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Catch a Fire Catch Afire: An Understanding of Distance and Its Meaning

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I took a step and measured the distance between my created space and yours. I took that number and multiplied it into the thousands. "This is nothing." I whispered into the open air. And you smiled.

There are moments when time and space mean nothing. I can reach out across a clear and cool night and feel your hand, feel a pulse as it moves from your veins into mine, creating easy and warm vibrations. It is a rhythm I carry, a beat my days dance to.

Here in this space I create repetitions and meanings. On this white page they shift and turn, stir and shake into understandings on distance, on newness. On this page I recreate images of closeness to a time and a place that felt like home. Here on this space, this empty page, I hold tight...

-Nobody Loves You More-

I can start up and
Settle down at the
Snap of those rough fingers
You use so threateningly.

Dear one, there is little
To understand here
If you are going to ride
This wave of hate and violence
Positioned hatefully against
My light.

There is a rainbow of
Doubt and expectation
Sorrow and protection
I see you through

And even amid the days of war
You reach out strongly to remind me that
Distance and blood can never
Make this pretty wrong
Into a lonely right.

-Dear Rumi-

I read Rumi and
Remember the buzz it made
In the dampened air of my room

Even the snatches I
Picked up quickly
At the store
Caused static clicks
At my fingers

And I shivered unafraid.

A friend at the perfect moment,
I realized the world could
Be my creation, my craft.

-In Step-

autumn, gold and crowning-
we walk and
for you, with the glitter
on the horizon, it is the
crunch of the leaves
(their deaths, I think
must be slow)
Yet I feel the chill of
the pavement and the
weight of a doubt.
So we walk
(on and on is a nowhere
place) to the rhythm
of a gilded day
with the yellow falling on our
shoulders and
sliding from
our frames
into pools
for my foot
to hit
when the
autumn is full and
I am
Walking.

On and on is a
Nowhere place.

-Indian Giver-

The story of a childhood
How my mother chided me time and again

Never give what you can't take back
Never give what you can't take back

And I was haunted
That what could be one moment
Might become a thousand
And I paid price after price
For their sneaking violations.

To give and to take
Indian Giver
You know best

Because I can feel the
Pulse and the heat of his
Fingertips at my skin,
Wet,
And will wonder to this day,

What was there to give
If it was nothing I would take back?

-Ill-Fit-

The peaches I ate were
Soft and rotting
In my mouth and
The mush and meal
Made my stomach turn with
My head as I moved to look at you.

This is a morning
Like any morning
But with the ice on the windows
And the howl at the door
I am starting to believe that the
Sum of you and I has become exactly equal to
Nothing.

-Pomegranate Tree-

I sit alone at the kitchen table
Covered in his old clothes
Eating a pomegranate
And cursing every seed of it
A damned mess.

(He loved the
running juice
and the sweet dripping bitterness
on my mother's
china white plates.)

I remember the time your
Anger was riper than
The browning fruit in
My hands and I fed
Him seed by seed
A small treasure
In the fired air you created.

You would never love
As he loved.

-Love, Sara-

It haunts (tedious day!)
Thrills then excites
A witness by a glimpse
To perfect proof bestowing
Understanding.

They are, simply,
Two words at the end
Of her gentle, open (beautiful)
Admission taking
Our certainty into
Dove-white hands and

Shattering it.

We break and turn
Curl and burn
In our anger and
Defense only to
Weave our remains
In the smallest moment of
Closeness and hope and

Lasting until -

-Secret Energy-

The moment I
Realized that
I could miss you,
 Your kind tone
 And sweet smell,
I reached out my palms
Eager to stop
A sudden and nearly
Painful wave of
All-knowing that was
Driving at me.

And it broke the windows instead.

An easy thing?
To miss a body
Miss a soul.

-The Turn-

My hand, white upon yours,
 Can draw these curtains
 (No second guess)
 To block out the world
 And block out the light.
 (The smallest of voices goes silent inside)
 and you and I
 will hold on the night
 where we love and become
 dark creatures
 misshapen and beautifully incomplete
 and I murmur and protest
 into an ever widening vacuum
 at the ceiling
 with her words at my ear and
 that silence inside.

I look at this pale hand
 In the shock of day
 In the wonder of

Who are these dark creatures,
 Owners of these hands,
 White and white and scarred?

White and white and scarred.
 White and white and scared.

