

3-19-2020

## Growth Theory

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

GROWTH THEORY

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

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

CREATIVE WRITING

by

Samantha Leon

2020

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

This thesis, written by Samantha Leon, and entitled Growth Theory, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgement.

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

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Nathaniel Cadle

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Denise Duhamel

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Campbell McGrath, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 19, 2020

The thesis of Samantha Leon is approved.

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

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

Florida International University, 2020

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was made possible by the unwavering support of my friends, family and the South Florida literary community. I'm forever grateful for the Creative Writing staff at Florida International University for their generosity, patience and passion for our work together. Thank you to my parents, Jenelle Aromatorio, Grace Emmerling, Megan Bayer and numerous early instructors whom encouraged me to spend time doing what I love. Eternal gratitude to financial contributors to The Carroll Creative Writing Scholarship at Duquesne University, The Florida International University Creative Writing Program and the Christopher F. Kelly Award for funding my writing. Many thanks to So to Speak journal and Poets.org for making space for my poetry, many others for making space for my literary criticism and the many fellow writers whom welcome me in collaborative efforts.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

GROWTH THEORY

by

Samantha Leon

Florida International University, 2020

Miami, Florida

Professor Campbell McGrath, Major Professor

GROWTH THEORY reckons with a natural world in distress and imagines what attributes and learnings are needed for the individual to become a more beneficial part of the natural world. What does a person's interaction with their surroundings say about them, and say about the surroundings? Violence, art, relationships, community are all examined along with the mediums through which we record our reality: speaking, writing, singing, taking photos. Despite covering a breadth of physical places and topics, a central tension that takes place between fear and curiosity colors the manuscript throughout. Poems are ordered by subject or temporal consideration, but also in pairs as to what pieces will logically follow or complement one another based on their thematic or craft elements. The voice in GROWTH THEORY toggles between assertive and keenly observational, reflecting inspiration from contemporary poets such as Li-Young Lee and Ada Limón.

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## Poem with Tomatoes

Tucked on the side of our little tan house,  
my mother's garden sits: a dust-colored clearing.  
Scraggly tomato sprouts practice toward an outline,  
seem to say *I have a feeling the trouble isn't over.*  
Pale rocks strewn between their untilled grounds,  
small obstacles steady & unavoidable nevertheless.  
All the time things grow where they shouldn't,  
grow despite beauty & right circumstance,  
grow despite countless variables & predictions.  
See the chartreuse of new life, the parakeet of vitality,  
the mantis of strength. I wonder what the shades  
of green told my mother while she half-tended them  
out there alone. Maybe *It wasn't pretty for a while,*  
*but now look.* Oh it wasn't pretty, that's true,  
but now, a few scarlet & carmine Early Girls perch  
on the kitchen's east windowsill, ripening.



Main Street, Zelienople

I duck back between the clouded  
plastic panels that separate the body shop  
from the front desk at Jack Hockenberger motors.

The blonde woman, whose name I never got, rang me up  
for the thousand dollars they would ask of me  
for things I know nothing about.

Even if I did know something,  
I wouldn't ask any questions. I'm busy now.  
Looking past her as I hand out a credit card,

approve a payment and say thank you.  
She can tell I'm not looking at her and she can tell  
I'm the type of person that means nothing rude by it.

It's just that I'm watching the rain  
stream down the window, floor to ceiling,  
like it did with the windows in your apartment

some years back. Hundreds of lines

racing down the gray reflection to the same point.

That's the comfort of it, the endgame.

And I'm thinking about how many times again

this moment will manifest itself,

wherein taking care of the ordinary, I find you.

## Butler County Fair

I let the blood of a rabbit's foot  
impress your white shirt at the county fair.  
Tiny dark gray fur pursed out in fear,  
nails clipped too short and now bleeding.  
Old wooden chairs, popcorn, lemonade  
with sugar at the bottom dense as river sediment.  
Lucky to have loved you once, up close.

## Cherry Dip

Dairy Queen parking lot, thick air  
and the sun beats down on the asphalt.

I move just as slowly here as I would  
on the bottom of the ocean.

Black leather duffle bag. Couple hundred bucks  
to your name. No one ever sees it coming to this,

but it does. We meet up like it's a deal.

Highway. Cherry dip cone. Gold chain.