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MFA Graduate Portfolio

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Creative Sample

What the Water Gave Me

After Frida Kahlo

The water gave me/ reflected a silk love pillow to float on ribboned with pomegranate four days of the moon cycle. Here I see/conch-hear your semblance and think I never want to drive my car while you ride your bicycle, I want to volcano-love you, my panzón, I want to make the Sun say si sólo fuese humano... I want to float on you. I’ve only husked corn once in my life, I have touched volcanic rock twice. A geese beats towards my thigh and sits, slanting/confounding head towards me, repent repent repent. A snake swims straight into mi ombligo and impregnates my womb, it will grow inside mi vientre for 5 months to become mythical. One day our baby will grow there too, and He will have your name, but secretly I will call him hijo de la luna.
El Vellito de tu Lóbulo

tickles sweet
like el vellito de los
melocotones that
I would bite into on the
splintered park benches
of my Santurce youth,
el jugo trickling down
my fingers and up
to my codos.

Días en la feria, and
then casa de abuela,
where I note her
marea-colored veins
under skin like the
nata atop boiled milk,
a trait dissuaded by
café-con-leche dad,
not to mention his
closely-cropped ‘fro.

Hoy estoy hecha un desastre.
Se me resbalan las cosas
de las manos, y he pensado
demasiado en la muerte.

También he pensando en ti,
y las olas de tu nombre:
Al-va-ro. Cada sílaba
smudging out footprints
left behind on my lengua
by past novietos.

La luna derrama sangre
in drops onto my body
mis pezones hard, yet
my heart blandito
for you.

You are un buen mofongo,
like the one mami makes
on Easter or whenever
Cotto fights. Whenever I
am cold, as if washed by
unwelcome rain piercing
a lonely night at el Yunque,
me sumerjo en ti.
Conch,

Do you hear me?
The trees are drifting within
and without
and a seed, I planted
it in the Son above.
Father, I have asked
for the miracle of skull,
the stuff of paintings,
the loom of forgiveness.
But I am still bare
of king’s clothing, bare
of remembrance, bare
as a lizard smiling at me
from my windowpane—
I shut
it out, as my mother,
and the apricots and olives,
and the snow on my ear,
and the rice on my shoes—

I shut you out, Conch.

I hear you, Virgo

leaping

live long

polar bear

machine gun

your breath is ocean

Pensive sea, do you sea me?
I sit, I sieve, I knit, I knead
I need bread like a mortal
and wine down a throat,
forgiving
The Lovers

After René Magritte

A green wall
looks like an eye
embraced
by a red lipped rug.
Your lips are tamarinds
they are soft wool
they are a woman
singing into a red earth
house that I hear
with my mouth
they are a white cloth
that suffocates me
into sky birth
they are a bird
they are concrete
son la malicia de niñez
they are a hop & skip
and they teach me
that I will never
be old or young.
They are a tie
that I tie for you
with vein hands
and magic.
Lost in the Shadows

After Concha Méndez

February 1935

Someone passed by and left stars under their steps, is it you?
My heart will keep rocking you to sleep until the end of hours,
my ghost infant. Here in London, Paloma grows and grows
like an oak tree, like the sea entering a tsunami-ridden city.
I think of the moment she will say mamá, rose, wall, table.
My Palomita still sleeps in your crib, wears the white dress
your grandmother knit. Flower of my blood, spirit of thought.

And there is no longer a reason to return to that beach...
nor to hear from its breeze your cry.

Se Perdió en la Sombra

Para Concha Méndez

febrero 1935

Alguien ha pasado que ha dejado estrellas bajo sus pisadas, eres tú?
Mi corazón te seguirá meciendo hasta el fin de sus horas,
mi fantasma bebé. Aquí en Londres, Paloma crece y crece
como un roble, como el mar adentrándose a la ciudad
en pleno tsunami. Pienso en el momento cuando dirá
mamá, rosa, pared, mesa. Mi Palomita aún duerme
en tu cuna, lleva el vestido blanco que tu abuela coció.
Flor de mi sangre, espíritu de pensamiento.

