

2019

The Forever Baby

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THE FOREVER BABY

By

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B.A. Liberal Arts, Florida International University, Miami, Florida, 2016

Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Degree Master of Fine Arts
in Poetry

The University of Montana
Missoula, MT

Official Graduation Date May 2019

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Creative Writing

The Forever Baby

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This collection of poems looks at identity across multiple forms of lived experience. Each section of this project is distinct in its use of voice although the content is weaved together around the same themes: the aging body, personality, and poetic introspection.

THE FOREVER BABY

I tread my mother's wrist and would draw blood.
Behind the little hood my eyes are hooded.
I have gone back into my hooded silence,
Talking to myself and dropping off to sleep.
—Robert Duncan, “My Mother Would Be a Falconress”

Mon dessin ne représentait pas un chapeau. Il représentait un serpent boa qui digérait un éléphant. J'ai alors dessiné l'intérieur du serpent boa, afin que les grandes personnes puissent comprendre. Elles ont toujours besoin d'explications.
—Antoine Saint-Exupéry, *Le Petit Prince*

LAUGHING GULL. *Larus atricilla*...
Distinguished from other small Gulls by its *dark mantle* that blends into the dark wing-tips and the conspicuous *white border* that lines the hind edge of the wings. In the breeding season, the head is black; in winter white with dark markings. The immature bird is a very dark small Gull with a *white rump*. The white border on the rear edge of the wing and the dark breast are also good marks.
—Roger Tory Peterson, *The Field Guide to the Birds*

DRAMATIS PERSONNAE

BIRDFACE—A developing chaos of feathers

WHITEBIRD—An uncomfortable lightening of feathers

THE WATCHER—A taciturn stillness of wise un-feathers

THE HEART OF KNIVES—A scholar of palmchats

AURORA/THE TAROT—Two friends within one subjugated body

MANFACE—A late coming attempt at fatherhood

PUSHOVER—A weak smothering

BACKBONE—A lower back pain of feathers that resists pushover

BROTHER/BROTHER CIGAR—A sentimental duality of performance

BEADY EYES—A study in passing a Turing test

Everyone is a bunch of babies
—*Birdface, The Forever Baby*

BIRDFACE & ONOMASTICS

The Heart of Knives was named after her West Side island trek.

The Tarot was named after her discovery of esoteric knowledge.

Pushover came to be from her disposition.

Backbone emerged from Birdface's tailbone because it was necessary to resist.

Manface is all that he is.

I am Birdface, winged Manface.

BIRDFACE & THE FACES OF MEN

My face is the face of a man, my father, Manface, whose face is my future face. It means something beyond understanding. Just as my name, can't find the words for the wood-like pieces that populate the base of trees around the city.

I didn't see myself as anyone's light skinned pitcher or base bastion. The other players didn't think such. In that moment I was Whitebird. The time of Whitebird was short.

At practice, but feathered, in the dirt, I went back home, and pretended that fence-climbing wasn't the only shortcut I took to stop the velocity of sports and projectiles.

I had one victory during the time of flying orbs. Second base, direct hit, glove-caught. What should have been growth became aspiration since I've always been second never first, sometimes fielded way back where all the bases look like pillows and all the players look like the animosity of grown branches fighting for sunlight.

BIRDFACE & REAL TALK

I love people who begin conversations by saying “real talk,” without no context at all. So, real talk...

You would think I'd have a beak, but I have a handsome man-face. Although, one time I took a baseball meteor directly to the beak. My lip inflated into a hair-lip. It was also disoriented before the pitch, being an inner bird and all.

After the pitch, I went into that disoriented dimension that rips open doors to other worlds. There I became Backbone and was blessed with the boon of wallflowers.

I also earned the title of Eternal Watcher, as a Watcher, I saw myself as a toddler in pain caused by The Stray Women. I don't talk about them because I'm not sure how to process the eternal looping of memory.

Which direction should we move the eye? What side of the brain stores hardened memory? This is one of the memories I want to share with Aurora, now known as The Tarot, ever since she gained the deck of decisions and rewrote all the archetypes of her behavior, she has become wise and distant.

Sometimes, but not always, I feel safe in a woman nook.

BIRDFACE & BELONGING

I mapped this island city in my mind. It swirls and becomes nothing quite easily.

It was planned for trellises, arcades, and spirals.

It's baffling how it resembles a nest of snakes. If I were the city planner, I'd have moved the rivers closer to supermarket crops.

I'd take the mountains and push them all the way to the edges beyond the beaches to make giant protective walls to turn the sea into our true moat.

I sit, cliff by the woodside, around the thick tree, the true queen of birding.

This is the nest I've needed this whole time. At the queen tree, I'm not bird nor man nor boy. I'm not anything. I can't be the baseball nor the glove nor the bat.

I have neither role nor position. My friends keep telling me the things I don't know about myself. It keeps happening or I keep letting it happen.

I have a body. That's all that matters. With every step I don't take, a path is already formed.

Why bother in flamboyantry when the tree blooms tall and fire red?

BIRDFACE & MEETING WHITEBIRD

Whitebird is afraid of The Under-Bridge. It was tricked by a past lover to drive under. Everyone was loud and angry. It was frightened and made to feel as it didn't belong in the island that it knows and loves.

BIRDFACE & CAREER ADVANCEMENT

When the decayed year comes, and all the fart-face teachers start asking questions about the future, I'm sixteen with the right idea.

"I'm a soda can that will grow up to be a wine bottle," or "I'm a jacket sleeve longing for a shiny button." Or, "When I grow up, I want to be the memory of a nice conversation."

BIRDFACE & BEADY'S DEFENESTRATOR

Beady Eyes unveiled the machine and said, "this is the Dream Defenestrator."

A mechanical mess of arms, bands, and cogs occupied the windowsill's inner and outer edges. It hung on with the determined strength of clinging to the past.

Before Birdface got a chance to form a thought, Beady Eyes continued, "write down your dreams on this piece of paper."

