

WOOL AND WATER

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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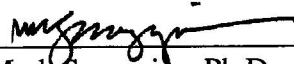
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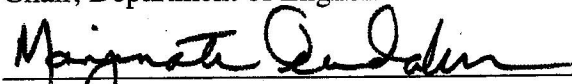
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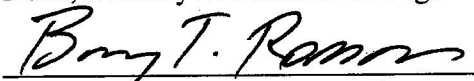
  
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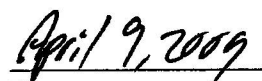
  
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## ABSTRACT

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*Wool and Water* is a creative work of 36 poems. This collection examines the relationship between the silent and vocal, between the pastoral and urban. By reconfiguring and retelling the fairy tales and nursery rhymes, this collection seeks to challenge the status quo through trickster-like diction. Themes that are prevalent include: alienation, nourishment, anonymity, and the female body. From the concrete to the lyric, *Wool and Water* relies upon the process of questioning patriarchal guises. These poems intersect in order to rectify the past and make amends with the present. The female voices that drive these poems are multi-generational.

**For Kathleen D. Horowitz,**  
maker of just worlds.

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## **Paring Fruit**

I touch your hands        so that I understand.

    The grapefruit is pale today.

                  Fuji, Gala, Pink Lady. Ruby-eyed. Sparrow-throated.

I wear second hand jackets that smell of other women.

                  What isn't there to know, to touch?

                  Adam's apple, paint brush. Mouth to neck. The lake.

                  I was a thimble, the color gray.

## **A Woman Walking in a Painting Late at Night**

A woman

walking

in a painting

late at night

reaches

for a

cherry

blossom.

If she's

careful

maybe she

can make it

on one

high heel

taped

together.

### **Advice to a Reader**

If you enter the sea by parting  
the glass beads  
make sure you avoid  
the house with the suspicious  
onion patch  
and the lifeguard  
who examines your legs  
with longing.

If you dive head first  
make sure the sea  
is a well-spun  
glassy octave, a feather  
to glean, to tease.

If you run into trouble  
gather the bougainvilleas.

## **Eating Oranges**

In Kindergarten  
we learn what women wear:

musty see-through negligee,  
torn nylon stockings.

During nap time  
we lie awake,

waiting for the teacher  
to choose us.

I watch the privileged rise,  
stretching from their sleep

like violets. I wait for her  
to pick me. *Will she pick me?*

Sometimes we eat oranges.  
We peel a part

their drenched skin.  
What we keep

we tell to the eucalyptus:  
we won't wear stockings, not yet.

### **Frayed at the Edges**

I write this poem because of the dread.  
Because you severed all ties to me,

slashed out “best” from friend  
and “friend” from “nest.”

I thought that shadows drank from collarbones,  
that blood could fill six basins.

I’ve watched ghosts drink from a cloak I set out as water.  
I let the soap curl atop my shoulders.

I curl these fingers to understand.  
I open and close my hands.

### **Laughter like Halloween**

I have a witch crackly  
laugh like winter trees.  
Like Halloween. A  
fabulously wicked Great  
Aunt Winnie laugh, a  
laughter like candy corn,  
spilling funny like acorns.

Cats scatter when they hear me.

### **Amelia the Awful**

The girl who was born with a jewelry box for a mouth  
had a dress and teeth that opened like a shark.

If at one o'clock her jaw got stuck  
she could usually unlock it by two thirty.

Look how she swallows rings, whole pearls like gum.  
Look how she presses him, leaving bruises like mood stone.

His glasses and his gentle phrases.  
Even the sea had cleavage.

## **Cochlea**

The inner ear, we learn,  
is made up of three chambers.  
The Cochlea is a snail at work,

a tough working snail buried in rooms.  
Mine was asleep, in hibernation for 26 years  
until an audiologist tapped her awake.

She yawned in her slippery cave,  
miserable at being woken.  
We stand behind curtains waiting

for sound, decibel, for syllable.  
This one was a green ribbon,  
a song I held on my tongue.



### **Natasha's Rhyme**

Natasha, Natasha,  
how does your  
garden grow?

