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(EVOL)UTION IS LOVE SPELLED BACKWARDS

A Thesis Presented

by

ERICA MONTEIRO

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

February 2010

MFA program for Poets and Writers

(EVOL)UTION IS LOVE SPELLED BACKWARDS

A Thesis Presented

by

ERICA M. MONTEIRO

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ABSTRACT

(EVOL)UTION IS LOVE SPELLED BACKWARDS

FEBRUARY 2010

ERICA M. MONTEIRO, B.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS

M.F.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Dara Wier

My thesis is a collection of poems.

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bloc 1

to the yoke.
got me hooked
on ur rhythms
and outside
seventies
front stoop
chillin.

sharecroppin
on farmland
in connecticut
got u this, a
legacy of bliss,
where i can't
come sit in su
casa without
takin something
home to my
crib.

at the park,
we get a quiet
destiny
in tow to
the banks
of the river
where i get
treated to
dead dog
stories
and fishing
permits to
eat.

jump off the
rock to the spot
in the middle of
the river,
but know how
to swim a
puerto rico
uptime to not
get taken
downstream

and drowned

by the tide.

abuela salsas
on the street.
mamba in her
switch, got a
tenement
garden on the
block
where she
plants the
flowers of
a jibara's
heart.

calderon it
to zion.
smoke high on
ur island-couch
back porch
is a westside
story playground
complete with
laundry a breeze...

at 1 am
a d.y.s.
just got
my own pad,
muthafuckas kept me
in esl class and
that's why
i speak spanglish

fluidly
sleepy, slips
in and out.

one nigga
2 chics
y a lil muneca.
got me
happy that
my sadness
turned into

car seats on the
sidewalk, while
papi cleaned the
ride:
chihahuas,
coronas,
cheeba,
and
children.

goodnight obama

sleep does not overtake
those who wish it away
by staying up late and
going to bed before the
sun sets on a country
in turmoil.

this is our last stand.
after all, the majority
voted for a black man,
the go to guy when
shit really hits the fan.

the banks won't even
lend to the white boys,
and we know that
the average white
nest egg is
the house that
one secured the
mortgage for.
the welcome sign
on the door.
the picket fence and
monsanto
to make the grass
greener...

but no one complained
when they redlined
the brown folks out
of property or
burnt it to the ground
out of jealousy.

to spite the new
president there is a
neo nazi tea party
agenda, a clever
disguise for what
lies just under the
surface of the nation,

waiting to bubble up

and drip down to the

streets, where there
will be war before
there is peace, and
everyone will arm
themselves for the
coming debacle.

there are some places
where people can't
accept new faces
but rely on old facts. we
obviously
haven't made as much
progress as all that, try to
sweep the real
sentiment under the
beds where we rest
our heads, looking forward
to a new day of
the same ol same ol.

just cuz our president
is black, don't mean
jack.

just a sign that things
are worse than expected.

grease

there is man locked up
in the claws of justice,
afraid to come on
campus, a safe space
before his race became
a factor in this case;

for something he did
not do, a crime he did
not commit, two grown
men, and them a$$hole
pro$ecutor$ keep saying
it's all legit, how these white
boyz came on campus
and started sh*t, broke
a window and then
entered a dorm to
confront a lone sole
with a pocket knife
for protection, a broken
nose and concussion
for his rejection of
their words about
his niggerdom,

probably
thinking bout how
far he's come just
to endure this,

he got down
in self defense,
barely doing
any damage...

now he sits, on
a potential 30+ year
bid, awaiting court fees
instead of payment
for his graduation
cap and gown, student
loans hover, and
he's still on lockdown.
no traveling to another

place to get away from

this space of misery.

waiting out the burden
plays with what you
remember about your
history. the times
blend together,
the in and out
of court, trying hard
not to cop a plea when
one dude actually got
off scott free and the
other got time out
in a corner…

no vacation.

we want

justice for jason.