Birdface did as told. Beady Eyes swiped the paper from Birdface's hand. With all her strength and light bodyweight, Beady Eyes pulled the furthest arm leaning outside the window and stretched it all the way back inside the room. With great effort, she locked the dream between the machine's index and thumb.

The machine clung to the dream with much more force than Birdface ever could. Beady eyes released the hand which promptly screeched to a halt, shot back to the floor inside still grappling the dream, then it boomed away with a quake that shook Beady Eyes' hat collection to the floor revealing an endless sequence of hooks and the floor: a hat garden. After the quake, Birdface and Beady Eyes watch the paper piece, transfigured midflight swinging upward closer aiming toward the sun, as it finally became a true dream.

"That's how the Double D works," Beady Eyes said with hands on hips and a proud fully puffed chest.

"I see that... but what about my dream?"

"Who cares, just let it soar," Beady Eyes said visibly annoyed. "Don't be so selfish."

BIRDFACE & ITS VISION OF ITSELF AS BACKBONE

I am the flight anchor of narratives.

In horror, the bloodied grass.

In romance, the dirty plates at the restaurant.

In history, the hypothetical future.

In fantasy, the pointy hats that should be discarded.

In Sci-Fi, the fallen scales of the lizard people.

In thrillers, the obvious solution to a frivolous problem.

In crime, the security guard that dies from BB gun shot.

In drama, the brief moments of uncomfortable laughter.

BIRDFACE & REMEMBRANCE

Inspired by Backbone, I grew fingers above my forehead, fingers that tapped percussively as if saying “remember this.”

Tapped into memory, ten years old, the taste of baseball is equal to traveling back to the best of past lives. The hollow sound of my dumb beak planted.

Onto first base I dived.

Wanted to be less of a backdrop back then. I wanted to be good and grow with a mahogany arm like Manface’s because he really could sport. He has always been more noble, a better animal.

“Are birds animals too?” I thought trying to fit the old mitt to the grown catching wing.

I believed other bodies lived better lives because they accepted their vessel. Accepting my avian vessel has made mine more difficult. The difficulty has always been in being.

When I chose pronouns and species, I made promise to my feathers to ignore those who don’t refer to me as I refer to me.

I am Birdface; I am it.

BIRDFACE & HOLIDAYS

After the time in the sandlot, at the arrival of holidays, Christmas baseball was born within me. I exploded ornaments with a broom handle. I was bursting garlands of glittered crystal which gave Pushover a near heart attack that was demoted to a breakdown.

Instead of apologizing, I concentrated all my baby bird attention on news clippings of new millennium babies born bearded with stumps that would grow into horns according to the Christian gazette that distributed this nonsense.

When my feathers wouldn't still themselves for sleeping, I suffered from a night paralysis that made me picture these fiendish infants living regular lives, getting regular jobs, and marrying regular partners. But, I wouldn't because I made Pushover cry.

BIRDFACE & ATTEMPTED TRUTH

I know shit truly is great on a slingshot, terrible on a catapult.

On fall afternoons I watched the reflection of a lavender candle that Pushover put up against the top shelf where I kept my bird clothes, woolen pants, plain t-shirts that have openings for wings to fit through.

She knows I truly hate strong scents. The fabric is tough to handle cooking stains and unkempt feathers. It absorbs all the lavender expanding in the room.

My instrument is the independence I gather.

Hers is how awful she makes me feel when she tells me she's going to hurt herself because I don't come back to the nest anymore.

We have clashing but familiar engines of war.

BIRDFACE & BACKBONE AND PUSHOVER

PUSHOVER

"That was the first time you got prescribed the anti-scarring cream."

BACKBONE

"No, that didn't happen. I'm not stupid. At least I think I'm not that stupid."

PUSHOVER

"You went with the boys to the yard with the long trees. You all raced to the top of the tree. You climbed up, slid back down on your chest."

BACKBONE

"I know. It wasn't a dream."

PUSHOVER

"I can't make this up. I spent so much on cream."

BACKBONE

"I remember it differently. I almost lost a nipple. I was coming back from class and I climbed a different tree, a thornier one. And, I lost my hold and footing and slid down. Then the babysitter dowsed me in tomato paste."

PUSHOVER

"To prevent the scars plus I can't have you replaced."

BACKBONE

"I don't remember it that way, but I sense a rising theme."

BIRDFACE & THE HEART OF KNIVES

The Heart of Knives has long flowing black hair, an unparalleled sense of style: zebra pants, pink vinyl jackets, scarves in the shape of Pushover's latent disappointment in me.

She can do it all.

The Heart of Knives has seen the side of the island that is unknown to me. The side where all my siblings live. The side where my grandparents turn to dust.

The side where magic is real, impossible to be a bird. Impossible to be a boy. Impossible not to be a man there. She understands me when I'm Whitebird more than I do.

She sees how at the island Birdface is Whitebird and how a bird boy is nothing.

BIRDFACE & BROTHER'S TRANSFIGURATION

Brother did not mean to become a cigar.

Insidiously, he grew a beard, then he grew this strange rocky brown voice soured by the tobacco of his self like a cascade of sand that becomes glass. Then he became prone to crying over injustice while committing some himself. He would tell me all about how the island was abandoned, how nobody cared, how music was dying, how the arts were in decay, how painters stood on the sidewalks of the marina, all selling the same painting, then he told me how he wished he could sell of his precious stones to stay there.

He regretted leaving the sand and the salt behind. He regretted a past drawn in chalk and the hopscotch path. Yet, his beard was shaggy with the island's classic hypocrisies.

"Bird, what are you doing after?"

"Why do you care? You're a cigar."

"Just tell me, Birdbutt. Don't be so difficult."

"They're private."

"Come on, tell me. Don't be a bitch."

"To bird."

"To bird? What the fuck does that mean? Do you not bird every day already?"

"The plan soars."

I hovered.

BIRDFACE & THE BIRTH OF THE WATCHER

The Watcher is old, old like Brother Cigar, old like guano rocking chairs, old like solving problems through violence, old like the songs that make us cry whether we want to or not.

The Watcher is made eternal by wisdom that surfaces often strangely when nobody wants it.

