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# North Atlantic Black

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

NORTH ATLANTIC BLACK

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

ENGLISH

by

Chazz Chitwood

2018

To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus  
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

This thesis, written by Chazz Chitwood, and entitled North Atlantic Black, 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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Campbell McGrath

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Vernon Dickson

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Denise Duhamel, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 5, 2018

The thesis of Chazz Chitwood is approved.

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Dean Michael R. Heithaus  
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

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Andrés G. Gil  
Vice President for Research and Economic Development  
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2018

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## DEDICATION

For my parents, for my friends who are now my brothers—Daniel, Carl, Kayvan, and  
Brett, for both my grandmothers, and for Rodney.

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More friends than I can possibly list—Angie, Kayvan, Carl, Daniel, Brett, and on and on.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

NORTH ATLANTIC BLACK

by

Chazz Chitwood

Florida International University, 2018

Miami, Florida

Professor Denise Duhamel, Major Professor

North Atlantic Black is a collection of contemplative, lyrical poems that explore issues of coming out, suicide, yearning, and male relationships.

Woven together, North Atlantic Black moves through different questions of masculinity encountered by the poet through the process of coming out. Early poems explore themes of masks, of theater, and of dressing and costume as means of escaping the traditional bounds of masculinity

North Atlantic Black further braids in concepts of home, how they relate to identity through heritage and expectation, and how they inform the poet's thoughts on what it means for men to have relationships—how ideas of masculinity have imposed on the poet's life, and weigh on the relationships he wishes to pursue. Throughout, the moody colors of the Maritimes and the North East, of sealing ports and cold, forested mountains, loom over these confessions and contemplations.

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## **The Masquerade**

### **Act I**

Remember: this is theater.

When you first start, morning is for makeup,  
you steel yourself in the mirror  
and cake on a different face.

You are too big for yourself.

You have not realized the practicality of masks.

You wear thick oil to hide watery eyes,  
sleep-sunken, set in a pale, drawn face—  
and then go read consumerist poetry:

### **Manufactured**

Hello consumer!

I know what you must be thinking:

How will I ever fix the imperfections of my flesh?

How can I be suitable for mass technological consumption?

Well, I'm here to fix you up right.

I pride myself in taking the extraordinary,  
the bent, the fluid, the what-you-call-broken,  
the dangling, the limp, and the unseemly—  
and pound out the dents with a hammer.

We'll get you  
straight as an edge.

Like you should be.

## **Act II**

Do you remember? You should.

A mask can be placed over the face

To render you robot.

This mask is for friends. Friend beats paramour.

In private, without the harlequin smile, with no mask,

he tells you he realized that sometimes, he's a girl.

Sometimes he is not. If someone asks, he, for the moment,

tells you to smile and to remember:

This is theater.

## **Oleander**

You never belonged here, in this greenhouse  
spreading your sweet fragrance, exploding  
with seeds. I was forced into keeping you  
inside when, as is so obvious, protection  
was unneeded. What a sprig of you has done  
to that fawn, to a neighbor's child,  
to the loyal foxhound—it is irredeemable.

And yet I plant more of you here,  
in poor soil, in salty air, dry dirt. I water  
you less than your fellows as punishment  
but I will always know you for your colors,  
pink, red, or the flesh of salmon. The way  
you seek to overpower your collaborators,  
outscent the rose, bloom larger than it, seeds  
scattered at her roots—it is almost admirable.

I cannot hope to hide from the doe  
when she comes for her fawn, sees the killer inside  
panes of glass. To stop her from smashing it all  
in her grief, I'll give her a sprig of olive—  
that is what you've wanted all along, of course.

## **A Different Gun**

*After William Archila*

It was not excavated but, as I oil it,  
it feels somehow more ancient than an arrowhead.

How many times had you cleaned it?

Worked young hands over the steel and wood,  
the mechanics of the pump and trigger?

When was the last time you used it?

You killed yourself with a different gun.

Dad says that when you were both young  
you went shooting blackbirds. Mama taught you a lesson.

*She fried them and made us eat them.* He says.

*Never did that again. Shoot only what you mean to kill.*

I much prefer that this gun is oiled with blackbird blood—  
and not yours.

## **Specters of Horatio**

### Act I

Enter Horatio, archetype of the populous, to center stage. Highlighted by an unearned spotlight, he begins to speak, ignorant of Hamlet's decision to die right beside him. In the director's cut you can see Hamlet's blood on Horatio's sleeves.

### Act II

Kill your Horatios before it is too late. Oh, under moonlight, everything seems fine. They'll tell you all about that ghost they saw and claim it has your father's face, but really, fuck Horatio. Horatio's great. You'll remember the experience and make other lovers feel inconsequential by invoking his bedtime escapades.

### Act III

Horatio has been up all night participating in Act I, and no one remembers what he was talking about. Still, we're all quite willing to accept that he's a better person than any of us, because he is all of us, and Hamlet, Claudius, and Gertrude (who insists we call her Geri) won't stop telling us how delightful and awesome he is.

Stop asking for proof; you're not going to get any. Take their word for it.

### The Forgotten Act (or The One on the Cutting Room Floor)

Horatio is privileged to interpret. Interpret this privilege as you will, you blocks, you stones, you worse-than-senseless things.