his loss

she made a
break for it,
when he least
expected it.
thought she
would love him
forever, but
decided
something
different.

yes. friends
on the terms
that are
declared in
her contract.
reappropriated
to fit a new
context

no more
tears bout how
life's so hard...
the plantation
wants more
for less. ..
what's life
worth living
for if there's all
this stress...
my brother's
gone m.i.a.
somewhere in
a mess...

i don't want
to hear it.

don't want
to feel empathy
for ur pain cuz
i got my own
pain to get
through and

a lot of

growing to
do
without u.

u couldn't see
the forest for
the tree of life
that stood in
your midst. ur
satisfied soul
will crave what
u miss.

but it will
be okay for
me

the one who
was there when
there was nobody
to pick up the
pieces of your
shattered quilt
and thread them
together to
create a new
mosaic.

a well worn tapestry,
dumped for
brand new shoes.

goodbye moon

he who knows her better
has moved to strict
platonic, no more
intertwined
positions of
intimacy
vulnerability.

she can blame herself
for this she made;
slipped her
tongue in funk
curled waves and
invented fetal positions.

he says in his
silent moments:
away

is made
whole from her
presence.

he does not want.

nor does he need.

all business on a
first name basis.

to bleed on a sword
stuck womb
filled with nothing
but whispered
memories tortured
in late nights

is not
a life.

so she sits lonely
on the moon.

contemplating

the heat of his
hands on the
back of her knees
and the crushing
sensation of
googly laughs
that come with legs
hard pressed between.

dishes cleaned
and a meal on the
table

before
he winked across
the room and
baalinbaalis
changed to
butter…

back when
they
still smiled
at the thought
of actively
loving
each other.

disparate stanzas

falling under
the eyes
of mystery
is better than
sitting in the
heart of misery

making believe
that another
night in solitary
will cure u
of any want
to be alone.

loneliness
is like shit.
everyone
goes through
it, so relish
it and eat it
without
gagging.

oogling men
in expensive
clothes that
don't look like
quick clean
get up's from the
army navy store
bores the situation
a bigger hole.

what one likes
and what one will
take are two separate
things when words
become wings
to find solace.

prematurely ripening
in the dead of
night. sleep will
come without the

flight to atlantis

when the universe
is in alignment.

it's an even
softer refinement
to be back in the
eyes of mystery.

one last hurrah

one more day to be sad,
and remember i dodged
a shattering bullet.

one more day to think
about the way things
went down, searching
for something that
wasn't lost...didn't
need to be found...

my mind was gone...

not equipped to
handle it. not ready
to see through the
deceit to get to
the root of the
abandonment.

in this race of
heartbreak, see who
can get to the finish
line faster, who has
had the time to
really recoup from
the disaster, and
who buried it in
the arms of another?

brother, i loved you.
would have given
you a thousand
dreadlocks and a tubful
of kush, would have
massaged your soul
to relaxation, and
treated you to a
kenyan vacation.

all the stops and
starts couldn't have
kept me from running
to you.

but you chose,

and i rose to a new
height of understanding
that the boy in the man
is bigger than the man
in the man. that what
happened, made me
erase all those plans
and find myself in
me. a new song to
sing about the
heart and how it
pumps, offbeat.

the rhythm is
no longer a
scattered racing,
it's a slow pacing
for the healing that's
taking place. no more
sweating imaginary
bullets, or worrying
about what's next,
no more reading
extra messages
into a simple text.
or staying up late
till you come home
from filming
another family...

it happened so quickly,
i got physically sick,
and while i suffered
you found another
lover, and acted as
though i didn't exist.

that's the shit of it.
the part that plays
with the conscience.
like so much that
has haunted you
that can't be recouped.

a landless man
in a nomad's country,
no solid foundation
for stability.

i felt the truth before
i knew it, never brave
enough to show me the
real deal so i took a
background seat and
let things just happen
to me.

my mind came back...