This is how old Birdface is when it dons the mantle of The Watcher

The Watcher's birth was strangely uncomplicated despite being born with a full beard that lengthened all the way to its round old man baby belly with an outward navel.

It was born without an umbilical cord——wishful birthing.

The Eternal Watcher wanders all dimensions wondering how it ever had a connection with the womb.

Birdface likes to pretend that it is not The Watcher.

That pretension doesn't last long.

The Watcher is an identity of endurance.

“Is the womb,” he muses outwardly like his navel, “Pushover?”
He says this as if Pushover is there to hear without listening to a single word, lavender candle still burning.

THE WATCHER & PATIENCE

Everything I said was born of my defeated patience.

The worst type of patience to have. Beady Eyes would understand.

This is the kind of patience that listens closely for the other person's argument knowing quite well that it's wrong and illogical and so far-removed that it's become unsound in some remote space of a logic that recursively, itself, has come face to face with its own defeated silence.

The Tarot convinced me to climb out of my high window, into the rock garden past the doghouse, piercing a roundabout into the tunneled night that filtered through a siphoning cold far fresher than the metaphorical cage of four lyrical walls.

This was the first time I sought to be brave.

Being a coward becomes a practice like any other natural practice. As a chick, I never flew. As a bird, I never hunted.

THE WATCHER & DISAPPOINTING SIBLINGS

My nameless brother plummets to his death while my other brother is trapped in a systematic silence of concrete.

He only reveals his coral to me. He tells me how my feathers are soothing. I tell him I could never do his job.

To my brother, silence is survival.

And, I understand that. What I can't understand is that he still works there.

THE WATCHER & DIMENSIONS OF BIRDFACE

End on that side of the dimension since the other sides have animal shapes.

In the land of stags, when Birdface is The Eternal Watcher it sees the effect of a choreographed stomp. Birdface doesn't know what to call a mob of stags.

The Eternal Watcher, on the other hand, does. But, The Eternal Watcher, won't share any knowledge. All knowledge is private to the eyes of The Watcher.

Birdface croaks, sings, chirps, quacks, screeches, and roars, all that it sees. Birdface is as much a chronicler as an annoyance to the scribes of all dimensions.

Birdface won't stop beak-screaming itself into timelines. Its instincts are to be the wall and not the fly; to be present and unnoticed.

The Watcher, though, is the curtain nobody notices or the four-leaf clover that suffers a trampling. From its perspective, it can see up skirts but it's too respectful to do that. The Watcher won't give Pushover or Manface the satisfaction of being what they want them to be.

The Watcher is self-blinding during moments of blushing shame.

BIRDFACE & CHRONIC ANGERS OF MANFACE

Manface's angers arise from the smell of cooked fish.

Lack of control also sends him hurling for shouts.

He is angered by his face beneath my beak. I know he thinks
I'm a disappointment because I'm wasting what he gave me.

I'm feathered and making the best of it despite him.

BIRDFACE & CHRONIC ANGERS OF BROOMS

This time there were no Christmas decorations involved. This happened way before the decorations exploded their thin films of crystal.

I didn't know what animal I was. So, I tried to become a fish by plunging head first naked into the water tank. I almost drowned.

To dry me, Pushover grabbed my little foot before I gupped myself back to the eternal nest. Then, she beat the water out of me with a broom. My back was so red and dry. I knew then that I could never be a fish.

BIRDFACE & BEADY EYES' MEANING OF LIFE

Beady Eyes leant forward to meet the Mighty Aquarium Iguana. It shriveled in the sun slowly atop an amber deposit.

“Girl, I’m telling you. You keep that fact-based science shit up and you’ll make it big,” said the iguana, its dewlap loose in relaxation.

“It doesn’t really fulfill me anymore. I used to think about objects and their personalities. I want nothing to do with feelings now.”
The iguana looked into Beady Eyes’ eyes. It saw that they were lacking something.

“Girl, your eyes are weird. You’re so blind and so wide eyed you look like you can see into the future.”

“I think I used to.”

“You still do... See... No wonder you’re so unhappy.”

BIRDFACE & THE SUCCUBUS SAY WHAT HAD TO BE SAID

I showed La Zorra my genitals. She looked at them for a long time wondering how it all became gemstones, the tip were amethysts. The rest were emeralds.

“I’m not sure what this is, Birdface.”

“I don’t know. Is it normal?”

“It seems normal but they’re too bright and colorful. How do you use them?”

“They’re my favorite paperweight.”

La Zorra chortles.

“What about the two diamonds hanging from it”

“Oh, they’re twin pendulums. They’re always at conflict. They can never decide who is going to win the race.”

“Wait, what? How do they race?”

Birdface takes a step back and birds its pelvis. It swings the diamonds back and forward causing a sharp flat sound at the perineum. The light hits the diamonds creating a perfect light fractal through the gemstones.

Amused and entranced La Zorra says “That’s not supposed to happen. That’s not supposed to exist or maybe it is,” she pauses for a second, “it seems perfectly normal in your unique way.”

“But it’s what I have. What do I do?”

“Enjoy it. You haven’t had problems thus far. Just don’t hit anyone in the eyes with those pointy bits and you’ll be fine.”

Medical advice from a celibate succubus is always reassuring.

BIRDFACE & THE TAROT LISTEN FULL OF LOVE

These are my wounds. This is where the flight feather used to be. It was the one that reminded me how touch should feel. This is the feather I use to practice affection. I touch others with it, without intention.

I use it to remind myself how touch should feel.

This is the wing that never grew. It was supposed to grow but do you remember how that bus driver made a stop he wasn't supposed to make and how I was the only one on the bus and then I don't remember.

Remember how it feels to be bare in all emotions. This is the feather I appreciate without consequence or condition. It's almost a feather mirror. I forget to be a feather mirror. It's probably for the best I can't reflect myself on it. This is where it hurts the most. Run your hand through my wings, please run your hand through my wings.

I want to believe I'm okay, The Tarot, but I'm just not sure anymore These feathers hurt every day. It hurts to feel, it hurts to listen, it hurts to climb windows, it hurts to peel carrots, it hurts to sift flour, it hurts to look for stones in a dirty batch of beans. Everything just hurts.

