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## Don't Be Another Girl

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

DON'T BE ANOTHER GIRL

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

CREATIVE WRITING

by

Brittany Marilee Owens

2022

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

This thesis, written by Brittany Marilee Owens, and entitled Don't Be Another Girl, 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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Julie Marie Wade

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Maneck Daruwala

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Denise Duhamel, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 9, 2022

The thesis of Brittany Marilee Owens is approved.

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Dean Michael 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, 2022

## DEDICATION

For all the girls, gays, and theys. For everyone fighting to survive in a patriarchal world  
that was not meant for them. For the family we choose along the way.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Grateful acknowledgement to the editors and staff members of the magazines and journals where these poems from DON'T BE ANOTHER GIRL first appeared, sometimes in earlier versions or under different titles:

Pittsburgh Poetry Journal: "Wishes for My Uterus"

Salamander: "Where Words are Buried" and "The Woman Behind Me in the Target Check-Out Line"

Silk Road Review: "The Whale Tells Us: I Want to Beach Myself"

Small Orange Journal: "Claiming the Throne"

South Florida Poetry Journal: "At 25, Britney Spears Picks Up Razor" and "My Dog Teaches Me About Self Care"

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

DON'T BE ANOTHER GIRL

by

Brittany Marilee Owens

Florida International University, 2022

Miami, Florida

Professor Denise Duhamel, Major Professor

DON'T BE ANOTHER GIRL is a collection of poetry that braids together themes of familial relationships, death, abuse, mental illness, feminism, and attempts at healing. These free-verse and prose poems use pop culture, politics, and elements of nature as vehicles to explore and reject the violence of the western white patriarchy. In the first section the speaker questions the curses that flow out from bloodlines—genetic traits, behaviors, and gender expectations. The second section utilizes lyrical prose blocks that thread together trauma and sleep paralysis, following an emotionally immobilized speaker who struggles to step off a dangerous escalator, away from toxic relationships. The third section slowly shifts, towards confronting internalized sexism and defining sisterhood.

Under the influences of Sharon Olds, Rachel McKibbens, Julia Koets, Jaquira Díaz, Anne Carson, Jan Beatty, and Audre Lorde, these poems attempt to call in question the sexist ideals of a male-dominated society.

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I

## **But She's Your Mother**

I've always wanted to be the ocean. Maybe if I ruptured—if I set myself on fire, would I destroy the parts of myself still connected to my mother? The parts connected to everything else? I'm boiling—bursting currents of flames. I engulf every man-made pipeline. Every sexist. Every judge who acquits rapists. Every person that says *but she's your mother*. Everyone who thinks global warming and consent are myths. I'm spiraling to the core of the earth—swallowing worlds. Am I water or fire or something else? A hybrid of elements—an inferno, ripping everything apart.

## **I Go Back to Sharon Olds**

*After "I Go Back to May 1937"*

My therapist asks me to write/a letter to my father/but what's the point/writing the dead/I haven't seen the point/in most things lately/but I can point/to the month I was conceived / Sharon when did you/reach the point of healing/where you could pick up/the paper dolls of your parents/and ignite their spark/how did you let them meet/knowing they'd erupt/how do you want to be born/anyway / I'm not there/I'm here/building a time machine/with my words / I start at my parents' marriage/and count each month/they dated/three/I go back to November 1991 / I write my mother/and father/into opposite sides/of the planet/sew their paper feet/into the ground / burn the hotel/where they'd meet/smother the flame/a defense learned/from my mother / place her with the man/she didn't marry/that wouldn't have crinkled her body/who really was her soulmate/if there are soulmates / Sharon, are there soulmates / My father stays/with his first/ex-wife/and daughters/he'd keep choosing /over my mother and I/anyway / Even in this paper place / inside my words / I know / my parents will find / other ways / to be unhappy / but they won't / rip / each / other/apart/to/stay/together/for/me

## On Rejecting Inheritance

I have a reoccurring dream where I'm holding a dead baby. I forgot to give her glucose. Can babies have diabetes? Did she get it from my great grandmother?

No, that was type 2. But if I actually had a baby I bet she'd have diabetes. Bet

she'd wish she hadn't been born. Bet she'd have the same scowl I make—the one my mother tries to rip off my face and can't. I can feel my mother fighting my father through the reddened burning palm print on my cheek.

It's his cheek / his sullen mouth / his sarcasm she wants to exorcise from my body. Maybe she thinks she can hit me hard enough to reach him.

I can understand that—that wanting to claw and tear away at the person

that pinned you down. I feel it too, surging through and into my palms but I stopped the spread. I took Plan B. I don't want to bring another girl into a world where men don't hear our words, *No. No.*

No, my mother was selfish to bring me into a world she didn't even want. I tell my mother she should've married the musician from Australia, not my father. *But then I wouldn't have you, she hugs me, you're going to break the 'Owens' curse.*

At 15, I ask my mother why some women can't have babies hoping for a spell

or ritual or practice I can use. Instead she says *some women sleep around too much. Their bodies can't contain a baby*. She thinks I want children one day.

She thinks it'll stop me from having sex before marriage. It doesn't.

I fuck more men than I can count. I fuck until my ovaries are rattled until broken. I fuck hoping to desiccate my insides. I imagine my uterus shriveled

inwards begging me to stop. My eggs disintegrating—maybe my unborn children are smarter than I was—they know they'd only inherit my mother's or father's or both of their faces. They don't want the pressure of breaking curses—real or imaginary.

My father and his father and his father's father submerged beneath drugs and alcohol to avoid this life. My mother and her mother and her mother's mother tried to stifle their anxieties—smother them beneath water. My mother

keeps hers in boxes—an ocean of cardboard spilling into the living room, dining room, hallways, bathroom, and kitchen. Boxes I fall into while walking through rooms. Boxes that I'm not allowed to unpack. Boxes with contents

my mother moves to every new apartment and never opens. Boxes she asks me to carry for her. I opened one once—just divorce papers and receipts and printed Google searches of my father. He left us when I was 6. His father left when he was 2.