*With silver hooks,  
with diving bells,  
all in a tidy row.*

**I Think My Heart is a Poinsettia**

I think my heart is a Poinsettia  
except no one knows except me.

Is it possible to summon a dying stem?

How far is January?

### **Grandfather Takes Me to War Eagle's Grave**

Before we reach the top  
he tells me about the brides  
a white settler kept,  
how pleasant War Eagle was  
to give his two daughters away.

I have seen women who wear blouses  
the color of namesakes, whose bodies  
could be husks of corn, dirty pretty  
husks of lace. I want to ask for their names  
but grandfather and War Eagle turn

their backs to me. I am left to speak  
to stone, to taste the dust that shrouds me.

### **This Poem**

This poem is an elevator holding its breath.  
Is no girl scout but knows how to roast marshmallows.

She is not the kind of girl who flips her hair in other girls' faces.  
It is hard for her to keep secrets.

She would feel around under doors, and smell the silky dirt of corn.  
She would lick the shores of Lake Michigan.

This poem is a cheerleader. She is a tent of sequins.  
This poem has been drugged, felt up and lied to.

When she was young she worshipped the earth, the sea,  
and then knelt down to feel the brown eye drop inside of her.

She is the shucked leaves of corn, a tree loosened in winter.  
When she was good she was lousy, a disorganized art teacher.

Sometimes she dreams of men who dress as foxes,  
who float her chintzy high heels up rivers.

In these dreams the men refuse to remove their masks  
and the women can run much faster.

## **Hi Billy**

My bully was a soup  
plaited kid named Billy.  
He would ask me  
if I fondled  
the ears  
of mannequins.

I would ask for his name.

Tell me, Billy,  
about the logic  
of curiosity and  
closure.

Tell me Billy,  
about your father.

**Lillie Vanessa My Judy My Madness**

Lillie Vanessa My Judy My Madness  
What did they do to your Salvador Dali?  
Did they supply you with a windbreaker?  
Was there a trolley?

Lillie Vanessa October My London  
How did that garden grow?  
Did they keep you in a dark closet?  
Was there a microphone?

**Seven**

The other day my mother mentioned  
the seven surgeries.

and I thought of them  
as my seven birthdays,

each one an opening that wouldn't budge,  
each one a melted cake.

### **The Girl Scout Ghost of the Dearly Departed**

haunts the refurbished drive-thru  
theater with vengeance.

Her flashlight shines over the heads  
of the guilty. Has an affinity  
for kittens and Avon cosmetics.



### **Father and I Walk on Either Side of the Railroad Tracks**

Father and I walk on either side of the railroad tracks,  
the test of iron weighing us. "Walk over here," he tells me.

"This side is easier." His side is mowed over, tempered  
by the blades of farmers. My side is dotted with dandelions.

Once I found a rabbit's tail. I wanted to keep it but it felt wrong  
inside my pocket. I let it fall from my fingers. It was softer

than a cobweb. At night I dream of rabbits playing dead.  
I dream of uncle's stale breath. I was a velvet couch, a mouth

without a box. "Walk over here," he tells me. "You were only  
imagining." I would cross to his side but I don't mind the thistles

and tumbleweeds, the dandelions I pluck for good dreams.  
At night I am a rabbit, stealing back my fur, my feet.

## **The Crossing**

Oh Virginia,  
what thoughts  
I have been

having.

I imagine you  
downstairs  
your hair

a tangle  
of beauty.

Not even  
the noose  
would do,

would it?

If I could  
summon

you, I would.

Just to ask

your slate  
blue eyes--

Which stones  
were they?

## **The Waltz**

How do you teach your limbs  
after the game of lust?

How do you touch a pear  
after you relearn air?

How do you color marriage?  
How do you number grass?

### **Sylvia Street**

One day she cut through the chicken wire. She said she'd never tear her dress again. But for twenty years she stood outside, transfixed, twisting a washcloth in her hands.

## **On Power**

Once I tried to choke my father.

As I wrapped my hand around his  
loose neck my fingers grew  
feathery as a snake's.

He laughed because I did not press hard.

"I am choking you,"  
I explained calmly,

"For the time you choked me."

I thought of the duck ponds  
he took me to,  
of the coloring  
books and visits to the zoo.