Among all we have cast down
 I can see us,
 Dark creatures,
 And we're spinning
 Circles in the waste of
 Our unforeseen downfall
 Only to

Catch a fire, catch afire
 Catch a fire, catch afire
 Catch a fire

-Catch the Fury-

Bees bees bees.
 The bees' knees-
 A phrase I never understood.
 It always made me laugh,
 Always made me think of you.
 And here, now, I stand-
 With the bees.
 They are my worries, my burdens,
 The words I never said to you,
 Everything you asked and everything I withheld.

They start on my arm and cover me, like the landmasses of the world cover a globe,
 thick and packed in places,
 empty and vast in others.
 I stand here, holding them close. They do not strike; they do not anger.
 I feel nothing and I am not afraid.
 They are the differences that have divided us, calmly in peace and mightily in war.
 All that has broken our stillness
 Sits here on the plains of my body,
 Moving and working,
 A living, breathing blanket of warmth and safety.
 And I feel nothing and I am not afraid.
 I let them stay;
 Here we are one.

There is no memory of when they arrived for I have stood holding them this way
 Long
 Long
 Long

And they keep me from you, dearest,
 Wrapped in a shroud, thin and translucent, holding you at bay.
 You fear the bees.
 They strike and they anger. And you hurt.
 You do not pull them around you,
 You do not stand to welcome them.
 You are no home.

And yet for us, to me, they are everything:
 Every word I have said, whispered, promised, prayed, lied-
 Is a sting-
 A swelling, a reddening
 Over the gentle folds of your soft form.

They are your words,
These masses, your
Whispers,
Promises
And prayers-

 Designing the pale and painless markings across my open valleys.

They are the static buzz over our phone line

 When you beg for their release-

 The busy hostages of our differences, of our anger, of our impatience.

But I will not, cannot release them-

 These mistakes I have made,

 The ones I am making,

 The ones I will make.

For I feel nothing and I am not afraid.

The bees are what divide us, calmly in peace, mightily in war.

-facing avoidance-

light breeze
one late september day
midmorning.
i wait for you, lose track of time
sitting on the church steps.
all night and early morning hours
you flash across my mind.
and me-
dropping books
cutting ankles
spilling coffee,
my hands less graced.
also distracted-
allowing you to stain with
ink; pale attempts at tying you
down to something they can
shove into words
choke a meaning from
nail to a page
stopping underhanded escapes.

you arrive
and all this scatters.
i take your kiss
and reach out to catch
what fled.

the day moves on.

*I sit alone. I am alone.
 I sit in peace
 But there is no peace.
 There are words, ones you have said-
 The first in anger-
 That have remained with me
 And now-*

*This is what I have remembered, and carried with me, over
 the miles and distances put between us by time...
 These very words are what I have etched onto the walls of
 my memory
 As I have tried to find my voice...
 Will you help me find my voice...
 This is what I have left to give you...*

A Glimpse

The now bare walls of my room
 -a place I have made sacred and formed to the worship of
 you-
 Have become this tight space
 And the snow outside makes the only remark on our
 solitary haven.

In this silence and warmth-
 Your back becomes an altar at which I
 celebrate,
 Your stomach an apse in which I yearn to
 raise my voice-
 -Raise it in praise of the glory that is
 your marble-white skin-
 Your legs an aisle I walk to salvation.

Yet here my words to you will be few-
 Only a prayer beside your passive form-
 Before I offer sacrifice
 To the church of your body and the religion
 of your soul.

*And so you see, dearest, parted lover,
 I cannot tell you I am voiceless
 For my words still echo along the walls
 Of this, my church.*

-Blink-

I walk out silently to the sunset rooftop.
 I am barefoot, open and embracing
 This cool, rising night.

Stepping forward, toes to the edge,
 I am ready to fly.
 My thoughts are only on you.

I wait for the right breeze
 To tuck itself under my arms and
 -Oh weightless moment!-

It arrives
 Breathless as if in a hurry to reach me
 And I am carried away-
 Away from the city I know,
 An oasis we shared,
 To a dirty, destructed desert-
 Emptied of love
 Voided of hope
 Stripped of peace.

My dearest brother,
 How can I look upon you
 In this raped city,
 Among these hollowed eyes?

Here in my small space
 I am reaching out to you
 And I can almost
 touch your hand.

But as I stretch to graze your browned fingers
 I am caught by a dry gust of burning air

That pulls, pulls, pulls me away
 Back to this rooftop
 -Now hardened in ice, slick with rain.

Soon I will leave this place
 And my very bones are clinging to
 Its walls, its streets.

And the places we forgot

The heathen vow
To laugh and yell and talk
Like children of
Faraway parents.