in the blink of an
eye, the universe
realigned, and now i
see what you missed.

a poetic soul capable
of pulling her own,
making something
out of nothing
that you told in
your lies.

just a single mother
struggling. that's no
surprise. just don't ply
her with untruths, or fill
her with false, or
mess up the hearts
of the children involved...

sisterhood is stronger,
it's what's gotten me
through, and at the
heart of you.

the matter is naught.
fraught with anxiety
over nothing left, and
wishing you happiness
till my last breath.

a man's character
determines his life,
a man's actions
determine his
destiny.

there is rest for me
in this new land of
unchartered territory
and time to build
a family that won't
self destruct.

today i woke up
and saw me standing
nakedly at 36.5 in a
full length mirror,
liking what i see,
and knowing that
what's reflected belongs
to me.

in the blink of an
eye, the universe
realigned, and
i became,

well,

free.

goodbye

there is no
answer on the
line, a dead long
pitched high
silence of
empty ringing.

a click.
a slam.
a disconnect.

under the
emptiness there
is a feeling of
discontent,
the way a bird
slams into
a clear windowpane
thinking it's flying
in air.

shattered,

it crashes
to the ground

it makes no
sound
as it lays dying.

or the way the ride
turns around to
chase u down,
but u see nothing
as u walk in ur
contentment.

when one back
gets turned, another
turns toward u.

when one love is
lost, another
becomes u.

remix

take this empty
space and remake
it anew, in the
image of purity
that sees you
through brighter
days and
better ways
of coping
with the tough
times...

there is death
all around, but
there is life
in the smallest
of places,
rebuilding
what was
lost in a haze
of shattered glass
that one tries
not to step on…

and over time
the shards
are worn to
slivers that smart,

and over
time replaced
with new
memories
that lend
themselves to
new starts…

and the slivers
have duller
edges.

when u have
a slate that

gets erased,

u get to
redesign
ur
fate.

for Daniel

between lil london and sava'lamar...
and the way,
at midday,
the rain cascades
a steam off the
the dirt road
downpours.

i wanna feel the
hiding under
banana leaves, and
curled sugarcane
husked machet.

the roughness of ur
feet like jagged
rocks.

wet is wet in
rain.

do u remember?

missing teeth,
soupy sweet,
hot heat
is a rhythm
that cascades
over democratic
debates

won't take me
up river
again,

to 12 years old.

on some flagrant,
downright complacent
acquiescence, shivering
in the sunlight.

u better not suggest
take the rented scooter

to go get the _____

that ain’t in season, and
condoms ain’t
got nothin to do with
reason,

today.

i remember.

the party.

and how i had to
find a way to
skate
my father in
that dark road
rythmn, congested
with people.

pimps know pimps,
my playa, i told u,

when i found u

playin dominoes.

bathed in
the river
together.

me in
my bathin suit,

cuz
u suggested
i was meant for
something
better than
just the river,

just jamaica,

and jerked air.

just jamaica.

if i came

u sang

i’d be
a migrant
worker
in america,

if i came.

in alla that.

the bat

her words flow like water from the tip
of her tongue to her hips, she does not stop
talking even through the kiss. the way a verb dips
into his soft lips makes for satisfaction, she massages
his neck to get his reaction to her eyes in his irises,
close enough to reach down
and caress stray hairs on his chest with her fingers
and she slowly trails to his knees, kisses
each kneecap then giggles silliness
before he whispers his own caress to get
her up, kneeling position to eye
level, feels her tremble at the palm of it.
his hand on the small of her back when she
stands, supports the weight of weak legs
shaking softly in the midst of it. a caress
that doesn't convalesce in it's longing to
be more than a touch, soft enough to break
through the shell she has created, hard
enough to shatter kneecaps.

in the heartstrings

there is just
staring laughing,
a lack of focus
for the sake
of modesty underneath
me,
a press up
conscious
knowledge of what
may or may not
be presumed in ur nature
rising cleared
of all abrasiveness.

