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## Strike Out Across the Shoreless Ocean

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STRIKE OUT ACROSS THE SHORELESS

OCEAN

by

Julia Claire Paajanen

Bachelor of Arts  
University of Southern California  
2007

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

**Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing**

**Department of English  
College of Liberal Arts  
The Graduate College**

**University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
December 2011**



THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

We recommend the thesis prepared under our supervision by

**Julia Claire Paajanen**

entitled

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and Dean of the Graduate College

**December 2011**

ABSTRACT

**Strike Out Across the Shoreless Ocean**

by

Julia Claire Paajanen

Dr. Donald Revell, Examination Committee Chair  
Professor of English  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

What happens between a reader and a poem is none of my business. The world has  
always been yours; find your own way.

1. Every choice is correct.
2. Everything is true.
3. What is anything, unless so far as it is enjoyed?

All you have to do is see the course, and when you see it, go.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT..... iii

Wake in the slumping red reeds, yellow mud and the flies ..... 1

A baseball player throws a baseball to another baseball player..... 2

My head is star-shaped..... 3

nothing here is not god..... 4

Phoenix lives in the mountain..... 5

Pull the down comforter up..... 6

I was running from the madness ..... 7

Wade with me through leaf-piles of dead ..... 8

Oh! Mayan temple skyscraper! ..... 9

Horizon! Lox! Automobiles! Sex! ..... 10

And after that, nothing can govern you ..... 11

run from the sun! there is no more room ..... 12

(elbows in your ribs and bruised blue)..... 13

Go forth!..... 14

There is a hot spring by Phoenix's nest..... 15

I will say this in case you recognize it ..... 16

Remember the yellow robes and the kneeling? ..... 17

You and I must learn to ignore this world ..... 18

Phoenix fed me figs ..... 19

Step from stone to ..... 20

the ways are myriad and ..... 21

Come, O reader, walk beside me ..... 22

The chorus sings .....	23
I kiss Phoenix on her hard beak .....	24
Do you wake up limb on limb like icing?.....	25
Place your body inside abother .....	26
Phoenix fills the mountain with her chicks.....	27
Sharks! They do not love everybody!.....	28
We are a party of imperfect souls .....	29
Phoenix left me in the valley .....	30
We are not only trajectory.....	31
Watch the row of seconds.....	32
Roll up your sleeves, the quivering.....	33
sing a song of loneliness, the rising of the run.....	34
Sacrifice is sufficient but not desirable.....	35
About a man.....	36
I never saw Phoenix again .....	37
Open the gate with your own hands! .....	38
your arms contain.....	30
if you cut your hair.....	40
soft hill of your abdomen.....	41
love, there is no body .....	42
We write the lists .....	43
The language of small notes .....	44
Here is the .....	45

Gesundheit, gazebo!.....	46
This is how I am real.....	47
VITA.....	48

Wake in the slumping red reeds, yellow mud and flies  
lost in the fog. The algae's suction of each  
tiny leaf on each pore, fingers of water up thighs,  
tadpole boots, and the pulsing of peat moss and leech.  
In the winter, reed edges nicked channels through skin,  
it was crisp and the only smell was of snow.  
The blackbirds have kept you too long, and the gin  
is all gone. Feel the drowned dogs dancing below.  
It is nice to be lonely, to look at the stars eating  
holes in the sky. Eavesdrop the foghorns from cast-iron ships,  
and think of the sea. It is cheating  
to listen to me, or pretend there's a script.

There are cattail seeds caught in the air,  
but don't think  
about that. Try forgiveness, and patience  
to sink.

6

Mosquitos will miss you. Relish the sins  
of the selfish, and break all the nests in  
your way when you swim.

10

A baseball player throws a baseball to another baseball player.

Take a walk/Carry:

:frogs

:Play-Doh

:a candle that smells like food

:a lock of hair

:a fondue fork, fondued

*I am going out tonight-- to have a beer and dance to an old singer in a sequined vest-- I will jump in puddles-- without galoshes-- right now there is gravity-- there is water holding up boats-- there are cookies--*

(I don't mind if you listen to Thriller while reading this--  
I'll put it on too)

I promise to catch you if you come.