For how can I cross that
 Blue, blue ocean
Live in our brick house,
Sing those songs,
And leave you in that hated place?

What is home
-Now-
Without you?

-War-

FEAR DISTANCE ABSENCE DEATH

Foreign and Unknown

They are thrown at me, hurled with complacent shrugs and beaten fists of anger.

I am just a child, understand? And these are empty threats of violence.

You cannot force this worry on me-

My back is young, my skin is tight.

And I am master here.

FEAR DISTANCE ABSENCE DEATH

Foreign and Unknown

I take each.

Strike it. Shake it. Bend it.

I will have an answer, you see.

This mystery will not tease or taunt
 My peaceful prayer,
 My hopeful sleep.

I am a child of understanding

This empty echo of parting words, tear-stained embraces
 Will not repeat, repeat, repeat.

I am master here.

FEARDISTANCEABSENCEDEATH

My hands are hands of power.

And I will write your story:
 They will not rub your spirit-
 They will not rip your soul.

For I am master here.

Feardistanceabsencedeath

Dearest Brother,
These are merely markings, petty warnings
Only scrawled in the sands of time.

For they will never hold you.
I will always hold you.

And I am master here.

Against any delicate word
 -A small and fragile vessel-
 We might send across this gulf-

Covered in caution.

-Anniversary-

The natural fall of your mouth
 Lands in a smile.
 And I always mistake it for such
 In the worst moments,
 Taking headlong dives into the pitch dark ocean
 Of your quiet anger.

Years later I will watch you
 At the end of one long dinner table
 And mis-
 Understand
 Take
 Conceive
 A landing of your lips.
 And as always
 -As at this moment-
 I will raise my face to a clear open sky
 -Palms up, mouth open, eyes closed-
 And take

A chance.

-Rainbow-

the boy who loved blackbirds
the boy who loved batman
the boys who loved themselves so eagerly and
completely they left no
love for any one else
the boy who remembers each bite
and the boy who rapped
west coast style

the boy who came and went
the boy who was never alone
the boy whose anger unleashed
his tongue and his fire
the boy who believed his hands could make love
the boy who only
inhaled his love
and the boy who thinks
he's the elephant man.

the boy whose smile doesn't
fool me
the boys who turned their backs on God
and the boy who came from the shadows
of my life
to start a revolution.

-The Mix-Up-

they're taking and shipping and
killing our youth away.

and these are words
I mustn't say
Although if you
Were to excavate
My heart
You would find this
Golden truth:

I didn't love
And hate you
So that they
Could take and
Ship and kill
You for an
Ingratitude
So worldly
And inhumane.

-The Brother in Vietnam-

The Brother in Vietnam
Tells me
That it will not end here.

Pace yourself
He has much farther
To walk on a
Hot, broken glass highway.

The Brother in Vietnam
Tells me, movingly,
Of detachment

That if we had ever
Truly felt a single
Thing on our small,
Small lives

Than this place and
This time of war
Would never have
Been born.

The Brother in Vietnam
Tells me that this is not
My story but the
Story of a boy who held my
Hand and crossed the street.

-Reality TV-

I heard a young man
On the TV say
Definitively
That, "Everyone has a price."

And I felt he had presumed too much.

Had the reality of life
Taught him this?
Or the reality of the consequences
Of his decisions
In regard to
The meager unhope
Of a high school dropout forced
In his own way to the
Production of gay porn?

The reality of my life revealed
That I would never need to defend
Myself with a price.

-Math Major-

I did the
Math in a quiet
Corner of
My life
And have
Settled that
The number of
Days since you
Have left me
Has far exceeded
The number of days
Since you armed
Yourself and
Fought a war I hated.

Hated because I
Took apart the words
And the promises,
Shook clean your beliefs
And your values

And I found that
Even though there
Was a string tied from
Them to the heavens
(and a truth yet
covered in dust)
you were still a thousand miles away
barefoot and bare-chested
running toward a fire on fire
and humanity at the edge of its ruin.

-Sibling Rivalry-

I talk of war
As an easy thing now.

I talk of you
As a lonely man now.

Our phone calls
Are long and undue.
You talk from far away.

And I talk from far away
 Dismissing your war
 And forgetting your strain
 As they stretch and stretch and stretch you.

But when we are
The absolute farthest
Away and I
Talk of you

I imply a connection
And breath in a meaning
Making you into something
Unreal, something you have
Never been
To me.

But in the middle of a war
And at the end point of our distance
You, as a person, begin to make sense.

