

May 2015

transplants

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TRANSPLANTS

by

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Bachelor of Arts in English
University of Notre Dame
2008

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the
Master of Fine Arts – Creative Writing

Department of English
College of Liberal Arts
The Graduate College

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 2015

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We recommend the thesis prepared under our supervision by

Denise Weber

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transplants

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Master of Fine Arts - Creative Writing

Department of English

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May 2015

ABSTRACT

transplants

by

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Dr. Donald Revell, Examination Committee Chair
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transplants is a body of poetry that joys in migration and grafting; in change and self-destruction; in cycles of survival and death; in resurrection and reincarnation. In this collection, I write of saints and prophets as regular people, faulted and accessible, transposed into the landscapes I've inhabited: from the deserts of Las Vegas and Mesa Verde in the U.S. to the coasts and jungles of Belize and Costa Rica in Central America. Through their eyes, one may find the profound within things overlooked, and the vulnerability of our mortal condition. *transplants* draws on not only stolen and transformed identities, but also appropriated texts and foreign languages. Some of the poems seek to disrupt human authorities and communications, through heavy collages and loose translations of canonical works. Folktales and myths are woven together with modern narratives. Human systems are overturned. "Home" and "family" become alienating or alienated; other places and things become beloved. The physical body, too, is a site for metamorphosis. Speakers transform, growing parts, removing layers, shape-shifting, and moving through time and space. Decay and weathering play their role in the conversion of things from one state to another, yet death is not the end of all things.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
STILL LIFE	1
CUCURBITS IN AN URBAN GARDEN	2
TORTUGA, ORUGA, LECHUGA / LETTUCE, TORTOISE, WORM	3
ORCHESTRATION	4
BIERGARTEN	5
OLD GAME / NEW GAME	6
STILL LIFE	7
VOTIVE	8
WE BUILD BEAUTIFUL	9
[BY THE TIME THIS HOUSE IS DECEASED]	10
T(R)OPICAL DELETION	11
INTER/POSE	17
GROWTH	18
ROYAL TREE	19
DRIFTWOOD GRAFT	20
HALMONI AMONG ALLIUMS	21
POOR MOTHER	22
LEERY OF BABBLE	23
[I SET A DRAFT ADRIFT]	25
MESA / MEADOW	26
INTERPOSE	27
MAKING APRICOT JAM	28
DISTRACTIONS	29
FOR ST. FRANCIS, PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE PATRON OF HIPPIES	30
FOR GEORGE OPPEN	31
DISTRACTIONS	32
ST. FRANCIS AFTER SOME DRINKS & A BONG RIP	33
TO A SPARROW, SWORN	34
ST. AUGUSTINE WITH RAVENS	35
SELF-PORTRAIT AT LOURDES	36
ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST AT RED ROCKS	37
SONG OF SONGS 2:14	38
OF ORIENT / DRUNKEN WISE MEN	39
SONG OF GALATEA	40
GIVE US THIS DAY	45
CURRICULUM VITAE	46

STILL LIFE

CUCURBITS IN AN URBAN GARDEN

they make their own magic
of petrichor, wet spring smell
of asphalt hot with ozone, that
semen'd musk of rain-god, iron
tinge of earthworms, drowned
and tissued on the sidewalk

cement aside, dandelions thrust,
insistent, up, indigenous
and fit, and caress
our seedling cucurbits

TORTUGA, ORUGA, LECHUGA

come la tortuga la oruga como
la oruga come la lechuga como la
lechuga come la tortuga como
la tortuga come la oruga
como come la lechuga la oruga
que come la tortuga

loose translation:

LETTUCE, TORTOISE, WORM

the worm the tortoise eats
eats the lettuce as the tortoise
eats the worm the lettuce eats as
the tortoise eats the worm as the
lettuce eats the tortoise as
the worm eats the lettuce
that eats the tortoise

ORCHESTRATION

ants & bees:
few beings have
more power
than these

BIERGARTEN

falling into yellow
flowers unnoticed bumble
bees tumble into gold-filled cups

OLD GAME: rock paper scissors

NEW GAME: cats nukes roaches

STILL LIFE

it was days after
— at last —
i'd stopped

feeling mouse fur
in my mouth, soft
still body in my palm

that i found its home
in a forgotten space
behind books

its bed made
of threads missing
from sarong & sweater —

small cupped space pressed into
the tangle — warm bundle —
sweet spot where it had slept

VOTIVE

Votives for our beloved dead
And flowers on the altar

Ladybugs piled on the floor
And so many flies,
Dried bodies in windowsills

WE BUILD BEAUTIFUL

oh burrowing things
in borrowed bodies

other deformities desirable:
thoroughbred bulldogs' mashed faces
eyes askew cuted in our skewed visions

burlwood & wormwood
& blue-stain pine line
the places we build beautiful.