My head is star-shaped  
waiting for a star

My hands have made  
the most surprising things  
out of cardboard

House, motor, horses  
Here, little box:  
this can be a spaceship  
Here is a porthole, engine, fins

If I want to breathe more air,  
I will make a hole for that

The breathing of the world  
is too fast for me

I will breathe like this tomato plant:  
making tomatoes

nothing here is not god

red plastic stadium seats

this is a new place

everyone is here:

dinosaur bones crusted in rock and the dogs that are

abused and not abused girls you knew

god pedaling his red god down the dusty god

lettuce leaves

try being the grass

try being a rock, the dinosaur

molecules of water:

stop  
you're doing it wrong, running

your eyes over me

let's parade with him outside  
drop those hands  
held so tightly to your wrists

give hands back  
to share the particles

:never stop loving

Phoenix lives in the mountain  
she is red-beaked  
and white like moonlight

Pull the down comforter up  
or your feet will dry like apples

Body is only particles here  
feathery dirt breaks bones for mineral

The farmer is here too  
skin breathing in iron  
spade breathing in oxygen

The girl's sacrifice skull  
letting in the rains  
that make the harvest hard

Farmer has your feet now  
girl has your hair now  
the rain beats at your ears

He expands  
she laps over  
cups of bodies spilling over

The world is warm and close  
and made for sleep

Pull the mantle up  
swap follicles for the thick everyone  
4

The mallards tense wings in the water  
muscle strain sticks to the soul

The frogs are too far away to be fingers  
the mind remains mechanism to know

Your grandmother's near and she told  
me to tell you  
Let it go, let it go, coming home

Feel gravity pull all your darker parts  
faster  
weight is a thing that's determined to last  
Travel needs presence to move and to  
learn:  
The gone and the silent are equally vast  
8

I was running from the madness  
the broken ship, the yellow torches  
Phoenix hid me in her nest

Wade with me through leaf-piles of dead:  
I am here to hold hands from turning smoky.

The skyscrapers fold open like dollhouses, fake  
and solid. The dust that gathers in the creases

of your shoes isn't real, but it is heavier  
than real dust. There is no sun.

Ask for Elvis, but there  
are no souls unsullied:  
like gorgonzola in your  
fridge.

There are twenty copies  
of your heroes, fifty  
maps of where the will

is stashed. Every rock  
will tell you the stories  
you already know.

Follow the signs that  
resemble feathers.

22

It's OK: darkness is real  
and terrifying. Breathe  
as much as you can.

The mountains over  
there will lead up,  
but the rocks will only  
love you

if you believe they will  
34

Stay: sift.  
21

Oh! Mayan temple skyscraper!  
Caged tops of the fortress!  
Spears in the setting sun!

Liquid sky and sacrifice clouds

Escape from the charred cigarette-earth  
to air out of gold

Anything can save you:

Each day the towers still point up!  
Still the circling desert, the wind

Silhouettes, halo set on earthy sand  
crowned with the diamond searchlight  
someday you will capture the sun

The distance may be dark—  
in this circle we worship through the  
night  
29

West through dunes  
and head turned up

follow what you can:  
light iron roads  
spikes into :things to pound rail

migration along the invisible trails

one thing cannot help but move to  
another  
32

Horizon! Lox! Automobiles! Sex!  
Run to the ocean and swim past the sands

They're playing a polka  
they're twining their arms

Dance with the dollar  
wash off your scars

Sloshing your belly  
One more night, please,  
of lights  
before chambers and  
feet  
9

(You are the camel  
and they are the jars  
start walking backwards  
toward opening mouths)  
12

Goodbye to the lillies,  
the  
streets!  
Parkas to make the cold  
joyful  
14

And after that, nothing can govern you:  
Play billiards with marshmallows,  
or graft together a lime tree and a tulip.  
Make a vacuum if you really really want one.  
Use lungs, use water, the world is your machine.

What is left?

A metal lathe is the only tool that can make itself!  
Make a kingdom:

Seeking God can be either easy or hard:  
lay a trap with leaves or stained glass.  
Avoid earwigs. Don't trust anyone  
who doesn't know how to work a chisel.

paint, paint, paint.

run from the sun! there is no more room  
under the umbrellas  
13

(elbows in your ribs and bruised blue)  
the elbows do not mean it: arms and bones  
need space for their matter  
rib, rib, ribs cage the heart and lungs:  
they do not deserve to be bruised

but inside your body  
there is no air:  
intestine coiled next to  
liver and only  
warm too warm liquids  
and skin  
that hugs your body  
together  
push into this body next  
to you:  
diaphragm to lung,  
move each other  
and hairs that are not  
yours in the drain  
and the floor covered in  
crumbs  
but hold to the other  
because  
a body needs many to be  
whole  
26

because they were  
strong, and wanted  
the lungs to fill with air

hammer together a new  
space  
a fort of sailcloth and  
paint: stretch

batten yourself with tar  
paper,  
you little hidden candy  
stash

hang your paintings and  
your lights  
invent your own  
transmutation device

11

because they were  
strong, and wanted  
the lungs to fill with air

hammer together a new  
space  
a fort of sailcloth and  
paint: stretch

let in the man who plays  
saxophone in the street  
or notices when you're  
changed your hair  
this is conditional: fair

contract of family or  
shared cigarette  
pull up the ladder, you  
have what you need:  
sandwiches: value of  
parts