Y ya no he de volver a aquella playa...
ni a escuchar de su brisa tu grito.
Critical Sample

Poetry's New Aims in the Aesthetically Pleasing, Readily Digestible World of Instagram Photos

Poetry does make things happen, in contrast to what W.H. Auden famously stated, because like all art, poetry should intend to lend the reader the poet's own perspective and life view so that the reader can compare that to his own life view. This creates a "we", or universal, process that intends to join people together and make obvious the connection between all people. Although this undertaking does not necessarily immediately stop a war, it does allow people to relate to others, and understand that they are not alone in the world. This opposes bigotry, racism, nationalism, xenophobia and anything else that is tied to separating people, especially in the current political climate. However, something that makes this whole viewpoint I have always held more complicated, at least for me, is the quasi-capitalist, easily digestible poetry of Instagram. Much of the poetry on this social media platform is formulaic, as it is ready buy/ready sell and follows a recipe that the poet knows will make the poem go viral. But what these poets really want to do is connect to as many people as possible, getting the most "likes", "comments", and overall reactions as they can. They are creating a universal, "we" process that makes obvious the connection between many people much more than other more traditional poets today. But then again, they are also "barbaric" like Theodor Adorno states in his essay "Cultural Criticism and Society," as it is a total capitalist gesture for a poet to mostly think about his or her own success and notoriety, and about making their poems go viral. Thus, the difference between wanting a poem to go "viral" and wanting to add to the world's
culture and understanding of life by creating a poem that connects to the most people as possible is a very thin line that is sometimes impossible to recognize. Do Instagram poets just want notoriety and success, or do they really want to speak to as many people as they can to promote universality and human connection?

Moreover, one cannot point their finger to a certain poet and say they are totally barbaric in this way, as one cannot know what is going on inside another person's mind, and mostly every poet wants to succeed and make a living off of their writing anyway. Many of these Instagram poets would probably say they write their poems to connect to people and to resonate with them, and if they succeed at it and go viral, who is really to judge? However, when each new post is so similar to the last, and an artist's "style" becomes nothing short of formulaic, one cannot help but think that the whole situation is bordering on capitalist poetry and that the poet is numbing society with easy proverbs, while giving people the feeling that they are "deep" because they read poetry. This is all related to the bourgeoisie, which is odd, because most of these poets vaguely state that they resonate with leftist views.

An extremely famous Instagram poet today is Rupi Kaur, a young woman originally from Punjab, India who I came across by many friends (not regular readers of poetry) reposting her dainty, square-cropped proverbial poetry that includes beautiful hand-drawn images on the bottom and the heavy use of blank space. My friends reposted her poems with captions relating to soulfulness or thoughtfulness. Visually, these poems really stuck out to me and made me immediately click on her profile name. I was struck by how aesthetically pleasing her Instagram was (alternating between photos of her poems and photos of herself to create a pattern), how famous she was (1.2 million
followers and counting), and the comments on each photo that range from hundreds to in the couple thousands. I immediately understood how this type of poetry could resonate with so many people—it really is wise and thoughtful, and looks quite beautiful. An example of one of her poems is the following untitled work, which I will include just as Kaur posted it on Instagram, because in this case, the aesthetic is almost just as important as the words themselves:

One is immediately drawn to the illustration, meditative and simple just like her poems. The image in general is beautifully composed and shows knowledge of design with the use of blank space, symmetry, and more. However, the poem itself is a very simple
proverb that I can see on a greeting card, t-shirt, or self-help book. One can immediately see how the gorgeous aesthetic aspect of Kaur's images draws people in, and how the meditations themselves can resonate with so many people due to their simple vagueness that can be tied to pretty much anything or anyone, but her poems seem so familiar and flat that it is hard to totally get on board with her work. Another poem, also left untitled, shows that Kaur has developed a formula that works perfectly to draw people in, get the "like", and get commenters to "tag" their friends. It is very similar, in tone, diction, sentence structure and aesthetic impulse, to the last:

accept that you deserve more
than painful love
life is moving
the healthiest thing
for your heart is
to move with it

- rupi kaur

Here we can see an almost identical visual concept, and a very similar type of proverbial language and topic choice. This poetry has a distinct formula to get people to pay
attention and become "fans," something that usually does not happen on this scale in the poetry world, especially with seemingly less attention to word choice than usual. But, alas, we are confronted with a complication when discussing Kaur's work: is Rupi Kaur a capitalist poet who has created formulaic tid-bits to garner success and "virality," or is she against the machine or the "man," as she pretty much does everything any MFA program will tell you is wrong? I ask this, as MFA programs have as of late been tagged as part of the capitalist "regime" and seen as churning out poets that all write in the same wordy, questioning, language-oriented way. Kaur, on the other hand, writes with vague, familiar, airy words that reflect on the spirit—in a way, she is writing against the educated institution of poetry.