The Tarot listens. She lifts her chin and nods in silence.

BIRDFACE & SCARS

This is why.
I climbed all those trees.
I flung myself from that first floor.
The Eternal Watcher's knees are shit.
Backbone has no strength.
Pushover worries so much.
I blow-dried my eyes by mistake.
I will win every award for dying.
I make it into every contest about living.

SELF TEACHING KINDNESS

«¿Qué gigantes?» dijo Sancho Panza.

«Aquellos que allí ves,» respondió su amo, «de los brazos largos, que los suelen tener algunos de casi dos leguas.»

«Mire vuestra merced,» respondió Sancho, «que aquellos que allí se parecen no son gigantes, sino molinos de viento, y lo que en ellos parecen brazos son las aspas, que, volteadas del viento, hacen andar la piedra del molino.»

«Bien parece,» respondió don Quijote, «que no estás cursado en esto de las aventuras: ellos son gigantes; y si tienes miedo quítate de ahí, y ponte en oración en el espacio que yo voy a entrar con ellos en fiera y desigual batalla.»

Y, diciendo esto, dio de espuelas a su caballo Rocinante, sin atender a las voces que su escudero Sancho le daba, advirtiéndole que sin duda alguna eran molinos de viento, y no gigantes, aquellos que iba a acometer. Pero él iba tan puesto en que eran gigantes, que ni oía las voces de su escudero Sancho, ni echaba de ver, aunque estaba ya bien cerca, lo que eran, antes iba diciendo en voces altas:

«Non fuyades, cobardes y viles criaturas, que un solo caballero es el que os acomete.»

—Miguel De Cervantes Saavedra, “El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote De La Mancha”

SELF-TEACHING KINDNESS

To train my reflexive language to remain caged behind the teeth because I can't
allow
the dominant catapasm to overpower the chemistry born from a former remedy.

If it emerges as a chest blast of mutual wounds, whether spik or fag or what have
you,
nobody leaves unscathed.

Neither the blasting chest moving the axing tongue, nor the other end of the
explosion
where the aftermath is rifts and rifts of artificial separation

APHORISMS I WISH WEREN'T TRUE

My BAC level is directly proportional to my honesty.

Erections prop up the glass ceiling.

Erections sustain the glass ceiling.

Erections won't break the glass ceiling.

I was born to be unbearable.

An organic life should be free of minor chords.

I will likely die of natural causes such as saying the right thing to the wrong gunowner.

My mouth runs faster than my logical thoughts.

I take four letter escapes mostly unnecessary.

Baby powder contains 0% ground babies.

Baby powder is ground baby free.

Recursion means patching a taco with another taco.

BLOODBERRIES

I'm picking fire ants like berries from a whirlwind
In the naked aftermath of sweating a lifespan
A spire shrinks to frozen magma
So tiny it must disappear in the winter

In the naked aftermath of sweating a lifespan
I don't like the complexion of this thing
So tiny it must disappear in the winter
I grazed your slick hole by accident

I don't like the complexion of this thing
Don't look—it's not funny
I grazed your slick hole by accident
Soft grip a dying carmine-colored worm

Don't look—it's not funny
I'll pat dry the bloodied worm
Soft grip a dying carmine-colored worm
Just turn on the lights—No. Stay down

I'll pat dry the bloodied worm
A spire shrinks to frozen magma
Just turn on the lights—No. Stay down
I'm picking fire ants like berries from a whirlwind

FRIENDLY BUT MONASTIC

I won't age out of this friendship if it turns epistolary.

Your work is just as good as your company.

Not that your voice is annoying or anything like that.

But in absence nobody must travel to be present in silence.

I'm selfish with my silences and I hate the scaffolding of small talk.

I love the platform of a letter. The postman would prance in and out.

To my mailbox, in my slippers, I would be fine.

Letter, brave. The weather has not been an obstacle to our talks.

NOBODY UNDERSTANDS YOUR LITTLE JOKES

Sometimes you call a family member for cooking advice.
You end up with a giant morsel of unsolicited life advice.
A Rubik's cube of criticisms and a lecture not worth the effort
of learning to boil the sausage which is probably killing you anyway.

MARRY ME METAPHOR

atop the Chinese tower, Dear Slow Cooker, where a face smokes
a bright kite cigar which flew because I wanted
to be cuddled under your warm wing prone to cooling at a moment's notice
in an agreement more than a nook of the safest space
in muddy thought is a stoop where you can shout sing
dance, across the art gallery when nobody watches without joining.

OFTEN, I WALK BY

the trees blush approaching nakedness in fall
desire digs in the winter; wishes all were flowers
one's favorite silence is a friend's sudden laughter
at the peach pit eyes of squirrels my sworn enemies
a bundle of proses dreams itself aesthetic
vines cling to buildings as elbows swing
angles sloping up and down hill
while red blossoms curl branch tips anew

The vine fruit knows detritus even in memories
an end to end catenary that befriends us
the sage advice of mentors who stir the growing
sense of capability as leaves, sicken, fall, and renew
so, we do, sing of Spring in Autumn
so, we do, we do, we do

SELF-PAST & PRESENT

The past self intends to write from the ridge of a lunar position.

The present self struggles for a position.

It does not know if it writes as a person, as an object, as a desire, or as a whim.

The future present self sees with touch and taste.

SEX APATHY

If ejaculation is an ejection of interest, one transaction is discarding.

Sex tangles me in a vine of arms in which I lay flat speaking.

All that really matters is that The Shirelles keep singing their hit.

I DOUBT

myself when I switch lanes on the avenue that measures my words
watching the toasted watchmen watch the road I can't tell apart
the salt of effort from other salts we've never scattered
on roads fearing hands slipping from the steering wheel

my own people can't place me anywhere because my head
hangs and moves in my lanky foreign body looking weird
they have said I look like all other ethnicities but mine

the skipping homeboys watch for the line
slippery bastards sharp nailed night corner hookers
dancers writers poets ballerinas orchestras sex & derivatives

dead paper the author at the end of every line
yes, next to Haiti I felt quake dress clad knowing
the stench of public transportation every car-trunk-machete
musical throng moves freely through my blood but
can't seem to make me dance bleeding merengue

I watch the beat fearing a lover will find me
fleshed author man behind a fearful prick
some kind of armchair Dominican

TO UNLEARN MY PHYSIOLOGY

I had to wake up to learn how the human body works

That is until I flex my knee to the wrong side, and it makes a sickly sound that burns and now, I walk crooked to one side.