-The First Time is Never the First Time-

I grit my teeth at night.

Maybe I am thinking of
Skin on skin

The planning and
The improvisation
Creating and maintaining
A beautiful, I am told,
Dream that haunts like a sweet melody.

Or maybe I am thinking
That we are ruins of
The once splendid kingdom
Of God.

-Story World-

A body catch a body
Cough
Shuffle step
Tell me a story of a girl
Once new

A storm window romance
And your knife cut
Profile strikes like a
Cop at the door

You shine the spoons
Close all the drawers
And your love like a
Fluorescent lamp in
The damp summer kitchen

My head is heavy
At the thought
Of a life
On a boat
Lost at sea

And your lightning
Strike profile
Like a wolf
At the door

You carried your love
As an easy and ready
Something to barter with.

-Cityscape-

I arch my back
And hear the pulse steady beat
Of the city.
You move strangely
In the dark
 Shape unfamiliar
 Touch undefined
For a week my skin is
Brittle and hard
From walking days in the
Noise and the crowds
And the wanting.

No matter where you go
There is wanting.

-The Baby-

Little girl,

 You are

 Playing grown-up games

 Making love to a blank mirror

 Praying those bedtime stories

 To a shot-put God

 Lost, to you,

 In divisions of religions.

You are

 Pretending tea party

 With the wall

 A make-believe woman

 In your color fantasy world

 Made up and dolled up

 With your fairytale courage

 You are

Mixing your daydreams and strip dancing your lullabies

Until you are nothing

In these reflections on a lonely life.

-Morning A.M.-

The sound of
A cry from inside
Then the thrill of a discovery

You reach over
Me to silence the alarm
And in the quiet we have uncovered

Pretty prayers wrapped
In colored beads
Yellow mornings
Running towards day
And a silk string of

Years slipping through our fingers.

-Senses-

While softer you spoke-

There were bells breaking silence in your voice.
And the damage seemed to last forever.

While softer you drew near-

Your soap and my linen rose like incense at an altar.
And the smell lingered as within the arching apse of my ceiling all night.

While softer you slept-

I watched a gentle rise, a steady fall.
That mimicked the breath of a child
Still new, talked old and died young.

While softer you stirred-

A hand meets a hand, small introduction.
To the wonder of our world at the threshold of a fragile peace.

While softer you kiss-

Oranges and peppermint, companion the birthing
Of a love, raw and aging.

-Ben Di Rado-

Walking home tonight the air is so
Clean and precise I might cut it
 Into halves, quarters, eighths
To slip into my pockets.
Small pieces of clarity. Crisp and fresh.

I walk and hear only the snow
Arguing against my shoes or
The wind gentle around a corner.
 It is me and this night.
And the world, the earth, the ground
 Takes one peaceful breath with me
And lets it out,
 White and pure,
Into the night.

-April-

The only spring to see-
A dull morning sky
Leaking its heavy hues
Into early afternoon
When the sun peeks
Out, timid and shy-
A lonely little stranger.

-November Rain-

Rain and wind throughout my day
I walk for hours.

I write you poems,
etching them on napkins in cafes,
make asides in notebooks;
little ballerinas dancing on all that paper.

I walk and see nothing.
Just the dimness of my room,
your face in pale light
among the muted pinks and yellows
making the air stand heavy.

And this weather curls around me
tight-fisted and cold.
I bring my hands together hoping for a spark
and feel
only the warmth,
hanging and lazy,
at the small of your young back.

...Ieri, Oggi, Domani...

-Morning-

I drag my hand across the morning sky,
Turning all the colors into one shade.
With that same hand I turn to wake you
And scatter reds and yellows across
Our tousled bed. You open weary eyes
To see a painter's palate, wild and strange.

You take a moment. This new world is strange.
I have painted our room with the sky
And every sparkling color marches toward your eyes
That open to this early beauty; yet seek no shade
From the wild light as it stretches across
The small space that held me. Now you.

-Afternoon-

I spend the day's warmest hours with you.
Our bodies meet and I am not strange
To the soft valleys of skin my hands travel across.
Along your back I find smears of the sky;
Its colors come together into a shade
Of burning red that is swallowed in my eyes.

You do not speak and I see in those telling eyes
The simple truth, small, delicate, that you
Have locked away. I see only a shade
Of this and its shimmer is strange,
Unlike the golden glows I found in the sky.
It shines like your ocean, vast and deep. I must swim
across.

