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# Grey Slate

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

GREY SLATE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

CREATIVE WRITING

by

Brittany Szabo

2014

To: Dean Kenneth G. Furton  
College of Arts and Sciences

This thesis, written by Brittany Szabo, and entitled Grey Slate, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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Maneck Daruwala

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Campbell McGrath

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Denise Duhamel, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 3, 2014

The thesis of Brittany Szabo is approved.

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Dean Kenneth G. Furton  
College of Arts and Sciences

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Dean Lakshmi N. Reddi  
University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2014

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

GREY SLATE

by

Brittany Szabo

Florida International University, 2014

Miami, Florida

Professor Denise Duhamel, Major Professor

GREY SLATE is a collection of poems that focuses on the natural world in order to explore the mysteries of life with the intent to create a meditation on what it means to be a human being interacting with this world. Inspired by John Keats' theory of Negative Capability, GREY SLATE does not seek to explain, but to dwell in the mysteries it explores. The poems are tied together through similar images or ideas in order to mimic the way the mind works as it jumps from thought to thought. GREY SLATE also mixes different types of poems: from haiku to sonnet to paradelle, and from lyric to narrative to prose poem. GREY SLATE hopes to inspire readers to take a break from searching for truths and indulge in the beautiful mystery that is life with no need for answers.

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## Question

Even buzzing flies  
cannot tell us what it means—  
the buzzing of flies.



## Ars Prose Poetica

Drifting in a white sea with no end, spread in inky tentacles across the surface, each wave erases what the other has done until the right pattern of swirls and straight lines emerges. It floats there like an answer to a question you didn't know you'd asked—a tiny seed fallen from a tree sprouting all the different secrets of life, but no dove lands on your hand with a branch in its beak. Instead, the waves return, and the moment passes like a forgotten dream. And while you can't see the halo of ink drawn around your head, the white water becomes a green, green field, the deep soil more fertile than the Virgin Mary.

## The Snakebird

Sneaking out my old window,  
I find the spot on the roof  
I've escaped to since butterfly pajamas  
only this time I'm here to smoke,  
not just to think about how the stars  
I'm looking at can really be trillions of miles away,  
and how we can even pretend  
to comprehend that kind of distance.

Blowing rings toward the backyard,  
I remember the snakebird  
we found dangling in the tree  
where the swing now hangs  
down by the lake, its skinny neck  
wedged between two branches, black  
feathers shining like it just caught a fish.

We figured it died resting up there,  
too old and tired to fly another inch,  
and we tried throwing everything at it  
to knock it down, but the bird wouldn't fall,

and afterwards we all felt bad  
for pegging it with sticks and rocks  
and the wet noodles we used  
to hit each other with in the pool.

Every day for two weeks, its neck stretched  
longer and longer, and every day  
I expected it to look more like dead birds  
you see on the side of the road—rotting  
windows to their insides and feathers  
pointing in every direction, but it never looked  
different except for the length of its neck.

One morning, I looked out the kitchen window  
expecting to see it still hanging with the grey moss  
in the branches, but it wasn't there anymore,  
and I have no idea what happened to the bird  
or why my mind stumbled across it  
like a book fallen behind a bookshelf long ago.

And I don't know why I think this memory  
is important enough to share in this poem  
with you, who may or may not at all care

about the bird or me or any of this, but I just did,  
and chances are you'll forget all about it  
until you see a snakebird bobbing its head  
in the water, or maybe you'll think of it  
for no reason at all while making  
your morning cup of coffee years from now,  
poured cream swirling like the smoke  
from my mouth into its own galaxy  
on the surface of a dark sky.