Another even more important complication one comes across when analyzing Kaur's work is when one begins to dissect her background as a woman of color from Punjab. It is clear that her background adds other dimensions to her poetry: as an immigrant from India to Canada, and as a woman of color. Even though Kaur writes lyric poetry tied to the ego which is in turn connected to romanticism, the bourgeoisie and being "apolitical," her identity gives her work a totally opposite implication that ties it more to leftist views, and makes it all seem a lot more political than at first sight. However, while I am a firm believer of lyric poetry and even confessional poetry, even more so when it comes from a person of color or any other type of minority group (regarding race, disability, religion, gender, and so forth), I also might be a little uncomfortable with living in an age where the poet is just as important as the poem, where the artist is just as important as the art, and where the brand is just as important as the art or more so. This seems to be a product of the obsession we have with social media.
and with *celebrity*, so much so that we elected a reality TV show president. It is not just about your poetry book anymore: it is about who you are, what you look like, what you wear, what your house is decorated like, how witty your captions are, what pet you have, and even what you eat. The *brand* is just as or more important than the work, and social media is a way to communicate this brand, which communicates who the poet "is" (not necessarily totally accurate), which in turn makes the audience feel connected to them and makes them want to buy books. However, just as there was a complicated, very thin line between capitalist poetry with the intention of "virality" and actually wanting to make poems that resonate with the most people as possible with the intention of universal connection, there is also a thin line between the brand becoming just as important as the work, and a minority poet lending another meaning to their own poetry. Although I cannot say that Rupi Kaur writes poetry that seems very vivid or innovative to me, I also cannot say that I can totally place judgment on her as a woman of color from Punjab, India writing poetry that is lyrical or confessional and becoming wildly successful for it, even if it does seem formulaic with the intention of virality.

We can look at another Instagram poet, named Tyler Knott, who I believe also uses his knowledge of what will be the most aesthetically-pleasing Instagram photo to promote his vague, nature-oriented poetry up to the point of having more than 300,000 followers. An example of one of his poems is one left untitled as part of a typewriter series on his profile that shows how prolific he really is (he has written 1867 typewriter poems so far):
Immediately, we see a certain similarity with Kaur's work, mostly in the kind of spaced-out, very lyrical tone and diction, the blank space, and even some of the themes about love and nature. It is something my MFA program would not like, and frankly, it does not seem innovative, inventive, or unique to me either. The ideas are great: having a typewriter series, a haiku series all scribbled on little note papers, and the great photos of nature he regularly posts on his profile (which follow the perfect order of typewriter poem, photo, note paper poem, just as Kaur follows a certain order as well). However, the actual substance, what *should* matter, the poems, does not seem to be what is mostly thought about. The identity of Knott, as a nature-loving, handsome poet/photographer seems to come first to his actual poetry, just as Rupi Kaur's identity seems more
important as well in her case. However, there is something that feels odd about comparing a woman who is an immigrant from Punjab who writes lyric confessional poetry, and has amassed a million followers for it, to a white man who has the time to enjoy nature and think about the order of his Instagram posts. But then again, can we place judgment on Knott more than on Rupi Kaur just because he is not a woman of color, but rather a white man? Does his identity make his somewhat vague, flowery, ego-oriented, and confessional poetry, very much similar in tone and aesthetics to Kaur's work, more tied to capitalism, the bourgeoisie, and art for art's sake? Can we judge him for his identity as we forgive Kaur for her's? We probably can, but this, for me, as a woman of color, is the most complicated part of this essay, where I admit I feel I have dissected up to the point of feeling quite confused. However, this confusion seems necessary in getting to the point of understanding who I am as a female poet of color, and where I stand in the political landscape every time I decide to write a confessional, lyric poem, attempt to write experimental work, or worry about my social media following.

Conclusively, Instagram has totally changed the environment of the poetry world and I believe that Rupi Kaur, Tyler Knott and the other famous Instagram poets are pioneers of a practice that one day will be expected from, or seen as second nature to, poets (if it is not already). The social media platform has commoditized the art of poetry and shrunk it to not much more than Hallmark card proverbs and meditations on nature and love— in short, exactly what most people think poetry is. It is not strange that people flock to this type of poetry on Instagram, because most programs in schools teach their students that poetry should be about the ego, "deep", vague and confusing (and should rhyme). The Instagram poets are giving their mass audiences exactly what they want in
order to ensure virality, success, more followers, and being able to actually live off of their art, the last of which no poet can truly blame them for. A complication that arises through the birth of Instagram poets is how to differentiate between the "capitalist poets of Instagram" who just want notoriety and virality and who make formulaic poems to ensure this, and those who use social media to really try to connect to as many people as possible and remind them how similar we all are, defying xenophobia in the Trump era (and of course, to gain readership along the way). Even more complicated is how Instagram makes the identity of any artist, and their brand, more important than the actual art, which is seen in how Kaur and Knott's work both seem to rely more on their incredible aesthetic impulses and their own lives rather than their words. It is difficult to judge any poet who is getting people to actually read poetry and who is seemingly making a good living off of the art, especially someone who is a minority, who comes from humble beginnings, or anyone else who is not seen as the "traditional poet."

