

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &
Professional Papers

Graduate School

1986

Pounding In the Stakes

Judith Hiott

The University of Montana

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Hiott, Judith, "Pounding In the Stakes" (1986). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 3269.

<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/3269>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

COPYRIGHT ACT OF 1976

THIS IS AN UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT IN WHICH COPYRIGHT SUBSISTS. ANY FURTHER REPRINTING OF ITS CONTENTS MUST BE APPROVED BY THE AUTHOR.

MANSFIELD LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA
DATE: 1986

POUNDING IN THE STAKES

By

Judith Hiott

B.A., Wake Forest University, 1984

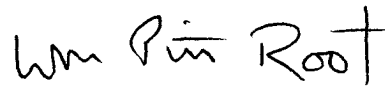
Presented in partial fulfillment for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1986

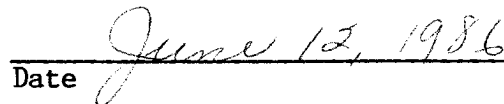
Approved by:



Chairman, Board of Examiners



Dean, Graduate School



Date

UMI Number: EP35673

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI EP35673

Published by ProQuest LLC (2012). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

-15. 86

For Jeane Haugen and Greer Fleetwood Hiott

CONTENTS

I.

Listening For Answers	2
Revelations	4
Under Sun Shaped Like A Circular Saw Blade	5
Window Between Mother And Daughter	7
January 1951: For Emma	8
Midnight Reverie	10
A Woman Reporter's Special Interest Story	12
Reply To A Friend As I Walk On The Shore	14
Mona Lisa	15
Vindication Through An Unassuming Stranger	16
What You Need Are Sugar Daddies (After Ovid)	18
Hangover Poem	22

II.

Friday	24
Roughing It	25
After Rain	27
Catfishing	28
Mornings Keep Her Grieving	30
Refinishing	32
The Tandem	34
A Wife Of Thirty Years Recalls Her Honeymoon	36
Hummingbirds	38
At The Cemetery With First Graders	40
Family Practice	42

I.

...Love is a country
to which we return and return,
but in which we cannot live.

--Chase Twichell

I.

The day Mary joined the church, a deacon
whispered to our father
that a son had beheaded his mother.
Daddy's face disappeared;
he looked witched-- like he could hear
death as an Indian hears hooves, one ear
to the ground. A blessing and censor
of my fidgeting in God's house
sped to doctor the family
that summoned a second signature.

II.

Pious like my sister,
green by the river with dripping hair,
I posed later in a slinky swimsuit cover
so full of flair my mother named it
for a woman who'd loved
loud colors. A mystery, as strange as the new
roundness of my body, ripened
when Mama recalled the ghost
conjured in my girlhood seances.

III.

With more prudence than my body taught garments,
Mary filled me in on church joining.
I had to learn to say yes
to everything the preacher would ask me.
I guessed answers came to adults
with the magic that made morning glories
close in the afternoon sun. I overheard Daddy
telling Mary the right response when boys
became overzealous. My body could assume
what overzealous meant.

IV.

The murderer is well now and builds
homes for the town's finest families, father
still certifies death, and the woman never ceases
to haunt young girls. I wonder what possessed
the dead woman's son-- what he believed
he'd mastered as he held his mother's head
in his hand; whether the herd
galloping from the horizon,
colors on her Sunday best, clamored yes
yes.

REVELATIONS

4

When God reveals himself to girls
Albert keeps their skirts in place
As the preacher soaks their faithless curls.
When God reveals himself to girls
The river around their bodies swirls,
But thighs don't know the surge of grace
(When God reveals himself to girls)
For Albert keeps their skirts in place.

The arm of a girl learning to play
a trombone grows toward low notes.
As her stomach caves in
with each used up gasp
landscape flowers from the bell,
her tongue its clapper.