-Evening-

The sun falls, pulling blazing oranges across
The edge of the horizon. Your eyes
Take in the blurring dark sky
And I sit, moved and silent, next to you-
Set sharp against the canvas of this strange
Painting; everything on fire, nothing in shade.

I close the house, shut the door, pull the shade,
Climb into bed and crawl across
The length of the bed to reach you, strange
Creature, with your long body and eyes
Watching me inch closer. I stop and you
Hold out one hand, covered in the sky.

And it is strange to see the glitter on the shade
Of those sky colors as they travel across
Our room and eyes, spilling diamonds onto me and you.

-By Blood Only-

I have a need
To be suspicious
Of your inquiring
Lines bridging
Years of wordless
Relation.

Tell me of your
Need to use jealousy
As a weapon
Against the young, the
Old and all those
Whose hands got in
The way.

-Family at War-

The whole world can be transformed
In the middle of a week
In the middle of a month
In the middle of this year.

And I am a stopping point
In April
In our family
In our loss
Dragged into the streets and
Ordered to live in this
World refashioned to turn without you.

And despite this brutal demand
I see your face
(absenting a heartache
then reviving it)
And you are sitting
There dropping words and
Telling your story
Only to leave me
In a moment
For the sand and
The heat.

-Homecoming-

Your arrival is a shock
 A shot in the dark
 A jump from behind
An early spring in shy, young April.

They say: it will be only a body.
They say: we can show you how to
Rebuild this different boy.
 New shine.
 New shimmer.

At your homecoming
There will be phone calls
And I will wait for
The honesty to peak.

The real return is the
Emptiness of a change,
The cardboard thinness
Of a new boy.

You are always the same
And I am always wounded at your hands.

Reflective Essay
*Catch a Fire Catch Afire: An Understanding of Distance
and Its Meaning*

This project has been a monumental accomplishment for me as a writer, a student and a person. I have always intended to do something of this nature, and achieving it at this age and this time has been a truly wonderful experience. I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity the Capstone Project afforded me, to test and challenge myself by taking on something many students chose to avoid. I have learned a great deal not only about myself (how could I not?), but of those about whom I write, the people who found their way into my mind and heart, illustrating their selves in my poetry.

Taking the time and patience to create and finish this project represents not only a commitment to my field of study and my place in the Honors' program, but also a dedication to my craft and personal development as a writer. I have spent a great deal of time considering and reconsidering my work and its quality. It has been three years of brutal honest with myself culminating in supreme humility as I allow those around and close to me to read my poems. The creation of this collection has required me, in many ways, to be incredibly open and honest in the

transformation of my thoughts and feelings into words on the page. However, it has been the humility to offer those words to others' eyes, which has required the greatest amount of honesty and courage of me. Many times I lost sight of the end product of this process: the sharing of my work with many people. Yet, for me, it is this end product that means the most to me and, also I believe, for those will share it with me. I am the only person in my family whose talents and interests lean in the artistic direction and sharing a collection like this will be a great event for each member of the family. My parents are especially excited to see such an accomplishment in a area and aspect of my life and education that has been for the most part been kept private from them. While this done only out of shyness with my work, I think that seeing the personal nature of my education through the collection will have a great impact on my family and loved ones.

My hope with this collection has been to expose how each of us can experience different perspectives of distance in their everyday life, while displaying a certain amount of honesty. I think each individual who will interface with this project will walk away with some greater sense of distance and personal honesty, two things (especially

honesty) which I believe are valuable to a person's development and self-awareness.

By completing this collection I have also hoped to increase the awareness and appreciation for poetry as a profoundly meaningful and useful venue for introspection and personal change. Poetry requires honesty, and in creating it we are forced to be honest with our inner selves. Through this process we can be intensely changed. Taking that change with us into the busy world and passing it on to others through their own interaction with either our work or ourselves can have an important impact. I sincerely hope to give my readers a powerful look into another's experience and in doing so, effect a productive change.

As the creator of this project I made one very large artistic choice: to not force my work throughout the entirety of the process. I have been writing poems since I was a small child, and until this very day I can never sit down and simply write a poem. I must always wait for the inspiration to pair itself with a particular impetus of feeling in order to sit down and write. This process often led to lulls or plateaus in my work, which in their turn caused me headaches and minor panics. At the end of this project and reflecting back I can see that this was the best choice I

made as a creator. I took a great deal of the control out of my hands and gave it to my work, letting it own me in a way. There are many obstacles caused by this approach; however, taking a back seat to my work allowed it blossom without the added constraint of forcing my words.