However, in art there must always be "blood" (to quote Rodrigo from the series *Mozart in the Jungle*), and it is obvious when there is no "blood," but rather formulas and excessive thinking about success and virality. Instagram is not the issue, and the "Instagram poets" aren't the issue either; the issue lies rather in the masses and what they choose to flock to, and the direction our celebrity-driven political climate, and quickly consuming/digesting society obsessed with "perfection," are going toward.
Process Letter

My experience as a poetry MFA student at the University of Miami has been completely dynamic, with constant changes that almost make me feel that the program was a lot longer than it actually was. During the two years of the program, I juggled my music career while constantly churning out poetry for my Workshop and Form in Poetry classes and teaching for the first time ever. At times, I felt like it was possibly too much to handle, not so much because of the work all of this entailed, but more because I had never felt more inspired in my life. I was drawing so much constant inspiration from my professors and the books we were reading (everything from *Matria* by Alexandra Lytton Regalado to *Contradictions in the Design* by Matthew Olzmann and the work of Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery and many, many more) that my brain was going into overdrive—everything I saw, spoke about or heard was being poetically processed unexpectedly. I had never had this experience before, even in my undergraduate years majoring in poetry at UM, although of course, the MFA is a much more all-encompassing experience.

Before the program, I had drawn inspiration from music more than anything else. In my case, this is a much slower, drawn-out process, involving taking my guitar out and playing with chords that then somehow turn into music and lyrics. Now, so full of all of the lines I was reading in these incredible books, and reading theory by Martin Heidegger, Judith Butler, Theodor Adorno, and more, my brain was processing experience into art in a much more haphazard, rapid, idea-driven way. Most of the ideas for the poems in my thesis were first written in the "Notes" application on my iPhone because of how quick and out-of-nowhere they felt. I think my thesis really shows how
my process changed because, for one, you can almost see two different "groups" of poems that exhibit a shift in my writing style that came about because of all I learned in the MFA. Before the program, I tended to look exclusively inward when writing, focusing on my family, heritage, and concrete experiences. The program ended up changing my perspective so I began writing in a much more surreal way, including random images, stories, and fleeting moments that resulted in a sort of poetic collage. This is also evident in my thesis on the pages I placed in between poems, which included fragments of thoughts and conversations. This fragmentation I began to play with during the program was very unexpected to my professors (they had not seen me write in this way before) and to myself. But, it very much illustrates the way my brain processes information much moreso than a lot of the work I had been writing previously. I can now say that my thesis is a marriage between my family, relationships, identity, experience, and heritage, and all of these are expressed in the surreal, fragmented way I tend to see all of it.

Going into the MFA, I was initially quite intimidated, because although I had majored in poetry at UM in my undergraduate years and knew most of the professors, I felt that everyone else was more well-read than I was, and had more of a poetic voice. I had focused on music during college and the gap year I took, and although I was excited about the album I released and how it led me to the Latin Grammy's, that success almost didn't feel real because that musical persona didn't always feel like me. In a way, I believe it is more difficult for me to illustrate human complexities (my own and of others) in music than in poetry. I knew I still wanted to constantly work on music, a
passion I know I will always have, but poetry was another artform that I wanted to keep exploring.

As I stated before, in the MFA program, I began to read much more, which together with my classes, inspired me to write in more surreal, fragmentary ways. During the end of my first year, I released my second album *Flora y Fauna*, which featured lyrics that used much more surrealist imagery. This album is definitely another way one can see the program's influence on my art. My music career kept being present, but every month that passed, I realized that poetry was and would keep being a principle feature in my life.

During my second year as an MFA, in September, I was nominated again for a Latin Grammy, and attended the ceremony, not really telling my creative writing students (although they ended up finding out anyway). I felt almost like I was leading a double life for a few months, which may have also affected my mind, speeding up my thoughts since I was always either thinking about music, my classes, or the class I was teaching (apart from family life and my relationship). However, although it may sound cliché, I was genuinely happy with my music and the program, newly discovering how much I absolutely love teaching creative writing so I really didn't mind all that I was taking on.