Where cattle are grazing
in an ripened field,
the uniform of an ex-GI
abandons the woods.
His face can't camouflage history,
catfish trapped in his body's pond.
Behind him forest burns. Fire rises
through the limbs like growing pains
that seize a girl's hamstrings
as she sleeps, dreams of revivals.
Round as whole notes,
cowpies lose the crows they feed
to a steep sky. Reaching
the slaughtering block
the soldier admires
crescendoing flames. His eyes blaze
with a desire to return.

(Stanza Break)

The girl's arm folds in to her side
like a hen. Her tongue prolongs
high notes-- orange-suited men
scurrying to extinguish the fire.
She would compose wingtips, lustrous
around grain elevators
if there were swallows.

It's all about loss: her desire to get away;
mine for her to hold me, sad
as I hang out each window
of our rooms, the wind blowing
two stories up. She's mad
because I made her help today;
her anger burns my knees, warmth
that frees my arms

to wash away the outside dirt
which spoils our view. I'm
angry too when I look in
at her face through a clean window pane,
so clearly her father's. She never knew him--
struts in the mirror at beauty that hurts.
More than just cost: the space she deserves;
three years she slept in the curves
of my body. One room then; now two aren't enough,
our sleeping space split in half by a screen.
She wants her own room; too soon,
her own home. Her young body's boon
is what I fear will be mean.
I think painting might keep her, but from slough
of a snake, auroral colors are tossed
to the hills. It's what loss wills.

She is bitter; it is the time
when fascination
with the weather's whitewash succumbs
to longings for spring.
Looking beyond the window
makes her shiver, and conscious
of the strength it will require
she positions two more logs
upon the fire. She's anxious:
for the feel of soil
when it melts beneath her fingers
releasing worms and warmth
for another garden, for Andrew
to decide to leave the milking
to their sons
so they can savor climates
she's never known,
and for her family's return at dinner.
They make the room seem smaller.
And when she mounts the stairs to bed
her husband will fill the space
that lingers in her body.
She doesn't know the reason

(No Stanza Break)

cabin fever seems more unsettling
this year, that when she's washed
the smell of winter from the curtains
and hung them up, her heart
will beat the air of
spring out of her body.

The priesthood:

a measure to escape
this town, gutted by mines
that won't produce.

But the diocese sent me home
to listen to a former boom town's
houses caving in
as the holes dug under them
crumble. The place is filled
with Catholic mother's
freakish daughters.

I'm the only father here.

Black-lunged
fathers are dead
or always dead
drunk. I wish, by God,
I could make gold
or coal enough
to fill these empty houses.
Like actors crossing a stage
notice an amphitheatre,
blank eyes waiting

(No Stanza Break)

for their words, tourists passing
might stop here,
shop for a used treasure
the last family that left
left behind. Or from the next state,
like the two I hear emerging
from the judge's house,
couples come to marry
and leave. They titter
up the sidewalk
scrubbed white this morning
by a smiling mental deficient.
In the heart of town
where steps from thick doors
fan out, their laughter halts.
I hear wings beating
against bells in the spire
answer the silence.

A WOMAN REPORTER'S SPECIAL INTEREST STORY

Poultry farm? Combs
Of unclipped cocks alone
Tame the scenery. Drums
On scratching post housing
Roosters dark dots could be
Mistaken for mailboxes
Without red flags.

Pitside the fight must be
Like the rupture of sepals
When a bud blossoms;
The pre-game green, wagering,
And the final burst of blood
And red-faced men coil
And recoil. From above it's like seeing
Down the tunnel of a kaleidoscope:
Mirrored feathers,
Spurs, wounds, spectators--
Crystallized pattern unbroken
Unless one bird bows its head
Showing white feathers under its hackle.

(Stanza Break)

Touring your farm

I'm captivated by the poise

Of roosters bred to achieve

Physical power, speed

Courage. Their plumage shimmers

In the afternoon like the patent leather

Of a stripper's shoes.