That is until I hunch my back for so long, I feel like I'm sprouting new bones behind my neck where my shoulder blades meet at the center with a stabbing feeling that hurts like a blood eagle.

Or when I take a tantrum of a nap on my couch, so strongly,
I don't account for external sounds or the fact that a car crash could happen outside my window.

It does and now I might be the only person to get a neck injury from a crash in which they weren't involved.

APOLOGIES AND THANKS

for your endurance, sometimes you aggress yourself into corners and write yourself into offenses.

Silliness woven into silken verbiage to suffocate, hoping the validation from others more serious, more composed, more there and lettered will somehow fix the scraps of self you have gathered.

To perform the art of failing the rock heavy aluminum ball of crumpled memory, thanks.

My apologies do not fix the fact that the act has been committed.

The thought put to action. Tthe lips flap limp wet birds of heartfelt picture painted already supplicating a detached phenomenology.

What I'm saying is I know, I did it, I've come to undo the impossible.

Apologies are impossible—apologizing is lying the course—etched forever in the past. Apologizing is sculpting the path towards bigger passes.

My goal is never to apologize again is the same as saying I'm never leaving the house again which is the same as saying I'm a handsome coward please come visit me for tea.

REMEDIES

Mais on trouve, parfois, des gens avec des secrets admirables, de certains remèdes particuliers, qui font le plus souvent, ce que les autres n'ont su faire, et c'est là, ce que nous cherchons.

—Molière, “Le médecin malgré lui”

A plaything and a treasured idol,
take the arithmetic of time.

The seasonal worms, dug up in substance,
take how a fatigued lightning is primal.

The rumble like a crash on vinyl.
So little in comparison to everything. A finger
snapped out of time to then point elsewhere.

A voice speaks a single “stupid” word,
like “disdain” or “emerge” or “gold”

Something like that without finality however
Filled with a discrete shade of greed.

If I were vulnerable this way,
would you believe me competent?

Then, when I say this:
I am water-clear, still, diaphanous.

Every pore dilates into clarity—come
mirrors chain linked. Mirrors that say,
this is what I meant, all we mirrors meant:
The grammar of reflex, of sight, effort
in arrangement of income—the heart.
What I truly meant, I mean, is this.

If I say it this way,
I don't want someone.

Intelligent or likewise,
taciturn or perky or aloof
quiet or pensive or lethargic
like a growling branch.

I don't want someone.

So natural.

If I'm the leader and solitary member of my own religion,
Can I nominate a god condition as a branching estuary?

Through the rich life of the holy, I hope my flesh is spread
across my new religion's archaic gorget.

The gospel of the free literature pedestrian is the tidal voice
I give my loved ones.

And, if by chance that makes me a target, I know I'm growing.

Too many things are said, about the anxious arrival of leaves.

A solemn question of vines, a little trailing of ants, leading
by a need to grasp a thread, such as a skein of speaking lips.
When a shrub becomes a tree, or a cry becomes a shriek,
The birth of a new body embodies

into the growling branches.

I consider this a failure to remain
concrete in objects painted the color of most nights.

The social circles of Dominican poets are drawn in cigarette smoke-making.

The same redundant moves: saying goodbye but never leaving,
hello but never being present.

The social circles of Dominican poets are deluged in tired metaphors.

While I'm marooned, happily, in concocted islands.

Said but unheard on the other side of the portal.

A well-shaped drop lingers as if intrusive thoughts
were unfixed onto avenues of communication.

Palms entangled as rubber enshrine a stall, wherein a voice
speaks in wet eruptions. Again, your fingers curl dry figs.

Spoken in cold bristles run across a landline helping
of warmth disguised as an embrace that knows us.

The language bandit anxiety that just feels right of cloaked lemon
makes a clean break.

The bottom fridge shelf
where the cheese was
holds the old family remedies
of reaching to open the door.

His personality filled
the ice cream parlor, as did
his burly hairy arms,
clutching live lobsters.

How the mechanical horse galloped,
Grandfather stocker of cheese.

A steed I loved.

Practice is guayar caña to undress a spoonful of romero.
Or was it doubtful of canela?

Kitchen herbs are gender bending from language to language.
Rosemary is not Rosa María as I initially believed.

Romero, not that it means the yolk is any less itself without thyme.

If skipped for morir soñando, bless this boiling greca's chambered brown pressures.

A fragrance of saffron. Paprika sprinkle on Teflon.
Nice remains. La borra de café.

Fretted flavor of wood

forever on my fingertips
pressed the string tenses
the sound moored in
what I withstood
was the practice
of practice.

It wasn't anybody's fault
that oil built up to halt
the grooves of my digits,
here, old and past now.

This doglike soil kicked is no longer fertile.

This dog is dead on all the hourglasses shaped
like the aristocrat's desire to roughen up the blight.

The coloring opposite of cold hats my grassland of stone piers
that ignore the history of every cobbled brick laid for meandering.

Like every great poet, I hope for a novel someday,
you're supposed to enact your profession.

One must fill the shoes for money,
anything and everything for money.

In truth, I would love to peel potatoes,
be forever a potato peeler, a meat salter
or a tenderizer with a hot personal skillet.

The cast iron pains patterns of gloss.

As much as with purulence warns, old leg,

Of the colonial balconies' stucco dreg.

Foreigners across the lacquered gray of block tiles

Scented of fried fish, gasoline fumes,

the sharp pitched plume of terrible dates.

Easy on the eyes but hard to make of sense.

I never had script on how to be a man

I learned to not reduce the body to a single gender.

Acepté simplemente que un completo llena un cántaro de lluvia más rápido que una oficina de gobierno llena un badén o puebla un documento de excusas.