BY THE TIME THIS HOUSE IS DECEASED,
the grain of its wood will be too
diseased even for termites to chew.

T(R)OPICAL DELETION

So many Jonahs
Swallowed and swollen,
Nothing but bloat left.
The swell took the rest.

No bodies to pump with preservatives,
No faces to primp or pimp.
No profit.

No prophet.
No tunnel torched and blazing.
No flashlight with the battery run out of it.
Just my body, battered and fallow.
Elemental. Basic.

Beckoning,
Your fingers run through
My shredded skin, roped
And hog-tied. A rapid rape.
No time to recover
Before the next wave
Wraps us up.

Wait — us?
Whose turn to be
Turned over and
Over. (Never really over.)
Tumbled. The next page
Just a repeat of the last.

(Who gets the last word.)
My dipped pen
Dripping
Squiddy ink
Everywhere.
Blind,

Dunk the chip
On your shoulder
Deep. Drown it
In fear and bring it back,

Embraced, disembodied,
Close to your chest.
Cherished?
Misered trove, kept
Stored and safed,

Somewhere shallow and
Bordered with flowers in empty
Tea tins. Sullen even in sunlight.
Gold mullein with furred leaf
Barking / basking mad
In sorrow, in delight.
Alternating altars:

Which small god to burn sacrifices to,
Which throats to slit softly,
Which arms to bind with your own
In mutual mutilation.

What permutation of futurity
Will unwind with the burial cloths
When they release you.

What worms will wriggle free of chrysalis,
Winged and wonderful.

What fertility. What faith.
What wraiths in the reeds.

What worries will fall careless,
Stumbling and drunk.
Which will drop with ease, belayed.

Belied. Soft-bellied.
(They bruised quickly and
Healed slow.
Purple again. Yellow.)

Catch them like spiders and dreams.
Spin silken, feathered webs.
Inject

All the fish with lightning.
Pull the rods and hooks

Back through your own flesh and find

Me crawling under you, my small airhole
Smothered with pepper. Botfly robot.
Mechanical larva programmed
To feed and grow and shit inside you.
Hungry baby in tight skin womb.

Draw me
Slowly out
And use me as a lure.

I will eat myself.
As the sea sips the rain.

I, sassy salsa, picante and piquant.
Slapping if you laugh at —
Unshakeable. The stakes are low,
Buried in tidal waters.
Thick wood through a thick heart.
The mangrove begins there.

The thicketed estuary
Harboring brackish
Goodbyes
In the wide mouth
Of the ocean.

Leave me.
Weave flaming hibiscus leis
With northern sweet clover
And dandelion. Yellow again.
Now white. Blown away, ash and seed.

What will feed, this time?
Graveside willow digs for maggot-rich
Dirt. Time and
Tide risen in
Moonshine,

Light weight.
Easy to meet egrets in this state.

Regrets mete harder.

(They come with clubs and switchblades.)
(We flock to them in stupor.)

Startling how far I'd go back,
For you, gone fast. Your quick missing,
Your green.

Press refresh. Need rain.
(Even the sea, remember, with its salt-
Concentrated delusions, needs dilution,
Alluvial deposits to enrich with generous spread.)

Buoyant. Life raft. Rift separating me from
You. You from me.
Apart. Solo. Soul. Sol. The sun,
So far from Earth, keeps Mercury closest.
In our thermometers, red. In our veins,

Blood seeping out of capillaries.
Capulets — who we would die for
If we could. (Too romantic.)
Just store our blood in bags 'til needed.
Match type to type. Contrasting fonts
To show each other off.

Secretarial skills lacking, I save
All the notes you ever gave me.
A good archivist

Would order them
By date or
Subject, as if you could stick to just one.

Would catalog our dialogue
While the clock still ticks, analogous,
Congruent with the lines on your face.
Each notch. Contingent on the cotangent,
The sinful sign, lying parallel or not.
How, to a circle. Each point on it.

Each pout. Parts poisoned, tips barbed.
Slow-hopping frogs, unworried of escape.
Others, unaware. Onshore fleet
Landlocked, beached.