Now, looking at my thesis, I feel so grateful to my professors, in particular to my thesis advisor Professor Bolina, for helping me find a voice that exhibits all of my intricacies. Even if I don't publish it initially, I have never felt prouder of anything I've done, even my music. I am still yet to submit my poems to journals or magazines, but I plan on submitting during the third year as I also keep working on my music, researching
the life and poetry of Concha Méndez who has inspired me to write a chapbook in conversation with her work, and teaching at the university.
Annotated Bibliography Fall 2016 – Spring 2018

   I began reading this anthology in the last semester of the MFA, in my Form in Poetry class. I discovered the work of Denise Levertov reading this book, and immediately fell in love with it. I read and re-read John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara's work, and discovered Charles Olson's "projective verse" and "open field."

   I have drawn so much inspiration from the magical realism exhibited in this book, where the magical is spoken about in an everyday, banal context, illustrating the surreal political and socioeconomic atmosphere in Latin America at the time (and in many case, still today). The emphasis on family structures is also something I learned so much from for my own work.

   Although I cannot say I understand all of Ashbery's writing (or even most of it), I enjoy the particular sense of sadness and melancholy I get from his work, that is as mundane and conversational as it is totally surreal. This juxtaposition is something that makes me really like his work, which reminds me of Wes Anderson.

   I read this anthology of political poetry in my Form in Poetry class Spring 2017. We used this to think about what makes or does not make a poem political, or if every poem is somehow intertwined in the political. I remember discovering Mary Ruefle's work through this book.

   This has been one of the biggest sources of inspiration for my own thesis, out of all of the books I have read these past two years. So many amazing pieces here—"Self Portrait at 28" is one of my favorite poems of all time. How he talks about the banal in the strangest, funniest ways is something I try to emulate.

   Although I actually first read this in my undergraduate years here at UM in Frank Palmeri's Satire class, I have revisited it many times. Borges' magical realism is a different type of magical realism: it is scientific, more mathematical, and much more philosophical. It is really complex and not based so much on family ties, yet it definitely uses surrealism and magic to comment on life and politics. "The Library of Babel" is my favorite short story from this collection.
We were assigned this book in Holly Iglesias' research poetry class, which includes persona poems set in World War II, particularly the Gulag, Auschwitz. I remember discussing in class how Cassells chose to write a topic quite foreign to him, and in a way write "poetry of witness" without actually being the witness of these horrors. The discussion was inconclusive, but a lot of people were not bothered by it, as Cassells describes how it all started with a photograph he found, and a kind of spiritual connection through it (almost like destiny pushed him to write about this moment in history).

This book was partly what taught me how to mix Spanish and English in my poetry in a meaningful way that felt right for me. Mia Leonin actually gave it to me when she was giving away books from her library!

We were assigned this book by Holly Iglesias in the first class we took with her (a workshop course) and I remember how it sparked a discussion in class about racism and how its remains are still prevalent everyday in the U.S. This book is based on Collin's father's account of a lynching (a spectator of only 5 years old). I am inspired by the speculation in this book.

This book cemented in me once and for all that writing bilingual poetry was actually awesome—I had not done as much Spanish/English writing before this book and afterwards, I only wanted to write in that way. I still go back to this book all of the time for that reason, and for the absolutely amazing imagery such as in "Poem after Frida Kahlo's Painting The Broken Column."

*Gutted* was assigned to us by Maureen Seaton in her Lyric Poetry class, and I remember it being overall really sad, as it deals with his father's cancer as well as the poet's own sickness, yet it was also filled with humor (a contrast that really interests me as it parallels the way life actually works).

Professor Seaton also assigned me this book in my first semester of the MFA, and I just mostly remember how good the language was. We kept throwing out our favorite lines and I will always remember the "Nicola Tesla" poem—"To friends, he was as predictable as the mathematics that sailed through his mind like feathers."

I really enjoy how this book blends the magical realism of Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Isabel Allende with the modern world and its humor and intricacies. I also get inspired by the omniscient narrator and the use of "magic" through the theme of fukú.

This book is really different from *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, which I was happily surprised about. I like how it deals with machismo, especially in Latin culture, and it actually has inspired me to possibly write a short story myself soon (or even a script).

This is a poetry collection I have revisited countless times: I read it for the first time as an undergraduate, we discussed it again in workshop, and I have even gone back to it to show my creative writing students some of the pieces. Her imagery and language is outstanding, especially in "The Red Blues" (best period poem ever!).

I remember reading *La Amiga Estupenda* in my first semester in the MFA. I bought it in a bookstore in Madrid where I went with my boyfriend the Summer of 2016. For some reason, I think my surroundings when I first started reading it really affected how I read it, so when I remember the book, I also remember that vacation, my boyfriend's house (he is from Spain), and the airport. Apart from all of that, I was so inspired by how Ferrante brings together so many family members and neighbors without it getting confusing, creating a perfectly logical new world from her imagination. This work is clearly inspired by Garcia Marquez and Allende, too, although it doesn't present as much magic. This book was thrilling!