My vogue model hands stopped caring about postures wherein I saw my father as a hulking animal of a man. I wanted to praise his illiteracy in this sense. Already locked in his part. I'd been left out—seedless of emotional core—completely devoid of that growl that comes with stockpiling violence inside one's belly.

Dando evidencia de que entre batazo y batazo, blanquito ve más almohadas que bases y más arena que cristales y que nadie pregunte de dónde vienen los espejos porque no sabe de reflejos ni de hastíos.

My father gave me a generosity at the hips. I chose to sit down and ponder why he is lipless. I keep my giving to a single soul in that aspect, my capability of love as elements of my language.

I thought I commandeered this submarine.

In truth, I was capsized, where a captain
and a sailor have no sway over a plantain
routine, that's become embedded evergreen.
Scrubbing the intent from my lips', the sheen,
outcomes wanting to violate the staples of my people.
Their earnest abundance of dandelions, a nonlethal
lust that has been scattered as a deck unclean.

When I ejaculated in the bathtub for the first time
it was really confusing to massage myself thinking
about this redhead and I wasn't sure where it was going.

It just kept happening with the redhead and it felt weird
and kind of okay but sometimes this fit boy with a beard
would come into the bathtub-mind too and I was too afraid to finish.

I found him as attractive as the redhead and the erection didn't diminish.

It remained the same, stroke through stroke, redhead and beard boy
in the palm of my hand naked and moaning they made a convoy.

My sex made a soft sound and I was in my confused prime.

I thought I was the afternoon scribe
made of mahogany. As if I were
rocking pine doing something different.

Experiencing something unique and solitary
as if coal or cedar imposed a fine on my sexuality.

The litany of sleeping botany describes my lax ailment
with growing to fit the pot of an effeminate flower or
an imposing tree from which flamboyance would exude.

To form my own shout of breadth, the expansion
would encompass a sudden unary feeling of being
man, woman, tree, bird, soil, or ruffle of declension.

If highways roughhoused, I'd be left out of the game.

If these highways led anywhere, I wouldn't have to move so much.

I wouldn't have to consider onlookers, hustlers, legal battles, mangú justifications, and such.

If palms where mirrors I'd be a portrait of myself lame.

If I was a portrait of the ocean, I'd be a gray lighthouse where my name is all the nouns I hate.

I'd be the naked hopscotch sett pilot.

Amusing colonial vagabond—the endless blanquito that sees the home base as a pillow that is a decimating remedy.

My scheme now is to change
the national animal to something
small, poisonous or something
viscous with deadly fangs.

Something extinct would work the range
of survival or permanence in memory.

A concept pregnant with the music of mange,
the music of asphalt diluted in the blessed smoke
of public transportation stench, an almost necessary
landfill filled with Jack Veneno's estranged solitude.

A defined flavor—still without
a mixing sofrito—slow on the fire
made of midnight that doesn't tire
but summons a chewed pepper lout,
whom between mashes and stout
mouthfuls of what he thinks is
the proper business of sadness
which to him is not clear yet.
Quiet, exhausted, overwrought,
Unnoticed like a child hiked on a tree
nobody misses them

My friend understands what I mean

when I say such barbarities as: I think I'm in love.

She tells me what I already know but needed to hear.

I haven't had a youth and she knows I move

like a crystal lizard looking for hydration.

Back then I saw sex as an impossible solo endeavor.

She sees right through me. She tells she knows I know

how to love and listen because I love and listen to her too.

Pillow talk gaze of the eyes
a silent agreement expands
connected in mutual watching
the tender nudity of sunrise
something baked or breaded
a yawning taste of lip
mint is the tip of the tongue
a sway shows we're funny
like our bellies touching.

At this point, I hope to have figured out

how it is I need to be loved more
than how I want to be loved.

One whole rung above the other, without
a doubt, yes but years of unsure meandering
in a drought of touch had some kindness
where every other interaction was wrecked
by the presence of this hyper attraction to personality.
I was told I was fundamentally broken.
I made the mistake of believing that.

I contracted sleep from the natural world.

I don't know what comes next to me in representation.
But every mourning is a better morning if I kiss a lover
without brushing my teeth first.

At this age, I'm all for raw kisses and grazing bellies.
And, I'm all for living separate days to commiserate
at night, as if we were daily doves plotting
their own path to the next morning.

FLAMBOYANT TREE

Ay yo soy Ogún
Y yo soy de allá.
—“Los Olivos”

Sin mi behique me siento desamparado...
...Que le paso a la gente que ahora vive aquí
Que no parecen ni arawak ni macorí, que extraño...
—Vicente García, “Bohío”

Del niño misterioso recojamos
cuanto dejó, sus cantos triturados,
las alas tenebrosas de la nave enlutada,
su negra dirección que ahora entendemos.
—Pablo Neruda, “Lautréamont Reconquistado”

algo anda mal, pero algo siempre anda mal...
...dirán que los jodidos
dirán que los jodidos y se olvidarán de nosotros
—Enriquillo Sánchez, “Por la cumbancha de Maguita”

Mother never took me to the flamboyant tree again
where the man fumed tobacco from his sinews.

He spat rum through his teeth at me, cured me
where I no longer felt my lungs strain.

Cold arrows sprung from my chest; the fire tree stayed
with me, red, after red at the outskirts, red the limit of the lips'
likelihood of touch, red flushed at the thought of sex.

The man said not to thank him never to thank him.
He gave me a sip of rum and a whiff of tobacco.

Mother looked frazzled—worried of the night to come.
She told me to pray with vigor, to pray at the thought,
of god, pray at the edge of remembrance I did offer rum
tobacco, sugar, but not to her god—Ogún emerged that day.

To lift the spirits of the fallen, Ogún comes without a face
shared spear-bent sailing long lost outside of selfdom.

The accidental fault of my flapping bembas after descending
to the solitude of age, aggressive into the perfumed memory
of Vick's Vapor Rub on my chest, my grandmother's chest.