The whales couldn't, either. Nor the ships.
Nor the men upon them. But the women,
In a blur, fled. Flash-flood-fucked.
Who really escaped? Sons and
Daughters strapped by father-fears
And mother-memories. A mess
Of moire, spinning with the screen.
Gold slipping through, too fine for keeping.
Washed away with foot-grime. Grit

With corn grinding teeth down to unusable nubs.
Man and mano y metate, stone tools and
Stone deco — jade finery bored into incisors
For status: matte green tinged sky blue.
It matters what they think / what they
Would have thought, to the extent that

You belong. (You are not alone.
We are not each ever all alone.)
Where are we again.

I forgot the name of the place
And so gave it another.
Later I forgot that, too,
And let it be. Left it far behind
In space and memory.
We are unfixable dots.
Movable, mutable.
Our morals, too, shifting with.
With? Against. Or, for.

How we connect: nose to ear, toe to toe
Palm to palm, cheek to lip. Pressed flowers.
The sensitivest parts — hearts — muscle,
And gut, extension of that organ — clenched
Tight, shocked with chemical overflow,
Oceanic. Dissipation. Ante-precipitation.

Before the storm, the wind. We waited,
Skin-cut. Paper. Splinter.
Sliced to the bone. Under flesh, we
Flush:

The rotation rapid,
Hurricaneal. Hot fulgurite
Branded and glass'd.
(The tone you see in.
The tint you sing.)
Obsidian hands of saints. Transfixed
Mummy mumble. Garbled and
Sea-tossed. Ground
To sand with shell and rock.

INTER/POSE

GROWTH

all my teeth fall out
so I can no longer bite

the hangnail
on my thumb

now a bulbous
scallion

ROYAL TREE

familiarity
breeds

what measure of
joy beseiged

i lief would leave
& fall to leisure

my liege
to have laughter
for a day

small pleasures

would that they
would stay

DRIFTWOOD GRAFT
(Pray for us sinners ...)

Why not let the pears cling to the empty branch?

the nearly empty house,
where I was switched with slender maple my eye pierced
by a birch stick — some sharp swish! — I knew well

thus behind the church, a bough
pear-shaped girls stroking rabbits & egos (Man's brittleness!)
into shelter, into Paradise

rabid, we confessed under the pines,
night streamed down. Why not let
the empty house the branches

there is no scent of resin comes of a stick that's so far down
(dry and brittle, easily snapped)
(crabs crawled over it and under other limbs broken off,)

Thir branches hung with copious Fruit long lost my long-beaked
boy hopped from smaller Birds with song
a twitter, a thrush a thrashing
sound he slept I swathed him
bundled up wanderer wrapped him
to myself clinging

HALMONI AMONG ALLIUMS
for my grandmother

the summer mother fed us raw onions
onions and onions! for days!
for days &
for good health

the taste on my tongue mingled with
my childhood of garlic-peel fingernails

..

visiting you in Imni, with my poor Korean
“eat” and “delicious”
the few rich words
we could speak directly
— you to me to you —
across platters of meat & sauces

summer I learned to say things
i've forgotten now

..

we can't bury you now with dirt or words
don't want to

POOR MOTHER *peau* skin
pouring over Bible peeling from hands
 chapters chapping
a chaplet of mercy *merci — merci —*
(how many times!) “How many
times do I have to tell you” pray for us sinners
 — we fall prey “Praise Him!”
 so easily so easy to say
hard work to feel penitent
 pierced by each potential disaster
the news of distant death sister, brother far
 the fear of loss precious chaff
stretched thinner children
 blown farther & fewer

LEERY OF BABBLE

Crumbs the baby left
Shining pate and spittle
Lick the literal meaning from the plate
Lick the lore from Petrarch's Laura

Lick "Lip my stocking Mr. Harris"
Lip a leg a lackadaisical
Jilted stalkings, some stillborn

The crumples of afterbirth
Placid placentas slick
With the strength from within you

Lick lecturers from lecterns
(Lazybones, stick, dog-like
Laurels in august kings' laps)
Lantern-lit literature

Lick erasure clean

Tuck the baby in
Click — shh, shove
Shrapnel down its throat

Quiet boom
Algal bloom, a florid flora
Horrid — You know

There was a little girl
Who had a little curl

A little livid,
Patsy found it tasking

To talk about —
A chalked sidewalk
Hopscotch
Whiskey tango
Tag: you're it!