My favorite aspect of this book is that it is the bilingual edition, which greatly inspires me for the chapbook I am writing on the life and poetry of Concha Mendez. Since I am creating persona poems in Spanish based on her, and then translating myself into English, I think it would be a great idea to format it in this way. Apart from that, I loved how each of these poems were snapshots, reducing life to a visual perspective, focusing on details, in a way that by the end of the book, we ended up getting the full picture. There seemed to be a sense of mystery throughout as well.

This anthology was used in my first year Form in Poetry class under Dr. Bolina, where we heavily discussed political poetry and what that term even means. I
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thought this book was very diverse and gathered many times heartbreaking stories from all over the world, and all different types of wars.


We also read this anthology by Forché in that Form in Poetry class, which was clearly published after the latter anthology and seemed a bit more all-encompassing due to the larger time period it spans. In any case, I find the idea of reporting on an event you're experiencing through poetry (instead of other means) really, really interesting.


This book was assigned to us to read in Holly Iglesias' class, which is comprised of persona poems set in the coal camps of the 1920's West Virginia Mine Wars. I remember the language being very tense, which impressed me as it was so restrained yet poignant. However, it was not the most exciting of books to be honest.


I included this book because this is another work of poems that I have revisited countless times after first reading it in Dr. Bolina's class in my undergraduate years. I always recognized a bit of myself in the speaker/poet, because he's Puerto Rican yet also feels like an outsider in his own country due to being brought up here. The language is great, and I'll always really remember the bowling ball metaphor he used for the coconuts on ice on top of a beach stand.


This is another work that will stay engrained in my mind for a while: it was the main inspiration for the lyric poetry I wrote in Professor Seaton's class, and really taught me a new way of retelling a memory or story, especially in reference to family and death.


This is like an elegy for the American Rust Belt, and I appreciated how intimate the language was throughout, as well as really strange and Gothic. I vividly remember how a classmate actually got a used copy Hurt signed to a family member!


This book is presented beautifully with all of the photos, although I thought the language was a bit bland to be honest. I do understand how that can have to do with the natural elements being referred to, and the slowness of meditating on
these great structures, yet I'm unsure if the language could stand on its own. It was inspiring physically though for a possible future book.

This collection of poems was so great! We read this in Holly Iglesias' Form in Poetry class for research poetry, and I remember being familiar with Pippin's art visually, but not really knowing his name or story. He was a complete pioneer, and the fact that he was underestimated for his skin and thought of as a "primitive" artist for the type of art he made (which was ahead of its time completely), is sickening. My favorite couple of poems are those about his relationship with his wife.

I remember not expecting to like this book as much as I did when we read it in Dr. Bolina's workshop class (we were discussing all the books throughout the 2000's that really made an impact on the poetry scene). The language is just so weird and different, focusing on materialism and existentialism all at once. My first poem from my thesis is titled after a phrase in one of this book's poems ("Oracular Bones").

I began reading this anthology in the last semester of the MFA, in my Form in Poetry class. This anthology is great because it comes after Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry: 1945-1960*, which together present a scope of poetry throughout the last half of the 20th century through today. A great discovery from this book was the work of Joshua Marie Wilkinson ("Wolf Dust") and Rae Armantrout.

*Spontaneous Particulars* was my book of choice to make a presentation on for my Research Poetry class with Professor Iglesias. I remember how everyone was surprised I picked a book by Susan Howe, what with her very experimental "language" poetry and my more confessional type of writing. However, I dug deep into this book and almost made a whole thesis about it for my presentation—I was really into it. I was so inspired by how she photo copied all of these bits and pieces from history (the writing and notes of Emily Dickinson, William Carlos Williams, and a lot more) and had them interact with one another, as well as her own life and writing. My thesis brings in "bits and pieces" and this was probably one of my main resources for thinking in that way.
Iglesias, Holly. *Boxing inside the Box: Women's Prose Poetry*. Quale Press, 2004. Holly Iglesias has taught all of us in the program so much in her classes about historical and research poetry, and this book really presents how else we can write non-fiction, literary criticism and prose in general. I'm really inspired by her "boxes" and how she thinks of writing a "box" as almost laying an egg.

Jordan, Barry, and Mark Allinson. *Spanish Cinema: A Student's Guide*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2010. I first read this guide in my undergraduate years as part of a class I took taught by Gema Peréz Sanchéz that dealt with gender and sexuality in Latin American/Spanish cinema. It has been a book I constantly look back at, as anyone who reads my thesis can see I am wildly obsessed with cinema and I am always writing about and referring to films. I almost see each poem I write as a "mini film" and plan to one day write and direct a short film.