The smell unlike the man's rum, tobacco never drifted
in my lungs until my father was ready for me to be a man
that syncretizes sex and gender, the orientation of motion
in my shame of branching I left without a goodbye.

After leaving I lowered my intake of mashed plantains,
fried salami to improve my accent, started saying things
as fings, lost the beer belly, listened to native speakers
closely, my effort floored me deep into frustrations
repeatedly unable to knot or unknot the test of being
uprooted a second time, without conquest of roots.

Bird by bird, and watch of us from trees as we struggle
with the smattering of native roots, dragged across the seas,
measuring the ocean distance from savannah to island caging,
undoing the knots from birth, tied untied and done to prick

an animal past its stabbing to an animal present, grounded.

Bird by bird, and watch of us from trees as we struggle in this bitter
plantation of sun, competing saplings aching for the limelight,
baseball paycheck to get off this island, for my mother to retire
for my uncle to have new clean shirts; for my father because then maybe
he will love me because I would be more like him and less like me,
fire and flamboyance, all not obstinate or lyric scholar,
with empanadas every Saturday, shoe shined or some other flattery.

Vengo de bien lejo casi del olvido.

Come to me reborn or refreshed, absent Ogún voice from within me.
There is less fire now that my breath has grown to represent me,
remembering past afternoons bleating mango juice from the pith
to my white shirt, undergone a mounting change of sharp confusion
where I found I was deaf to my body. I never listened to its calling of desire,
never fed it the meal given by Metresili whom I too call to guide me
in love with the heavy lore of my family.

Aé aé, te lo ruego.

I anticipate the heavy bite of yesterday.

Nunca son lo palo que a mí me decían,

Candelo unafraid of water and travel.
Come with me beyond the olive trees where I explain my light skin, my light
touch, my light voice, my forgotten loa of fiery disposition that acknowledges
a beast condition with my island siblings, a long wring of the neck.

Barón, tell me about the knives my brothers plunge into their hands to manage living.
Remember my abjection of the same secret street where three people died before
my first outing into colored spaces. Good night to the society of motoring devils
that take the night alongside the four wheels of my hulk, metallic like the taste of blood.

I question running inside me, Belié Belcán.
¿Quién defiende la noche?
A coward for justice,
De día me e'condo y de tarde no salgo por la pavita.
I hear, *take it easy.* I hear.

Relax the penetration of lead doesn't bruise but bursts the skin.
Slowly I remember the night anyone runs from place to place,
Ogún out of sight. Outside the window a thief runs a bullet brush
the breeze that sharpens the edge of every machete I've seen,
Belié I fear silence is my taíno heritage. My father is the clearing
silent about all that hurts. My mother in her shoulder carries a creak
that remembers motion, the paining distance one drags from childhood
to adulthood. Neither had the chance to meet you at the Flamboyant Tree.

They carry their past how I carry myself without Ogún, all snake-hunting,
warring truths scattered among the olive trees that are never really gone.

For my funeral I left a fun with which to pay the wailers to convert the weight
of my jokes that should have been silence and the silence that should have been
denouncing, so much work to be done in the coming, gully-steep, that cart drags
my imaginary *behique que uno invoca cuando nada dá salud*.

Come my son, *mule prieta, bohío ideal*, condition of peace, stupid pastoral,
a sprinkle of sesame near my camphor, to drag the contaminated breath,
the celestial sabotage of faith, the star anise of these preconditions of freedom
that brought: Stars, Rums, Lilies, *Muertos De Semana Santa*, beer, wild brothers,
sex, sweat, aloe, coconut, brought machete, cut my excess of arms, the surplus
of one of my brothers I can't quite know black sugar, avocados, salt, petit pois,
my grandmother's devil is hungry for demons: *un solo baká*.

Takes the shape of trauma by herself she is enough wildfire for my father
and my mother to be ashes of their former patio trees, tidy selves pregnant
with their former selves or *un fukú de miel de aveja y sal sola sin limón*.

I am a loose cock in a foreign pen, Barón. Get oil for their burial with pepper
for the flavor of falling or being fallen.

Fall pregnant is what my mother says when I tell her this world has had enough
of us and our avoidances. I wish for every skin that isn't my own. She evades
everything I say when I crave love, my father avoids a woman that would give
me a sibling, of someone who pretends to be me when I'm honest about it.

Si yo digo: Anaísa Pie si tu tá ahí, ven acá.

She is silent like god is silent, like my hope is a fatigue of swimming downward,
like my walking is just searching for sands that feel how I feel drowned crystals
in every child that reminds me of me, with the stunted boyish voice difference

unlearned at the loving ends of pasts. *Belié, tu sabe*. I want to sound like a man.

My, how my father sounds manly is how I dance, flamboyant, how my mother begs, fearful is I speak to my island of backed-up traffic—my island of enumerables.

Start building a voice of fish but never fish, a hook of licked fire universal dressed in dark slacks yonder sat by the pier, the long pier that crosses the city from where the boats come and go. Pet your belly with the long hairs, colors cover your back island of me with a grotto for lovers, attic-made son that keeps the pulp from fruit in all the juices. This stupid peninsular coast loves no one, since the words.

Since the words were guahananí, since the word was ayití.

Nobody cares for us and we don't care to each other.

Think of the nail driven into the forehead of a wildebeest and how much it takes to kill and end us is what it takes to organize us, because we won't die struck by hurricanes or floods or famines or foreign debt, mosquitos take residence in our veins, we pick each other off like dancing scabs, like Father and Belié and justice that can't be disappointed.

Father said I was a disappointment, so I never felt more like father than that day, before or after or sometime on purpose, outside of time father offered: I know a fat bitch that can help you.

Ogún, I heard him do a be-like-me sound from his expression.
I refuse to be like you, father.

I was fuming my insides. I wanted Metresa, help us make an appearance.
I will bring perfume and roses, pure thoughts, white linen, my bland apology for being myself, for being yonic and phallic, for loving women as much as men, and women as much as they want to be loved without a spread palm or an open fist, as they appear on island news, crimes of passion or just crimes and I'm just a man but I've been called different.

Ay, Barón. ¿Ofrecóme pero queseto?

