare
Of all the curving wonders that he vowed.
There never was a promise we could share.

I am young, but I cannot repair
The broken shapes cast by some passing cloud.
The past is always hiding here somewhere,
But there is only shadow left to share.

Undone

The seams were tricky to find at first. Minute chains of crochet stitched shoulder front to shoulder back, collar to neckline. The knit sweater sat wearily in her lap, and her orange Fiskars sliced smartly through the summer evening, through the first loop. She unpicked a yarn end. Then she began to pull, to unzip the chain of loops that held the body together.

It wasn't that the elements were so bad: a cotton-linen blend, sportweight, in sand and cream stripes. The trouble was the configuration, the pattern. The way they had spun their stories into one rope without first proving the strength of each strand.

Snip. Pull. Unravel. The wooden floor was hard beneath her, and she sat. Tethered, silent. Beads of vibration sputtered against her fingertips as the stitches came undone and fell into two hoarse piles of raw yarn across the floor. She smiled into the dimness, looked down at the growing piles of disarmed threads, and ripped out the rest of the sleeve. It had been long enough. Out of the same elements, she knew, something different could be woven.

November, a Monday. She drove off into the sparkling darkness of her birthday to pick him up before the party. Finally nineteen and in love, she couldn't help smiling. A question came, then quickly passed. She didn't want to court shadows tonight.

And then there he was, and he got in the car, his dark eyes beautiful in the growing night. Briefly she wondered, as she often did, what he was thinking. Looking at him, it was so hard to know. They hugged. "Happy birthday," he cooed. She smiled. "Hi," she said.

He buckled his seatbelt, cleared his throat. "Yeah, so I don't have a present for you, but..." She didn't blink. "I love you."

“Oh.” The car was stuffy, needed a good cleaning. “Oh,” she said again. “Okay.” She released the emergency brake between them, moved forward a few feet. She didn’t look at him.

He looked at her. “Hold on,” he said. “Wait a minute.” She stopped the car; he climbed out and closed the door carefully behind him. She sat in the silenced car, dulled, counting the chips in the paint on her fingernails. She zipped up her jacket.

“Hi,” he said as he slid again into the passenger seat, holding something where she couldn’t see it in the darkness. He reached up and flicked on the overhead light. “Close your eyes.”

She knew she wouldn’t like it from the feeling she had even before she opened her eyes. The feeling was familiar. The unreadable darkness behind his eyes consumed the air within the car; she opened her own. It was a pullover, collared and mannish. He said he bought it new at Wal-mart. It smelled like a thrift store, and its tags were cut off. He assured her that he had it for her birthday all along, that he had told her as much when he got in the car and she just hadn’t understood. She couldn’t look at him—it wouldn’t do any good—it never did. Her closet was full of clothes she could never wear, each stained with the lies that dribbled like wine from his mouth.

In her room, two days later, she began to dismember the other sleeve.

Shortly after the birthday, she drove with the sweater to the nearest Wal-mart. “Do you carry this sweater?” she asked the manager. “There’s kind of a relationship on the line.” He eyed it carefully. “Nope, we don’t. Sorry.”

Sitting on her floor, she unraveled the front of the pullover, the stripes spilling into long strands that pooled across the floor.

She told him she had been to Wal-mart. “Oh, well, I bought it in Brookfield,” he said, looking only briefly at her.

“Do you carry this?” she asked the manager of the Brookfield store. “It’s important.” The manager checked the label. “We definitely don’t. Sorry.”

She opened her closet. Piles of stained fabric spilled out across the floor. The lie-eaten sweater shied from her gaze. She dropped it and it fell to repose among discolored t-shirts and pilling scarves.

A woman will do many things out of love. It was two days after her birthday. She sat tearing the liar stitches, the falsities of thread, determined to recraft the faulty first draft into a better, truer narrative. She rewound the yarns into fresh skeins. This was her story; she would tell it her way. The sky was deep now outside her room. She rose to close her curtains against the oncoming dark.

The next morning, she measured out her warp, thread by thread, then wound it onto the back beam. Through the heddles (“four, three, two, one, four, three, two, one,” she counted), and then through the dents in the metal reed. Ordered, secure, with all the elements in their rightful places.

Her feet moved carefully over the treadles as the shuttle shot back and forth. “Four-three, three-two, two-one, one-four,” she murmured over and over and over to herself. The movement

of the shuttle kept time, ignoring even the sun's progress across the sky. Occasionally a few colorful strands of thread would float through the room toward her; she caught them and wove them in as well. The beater pounded. The fabric was stiff in the loom, held under tension by the beams. Then it was done, and she cut it free.

It was a carpet, heavy in her arms; she laid it down across the floor. Richly colored brocade moths hovered over a dense bed of snowy twill. Thickly, the yarns entwined. Emerald and azure, carmine and indigo moths fluttered across the fabric on the floor.

It was an assembly of wings.

Night again, and she stood out under the stars, holding the carpet in her arms. The thick grass was dewy beneath her feet. She laid the carpet down, knelt on it. A hundred colored moths rose in the air. Closing her eyes, she and the carpet left the ground. She fingered the thick fabric beneath her. The night was dark.

The wind wove wings with her hair. Above, the stars were numbered, ordered, clean.

Eclosion

Suspended, tethered to a twig,
A sessile pupa sleeps and waits
Within her meshed opaque cocoon
For something strong to grow within.

Sessile, the pupa sleeps and waits,
Trusting the layers of silk to hold
While something strong forms wings within.
The tense cocoon shifts in the wind.

She trusts the strands of silk can hold;
They bind her ever-weaving wings.
Tense, the cocoon shifts in the wind
Where leaves and moths fly, dark and free.

Thread binds her ever-weaving wings
That yearn now for the jutting night
Where leaves and moths fly, dark and free,
In metamorphosis-delight.

She stretches to the jutting night—
Pushes—breaks the threads—
Metamorphed—. Delight!—
The new imago breathes rough air.

Atop the nest of broken threads
The moth extends her untried wings;
The new imago breathes rough air.

She cleaves it, tethered now to flight