Pick lambskin leather

Pick sheepgut pluck-feather
Pick lyre string

Lyre, liar
Boy who cried

Pluck
The eyeballs
The waxen wings

Which sacred silence
Which sea-fallen fleck

Maybe a gull will peck
Sisyphus off the hill

Jack and Jill
And syphilis

Lick lust, a list of behavioral ticks

Maybe a gal will
Maybe she won't
Pilfer from a flea

Fleeting life
Lick the bleating lamb

Donne and
Done

What gall
The bleeding lamb
Slaughtered

A young male
Without blemish
Licked with flame

I SET A DRAFT ADRIFT
hoping it would die

i tired of its prattle
of the way it would go on
disregarding the fledged dreams
harbored in my heart

but i hadn't seen the paddle
snuck in while mind's eye slept

my moose in a basket
spirited away & found again
singing among the reeds

MESA MEADOW
verde where a verdin
perches, rufous, a feathered ruffle
on your red hot pokers, a gamble
for purchase rose cheeks, blush
the only evidence what happens in
the span of a wing heart beats spade
in your garden, winsome you lose some
petals to the squirrels and who strips the last
green leaves from your vegas table

INTERPOSE

it's Day 4 of a man's missing and my lover's out
searching in the white-hot sun and I'm left
home measuring time gone & cups
of rice for boiling and come evening I'm
hosing down my lover's shaded plants, letting
gossip & fat flies out when they finally
tire from long hours buzzing and
settle easy on the cool screen door

MAKING APRICOT JAM

Laboring over the stovetop you
miss the double rainbow.
That's the trouble with pectin,
its constant need for stirring.
I outside settling my frustration
concentrate on the rain,
the delicate drops on my skin

one cold wet spot and another
and another, warm, blinked back.
My fury in the fact that I
may not help you stir the jam,
cannot bring you the rainbows
which, so rare even singly and
now twinned, I do not enjoy alone.

The sun returns. And you bring me
solace in ice cream, cold, shivering
on our tongues and teeth
warm with kisses, apologies
of fresh apricot jam.

DISTRACTIONS

FOR ST. FRANCIS, PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE PATRON OF HIPPIES
for Daniel Hernandez

Not for leavened loaves
Or multiplied fish

Our Brother Ants come.

Observe,
They pass

(Glazed donut,
Corn chip crumb)

For tap water drips,
Desert springs.

FOR GEORGE OPPEN

“Is it not strange that sheep's guts could hail souls out of men's bodies?”
— *William Shakespeare, Much Ado About Nothing*

in clarity
as music

muted tongue
hands unclapped

clasped
for Marquez

whose Danzón
spilled over

beyond any *bravo*
what swelled first

the violins
my tears

DISTRACTIONS

in the balcony, music
muffled by moths
lashed to light

fleeing
something about
Mitternacht

ST. FRANCIS AFTER SOME DRINKS & A BONG RIP

ants & bees,
man:
few beings
have more
power
than these

TO A SPARROW, SWORN

affirm,
small-breasted
bird, what air
fills your lungs,

disarming —
what

(full-bodied
line & limber)

expl*!ve
delight

ST. AUGUSTINE WITH RAVENS

& from the sun
such happy happenstance

 & augury
an omen — amen, amen!

ymbology
you, pecking at things on the pavement

who with the king is dead
long live mumbo-jumbo!

by mambo,
go on — so —

& in jamboree
— come, crow with me!

SELF-PORTRAIT AT LOURDES

“Visionary” be damned!

At 5PM I am myopic
with a migraine,

healing in a hot tub
under desert palms,
uncorrected eye witness
to some mirage of fireworks:

sun-bright palm leaves —
rustling & restless,

edges blurred, glowing.

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST AT RED ROCKS

Think instead of ibises
Cracking crabs
From carapaces.
Bodies plucked from deep.

How it would feel to crush,
To swallow them in chunks,

Sand inseparable from flesh.

Think of hair lifted
By wind from pelican wings,
From sweet Pacific storm.

Sand in the ears
Months after all else has gone.