What made this method work so beautifully within this collection is that the regular path and tone of my life over the past three years lent themselves perfectly to the creation of meaningful exploration of distance. When I first decided to create my collection on distance and its meaning I was studying abroad in Florence, Italy. At this time I was facing a time of increased awareness of the idea that distance could exist outside of separation from a place or a person. This period allowed my prescribed method to flourish and I was writing out of personal necessity, rather than project-necessity. Overlapping with this period was the year my brother was deployed to a 15-month tour in Baghdad, Iraq. Over the course of the following year, the experiences of having him so far away moved me to write at length about this time and my place within it, as well as his. There were many times when I couldn't say what I was feeling and thinking and writing it made it easier to feel at ease with such complicated emotions. This added a

level of emotional reality to the overall collection, which I don't believe would have taken shape without the particular method I chose to employ.

What I am attempting to demonstrate here is that my life has continually offered material for my poems and simply by living my life I was moved in so many different ways to express myself and create this collection. My method of allowing the words to come to me in the proper time and place gave me the opportunity to fulfill a personal and academic goal in a unique and effective way.

By employing this method I was able to follow the thread of a change that took place in the topics about which I was writing. In the beginning many of poems considered the love and focus that I placed on the relationship I shared with my boyfriend. Yet as the year progressed I began to see a growing attention paid to my brother's war experience and my reaction to this great change in both of our lives. As I began to pay closer authorial attention to this shift I reconsidered the dedication of the collection and changed it, choosing to dedicate this work to my brother, rather than my boyfriend. This change was not a sentimental one, but rather a signifier that a profound shift had taken place subconsciously, enabling me to see the

product of my method and the progression and focus of my own thoughts.

By means of helping myself as an author visualize the progression and stages of the various poems I was working on, I would write the poems on plain paper (not in a journal) and then tape that paper to the walls and door of my bedroom. This allowed me to consider the expanse of my work-in-progress without having to turn to the stress of a pile of papers or flipping back and forth through a journal. Having a holistic vision of the collection at any given moment was an important stress and panic reducer as deadlines drew nearer or as I hit certain lulls in writing.

There are, of course, many alternative methods to complete a work such as this that I could have utilized. A number of different writing exercises were available to stimulate the creation and editing of my poems. One such method was used to jump-start *Catch the Fury* and did prove to be very productive and successful. I was given a black-and-white photo postcard and told to use the image/person on that card to “guide” me to a place in my mind where I could examine the concept of bewilderment. I received a card with a bald man, photographed naked from the waste up, covered in bees over various parts of his upper body.

Examining this guide through introspection led me to create *Catch the Fury* in the summer of 2006. It was a little less than a year later when *Catch the Fury* took its final form as presented in this collection. This is a wonderfully effective method that I enjoyed using. I could have employed other writing exercises, all set in a similar vein, I chose instead to wait for inspiration to find me, rather than let myself get guided to it in some way. In the future, I would like to improve my abilities by using these different exercises. I think it would be a great way of pushing the boundaries I established in writing this collection.

The formatting of certain poems is the greatest departure from convention to be found in *Catch a Fire Catch Afire*. There were certain periods of writing this collection where the formatting of the poem on the page provided a different landscape on which I could express myself and create. I used this strategy a great deal while I was studying abroad in Florence. It received good commentary from the workshop in which I was enrolled, and was a practice I continued, feeling inspired to create in that manner. I have had mixed reviews about these poems. Some enjoyed how the formatting reflected the message of a particular line; while others found it difficult to track their way through the

poem due to the spacing and tabulation. I cut back on it in the later stages of the project simply out of concentration on the content and then chose to keep the format simple. The work is organized to exhibit all of my work without a chronological order. I had an opportunity to organize them from the earliest written to the most recent but I found I didn't care for the flow and progression the collection took with this ordering. Instead I organized the poems according to when I edited them, as I do not consider a poem truly written until the final edit. I departed from this procedure in certain instances to shift the focus temporarily or shape the flow slightly. I also wanted the reader to attempt to pick out which ones seemed to them to be written in my younger voice. I was hoping that, to a certain extent, the poems would exhibit by themselves the time in which they were written, as well as my growth from that moment.