Lewis, Robin Coste. *Voyage of the Sable Venus*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2015. Reading this in Maureen Seaton's Lyric Poetry class was jaw-dropping—I remember loving this book and how it deals with femininity, race, sexual stereotypes, and the relation between sex and culture in general throughout history. The construction of the self in this book, brought about through race, identity, gender, history and portrayal by others is so interesting.

Machado, Carmen Maria. *Her Body and Other Parties: Stories*. Graywolf Press, 2017. This book was recently recommended by an online book club called Belletrist and I immediately knew it was a must-read: Latina, queer author who writes surreal, both sensual and eerie short stories. The book really lived up to the hype and I fell in love with how the book channels magical realism in a darker way that explores modern day queerness and femininity.

Manning, Maurice. *Lawrence Booth's Book of Visions*. Yale University Press, 2001. Out of all of the books I read for my MFA, this was probably one of the best takeaways. I was blown away by Manning's language, and his explorations on the Southern Gothic. He navigates death, the afterlife, alcoholism, race and even the role of animals in our world in such a beautiful way. My favorite aspect of this book is how the character Black Damon speaks in sonnets.

Márquez, Gabriel García, and Edith Grossman. *Love in the Time of Cholera*. Vintage Books, 2003. This is a classic book that has formed my understanding of magical realism, the writing of Latin America and even just romanticism. I think García Marquez's work really affected the way I was writing for many years, especially in my undergraduate days, and although I am inspired by all kinds of work now, one can say that his work, along with Isabel Allende's, is my point of origin as a writer.

I could say pretty much the same thing for this book as I said for *Love in the Time of Cholera*, as I read both of these when I was 18 or 19 years old and was deeply affected by the magical realism in both. However, I can say I actually read this particular novel during my first time in Europe (I went with my mother) and possibly affected me differently because of the life-changing experience that was happening simultaneously. I also think that the last death scene with the ants is the most remarkable part of any book I have read.


This is a sorrowful book that really changed my perspective on a lot of world issues, and I believe it is a book many more people should read to understand the crisis in Mexico of women being murdered in mass proportions. Martínez is a very skilled writer and the repetition throughout really works to symbolize how many women are being killed daily.


Although in my classes during the MFA we have countlessly discussed Neruda and a lot of the quite horrible things he might have done to women, this anthology is still a tome and a starting point for me as a writer. Just in the same way the magical realism of García Marquez and Allende affected me, the romanticism and overall genius of Neruda also changed the way I wrote many years ago, and I still go back to this book.


*The End of Pink* was assigned to us by Maureen Seaton in a workshop class, and I remember also going to Nuernberger’s reading at Books & Books that semester. I love how the poet mixes different characters in and focuses so much on fantasy, history and science. In a way, a lot of the books of poetry I've read during the MFA have shown me that you can literally do anything you want with poetry, as long as the work is authentic, true and the language transmits something. This opened doors for me as a writer to bring in conversations with my boyfriend into my thesis, and to show who I am unequivocally.


Much like how Latin American magical realism was a starting point for me as a writer, the New York School ended up changing my perspective a lot and with that, changing my writing. *Lunch Poems* was one of the first books of poems I read that I absolutely enjoyed and didn't want to stop reading. It felt like I was reading letters that someone sent me if I had lived in 1964, and I loved how O'Hara brought in the banal and pop culture. This book informs my writing even today, especially the conversational tone.
This is another book I fell in love with that was assigned to us by Professor Seaton in our workshop class, which I later witnessed "live" in a reading Olzmann gave at UM as part of the Ibis series. The language was just so good throughout, with such a clear, likable voice, and I was impressed by poems such as "Imaginary Shotgun" which I also saw Olzmann read. Overall, his reading was also quite remarkable with vast attention to rhythm.

Professor Seaton assigned this book to us in a workshop class, although in this case, I had definitely heard of Pietri before as an influential Puerto Rican poet, and one of the main innovators of Spanglish poetry. Although I would have appreciated it if the book was more experimental form and language wise, I also really respect this as a tome for all fellow Spanglish poets.

I count this book as another huge inspiration, which I guess goes to show how varied my tastes and interests are generally. I first read this in Jaswinder Bolina's class in my undergraduate years and revisit it often; I particularly love Plath's crisp, simply language that so often hints at psychological turmoil. I also really like the way she uses the adjective "fat."

I am really inspired by this book, much in the same way I am inspired by Susan Howe's *Spontaneous Particulars*, as they both use research poetry in ways I didn't think were possible. Of course, Rankine's book, apart from its experimental prowess, is one of the most influential works in regard to race that have been published quite possibly ever. It achieves completely immersing readers into the perspective and daily life of a black person in America, and in that way, it is a crucial book.