28

Go forth!  
and conquer!  
icy winds will rub your cheeks  
the stars will run from your astrolabe

diving bells made from garbage bags  
and your feet dangling and cold and blind  
it's not easy to feel the pressure grow  
or the brushes of fish against toes

only wave, wave, wave  
grey and smelling like crustacean

and here the dolphins!  
apples in your teeth and the  
crackling flags

dance to hear your steps make a noise  
the echoes and the wake and the others  
with you  
folding into each other

down to the hairs on your skin  
and the sun

2

salt to whiten your clothes  
and crack your lips  
and burn your hands

make this metal body float!  
turn heat into motion and keep going

there are black-rocked waters  
where a ship can't go  
the thunder could be a waterfall  
or it could be thunder

34

There is a hot spring by Phoenix's nest  
It took away the rotting mud  
and covered my welts with pale scars

I will say this in case you recognize it:  
the heavy sun            the dark paint that sticks to your skin  
it is like playing chess with Orion: one move for each of his rotations

carrot cake filling your throat            the roaches are already dead

the hills are accumulations: examine each blade of grass  
to find the small green ants climbing on it

your friends have been exploded and reassembled:  
dog's face    pink claws    crushed feet    stalked eyes  
lie still and the beasts will not see you: go to sleep  
                 and the green ants will cover you up  
                 if the brown leaves bury your face it is safe

17

Remember the yellow robes and the kneeling?  
a long-haired god of kindness gave you a handkerchief,  
and left you to the shackles  
it always starts with this. the torn contract  
the soft spots on the fruit  
did you refuse the bitter tea, the butter with hairs in it?  
or balk at kissing horned feet?  
outside it is cold,  
and those who chant the best are closest to the fire.

now all the straws but one have rotted: there is slime on your clothes

the rugs are hiding holes in the floor  
every thread you spin is eaten from your wheel:  
the butterflies need it more, we were told

there is no gold left in the dirt  
wine is seeping out the windows  
the rice is crawling away

cast your lines over the river: they will spool out forever  
there are no trout to come back  
hang the tin cans at the window  
no wind will move them

The ship's sails are empty, the letter reads,  
there is no way to leave.

18

You and I must learn to ignore this world.  
Cut the ivy from your body, pull its sticky feet from your skin.  
This stone in the stream, unmoved.

the mushrooms will only speak to one another:  
they whisper about dark and damp  
is this a thing to regret missing?  
Say to yourself, no, until you believe it.

The slow bricking, the glacier climbing over the tree:  
if you sing slowly, the crickets will learn your song:  
Scallop-moons, shine white in your shells  
bowl of water, you need nothing added  
ukelele that sings from its body

Rowboat on water, sky in all directions  
the oars that can walk over waves

Let's stretch our arms and row away  
break the rope and shelve the stings  
no force can hold our wings

Phoenix fed me figs  
until I was no longer starved  
I slipped the pits in my pockets

Step from stone to  
stone            in the soft river

little leaf  
in the wind,  
          Hello

21

the ways are myriad and many  
of us were great fish of the ocean  
that will whisper secrets water  
cannot consider footprints on the white tile white tile  
with sunlight filling in lines on the sand  
fish fish fish scales of wax on the candles  
can only move down the path is the only way  
you can look forward but your head turns  
around a single point treading water turning sun  
and at the end of the circuit  
is something new turn turn turn  
until the light grows out of itself

Come, O reader, walk beside me:  
there are many potholes on the road to Hell.  
Slip on this vest of wool and honey  
and I will tell you how to make it.  
I could sing to you the battles of a Danish king  
or names of the fifty states, if you will learn the tune.  
Sit by the lamb, sit under the low roofs!  
Turn this orange over in your hands.

Come on: there is a population  
of prophets, doublets and trees, who love to talk.

You will recognize the path: it is made of women,  
gravestones and moons.

