

SALT: A Final Creative Thesis in Poetry

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT
SALT: A POETRY COLLECTION
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This collection of poems is separated into three sections that can be interpreted as Identity, Place or Position, and *Things*. Although not clear cut, this collection explores these thematic elements by questioning and manipulating language, exploring the musicality of language and modernizing traditional forms. Memory is a large focus of the work, and is woven into each of the sections. What I leave for the reader is a body of work that questions Identity as a whole; how where we come from, and where we're going, might shape us.

The title SALT comes from the coastal phrase "Salt water heals everything," and reflects the significance of water throughout the body of the thesis.

Dedication

For my mother, who has never read any of my poems.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to these publications in which some of these works have appeared:

4and20poetry

Philadelphia Stories

New Fraktur Arts Journal

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I.

hummingbird

Bird, I wanted to spread your wings
like a T and pin them both to
a corkboard with your chest exposed,
to watch you breathe, see the heaving
heart beat, quick enough to merit,
while the wings that made you famous
are forced to hold still.

I'm not sorry.

I'm not sorry. I'm not sorry.

Captured in this constant movement
I wouldn't mind putting her on
corkboard and pinning her wings back
(Because I don't know where they've been)
and pray. The chest exposed so
we might forget the feet, and beak.

Blessing of the Moosleute

*The folklore says the moss people have
an intimate connection with trees.*

My mom is growing moss on her bones-
The way she haunts her own home.

*Sometimes, moss people are depicted as being fairy like,
are pretty and have butterfly wings.
Other times, the moosleute are grey, old, and hairy with moss
They are, generally, women and children.*

My mom is growing moss on her bones-
Another reminder that I have to keep moving.
That no matter how much I love the rain, and the pines,
I cannot buy myself time.

*The moss people like to borrow things from humans
and in return would compensate them generously.
They are, generally, childlike.*

My mom is growing moss on her bones-
It's impossible for her to dry out
(I mean that to mean two things).

*There is an old story, that the Moss People
would ask humans for their breast milk-
no one is sure why, except that
what is more valuable than breast milk?*

But my mother's children are all grown up now.

Phantoms

She was too tired to walk. A stray dog, caught in a storm, all fours begging for dry ground. Mom pulled her onto the porch, crying for help. Dad coming out with a towel. The family dog –calm, concerned, still a puppy. The stray a mom, too tired to keep her eyes open, dragging her vagina and nipples on the ground. She let the towel drape over her, tried to get warm in the house- but went back into the rain, wind looking for phantoms to suckle on her sagging stomach.

In my mind I Google searched *British Pointer white and liver, with spots*
I tried to remember what *fistula* meant
I wondered if words could keep a body warm
sweet baby, sweet girl, lay down and rest Lady you need some rest

Prescription to Keep You Here

There was a bag labeled “accordion,”
enough tubes to act as performance strings
for a silent instrument *that breathes life*.
A box labeled “The Secret Garden.”
White, white, grey, green. A novel for young girls
and plants to help a room grow, so you don’t
feel as small apart of this hospital.
Hooked loosely to the wall, a bed on wheels
and pain on demand. A “No Fall Zone” sign.
She can’t even sit up, can’t see the plants.

Can she remember the apple trees or
catching rainbow trout in Idaho streams,
sticky August nights at a Shoshone bar?

Then again, those plants aren’t really that far.

Save the Date, 7/29/2012

Today-
My best friend from seventh grade
is wearing white, and I
in grey yoga pants and an old sports bra,
wasn't invited.
She is going to be beautiful-
more beautiful
than the homecoming she wore the
red dress
and her date never came.

More beautiful than her tear streaked face our senior year
when she called me to say Max had missed his flight.
And I drove over there in my pajamas and crawled
into bed with her while her mother made us coffee.

The dress hung in the closet-
bright, cherry red
a classic, satin heart line bodice that could
hug all of her new curves.
She meditated on the dress
how clothing can be a milestone
and I held her until she was able
to laugh again at the thought of going
to the dance with her brother.

Every time I think about it,
I wish she would have taken me.
That I could have heard about the engagement
from anything, except Facebook.

