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(Evol)ution Is Love Spelled Backwards

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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

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by

ERICA M. MONTEIRO

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ABSTRACT

(EVOL)UTION IS LOVE SPELLED BACKWARDS

FEBRUARY 2010

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Directed by: Professor Dara Wier

My thesis is a collection of poems.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT................................................................................................................................... iii

1. bloc 1...................................................................................................................................... 1
2. goodnight obama................................................................................................................ 4
3. grease ................................................................................................................................... 6
4 his loss.................................................................................................................................. 8
5. goodbye moon..................................................................................................................... 10
6. disparate stanzas................................................................................................................ 12
7. one last hurrah.................................................................................................................. 14
8. goodbye............................................................................................................................ 18
9. remix .................................................................................................................................... 19
10. for daniel ......................................................................................................................... 21
11. the bat.............................................................................................................................. 24
12. in the heartstrings............................................................................................................ 25
13. alone............................................................................................................................... 26
14. slip and fall....................................................................................................................... 28
15. july ..................................................................................................................................... 30
16. sean................................................................................................................................... 31
17. biodiversity ....................................................................................................................... 34
18. n.a. fetish.......................................................................................................................... 37
19. the spider......................................................................................................................... 40
20. gentrification...................................................................................................................... 42
21. t.v. ...................................................................................................................................... 45
22. the bloc 2.......................................................................................................................... 48
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: chihuahuas, 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.
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.

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 toplless
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
coil 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.

american
kitchy.

a bitches
brew.

a snuck cigarette.

a day with no
regrets.
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 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.
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 schitty 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.