Zoom on the lips of a lover, free-fire-glide unquestioning the tides, the fall of all waters jumping from a high ridge, the leap of faith in nonviolence.

Everything hurts when it's first learned with impact.
Over time it's okay to be fine, fine to care for hair until it silvers from the onyx of living in this earth.

We would be aquamarine if larimar weren't more beautiful, more us, more palmchat deeper tackled by waters more familiar, released shames, spores of willing to change a pickup of leaning to masculine proximity, a sudden of desiring feminine wisdom dendrites that lattice my intelligence of gripped fingers at the fulcrum, the perineum.

Anaísa, oye.

When to thrust, when to swallow, when swimming verdant in olive shames, my voice boxed, *con su llenura de cerveza presidente*, a correct recall of savage *viaje intergaláctico* landing at the indigenous forefront of a strange *strúcamelo* of inborn conflict, the light skin diplomat, prized hand of Ogún, lift the island from its turmoiled chasm, called the sea.

Our buoyant father as the cutthroat heat of alleyways, avenues fill my traffic of external arms, sharp turned toward the coast, pregnant with avocado, black sugar, nor the devil nor hunger, nor lasting impression of peace—between island siblings no sharing outcomes of bounty sprung.

Will blind us as much as rivers retreat, like we retreat through Moca with our necks intact, as we move through the Massacre river with our material possessions at least seventeen gradations of skin quilt this fabric, *de fukú, de miel, conflict, de avena, de harina, de batey*.

Tengo una pata rota.

Our father's collective arm is made of arms, hide, cattle, salt, sand, silt, one-shot pistols' soil, my father's first arm from the soil stole fire from his mother, and another arm grabbed our shared grandfather's rucksack, the same our cursed grandfather snatched with boats, sacked traveled and waved the furthest continent to build our state of dry fixes, decided or realized like a man among men. As he was redundant, so are we, wished forgotten.

Meant to be gone, leaves past season, waves past tides—*como rezos entre maleza y palos* the arms grew from father's trunk, a seed of arms, rose up, planted in the soft movement of trees, blurred leaves, scant of breath, effeminate, weak, bulky, slow-dragged.

Ogún, your watchful eyes are desired, on my best days I feel core-sick, peeled from chest to navel—*si Anaísa no me quiere entonces nadie me quiere*.

Cimetière you dig the graves, watch the resting and the restless, wait for my body, wait for my father's body, wait for my brother's body, sitting on your green ebony tombstone, counting stones the shape of clouds, measuring the distance from guava to armpit to the washing of feet, the measure of every island son is his capacity for violence.

¿Verdá, Belié? ¿Verdá Belié que son verdá?

This system of palm fronds is broken front trunk to nesting bird.

Every attempt in the shape of fireflies, shaped photographs
that capture a nightly heat which succeeds every night
in the shade of fireflies before the rain hits the leaves
of trees in the shape of me, every attempt in the shame of fireflies.

The cobbled streets where Columbus forged his fantasy.
Now walking, winter morning, bitter hot tea, roots that look
like grandmother's clutch on her aluminum cup back on the island
where my own imaginary son's roots float above all the trees,
and nothing at all looks like me anymore.

All vegetation alien, and unknown, son watching of river-grazing
animals where the forlorn cubs give tours in their rowboats.

Watch me, waste the freedom Anaísa gave me, wave Belié's club,
bench-parked zooming towards Cimetière, decaying tree, wishing me
flamboyant, and tell me what I should I do.

Cut it out to stay in my lane, with one tone, line, one cadence, single voiced—
unhook the curtains, climb the bars, break every window, replace the doors
with potted plants, to drink gin instead of water, to dance with my hips instead
of my strong longing that wallows in a single word... *maricón*.

Because the prospect of listening and concentration are foreign to you,
because I sprout from flamboyant seed, I become flamboyant tree.

We offer prayers to those who are lost, those don't know shit,
those who think they know shit, those who know are fucked up,
those who are famished, those who know the transference sack does not belong to them

I'm tired of the wasted tongue as a metaphor for speaking.
I'm tired of the wet lips as instruments of kissing.
I'm tired of the rhyme that emerges naturally out of being annoyed.
I'm fed up with the taste of genitals, the texture of nipples,
the entire season of fucking that sometimes happens with me in it.
I'm fed up with all the perceptions and senses I want to steep
in the opposite of synesthesia but sadly I want to do it in love.

Anaísa if you were here, you would laugh.

What do you want? You would ask. The most sincerely decimating answer is, I don't know; I would say I want some respite; I want what my mother had. A tryst or a flight of fancy toward a real person that fits the word I'm looking for is sunlight. The word I'm looking for is hypocrite. That finds me.

The word that finds me is solitary respite—*Ay, le tengo miedo a la cigüapa*. Cold and far are the adjectives my body feels when it feels safe.

If I'm bathed in oils faking a natural remedy, am I healed, or am I pretending my healing?

The mouthpieces of a single problem that is the gun left in the nightstand or the scroll that local government keeps to document every shade of complexion blanketing the remains of a colonial struggle, a blandness of soaked distance that hasn't defined what it means to be from the island or elsewhere or in my case what it means to be Dominican or Un-Dominican.

Others have different lists. Mine includes cheating at sports is un Dominican cheating on your spouse is Dominican. I wish Belié you would laugh at this.

Que condición ni qué raza.

A race that frightens is a race that does not exist because we are nothing but a mix of compromises and superpositions.

We are a quantum state of emotion both sad and happy in a forever spin of contrite metaphors and implausible ways of explaining this to someone without my privileged education of being and not being at the same time a stupid parallel line from mulatto to mestizo from moreno to Prieto from black to white, from insignificant facial features, from excuses insignificant to not love our island neighbors, for this reason this poet is a poem with a chest full of cocuyos, this poet recognizes the unknown nature of his birthplace within the theory of this birthplace within aesthetic the lighting of Quisqueya this lighting of Ayití this qubit of a country this island mirage of freedom that never wanted to be conquered for lack of spice, or rum, or sugar.

Rezo por mí padre.