Today- I think about her, and wonder if all that white
made her miss the red dress.

Untitled

I disregard even flower petals

She loves me

She loves me

She loves me

Metamorphoses

He could have walked out of the room. He might
as well have left. But there is nothing like
being kept by a woman, nothing in
the world like a beautiful, beautiful
woman. He wanted to go, but became
Brick. When she told him stories he became
Liquid. And when her voice sparked to laughter,
he burned within. Now, tell me something
Fire, Liquid and Brick- are you still man?
She will not leave until asked, stupid as
they come with baggage of the heart and hips.
Yes, go ahead- fall in lust and be quick.

Yet,
 he slowed to seek and see between thighs
Fire, Liquid, Brick. Metamorphosized.

Contempt

She wasn't glowing when she walked in
She floated with that extra weight, pressed hard
against her thin, grey shirt.

Her breast are still small. See-
still small. Belly button growing both ways.

I ask- *how has it been?*
She says the first couple months were *awful*;
but no one ever tells you that

No, everyone will tell you that,
and everyone will think they're the first.
When I yearn to melt my hand onto the grey shirt, it's not what you think-

jealousy. But wanting to be close to
what my body is capable of-
these cords of contempt.

Saint Dorothy

They have it all wrong Dotty-
history says that you were a virgin.
But you had eight children.
That your body could bear and create
more than its own weight is a miracle.
And you paid the price.

When you die, there will be no teeth
to sell as relics, you said-
having that many children puts stress on the body,
makes all of the teeth fall out. And then you smiled.

They always have you carrying roses in paintings,
as if our country gal were the belle of some ball,
but the paintings where you bear a basket
of apples are more fitting, producing all that fruit.

When you were asked you said
that you had probably held one hundred babies
during your lifetime. This is a miracle,
and how we know that the historical account is all wrong.

See, legend has it you were blessed with beauty
when named a Saint, but this isn't true- you had it all along.
They try to paint you as a patron saint of brides,
but how many marriages have you been forced to watch crumble?

How many of your children fell
so far from the tree?
As they tried to forget the Saint,
name, spoiled image.

Your coffee table was never a still life of fruits
and flowers anyhow, but of books and magazines
meant to distract a visitor's eye from your Bible.
Your Bible with all its dog eared pages, book marks,

notes, guides- secrets on the page and a relationship
with Him that you would never talk about with anyone else.
Because you understood that praying can't fix a marriage
or bring your teeth back.

When you die they won't remember the paintings-
they'll bury you with your bible and say *See-
there it is. All her strength tucked in to
words words words words.*

Memory

First it was stay-tabs-
Matty cut his finger on the can
and everyone laughed
-so we knew the taste of metal and blood

Then it was cardboard-
a wine box in the fridge
and we couldn't figure out how it held liquid
-so we knew the taste of paper

After school it was cheap liters-
but it didn't stop there
handles, gallons and cupboard space never used before
-so we knew the taste of plastic

At last we found the prescriptions
Andy learned to pray at thirteen
while cleaning the carpet
-so now all we taste is memory

Healing

Hey Dad, what do you say we
turn
all these picture frames around?
I want to help you (for)get (me) better.

The Drunkest Three-Year-Old in the Room

Here comes a school of them right now.
Just look at em! They are *sooo* wasted
they have to be strung along on a guide rope,
one walking like Frankenstein, another like he's on Broadway.
These addicts can't take two steps in the same direction without
falling all over the place. And it's only noon.
And that one's wearing a tutu, on a Monday.
I'm going to guess she's coming off a weekend long bender;
looking mighty sloppy. And look-
over by that fountain, those two kids are so hammered,
trying to climb over each other up the backside
of a park bench. But oh, it looks like their little drunk girlfriend
is a bit of a downer, possibly cross faded the way she's kicking around
the grass, yelling at her Velcro shoes. Loose cannon.
But the drunk I love most is the one who is finding his legs
for the first time. Unashamed at how he wobbles, arms reaching
towards his intention, the blonde woman cooing through
picket fence teeth, he takes his first steps to sobriety.