When I ask to be taken to a main,

Your eyes change color,

And I wonder if you desire

To show me the gore but you remember

I unbuckled my seatbelt

As you helped me from the car.

REPLY TO A FRIEND AS I WALK ON THE SHORE
(For Sarah)

You've suggested the framework
For my best poems-- ways
To erect shelters against the sea air
And cadences required to cycle
On kilter. Pelicans I approach
Too boldly on the shore
Soar alone in the pre-patterned air
Blue threads you've weaved around them.

I envy your desire to live here
Where moth wings dampen
In decadent surfs, hermit crabs
Leave shells in tidal pools
To head for the ocean.
But the vessels of your fingertips
Constrict in the cold.
By October you wear mittens
You've knitted to the measure
Of your own hand. You can't imagine
Why I'd like to move inland
Where swimmers make currents
In moon reflection.
Only the ground can hear
Waves that your breast stroke
Send back to the shore.

MONA LISA

Every suitor
Risen from that lagoon
Shaped like the shadows
Of her eyes,
Thumbs the passage
Of her backdrop's bridge
And arrives lucid
In the asylum of her body.

VINDICATION THROUGH AN UNASSUMING STRANGER

You claim I look
chilled without a sweater,
insist I accept
a lift to the pier
where I'll embark
for an island
at a cold hour.

If I'd divulge
what I've been dreaming--
girls leaping
from balconies for sport
to be collared
by some savior
on a subsequent floor--
you'd never venture
to take me
to a bar.

If you knew
how the wind
under their clothes
lifts their bodies
away from rescuing hands
as they drift down,

(No Stanza Braek)

you would fear
letting me drive you
wherever I care
to go. I take you
to the country
beyond paved roads
and hold you there
until you believe
you love me,
until leaves litter
your windshield,
frost glittering
like the hour come
for me to leave you.

AMORES 1.8 (AFTER OVID)

OR

WHAT YOU NEED ARE SUGAR DADDIES

There's this woman (whoever'd like to know a bawd,
just listen). Topsy's the name of this old broad.

A fitting name: she's always roaring

drunk when Dawn's horses bring an end to whoring.

She knows black magic, can sing the songs of witches,
sends surging waters back, an art of bitches.

Her herbs are tricky, and she's been known to treat
men with the poisons of a horse in heat.

She blinks: clouds fill the sky. She nods:

sun shines at night. I've seen stars dripping blood,
the bloody moon's face crimson. That she flies
feathered through the night, I'll bet and rumor verifies.

From her beady eyes flash double

pupils; from twin eyeballs toil and trouble

twinkle. From tombs she summons uncles. She cracks

earth with her songs. This woman's put to rack

pure marriage. To her tongues wicked words, chance

made me witness. I heard her ranting as I peeked through some plants:

"Do you know, Sweet, yesterday you pleased a dandy?

His eyes lingered on your face. Why not be handy?

Your figure is second to none. But oh dear,

your body lacks culture. If only your career

compared with your figure. I'll not be poor

if you romp with the rich. The adverse star
of the war god harms, but Mars is prancing
elsewhere. Venus' sign rules now; see her advancing:
the rich lover wants you. He's concerned if you're needy.
Plus he's pretty. If his gaze weren't so steady,
you could buy him. Look at her blush!
Sure shame loves a pale face, but truth's mush.
Feign shame. Casting your eyes in your lap, make a man pay
for an upward glance. In Tatius' day
the Sabine women weren't promiscuous; now
Mars wars in foreign towns. This city bows
to Venus: chaste girls are unchased;
beautiful women banter, and if baseness
won't unman her, she'll be the asker. Take
the matron with a wrinkled brow; shake
her: crimes fall from the folds. Penelope's test
of dandies' strengths showed their best
sides. Winged summer slips by. It deceives
and the year passes like running steeds.
Brass coins shine with use, dresses beg for gay
evenings. Deserted shanties in foul regions grow gray.
Beauty, unexercised, ages, and a few fumbling
men won't keep you fit. Plunder from numbers.
She-wolves reap more booty in herds. What? A bard?
What's the value of dreams? The god of bard's
seams burst with gold. He strums gold strings. Don't blow it!

