Grey Slate

Brittany R. Szabo

Florida International University, bszab001@fiu.edu

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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.

_______________________________________  
Maneck Daruwala  

_______________________________________  
Campbell McGrath  

_______________________________________  
Denise Duhamel, Major Professor  

Date of Defense: March 3, 2014  

The thesis of Brittany Szabo is approved.

_______________________________________  
Dean Kenneth G. Furton  
     College of Arts and Sciences  

_______________________________________  
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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ars Prose Poetica</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Snakebird</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound, or The Painted Lady</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bouquets</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching the Spider</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smell, or Burnt Flowers</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adrift</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Afternoon</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Red Bird</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loony Lapdogs</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Gods</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismembering Guns</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Sins</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space Frogs</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bouquets II</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luminaries</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halloween Decorations</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgetting You</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch, or Tree Bark</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.