your words are choice
anger but your heart
is riveted in
platinum assuming,
trying
a new tactic of courting
skirted angles, over
jeans clothed under
t., a bikini topless
vision of
precision.

what is simple goes the
way of complexity bereaved
for guilty stamina to stop
hardwiring like
bartering your cubic zirconia
for a diamond.
rough and flawed.

like a diamond,

back in the
coal of it.

alone

there is nothing
like looking out
at the ocean
on a hot
summer day,
sweltering away
as u
play under
water with
miniature
fish nibbling
at ur legs.

the snail that
you pry from
its perch
on a rock
attaches itself
to ur finger:
a crab
scurries
to hide,
a fish
swims
by,
as a water
bug
skuttles
the surface...

another
tantric move
for u in ur
place among
the rocks,
an arm behind u,
a stretch to
twist,
releasing the
snail gently to
the listlessness
of each
wave as
it crests and then

finally

breaks;
an ancient
rhythm
like
heaven as
sleep overtakes
from ur
blanket
position.

the heat
has arisen
anew after
cold atlantic
water.
reverberating
off the beach
u can feel and
see the
shimmer...

this will be a
day to
remember...

slip and fall

the puddle
grows disproportionate
to the house and
tree rippled
to perfection.

do u see the way
rainbows build
in the oil spill
of those ripples?

children laughing
are reflected in the
solitude of the
car splashed
water.

they make
obscene gestures,

curse the

clogged drain
can cause a mess
to form outside
the bodega.

*
why watch pictures
in a filthy lake
of water, that
get ur boots
wet, when
there's
always something
more important,
to be doing,

like hustle,
pay bills, and
pick up food for
dinner.

there's no
sense
wasting time
imagining

swans floating
in freedom.

july

the fourth
has no fireworks
cuz nobody wants
to watch from
the statie's back
porch.

it's a rehab.

a magnificent
pad. replete with
flat screen t.v. and
a kitchen made
to cook in. good to know
the gin. another
connect on the way
to success and relaxed in
the crib top roof
deck to
the jump off
of diamonds,
despite neil's
horrible singing
that we all laugh
at, his cracked voice
stays merry in
a hatched
shell.

americana
kitchy.

a bitches
brew.

a snuck cigarette.

a day with no
regrets.

sean

ring the alarm
see the bell curve?
how it gets hot
when someone
cock blocks
ur process
with their
aggressive
resistance to
ur happiness?

a march means
much ringing
in the ears of
wake me up.
this is no time
to sleep on a
flag critique...

charge! it takes
a lot. seen shots
of friends lost
in a small
hole that didn't
ooze so so so
so so so so so
so so so so so
so so so so so
so so so so so
so so so so so
so so so so so
so so so so so
so so so so so
so so so so so
so so so many
times.

desensitized
for protection
from the truth
of this life led

to
the one

time i called and

got pissy
po po; a
a no sirened
ambulance
10 minutes
later...

for my
zip-coded-youthdead?
here's a
salute. should
be another
llc to make
money to fight
the cattle battle...

snaked
stall resistance
for autistic
sensory deprivation
is a march
on washington,
d.c...

rodney king
wasn't good
on my campus.
wasn't good on
his atlanta
house either.

filmin
underground
before
cell phones,

had to hang up
to do what we did...

riot police and
a permanently
bum knee from
what we got.

it wasn't even

a wall. so
we jumped.

biodiversity

it has no borders.
an out of order
hyped dog looks

at all the drugs
they gave to the
cat,
argues wit the
vet about the
dosages, knows
milligrams
and body weight
and latin
root word
pharmeceuticals;
prevents an
overdosage,
and in the process
schools the doc.

paradise
has no borders.
it's ur sister
and her homegirl
and ur ace in
the hole on
a porch swing,
intellectualizing
warrants, gay
adoption, and homophobia
in the hood.