Epitaphs for Andrew

When we were little, the oldest cousins would tie
Andy in a red wagon to the back of bikes
And drive him over cow bumps
 Andrew the Fearless
 Andrew, Downhill Sports Extraordinaire

Second grade, he learned how to charm women
While wearing purple slacks, which he *swore* were hand-me-downs
And Velcro shoes, because he refused to tie laces
 Andrew the Lady Killer
 Andrew, Efficiency First, Fashion Second

In high school he was suspended for
Tunneling underneath the B Building,
Finding the old jail cells- and getting it on film
 Andrew the Legend
 Andrew, Hometown Nuisance

The first time I came home from college
Andrew asked me, disappointed,
When had I started cursing?
 Andrew the Youngest
 Andrew, My Keeper

And the last time I ever saw our dad raise his hand
My little brother grew four inches, became
Steel and confronted a demon
 Andrew the Protector
 Andrew, My Brother.

II

Translation from the Etruscans

Separated by seas and farmland etched in hills,
my heart misses you and steals lyrics from songs
you will never hear.

And I see and see and

 sea

because there is land upon land upon

 water,

and from here, you cannot picture me
apart of the Italian landscape.

You aren't aware of me built into God's creation
and have already forgotten my voice, face.

But answer me this question,
does anybody else look at the Tarquinian landscape,
perfect in creation, and think of you?

roomwithnowindows

At my grandparent's old house, I was forced to sleep in the bedroom with no windows. There were no windows because it was in the basement. The only closet in the room was a closet for the water, or gas, heater. I don't remember. I was only four I think. My brothers got to sleep in a room together, with a window and bunk beds. I would try to sneak in there, and sleep on the floor. But my mother would grab me up by the forearm, telling me I couldn't sleep with my brothers.

So I would try to sleep on the stairs, or with the door of the roomwithnowindows open. But my mother would close the door every time. I would lay there scared, until the exhaustion of being alone took over.

Now, when men say the things they do, I want to take them to that room. I want to tell them

*There's nothing to be afraid of, being alone
If you could conquer your fear of silence
You would know, this is the safest place*

San Fran, December 2009

San Francisco put color on the map

I'm here to bring the black and white of Seattle

So to the girl on the train:

I love all the colors of your scarf...and shoes

But what I really adore

is the color of your flesh above blushing.

How about a smoke?

To wedge open those lips

How about I read you some poetry?

To help you realize that there is nothing besides color.

Sometimes I still think of her, that

I never saw her smile.

And I'm not even sad.

Tensions

There are six tensions existing
in harmony.

Water reflecting brighter skies,

antique handheld mirrors in frames, a
picture I took
separated by memory.

This is the old lifestyle here-
cigarettes burn
and my grandparents get older.

But the tension- water and sand,
man made beaches
touched by the rising summer light,

rocks separated by dirt road
where the tracks were.
Pines, wondering where their roots should grow.

Tension, is a phone call I am
not receiving.

Even though we have service out here.

Aurelian Gates, Rome

We stood at the gates of the city
all the tourists ringing that damn bell-
a long line in the heat
helping it to lose history.
I couldn't focus on anything but her cotton dress-
that short, short cotton dress and how much she must be sweating,
how much I love salt.
They rang and rang and rang the bell and she grabbed my hand
to race up stairs.

We stumbled and kissed on church steps
pretending we didn't mean for where our hands went
and loved to play Behave
as soon as we walked in the doors.

We would go home dirty from all the walking
sometimes getting under sheets
not washing the day away.

We were living- but I couldn't die in Rome.
And when I had to leave,
the gates forced open,
I could hear her say
I won't ask where you're going.

SeaTac

Lakes are the center of ripples
that ricochet
and touch everything (*it's all wet*).

Land like wanting fingers gripping
cold water that
kisses tree lines and rocky beach;

A place that only calls your name
if it knows you-
has known you, it must grow on you;

Evergreens have been growing in
me this whole time.
Mountains echo "Welcome home, home."

This is the Sound my heart projects.

Fed by the largest mass on earth
I remember
a girl turning her back on you

her arms spread to take off, but now-
now, I see home.