I read this just recently in my last semester of the MFA and we actually had the treat of meeting Regalado in Professor Seaton's class, where she told us all about her life in El Salvador and even her photo project, Through the Bulletproof Glass. I connected to this book thoroughly, partially because of the use of Spanglish and the feeling of being trapped in between two worlds.

*The Life of Poetry* is such a phenomenal read in the sense that so many points that Rukeyser brings up are like "yes!" One has a million "aha" moments as a poet when reading this book, especially when it comes to why the general public believes poetry is something quite different than what it actually is (romantic, rhymes, etc.) and why not that many people seem to read poetry. She traces this to
the school system and even to the fear of poetry rooted in so many teachings from when we are young.

I fell in love with this book, and Rushdie's writing in general, in my undergraduate years reading this book in Frank Palmeri's Satire class. I remember being so into this class, which was very unexpected for me (we read everything from this book to the Satyricon). This book reminded me of my family, and also reminded me of the tradition of magical realism. I am still deeply inspired by its raw exploration of human shame and family structures.

This book is so much fun and presents so much joy, much in the way Maureen Seaton does in person! I read this in Bolina's class in my undergraduate years and still go back to it at times. The language is of course phenomenal, but apart from that, it really depicts the voice of the poet in such a clear way as if each poem is a letter to the reader.

I just read this in Seaton's workshop class now in my last semester of the MFA, and I was so blown away by it. How can someone write (such a long book) *this* well with such amazing language while constantly making cross references and allusions? The fact that the Caribbean and a discussion of poverty and race is crossed with allusions to Shakespeare is simply genius.

*Life on Mars* was a book on Professor Bolina's syllabus as part of one of the classes taught by him that I took in my undergraduate years at UM. I remember discussing how amazing the language was and how the discussion on death led by music and space was really interesting, but also if the book was groundbreaking enough considering it won the Pulitzer. This discussion served to highlight how one can critique even the books that win the biggest prizes and accolades, instead of quickly seeing them as sacred.

I remember a prompt in Seaton's class that came out of reading this book, which turned out to be wildly generative for me. I titled it "My Vocabulary Did This to Me" (it made it to my thesis) and it deals with all of my favorite words in the different languages that make up my life (words like "naranja" and "gorda"). This book really informed a lot of the lyric essays I wrote that semester.

Bellocq's Ophelia seems like a perfect example of how to write historical or research based poetry, of course done with the expertise of Trethewey. There was such an authentic sentiment in each of these persona poems—so much so that I was inspired to write a persona poem for the first time about a prostitute from Puerto Rico called "Mi Vida Film Noir en Bayamón."

A part of Professor Iglesias' research poetry class, Kyrie is slow and constantly foreboding, yet has a sense of opaqueness and mystery throughout. I admit that I thought I would be bored because of the type of language it uses (they are persona poems that don't use particularly experimental or innovative imagery) and also the quite depressing subject matter (the influenza pandemic of 1918-19 that led the U.S. alone to lose half a million people, worldwide 25 million), but I really was not. I thought the history itself was so interesting, especially because it is not as remembered or recorded as one would think, and how the various persona poems end up morphing into one sole voice of biblical proportions.

This is another book we read in Iglesias' research poetry class and I remember reading it in one sitting, so interested in this story that runs alongside the very famous tales of Lewis and Clark, yet is little known. It tells the story of York, Clark's slave, and how he also was one of the first Americans to explore the West, in a way being freed from the confines of slavery at least during the expedition. In a way, this book reverses the history that we have been taught, that is so often male/white dominated.

One Big Self is a book that was very influential to me while completing the MFA, and since I was both assigned it in Iglesias' workshop and also witnessed a peer's thoughtful presentation on it in another class, I feel like I really got to understand it. I will never forget the constant repetition of inmates' objects throughout the book (comb, soap, etc.) and also the thin line between exploring a subject to allow visibility of the underrepresented and exploring a subject that does not pertain to your experience which will also be somewhat lucrative. In that sense, we never really came to a consensus I think, yet the language and sentiments throughout are undeniably authentic and the book is careful to draw any conclusions—it just presents what the poet sees (in a way, the poet acts like a looking glass and nothing more).

Skid, like David Berman's Actual Air, is a book that was almost "passed down" to me by Jaswinder Bolina, as he studied with Dean Young. I appreciate the surrealism of all of his poems, and how it is blended with banal, every-day things,
just like in the works of magical realism. I first read this as an undergraduate majoring in Poetry, and it still informs my writing to this day.