You'll compile reams but not much from a poet.

20

He who gives is greater than Homer. Giving's genius,
believe me. Don't scorn a man who's redeemed
his own head. A chalk-marked foot is an empty stigma.
Don't let a coat of arms trick you either. Don't give a fig
for a hall full of masks: 'Take your grandfather with you poor knight.
Don't think, because you're pretty, you've a right
to a freebie. Sleep with a rich boy and earn the full fee!
While you're setting your nets, so they won't flee,
ask for less; badger the captives for pay.
Feigned love wins the day.
Let him think he's admired
then draw in the lines. Say you're tired
if he stays overtime. Now and then refuse
nights. Invent headaches; let the time of the month excuse
you. But fetch him back soon. Martyrs to whimpering,
from too much rejection, render love simpering.
Let your door be deaf to beggars, wide open
to givers. Let the lover let in
hear the shut out complain. Berate accusing
men as if hurt first. If he's abusing
you, your faults wane. But don't dwell
on anger. Harping biddies don't sell.
Let your eyes obey your command to cry.
If deceit is your aim, go on and lie;
the spirit that Venus lends to flattery can't hear.
A servant and maid might be acquired to steer

a lover when shopping. And let them seek presents;
a little from many and no one's a peasant.
Let your mother and sister and nurse pluck the suitor.
Many hands make light work. A looter's
day is never done. Lacking occasions to loot, fake
your birthday; bring out a cake.
Don't let a man lacking rivals feel sure.
Love, without obstacles, never endures.
Let him see the bed with another man's outline.
Make him notice the hickies that shine
on your neck. Be sure he sees what another man's brought.
If your gift supply's low, more gifts can be bought.
When you've gotten a lot, but he's still holding out,
to get the rest, go the borrowing route.
Return nothing. Let your tongue hide your mind. Flatter
and ruin. Poisons hide beneath honied chatter.
Take this advice I've learned first hand,
and if wind and waves slapping the sand
don't carry off my voice, you'll praise me presently,
and when I'm dead, you'll pray that my bones lie gently."
When my shadow betrayed me, she was sparing
few words. My hands fought an urge to tear
her white mop, those bleary eyes, and wrinkled cheeks.
Gods grant you no home, extra weeks
of winter, and the worst
of all curses, perpetual thirst.

HANGOVER POEM

Noon-- the world won't
melt. I'm sick of spring's
tease, bored with sky's
costume. Snow heaped
on the ground like last night's
clothing, leaves only
one more cloudy petticoat.
Too many wedding gowns.
They'd escape their own wind
blowing out of Hellgate Canyon.
Let the three-headed dog's
barking breath
sweep me into town.
Through a jangling door
I'll be rid of this mane
I've kept through the winter.
Who says hair has power?
There's pleasure in wind,
I'll drink waning moon.

II.

If you had been making man, stuffing him full
Of such hopping greeds and passions that he has
To blow himself to pieces as often as he
Conveniently can manage it— would it also
Have occurred to you to make him burst himself
With such a phenomenon as cachinnation?

--Christopher Fry

FRIDAY

Crossing the bridge
As ice on a sandbar cracks
And slides into the river,
I pass through a jangling door
To be shorn of winter hair.
Supine, my eyes closed,
The tides roar from my head
Bear away all
Memories but my first--
Entreating Mama
To swirl me in a mountain pool,
A spring, fish-full.
4 PM-- the whole world melts.