Lake Union. July. 2011.

champagne fireworks
paint brush strokes reflected on water
cheap wine that makes
bubbles in the throat and nose
girls laughing so the stars might hear
no way to avoid all these cameras flashing
capturing a frame, creating false memory

but no one took a picture of us in the stomach
of the houseboat
how I woke up to a blanket at 2am-
a girls' legs wrapped around mine-
entwined with our heads at opposite ends of the couch
giggling goodnight and praying
forever forever forever. let us be beautiful forever.

Citizens Bank Park on Dollar Hot Dog Night

I thought I would try to be
a part of the city that I hate
by returning to a sport I love.

So tonight, I let the Spanish players' names roll in my mouth-
sweet, like the sugar at the bottom
of my hot chocolate.

The crowd stands for the man whose arm,
bone and flesh,
is lifted, the crowd enamored, as if he is a gladiator-
trained and desperate.

Perhaps this city needs a safe sport,
a city where I've heard-

People wouldn't be so mean, if it wasn't for the weather.

No one will bother you, if you're minding your own business.

Everyone here is friendly, as long as you don't make eye contact.

Diversity is nice, when it's a walkable distance.

It's not our fault-

never taking responsibility

So tonight, they take responsibility by filling their mouths
with fat, what's leftover of the pig,
letting it roll in their mouths as they
yelp, cry and wail like
animals.

Anchored in the Tiber

We made our own anchors
meditated
Forgot the noise of the Campo
and fears of the city.
We focused on what we keep close
family, friends and the things we think are ours.

I kept my eyes wide open
to look and see if everyone believed
in where their minds were taking them.
They did.
But my anger, cathedrals and memories
couldn't fit inside a turquoise bead.
Give me a northwestern tree.

So I threw the pearl earrings he gave me into the sea
and misplaced memories into the Tiber
and not a single coin in the Trevi.

Salmon Poem

Did you know grey skies taste
just like smoked salmon?

Like salt- and fresh water
at the same time.

Where we're from water grows,
moss grows memories and

fish mark where we'll go.

Ogden Island

When you say I'm cold

Or that you're wrong

Is it cold like the apartment

turned off the gas? Or

left on the counter, abandoned

Is it cold like the river

yourself- is the snow keeping

When you say I'm cold do you mean

That you're allowed to retire

When I think of cold, I imagine

My chest warming winter's dirt
island

warms me. The St. Lawrence

making my extremities numb

Is this what you mean

Or do you mean I've disappointed you

do you mean that I'm wrong?

and don't feel bad at all?

when you unmeaning to

is it cold like the double fudge ice cream

while you're off playing video games?

it's ice covered in snow and you ask

the ice warm?

you're tired of this weather?

your favorite season

in favor of short skirts.

myself face down on Ogden Island

so cold that only the thought of being off this

tugs at my fingertips, turning them white,

numb numb numb.

when you say I'm cold?

allowing hope to keep me warm?

Whenever I Dream of Home

I see myself walking out of Lake Washington
drenched, in a long black wedding dress pulling
two black horses by the reins.

The sky and water are glass-
neither move except where my feet strike

I awake when my steps lose the water.
Born into this darkness, blinking away Madison Park-

Have I been sweating?

III

seventy-five percent of all facts are made up

ninety percent of all marriages in which
one person has to sleep on the inside of the bed
end in divorce.

I made this up.

Can I sleep on the outside tonight?

Bedroom Fit for a Poet

Keats/ Shelley House

Misplaced bed, curved and stiff
Fireplace filled in, unused
Tiles on one side of the room untouched
But
Flowers are still blooming
Chandelier, high sparkling
There is light giving life to dark wood.

Postcard

This is the Trevi Fountain-
People like to take their picture
in front of it-
But then they run away.

I think the water is full of ghosts.

Waves (tanka remix)

This is the dream where
you can breathe underwater
and even though you are

pulled by a rip tide,
large, salty, Pacific flesh,
you do not panic.

The water wants what it wants-
This is how you learn to swim.

Making Shapes

On our first date
in May, we made a Christmas tree
and I saw his mind create ornaments
out of my eyes.