One of my greatest inspirations, not only in this project but also in my career as a young writer, has been the utterly incredible work of Michael Ondaatje. I was exposed to his poetry in high school and it was that experience which birthed the desire to make my poetry and writing a real and constant part of my life. An avid reader from a very young

age, my whole perspective was changed forever from the opening lines of *The Cinnamon Peeler*. Reading Michael Ondaatje's work has taught me that every poem is, in some fundamental way, a love poem. My writing until that point had been focused mainly on romantic relationships. This consistency worried me about the future of, what I hoped would be, a career. But as I absorbed novel after novel and poem after poem of his, I was struck again and again with the simple love that painted each and every word.

Very soon after I discovered Michael Ondaatje, I began to seriously read the poetry of Pablo Neruda. I came to uncover a similar devotion to romancing the world. It was not long before I began to see the influence of reading Neruda appear in my poems. The open and honest sensuality so beautifully and movingly employed by these men instilled in me a lasting desire to infuse my own perspective and poetry with the same subtly woven seduction.

Reading these authors' work and meeting them (in the case of Michael Ondaatje) taught me a great deal about the process of writing. I began to understand that their poetry was a craft and an art of the highest order. As a growing author, this meant that I had to put time and effort into my

poetry on a daily basis, a discipline I had not anticipated.

Poetry as a *process* began to unravel before me. It was interacting with these authors and their work that initiated a detailed attention and daily devotion to my poetry to which I had not yet committed myself.

Those who read it often deem my poetry “confessional” poetry. I find this to more or less accurate. Creating this work has been such a personal and emotional experience, focusing on profoundly intimate topics, that I think I would have failed in some way if there were not a confessional aspect in it. I do not believe the collection possesses a mawkish or overly dramatic nature in being confessional. Rather, I feel as though there is a real honesty in the collection with its tone and approach.

I believe that the confessional label of my poetry with its free verse form lent itself most successfully to the collection and its aim. When I began this process I truly felt as though I were exploring something under-examined in everyday life. So when I decided not to utilize different forms of poetry (excluding the sestina: *Ieri, Oggi, Domani*) I felt as though I was writing in everyday language about something that was occurring each day, but under the radar. I also did not want to wrap my feelings around a form that

would likely go unnoticed by most readers. The presence of distance in its many forms is already something present *under* the surface I was hoping to bring to bear. Shedding light on it while tangling it in a form that might make the reader even more confused seemed counter to my aim.

That is not to say I dislike form poetry or am afraid of using it. I have practiced it many times in the past and found I disliked changing my meaning and tone to fit the parameters of the form. I feel as though I have done it quite successfully in *Ieri, Oggi, Domani*, but I wanted the remainder of my work to be the total truth of what I was feeling and examining at the time I was inspired to write.

That being said, at the completion of this project I would like to undertake form poetry more diligently in order to engage, expand and deepen my knowledge and skill.

I am confident that my audience includes anyone motivated or interested to read poetry. I have always wanted people to be more confident and open when interfacing with poetry. My greatest fear is that someone will pick up this collection and say, "I don't get it." My aim is for each person to be open and confident with their own experiences and abilities, pick up the collection and say, "That makes sense *in my life*." I have always believed that poetry gets a

bad rap because too many readers attempt to uncover some hidden authorial meaning as the sole purpose of their reading and understanding. Discovering authorial intent and meaning is important, but I hate to see potentially interested readers become frustrated in that pursuit. I would like my audience to be each person out there and I would like them to comprehend my work as an important perspective to their own reality. I would like to say to them: Consider this poem as an examination in some way of your own life experience. And react to that! Honesty is a cure-all and it can be found in poetry.

I strongly believe that my poetry displays my personal sense of morality in certain capacities. The poems reflect in many ways my devotion to family and God. While I hold myself to a very strict moral code, I also took an approach to these poems which deconstructed and examined that code, rather than simply poetically repeating it. I am very honest with myself and while it is a wonderful thing to stick to one's morals, I believe it is more important to constantly examine those morals in order to effectively evaluate your own approach to upholding them and your ultimate success in doing so. I believe this self-evaluation

is most prominently seen in poems such as *The First Time is Never the First Time* and *Indian Giver*.

Catch a Fire Catch Afire: An Understanding of Distance and Its Meaning was an incredibly road to travel. After three long years of work I still feel as though there is so much for me to do and say. Perhaps the poem is not truly written with the final edit. Perhaps, and I have a strong suspicion this is our reality, our lives play out around us in a beautiful, poetic extension of our very selves. And we are all works in progress.

Written Capstone Summary

In short, this project is a collection of my poetry gathered from three years of study and writing while at Syracuse University, at home and abroad. It is an attempt to widen a specific avenue of self-discovery while working on my talents and skills as a writer and poet. *Catch a Fire Catch Afire: An Understanding of Distance and Its Meaning* is my pursuit of deconstructing how I feel: distance from myself, distance from my loved ones, distance from God, distance from places and distances from where I am at any given point in my life.