paradise
has no borders.
it's real-power-
people-cops that stop
what they're doing,
to check out
the lyrics and

screw the
arrests of the
young boys
bikin it with
trees, paper,
and a one
hitter.

paradise
is a daddy,
ridin the
greyhound
with both
his daughters,
cross country,
in his slippers,
while learning the
value of
trusting strangers.

paradise is
stoppin outside
the midway
on lesbian night
(wit ur chatty,
angry, short
fuse ass), and
rockin it
with white
girls who
look nervous
at the tats
the hat
and the tee.
at ease enough
to get their
opinions,
pictures,
(digits)
and the
invite.

paradise is
a late night walk
after the magnums,
but before the early
breakfast…a
collaborative
effort that ain't
a commercial bout
bein all that u can be.

nigga? u got
another type
of army that
encompasses
all the biodiversity,
needed to sustain

paradise.

n.a. fetish

abandonment
reigns supreme.
motherless
homes of
heroin
eviction and
bridges burnt
behind.

routine.
like a lifestyle.
people here know
all the cues.
2 months
of non speaking
doesn't get
off extra time
when legal
crack breaks
outside
are common.

i want a cup
of café bustelo, and
the sista who
won't get off
step one to
break the
format.

i'm
confused.

a semi-group
and a home base?
there's a real group
and a meeting/sponsor
any time of day, plus
another group
you give time to?

(how do u get paid
in ur stumble on
the way to step 2's

as many times as

they pass around
that basket...?

hierarchy lifestyle
says u could substitute
any word for that
acronym. listless as
it is in relapse...)

surrender?

for who?

*
"i’m anne"

(they really do
that).

"hi anne..."

wants to raise
a hand and
say STOP THIS
SHIT! it’s sugar
and caffeine
nicotine. and
a passionate
speech that
was more than
5 minutes.
a dip into
something
deeply
personal.
staring
for strength,
and in the next
end, i actually
heard the
sista speak

waiting
for the

testimonial
fabled story
of love’s lost
latitudes.
highly interested
in the inflection
of his tone,
her affirmation
of his education,
written down,
he preached
her church
story to

people who
don’t think
loud movements
are jarring
the senses
of his faith.

*
tonight, she
gives her own
testimony:

"i come here
cuz i enjoy
artists, and
addicts are
some of the
best storytellers
alive. ummm,
how does
that sound...?"

and she runs
when the group
responds:

"just fine."

the spider

takes the front seat
when the cops
roll up to talk about
the loud crew--
gang in the minds
of the two who
keep calling cuz
of the politics.

while u small
talk ur way
through this
one. she stares
back, and watches
how his hand
creeps
to his holster...

it's just a girl.

nervous, cuz
she does not
flinch,
disdains
small talk, bullshit.

makes the cops
say who called,
and they both do
rat.

but she doesn't
blink.

green
eyed monsters
r not hybrid,
in the quiet of
night we will
make slashing
tires at the
precinct later,
a lover's
dream.

who wants

peace? when
the only reason
ur car ain't been
stolen in hotville
is because one
hand washes the
other; and
while u live by
the codes of
peeking out the
window, won’t come
over and state how
u feel cuz u scared
of the real in
the angels.

who are the ones who
make sure there's
no jacking on
this block? who's
the one who keeps
repo men from towing
away ur overpriced
car?

u hug ur purse closer
to ur body when u
pass them. and have no
love until one speaks
the king's english,
and a lighthearted
light goes
on...

but it's too late
to come back.

cuz we switch it.

in cops we trust
consistency. in u,
we trust nothing.

gentrification

and i love her.

the accident
that left her
relearning to
walk
and tie her
shoes,
made claim that
i knew nothin bout
the blues
confrontation of
crackhead to
crackhead.

and so we
cracked heads.

on a 15 year time
bid.

and she understood it.
so i explained the history
behind the claim i made:
that 15 years
is somethin,

but not enough.

the fact that displacement
wasn't an option but
crack was illegal

on our homestead.