On the second date,
we created a salmon ladder;
our imagination laid out a fish swimming
upstream,
Saying *you are not him, or her-*
but in breeding season,

good enough.

Minimal Pairs

Two

There
Where
Want
Went

Too

Buck
Suck
Cunt
Cant

Make
Male
Whole
Whore

Lone
Long
Legs
Begs

Hard

Can we as in us
Exist in the same environment as
Between lust

Just One

-for Jess

I asked her, "Do you guys want kids?" and she said
just one.

I laughed and made jokes about responsibility,
how I'm selfish and could never be a mother.

I found out from someone else
why she wasn't laughing with me.

Not in rumor,
not in gossip but

in truth because small towns keep secrets tucked
in their truck beds.

Jess had to make a tough decision-

When she was younger-

She was rational-

She made a mistake-

The kid lives in Watertown now-

No one really talks about it-

And I am ashamed to take children so light heartedly.
What to one woman is two to me is none

and to a sixteen year old girl is
just one.

Kaleidoscope

The only service a friend can really render is to keep up your courage by holding up to you a mirror in which you can see a noble image of yourself. –George Bernard Shaw

I can't tell you
the truth, because
it is biased
and cracked.
You exist in light
-are mirror shaped.

Gilded vanity, underneath the window
 Oval ornaments
Glass baubles on your necklace like teeth
 Cold showing white eyes, hot red lips
Open, unframed in dirty bathrooms
 Kaleidoscope of colors twisted
Reflecting flashes, and photographs

I want you to see this-
all sorts of art
in your reflection.
What I mean to say is-
you are the shape of you.

Buried

I thought you were
buried-

under the new pictures in
the frames you gave me

in the glove box, where I kept
the return address, just in case

beneath my legs and feet as I
ran my body into concrete

in between the pages of my favorite
book, which I won't re-read

underneath the fingernails of men
met at holiday parties

beneath my Latin tongue as I
translated poetry

alone, with hot breath underneath
covers, between pink folds

of brain and memory-
but you can't be buried by

time,
three thousand miles

or lines and lines
and lines

of poetry.

Ode to Rain

Can you smell that song?
Note of wet pavement
I tip my head back and let drops
settle on my tongue, filling and rinsing my mouth.

I click my tongue three times-
trying to find the salt.

I. Everyone's Baby

I want to tell you what it was like-
That I had to work, that this was a job. It's just that
I wore masks, and costumes, and
nothing at all.

Every day to get ready in the dark,
painting my face and leaving
the house in clothes that never lasted long.

And yes there were drugs –that I didn't take-
But the other gals did, like they were some kind of famous.
I was given my own mirror- like I was
some kind of Hollywood.

Most times I didn't need the free coffee
high from the bright lights
that the owner would adjust for me when no one
was looking.

I was everyone's baby.

You know what the end of a shift feels like?
It feels like I am the mother of the men of America
Queen of Hearts
All my biggest fans, and greatest sons, returning
tomorrow.

II. Yes, the Men.

What does the end of a shift feel like?
It is like the dream you have,
where there isn't time to sleep
because it's your turn to be the caretaker.

There was a man named Charlie
who came to see me every day.
He never commented on what I was or wasn't wearing,
made earnest eye contact, always tipped well
and was brave enough to say

I love your necklace. I'm a Christian too. Sorry about the State of things and all that you'll go through.

III.Economy

One time, two women came in
to invite me to the church I called "home."
I've been tithing with my tip money,
but
how were they to know?

My Friend with Autism

does not fear death.

He rides his bike around the cemetery waiting for what has already happened.

On Facebook, he posts-

There is a green tent
in the cemetery. There must be
a big party.

It isn't a party it's a funeral.

He deletes these comments.

He continues to post about the beauty of old women, WWE and how sad it is to live alone.

Then

he is on the bike again-

They are digging
so many holes now.

A lot of people must be dying.

Maybe they need to exercise possibly.

Need- present tense.

The simplicity of a young man, and his response is to keep pedaling.

Praise be to Spring's overturned dirt, these lungs and the spokes of the mind.

This is Someone's Story

Close your eyes-
Imagine fluorescent lights
and she's on her back about to have her uterus vacuumed.