23

The chorus sings:  
*Hold your eyes to the page!*  
*Move            here, to            here*

*there is a thin line, the groove of recognition*  
*tra: la la                            ends with: amen*

Is this what you want?  
There is always a space that cannot be predicted  
It is time to build a choice.

Apple tree, telephone! The dog that looks like a sheep: hold out your hand to him.  
Language of salt, song of butter:  
Snowflakes do not wait in line, are not numbered:  
The octopus chooses his form:  
Fold into an origami flower, bird, forest!

Would you be content to see the city from its carnivorous walkways?  
Step away to see the forests the fields  
Move your hands and imagine a lover lying in bed:  
there are no wrong choices.

I kiss Phoenix on her hard beak  
I did not know how else  
to love my champion

Do you wake up limb on limb like icing? The sweetness from entwining, the heart-shaped eggs. You are a lover, dear reader. The tree that loved the sky so much he turned himself blue. The berry that became silk. Wave that throws itself at the sand, kissing the buried clams.

I am in love with a man. I am in love like being caught in a rainstorm, or seeing your own skin under the moonlight. It is nice, love, building a chicken soup layer by layer, golden fat and carrots. Pour me out with your hands, love. Reader, come with me; the way is lined in linens. Let's listen to the echoes between bodies.

39

Place your body inside another: be a pancreas. We are always inner, hugging: cog cannot turn without its spring. Stretch your body and watch the storm grow miles away. Feel the resistance: cozy, whole: the core is pushing out. Stand on others to see far, the bubble on bubble climbing from ocean. You are structure, becoming thing.

Are you a sleeve sewn to torso, sewn to collar? Pattern, thread. Folding is planes wanting to be close. Membrane, keep us close.

Are you cake bubble, soda dissolved in water;

4

or mantle layer, hugged, hugging?

25

Phoenix fills the mountain with her chicks  
like fireflies and stars  
I was not allowed to stay

Sharks! They do not love everybody!  
An octopus will eat any other octopus it encounters,  
unless it wants to mate.

And how good is a steak?  
There is a math for this: a crane has the longest legs,  
but the wings are more lovely: keep those  
in glass jars, or stitch them into quilts.

The man in the cloak has trinkets, and knives,  
the hen carries her eggs like a bribe.

Moonlight asks for nothing, it gives what it wants.  
Air is free, and where will you stand to breathe?

What do you want?

hands  
teeth  
glue  
rocketships  
mountaintops  
the day can be stretched like taffy  
36

puppy  
bowls  
bubbles  
wild grass  
blank stretches of sand  
to watch your being glow like plankton

We are a party of imperfect souls.  
We have gin in our veins and sweat on our skin!

This is only an imitation of the ocean; this is not the real desert.  
We made them better for ourselves, full of danceclubs.

If you are happy here, clap your hands!

Be brave and stay in the light because we are honest  
and we are here: moles, wrinkles, lies, jealousies,  
tell them all! Build monuments to them!

Stay if you can see: this is a cracked egg,  
but damn! God loves an honest omelette!

Phoenix left me in the valley  
with nothing but my skin  
She told me, this is how we fly

We are not only trajectory:  
we are an aluminum cigar  
rolled on the thigh of God!

We are speaking the language of obedience  
the rolling ball that loves to roll  
we brought the coin to the plastic-funneled gravity well;  
the movement was forged by something else

We are a juggernaut!

The grasses tremble under our feet  
because we are following orders written  
in the stars and hairs of the world  
43

the wind wraps itself in our sails  
and carries us to its home

weight is not ours, it is a hand that holds  
us close

if you sit silent and still you can feel the  
movement  
a heart pumping us through veins  
20

Watch the row of seconds: like a line of baby quail!  
they can run as soon as they have hatched

the world is full of invisible batons  
carried out of throat and into ear  
scents carried on the wings of bees  
the tiny darling flashes from neurons to fingertips

one giant trampoline that goes in all directions!

the geese eating marshmallows are innocent  
when your lawn lies between the poles

iron filings and falling water and geese:  
31

let's run! There is no such thing as still  
and our wings want the sun all year  
round  
33

Roll up your sleeves, the quivering  
hours must be calmed into  
stillness, ice cubes in their mold.

Pour all your gold out as  
track through the mountains,  
this is smooth, but it's meant to be scratched.

Can you tread the new trails?  
Can you stretch out a line that is perfectly straight?

This flea circus is real:  
teach them to walk tightropes,  
to drink tea, to take tiny bows.