*
her usin drove me
crazy, cuz i could see
that, maybe, we could
work together to
change all this
into something similar
to bliss fucked with our

conversations
in late night
configurations of how
we'd help to rework
the code.

keep one step
ahead at all times.

i asked her to read the
paper. just for practice.
and still not believe what
she was told about the

flashing lights that claimed her
birthday silence. transmitted
to a skull sensed fury--
and the fact that flashings'
all that's left of
excitement,
in the hood.

be grateful. she said.
for the clear. my shit's
jumbled over how
it relies on
what the power i have
cannot be.

don't u know?

i CAN'T read.

but i'll carry
a burner
on a bitch.

*
i love weed
and weed loves
me. outta an intoxicated
blunt soaked in
formaldehyde,
over and over.

shoutin "m.p.v."
till the niggaz told her to
shut up.

but she wouldn’t.

she couldn’t.

cuz this
is territory claimed,
that despite the rumors
people ain’t stealin’,

she can
conceptualize
in her brain.

t.v.

hit the silence
with a little bit of
good old american
violence to pop off
the fact that the
backdrop for this
split is just another,
war torn damage
between republican
and democrat,
the inhumanity
on both sides
of the divide.

i see the hate
they preach while
dropping bombs
on beseeched
citizens. the rebel
walk of a young
boy carrying a
kalashnikov is
old next to
night goggles and
a rocket launcher.

begging
us to fly out
of his skies
before picking
up weapons
while on nightly
patrol, he prays
that he will not
have to fire on
you:

"sail away from
our waters.
a beach like
resort of dunes
with no development
does not belong
in hands of the
developed"

is a chant
in every
global south
nation where
guerillas reside,
what we
choose to ignore

is the slaughter
point blank between
the eyes, the
blank stare we
give back at the
screen and
the way the screen
stares blankly
back at us, a titillating
dance of
destruction
for the
watcher, not
the watched.

*
so tell us again
that there will
be another living
scraped from the
dust of a mother's
hands on a day

like every other,

except on this
day, her son is
dead.

tell us what happens
to the
innocent jailed
in paradise
somewhere between
a dog cage and
an oasis?

shipped to kansas.

click

there will
be new programming
to reflect
the bullet hole

in the head of
the boy

who
wanted you
out of his
heart.

bloc 2

jackie sullivan. his moms was
a cape verdian
chic, who would walk
by a *****
and keep movin;
his dad sold
coke
dog
named
satan.

dog wasn't hatin,
just trained
to bite a tight mark
in ur bottom;

and cats became your
best friends.

while...

tanya brown

wore the crown.
her mom's was
deep velvet. dark
brownstone.
felt on the
landing

so deep

dad
stayed
in the

background,

an underground
hound who kept
every stable,
lest it was
stack time on
his own time,

and then he flipped

tables with us

on the street,

made me plenty

of italian stallion
(i didn’t get
al capone, no watching
that shit in my home)
and his thunderbird
camaro
masserati;
lots of chics
that liked to party...

bobby murphy
gave me my first
sip of beer, while

ne-ne, was a glitzy
puerto rican l;

blitzy on a love
melody that made
her schitzy and

sane.

blond brown bouncy
curls, and a smile
that said:

don’t wet me with
that hydrant

nigga respect of
a 6 year old body
in a 20 year mind;

who popped it with

jelly shoe gangsta;
and made em all

look like wangstas
while our slip on’s
rusted in water…

.
.
.
.
.
…

teena marie in the
gutter, and
us singing
"squarebiz"

off time, hearin
elton jon’s
get back honkey cat
on a
frank sinatra
melody

over a poppin bass
jaw droppin,

brownstone stoop
heineken turned
felony…

adults sang politics under
neath the ghetto palms.

and the law of the
arm who
shut off the water.

that’s what u forgot
to treasure,

in ur pleasure.