Everything is white
even the doctor, the bleach clean of his coat and reflective pale skin.

She signed a piece of paper saying
she wouldn't need the medication
and entered the room alone.

Are your eyes still closed?
Now she's in a recovery room

and the gal next to her is crying.
She smiles as she hands her a cookie
the gal looks at her and asks "are you in pain?"

No no, not at all
and she lays her head back.

And you want to know the details that don't matter- like
how he sold almost everything he had to afford it
and how two kids skipped school without getting caught
traveling to the next town's clinic.

Open up your eyes-
You are not the girl in the recovery room.

To the Parents of the Boy Who had His Head Kicked Off at Six Flags

A teenager was decapitated by a roller coaster after he hopped a pair of fences and entered a restricted area at Six Flags Over Georgia. —Associated Press

Six Flags called “nose goes” on reliability.
Even if there was footage, it would be hard to miss the signs-

Do Not Enter, Restricted, Hazardous, Danger
-all ghost letters in the background.

Reports say that the kid jumped the 6 foot tall fences
to retrieve a hat he lost when riding the Batman roller coaster.

Six Flags shouldn't have to worry
about kids losing their hats.

A family on a church trip shouldn't have to worry
about their kid losing his head.

It's a shame the comedians are making light
of the situation. That the *Darwin Awards*

editors keep calling, thinking you might have
cheered up by now.

You might know better than anybody else that
it would, perhaps, be funny- if it hadn't happened to you.

So you're not getting a kick out of natural selection,
Or all these jokes- like, *You should see the other guy.*

He wasn't using his head. And
Guess he doesn't need the hat anymore...

The best advice would be to let it go.
Next month someone's kid will die from a vending machine

falling on him as he tries to steal a soda.
Isn't that funny?

**“Because no one didn’t think shooting an antique at a firework atop a woodpile
wasn’t a good time”**

What is so offensive about knowing death more by more
resting against your shoulder?
Lean in, learn this freedom
and shoot.

Words Have Meaning

Septic- Greek [septos] rotting, rotting and causing *sepsis*

Sepsis- Greek. Foreign toxins, present in blood, in tissues. *putrefaction*

Putrefaction- Latin [puter] rotting, rotting and all your chemicals gone bad.

See how they mean the same? *This is your body.*

And this is all I know:

Mother- both noun and adj., Birth, Create, Produce

Ovaries- Latin [ovum] meaning *egg*, sex eggs

Love- what I am from, or *about to be* –gerundive

You see Mom, it's just the ovary that's
septic.

Divorcing

Mom, the doctors are saying there's a crab
in your breast, that they're going to have to cut
it out. But you're married to Cancer and the sea.
Let them take what they need for good measure
and you'll be left to claw
for dear life. Let them tip the scales.

You watch your weight drop on the scale,
wondering what happens when they take the crab
out, if anything will be left behind. Maybe a claw—
something to help you remember why you were cut,
that there's a way to measure
what's inside you that can give birth like the sea.

Lots of things belong in the sea—
but not me. I've got the wrong type of scales.
You grew three kids: two fish and one that measures
all things by accident. How could you trust astrology, another crab
to give you all these cords to cut,
when none of us came out with claws?

You said of him, *We're the same sign, that's why we claw
at each other's necks.* I know how violent the sea
can be, but we can cut
that out. You have to scale
back, the cancer won't quit unless you give up the crab
and stop using stars to measure

all the things you hate to measure.
You have to use your claws.
Forget about the sweet, soft flesh of the crab—
I did. Because I don't belong to the sea,
the star you wished on gave me Libra scales
so I'm not scared to make the first cut.

Let the doctors make the second cut.
Let them take your vitals and measure
the weight of a broken heart, because my scales
can't hold it for you any longer. Use your claws
to climb out of the sea.
You don't have to live with this Cancer.

*My father loves to crab. I've watched him cut
nets, pulling shells from the sea. He measures
how big they are by the claws, and throws back anything with scales.*

Seattle

Salt air, down the hill
fresh water. Lose land
scapes, learn to let go.

What are you looking for now?
It'll rain everywhere you go.