ROUGHING IT
(For all my sisters)

Enclosed in a dark
Ruptured cloud
We struggled.
Laying it out
We pounded in the stakes
Hoping for firm soil
To build the rest.
We threaded the poles
Through the cloth
Then grounded them
In the eyelets
Of the foundation.
Grasping the last pole
We ducked inside
Hoisted the sagging
Center up
Into a stronghold
Finished.
There was laughter
Panting
Warmth
A circus inside.
Still rain
(No Stanza Break)

Pelted the skin
Of our homemade house.
We warned each other
That touching
The canvas shell
Causes leaks:
No one
Was tempted.

AFTER RAIN

Inhaling steam
from the rain-cooled pavement
I see the road unreeling beyond me.

CATFISHING

Waist deep, sometimes tit
deep in the cove they walk
between spring and summer
fishing with their feet.

Weeks before weather
is warm enough to wade in.
a boy and his father choose
among the farm's store
ten punctured tires
light enough to spin
over the river like frisbees.

The inner edges stitched,
they cut from the ring
a section. There
whiskered bottom dwellers
find a dim chamber.

Unlawful, they block
one exit with a rock
or chicken wire.

From the pier, sisters
watch the son and father
kicking up muck

(No Stanza Break)

where girls don't swim
because of snakes. Stubbing
his shoes, the boy surface-dives,
pours out the catch
on the sun-parched bank.

One girl will see how undammed rivers
float a thaw's debris
downstream; the other will farm
fish, build ponds
and make a living from her catch.
They don't know the future,
admiring fish out of water
multiplying, gills puffing
toward the wheel of the sun.

MORNINGS KEEP HER GRIEVING

Dawns when they've failed
to keep their rooms uncluttered,
her voice swells, "You must
not love me. I'm going to go live
at the motel." These mornings they open
windows, and picking up their clothes,
hope whatever breeze can survive
sultry Augusts will rise from the lake,
stir a new arrangement
of dust to appease her.

In her dreams,
the upstairs sounds having faded
like stars from heaven,
she is burning: she piles household
furnishings near the front door, and placing
herself at the center, drops a match, waves
wickedly at distance like it's a man
across the water.

Ducks call her back. She echoes
their reveille aloud through the dark
wishing sun would stir sleepers; light,

(No Stanza Break)

a ladle might fold back blankets.

Beds creaking overhead

sound like the grumbling her son hears
when he places his ear to her stomach,
the plashing of wings when ducks start
from the water, sounds that happen
just next to the heart.

REFINISHING

Softening from shade to tint
in the garage each day after work
the spectrum of her tempers
sustains this task,
stripping the free-standing mirror frame
mine by her death.

I pause, spatula in hand,
as paint remover bubbles year
from year. She never resisted
repainting. Hopeful to get beneath
the first in her sequence
of hues, I restore for a time
her choices: the yellow lightening
her first child's death, the tone
that bound a faith in her son
at the war. Why did she crave
the aspect of her reflection
framed by this latest blue?
The build-up of paint
that fills the corner medallions
lifted, layer by layer.
uncovers intricate patterns. (Stanza Break)

Finished, the glass
in the frame assembled
on a dresser, each day
I'll stand naked, taller
than my predecessor
with my head above the mirror,
and watch my reflected torso
register movement of air:
smooth composed skin
in summer, in winter
hair and nipples on end.

THE TANDEM

Though you've ridden once before
You let me steer, giving
the rhythmic push
To set us going. In front
Afraid to stop for fear
We cannot start again,
I tighten my grip
On the handlebars
When we wobble,
And approaching intersections,
Slow 'til the light
Turns or crane my neck
To check left and right
Before gliding through
The STOP I make a YIELD.

Seated in back
With handlebars
That will not budge
I notice the smell
Of lumber, and I hear boards
Being hammered to homes
Enduring renovation.

(No Stanza Break)

Pedalling, I learn
We do not split the weight.
As a master, towed
By too large an animal,
Must trust that it knows
The right path, I can only pedal
When you pedal, lean
The way you lean
Or wreck this thing.