It is important to mention these  
because they will ask me if I remember them.  
They will ask if he held my hand

while looking at the walruses.

*Yes, Father*, I would say  
when he asked if I slept well.

*Yes Father*, I would say, squeezing my doll.

### **They Travel in Packs**

Yesterday  
I noticed  
a teenager,

a strap of dog  
collar around  
her neck.

Today I saw  
the same  
girl running,

this time  
a white ribbon.

Her boyfriend  
stared vacantly  
from a bench  
nearby.

He held a balloon  
that read HAPPY  
BIRTHDAY.

### **Physical Education and the Problem of the Psyche**

I was once a hole that looped around the baseball field.  
You were a swing set.

You didn't know the effects of telekinesis.  
There is no safety net for dodge ball.

### **The Catwalk**

There was once this girl who had the largest earrings in the history of Soho.

She lived her whole life inside a straw.  
She clung to ironing boards and seesaws.  
She shampooed her hip on occasion.

When she came she really came small.



## **Snow White**

She lay as sweetly  
as a corsage,  
like a window display  
at Macy's.

You let her stay  
and keep house.

You did not  
put cigarettes  
out on her blouse.

If she was monstrous,  
if you desired her,

would you have  
felt the same?

## **Thumbelina**

When I was a child  
not even the owls  
would eat me. So

I waited until my  
hair was threaded  
to gold, my lips as

stained as beets.  
Now the squirrels  
and possums are kin

and the foxes are  
devilish as licorice.  
I used to think

I was impossible.  
Now look at me—  
forever floating,

clinging to a dandelion,

to the torn wing of  
a dragonfly, the reedy

wrist of a prince.

### **She had some Poems**

She had some poems that danced in kitchens.  
Slender as horses, they could have swallowed her whole.  
Some of them got into bike wrecks.  
Others chucked cigarettes out the back window.  
They danced and spat in their birthday dresses  
and lost their virginity in August.

She had some poems she kissed with her eyes open.

### **Memo of the Ill-Equipped**

I was a cluster of mermaids, you were a ruby.  
You were a timothy, I was a timmy.  
Once you walk the tightrope you can never go back.  
Back to Nova Scotia, back to rugby.

### **In a Coffee Shop on a Friday Afternoon**

A couple sitting next to me discusses food.  
*What do you like? What day is it?*

We sip at apple cider. *I cook for my daughter.*  
*Steak, salmon. Roast ham. Lobsters.*

How do you measure days? A man traces  
the characters in his book with a pencil.

Two women brush against each other.  
A woman in a gray sweater folds her arms

and smiles. It is February. *How do you plan*  
*to spend your Valentine's Day?* They play

Dean Martin over the loud speakers. I used  
to spend my whole life inside a library.

Now I just clean smudges from mirrors.

### **Deer Rite**

What was once velvet  
is now sharpened

for blood,  
for play.

I didn't know  
what we could touch

until I touched grain.

## **Eat Me**

Lady's Mantle, Skull Cap  
Colt's Foot, Witch Hazel  
Devil's Claw, Meadow Sweet  
Lady's Bed Straw, Savory.

## Vermilion

The roses

you gave me

have wilted.

*They're still red,*

you say. *Not*

*dead yet.*

Their heads hang

shamefully

like torn curtains.

I open their lips.

I fold their

soft heads.

I touch their red

thorns to know

they are still

vermilion.



## **Leche**

When you kiss me it is brown and easy.  
This is rarer than beets.

When you hint at carousels and breadsticks  
I am leche to your coyote.

## **Silo**

I touch your hands  
to know the knotted  
root of your ankles.

To feel the rush  
of black lace,  
the grain we've  
saved for later.

### **Summer Solo**

They sprayed for snails today and I watched them go like candles.  
I watched my whole life outline the boxy steel of my mailbox  
I watched it all blur into one orange song.

I watched for you but you didn't show.  
I didn't know Baby Sue Candy Lawn.  
When my dogs finally fall asleep I am settled.

## **The Bridge**

They made  
a bridge,

my dear.

Out of  
fox tears

and sticks.

To  
remember  
everything

they  
wanted  
to

remember

and

everything

they wanted  
to forget.