SONG OF SONGS 2:14
for a crab

o my love in the clefts of the rocks
in the secret places that stir

let me open your claws
let me toss and humble you

for sidelong is your glance
and your gait, clinging

OF ORIENT / DRUNKEN WISE MEN

libation of lobsters
and cacique

ching-chong!
(china, they think)

a clink will do, a toast
a drum of rum, a dram

will blink away
the girl

gone, or going
(ceramic, same)

blame
& booze in the eye

tongues telling
tales

jay-yi-yi!
(true)

(i am in love with you)

SONG OF GALATEA

my mouth-moth
my tangle-tongue

my fuzz'd brain
fizzing

my spitting lama
my drama

my whale of a tale
my breaching

my britches on fire
my bitches & pantyhose

my sexist expression
my flattery

my chanticleer
my chasers

my minx'd drink
brimming

my moonshine
my music

my tunic'd
tonic

my tears
tonal & sonic

my drip irrigation
my solar panel

my sombrero
my shades

my hades
my bottom dollar

my dolor
my polar bear

my foreign explorer
my ship helm

my masthead
my crown'd molar

my color
my skin

my kith
& kin

my wings & feet
my teat

my breast burst open
my baby's breath

my gentle asphyxiation
my confused contusion

my booze
my bruise

my formula
my excess

my abscess
drained

my zit
my pus

my popped
belly

my bug-eyed look
my mealybug mouthful

my mourning dove

my roaming love

my diver
my clam

my revelation
my turn

my spit
& spear

my witching hour
my power

my sorcery
my staying

my at-home-mom
praying

my crane wife
my swan maiden

my swine
my twine

my yarn
my spinning web

my chicken-foot house
my baba yaga

my puppet
& poppyseed

my opium dream
my oriental silk

my worm-covered sidewalk
my mulberry leaf

my berry-stained lip
& wineskin

my scratched-up hide
my covered-over eczema

my grazed
abrasion

my braces
my retaining walls

my bruxism
my eroded enamel

my gnashing of teeth
my fallen state

my stammer
my speech impediment

my scab-kneed childhood
my playground sandbox

my soapbox
& straw man

my sham
my wolf and lamb

my huff and puff
pigs

my professor higgins
my nonstandard greeting

my capitalization error
my free market

my deli counter operation
my surgical precision

my embalming fluids
my druids

my innumerable stars
my journey east

my dromedary
my beast

my cushioned seat
my shearling slippers

my moleskine notebook
my pen tripping ink

my gender-neutral word
my thousand and one nights

my life in your lap
my words in your fears

my father figure
my delayed flight

my scissor'd hair
my tent-peg'd skull

my platter'd pate
my warm gun

my trickster stories
my master's house

GIVE US THIS DAY

They hang us from our unspoken, unripe thoughts
& we are lifted in the hanging.

We swallow endless mouthfuls of swollen tales, of shoulder-slung and clinging words,
dampered and extended

to tomorrow and tomorrow's tomorrow.

CURRICULUM VITAE

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Education

MFA in Creative Writing, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2015 (expected)

BA in English, University of Notre Dame, 2008

Publications

“Small Talk.” *Peruse Zine*. Issue 1. Ed. Scott Hinkle. May 2014.

Teaching Positions

Graduate Teaching Assistant (Instructor), Aug. 2012-Present

Department of English, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

ENG 101: Composition I – regular and themed course (Fine Arts)

ENG 101WC: Composition I – linked course (Fine Arts)

ENG 102: Composition II – themed course (Food Laws & Ethics)

ENG 205: Introduction to Creative Writing (Fiction & Poetry)

Presentations

“Composition: Responding to Student Writing.” New Graduate Assistant Orientation.
Department of English, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Aug. 2014.

“Lowly Saints in Holy Places: Poetry of Humility and Exaltation.” Graduate &
Professional Student Association Research Forum. University of Nevada, Las
Vegas. Mar. 2015.

Readings & Performances

Neon Lit Reading Series. Trifecta Gallery. Las Vegas, NV. Nov. 2012.

Neon Lit Reading Series. Trifecta Gallery. Las Vegas, NV. Mar. 2013.

O Heart by Claudia Keelan. Greenspun Hall Auditorium. Las Vegas, NV. Apr. 2014.

Neon Lit Reading Series. Trifecta Gallery. Las Vegas, NV. Nov. 2014.

Scholarships & Grants

Beverly Rogers, Carol C. Harter Black Mountain Institute. Summer 2014.

Graduate & Professional Student Association, UNLV. Summer 2014.

Office of International Programs, UNLV. Summer 2014.

Service

Reader, *Witness Magazine*. Las Vegas, NV. Aug. 2014-Present.

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