The collection of poetry I have prepared has changed in very subtle, and yet very important, ways since I began around this time last year. My original intention has been the same from the beginning; to create a collection of poetry focused on the idea and presence of distance in my life. At the time when I made the decision to pursue this project I was studying abroad in Florence, Italy and was experiencing distance in physical sense from my family, boyfriend and then my brother who was deployed to a 15 month tour in Baghdad, Iraq. This served as the original impetus for taking on this project, and I was very interested and motivated to uncover and then explore the

ways in which I would experience distance in my life once I would return home from overseas.

As this year has progressed, *Catch a Fire Catch Afire: An Understanding of Distance and Its Meaning* has shifted gears a bit and has taken a greater focus on the experience of my brother's tour in Iraq. This change was gradual and almost happened without my own notice. As I looked back on a stack of work I began to see increasing attention to the relationship with my brother being paid in my poems. This attention made me a bit nervous at first as I feared it was moving too far from my main thesis.

However, as I edited and reread these poems alongside the others I had written and collected, I began to reflect more deeply on why this sudden focus on my brother had begun to surface. As I thought more and wrote more I began to discover that the distance I felt from my brother was not only a physical distance, but also a physical distance that had manifested itself into other aspects of my life within which I was feeling doubt or uncertainty, worry or anxiety about other happenings and changes in my life. These are in many ways, different experiences of distances that I have come to understand through my poetry.

I also made the decision to include a series of poems from earlier in my academic career at Syracuse University. I decided to do this solely for personal satisfaction; I wanted a way to see the progressions and divergences of my poems as they spanned three years. I'm fairly certain the reader will be able to distinguish my younger voice, but perhaps not. After I placed the poems within the collection with the rest I was pleased to read them with a new eye and see distance themes alive in them, even from before I solidified my theme. Needless to say, this was pleasing and exciting.

My method for writing this collection has been to write as often as I can in order to produce as many honest poems as I could. Typically my process includes: I am inspired through various means and sit down to write something; After I have written it, I will either let it sit for a few days or I will edit it right after initially writing it. This depends on how attached or invested I am in the particular poem. Certain poems push right out of me and writing them is a deeply emotional and involved. Some poems are slow to come out and I sometimes have to pull it out of myself. The latter poems are the kind that I usually wait a while to edit. Occasionally I will read a poem to my

boyfriend for comments or thoughts. Typically, however, I do not have any kind of audience to pass my poems along to (aside from my advisor and reader of course). As I have been gathering more and more poems I have been experimenting with the order of the poems. I have also decided to add some poems from my sophomore year in order to give a more well—rounded approach to my thesis. I have shown two full drafts of the project to my reader and advisor and received important feedback.

The collection will be printed in a small booklet form with some illustrations drawn by another artist.

This project is important and significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, the accomplishment of this project is very meaningful to me as a person, a writer and a student. It hasn't been easy in any regard and there were times when I was a little more than undisciplined about it. But completing something of this nature has always been a dream of mine and looking at the breadth and depth of work I have accomplished is truly pleasing. Furthermore, this past year I made the decision to pursue a Masters degree in my other major area (Political Science) rather than in English Textual Studies. For sometime I had been unsure of which area to pursue. I long had had dreams

within each field of study and choosing one became increasingly difficult. After I decided to continue in Political Science, this project became a means of bringing one dream to fruition. Secondly, this project is significant because it is, in many ways, a study of one person over time. It follows many joys and just as many disappointments all while focusing on one important area of my life. Seeing this progression is not only interesting as the author and the subject of the study, but it is also important because it offers an opportunity for honesty and self-exploration in a time where, I believe, there is little, true examples of either. Thirdly, *Understanding of Distance and Its Meaning* is an opportunity for a reader to discover the amount of distance that can exist in any one life. More than once when I was explaining my project to someone, the person would find the numerous prevalent examples of distance surprising. It's something that is present in many forms in our everyday life. Taking some time and exploration how it is present in your own life is a hope for the reader my project holds. Additionally, on a more general level, I think the idea of a young person such as myself taking the time to engage their self creatively and emotionally through an art like poetry is significant.

Oftentimes, I feel as though the struggle to make ourselves marketable and wanted by employers we forget or neglect to nurture our inner selves in introspective and exploratory ways.