A WIFE OF THIRTY YEARS RECALLS HER HONEYMOON

Arriving south
Where he was raised
We went spelunking.
I can't forget
Stalagmites and stalactites
Poised to eat
Our passage from the opening
Into blackness. Light
Of the torch he bore
Cast fluttering
Shadows onto rocks,
And the echolocating eeks
The animals spat
Beat like clicking tumblers.
I presumed I could learn
The lingo of bats:
The hold's dark
Unlocked would pour out;
Stones, collapse
And squash the grotesque.
Instead as a god
Blows breeze into sails,

(No Stanza Break)

The cave's breath blew air
Into my clothes.

Wind came from crannies
Where blind animals pass.
Bat eyes tease my dreams.
Like a prostitute's porch
Searching the night,
They glow in the dark.

HUMMINGBIRDS

More like bees than birds: small, never
still, the way
their beaks acquire nectar
not sunflower seeds that must be
pried open. They fly all day
and die if they can't get sweet energy.

Their hovering in air makes a birder work
to discover
if iridescence is a trick, a quirk
implied by suspended motion
or if, like a blushing lover,
it's a gift of natural commotion.

The ownership of orchids Martin Heade gives them
in paintings
(in which mystery is slave to nature's whim)
isn't challenged. The beak lengths are
adapted to the distance from the bright
cherry-colored opening of the flower

(Stanza Break)

to its pollen. An impetuous song, wings
beating the hum
of its name, sent Heade plodding to the springs
of Brazil to view rare species.
And Rosa, when her handsome
man passed, thought she'd rather hear birds than drink tea
to replace the company she'd shared.
One caught in flight
inside her screen porch scared her
when no sugar made it waver and dive
like a kite
in cross winds. She moved it outdoors, revived
it with sugar water to afternoon nectar,
the mother of height.

AT THE CEMETERY WITH FIRST GRADERS

"Even children's eyes brighten
searching for their own
names at duck
and lamb-topped stones,"
I say of the morning's history
lesson in the cemetery.

"On larger slabs
they searched for their fathers.
Instead they found street
names: the one by the school
where they wait for rides
home, the road to town."

As I scan the room
for a window seat,
you fill the conversation's
hole with more about living
in the desert. "It's comic,"
you say, "Yards children play in
are endless and there's little to drink
'til the rains come. Then
if you're lucky enough not to lose
your house, you spend
days pulling livestock from mud."
(Stanza Break)

The darkened lounge
makes sun on protestors
that march by the window
look fluorescent. Women
lobby for children's lives,
the right to crayons
and butcher paper. It's rolled out
for rubbings or marking
child milestones: comforting
toys, times parents fought.

"Yesterday my son," you start,
always entering the silence
that makes me fidget,
"slaughtered his first goat.
The knife was so sharp,
the head, for a moment,
kept eating grass."

"We can't win. They love bearing
the weight of didactic signs,"
we're both thinking. We curse men
and drink the day
away alone.

FAMILY PRACTICE
(For my father)

It's mothers you love.
Anxious to weather
Voyages you map out,
They wait to empty their holds
In a foreign port
And make it home,
Lavish themselves with ointment
To stop the itching.
When feet disappear
You steer them to the table,
And you remind them
To taste their cravings well.

In her letter, Mother
Watches for your car
As on many mornings
And writes about the weather,
Birds on the opposite side
Of the kitchen glass,
Grass to be planted
For winter. She believes
The child you deliver
Is legitimate and waits to hear
If it's a girl or a boy.

(Stanza Break)

Five o'clock humming
In bus wheels
Makes a song of Mama's news.
Above the blather
Of a drunk trying to get
A transfer, voices in the letter
Pulse. Turning back
The pages, searching for the outcome
Of your labors, I lose count of stops
On the way to my highrise home.
I'll alight where the man
I hope is not my final lover waits.