Black specks moving like  
notes on a score: yes!

11

Remember the dangers of high grass,  
say thanks to covered wagons.

Do not forget that truth can also be a real  
thing:  
that a cooked egg cannot be unwound.

31

sing a song of loneliness, the rising of the sun  
deer in the ocean, whales in the wood

the flailings are far away: hoof and hand  
and dirt are days behind you

the water is thick as honey and there is no more forward  
the empty space in sky where the moon should be:  
    plucks at your eyes and mouth

ask for the city of lace  
and light:  
put the silk scarves over  
your eyes  
and the gravel will lift  
you up

do not look back, do not  
look up  
this earthy elevator has  
no counter-weight

take a step when the  
moving stops:  
38

use the coracle when  
there is nothing else  
make cracks in the cliffs  
with your fingers  
when you push against  
the rocks,  
they stand still for your  
feet

roll the boulders from  
the path,  
and place yourself at the  
peak  
11

when the wind steals  
your teeth,  
and the waves wear at  
your skin,  
black eyes, drained  
veins

try the warmth of the  
volcanos:  
bubbling salt and the  
blind red tubes  
in the dark, the coral  
will kiss you a thousand  
years  
6

Sacrifice is sufficient but not desirable: return the ring to the store and you will lose its finger

Watch this gold transform into an arm!

See my silver become the sound of a foot tapping!

Where do the doves go? The woman? Will you keep the smoke you traded them for?

trade sugar for blood.....transaction cost

plus this effort

plus this tax

to every entry

36

About a man:

his nose black under the ice shell  
blood turned to crystals in his limbs  
and the granite cliffs ripping at fabric and flesh  
loosed featherdown in the snow

Oh, mountaintop, what pleasure you take in the scratchings!

Mr. Weathers left alone and he still walked home

The base of this mountain is made of bodies:  
will you climb over the frozen legs  
or will you heap your sled and  
pull their weight to the valley?

Or will you go with Mr. Weathers,  
pushing higher in the cold mud?

I never saw Phoenix again  
I can make the flowers flare  
the springs are sweeter

Open the gate with your own hands!  
You may carry the wreaths that are waiting for you,  
that are yours.

Here, everything else falls away:  
the evils, the little pains  
no sand, no salt, no little specks  
to rub the scrapes

The tiny droplets everywhere in the air  
are cold and soothing

The driveway and the water balloons hanging in the air like lanterns. The golden flaky  
promise spinning gently above the floor. Fresh plate of hors d'ouvres. Rows and rows of  
pink, uncorked bottles!

Here, we are all filled to the top, with hot gravy and white tangled root balls

I will go with the mud-caked woman, who dug for reeds at the riverbank, whose  
body contains me, and we catch sunfish, floured and panfried like they've always  
been, and when the sun is hot, we leave the bank for the bar, a margarita with the  
man who could see my height from the size of my head, also a glass of wine with  
all of our mothers doing a conga line down the dusky street, all of our fathers  
hammering nails in the infinite treehouse, all of the rice forever falling from the  
sky and the grasps of all the hands over our hands!

your arms contain  
shoals,  
soft around me  
40

if you cut your hair,  
where will my fingers  
swim?

41

soft hill of your abdomen  
the valley of your throat:  
anyplace is paradise  
42

lover, there is no body  
in these pages  
I seek your skin

We write the lists and  
post them by the pool

To understand the reason behind those red letters,  
that is a curse

We wish for them to listen: turn signals! children! thin walls and the wisdom in leaving  
one cookie on the platter!

When the crickets chirp, it means the water is too deep.  
When the tree splits, it means that the sky is spitting bolts.  
When the ground sobs, it means that the sand is hungry.  
Now we will recognize these.

We put each footstep in the best place  
to show the best trail.

44

The language of small notes:  
the singing bird who tells the forest  
to leave the seeds for him

The lion is honest, he takes his food at a run.

I can hear the rain on the roof,  
I still do not want your umbrella.

Can subtraction be stopped once it is started?  
If I choose to ride a bicycle, will you ride one too?

45

Here is the  
heart of the  
frog: Liberty!

Gesundheit, gazebo!  
Sing, cellar door!  
So long, ladies: the frogs are trilling to me.  
I'll meet you in the sunset marshes  
spreading feathered arms like thrushes.

This is how I am real:  
bundle of blood, wearing socks  
meatloaf for dinner

I am sitting on a blue chair  
typing these words

It is poem o'clock because we are on this page  
that is all I have to say about that

VITA

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