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FROM THE NOTES APP

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FROM THE NOTES APP

A Creative Project Submitted to the
Graduate School of
John Carroll University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts

By
Marc Anthony Lee Chiurco
2023

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Critical Preface

Since before it took on its textual form, poetry has existed in the oral and aural traditions of our ancestors, with each new generation contributing to it their journeys, experiences, and memories. Poetry cannot exist without some relationship with the past; whether it accepts, rejects, or shows its indifference to the poetry that came before, there is a connection that must be had. Oftentimes this makes distinguishing one's own voice from those who came before a difficult task. Early on in my pursuit of a post-secondary degree, I found T.S Eliot's *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, where he states that we tend to find ourselves praising the aspects of poets' works that least resemble the works of their predecessors—equating clear differences from other poets with successful creativity. Yet, as Eliot points out, “we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his [the poet's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously.” Inspired by Eliot's views on tradition, individuality, and becoming a self-sacrificing poet, I began to read and learn from older English speaking poets: Keats, Byron, Yeats, Poe, Wilde, and Auden. However, in my attempt to imitate past poets, I found myself writing lofty poems about things I didn't know with fanciful words that had no meaning.

I later found I had an affinity for modern and contemporary poetry, especially American poetry. I found the work of poets like Allen Ginsberg, Robert Creeley, e.e. cummings, and Amiri Baraka to be extremely liberating, freeing me from the mindset that all poetry needs to be formal or deal with greater metaphysical issues. American poetry, I found, is filled with politics and pop culture, fragmented sentences and modern vernacular. As I read, I discovered poets and poetry that I now understood and connected with more deeply than the poems I had previously fawned

over. Reading more modern and contemporary poets and theorists, I uncovered new insights into the poetic process. In the Black Mountain poet Charles Olson's essay, "Projective Voice", he holds breath as the central driving force in poetry. Breath conveys a personal connection between the poet and the reader. The poet in this way also passes what Olson refers to as a kinetic energy discharge: "A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it (he will have some several causations), by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader." This energy is then given to readers to take away and use in their own works. Projective verse is formless and instead based upon the individual artist themselves and in this, the poem holds stories, opinions, experiences told to the reader. The Beats took this poetic energy a step farther, incorporating jazz and rhythm into their works. They also believed that poetry should be about lived experiences and tried to find new, unfettered, and authentic styles of writing. Inspired by these poetic movements, I have begun to concern myself more with the way the words sound coming off the page, the cadence, the music, and the movement of the piece.

Perhaps what draws me most to poetry is its undefinable nature. Living in this day and age, there is so much to draw from, so many styles, techniques, and takes on what poetry is, what makes a poem, and what makes a poet (or what is the role of the poet). Combining what I learned from the Romantics (Keats and Wordsworth mostly) and Modernists (like Eliot) with the more contemporary and American language and style, I found that much of my poetry is still drawn from the traditions of my ancestors melded with the contemporary vernacular and style. Though still honing my craft, I tend to find myself drawing inspiration from all over. Sometimes I do play the role of the "self-sacrificing poet" or the "chameleon poet" (as Keats would say) in my poems; in "Sticky Note," "home," and "For Lily," I find myself writing stories about,

relationships and experiences that have little to do with my life. In other poems, like “My Brother’s Scar,” I draw from deeper emotions and lived experiences to tell the story of my brother and me.

My collection *From the Notes App* is an amalgamation of everything I have learned and experimented with over the past two years, as well as the by-product of the times, not just in subject matter but in terms of the way that it was inspired and created. My memory is not the worst, nor is it the strongest, as I tend to find myself forgetting important dates, times, or thoughts, etc. What does not help is that today we are constantly inundated with a barrage of text messages, emails, and mobile app notifications on a daily basis. At times it feels as though there is such an overwhelming number of other voices speaking at once that it becomes hard to distinguish which one is your own. So, where then can we find some respite from the bustling voices of today? For me, the answer lies in my Notes App—a compromise between staying connected and nurturing creativity.

When I was working on an oil field in the West Texas sun, I found myself wanting to keep a log of what I found interesting, so I used my Notes App to record my experiences and eventually wrote them out as poems on my phone. The opening poem, “Ode to My Notes App”, sets the tone for the rest of the collection. The first stanza reads:

The safe in which I keep
My most intimate thoughts
And Netflix passwords;
The “I love you buts”
And “remember to grab milk;”

Ideas for new stories
That will never be written
And birthday reminders
That I'll soon forget are there

These first few lines of the poem highlight the medium in which the poem is being written. This is a phone application, a tool. Its purpose exists beyond the art of writing poetry, but there is also something intimate about the privacy that it allows. The partial love letters are contrasted by the mundane reminder to pick up groceries, showing the ultimate randomness of the contents of this Notes App. The mention of ideas for new stories and the birthday reminders are a humorous way to connect to the shared experiences of the reader.

The second stanza lists more examples of what's in the Notes App and well as personifying it. Addressing the Notes App as "you" and ending with "That you have grown/ Far too accustomed to" implies that the relationship between the speaker and the app is an intimate and long-lasting relationship. Stanza three further emphasizes and confirms the importance of the app to the writer while expressing great gratitude towards it.

The fourth stanza is perhaps the most important as it gives the most insight into how to approach the poetry of the Notes App and, in this case, the poetry of this collection. It reads:

The poetry of you
Is a reflection of me
An experiment of life
No structure,
No lines,

No order or rhyme,
A couple taps away
From being deleted.
So, before I change
My mind

The poetry found in this collection is for the most part biographical or at least in some ways has a deeper connection with who I am. The poetry is also experimental and new. Throughout the collection there are different styles, formats, and subjects; the poems are an attempt to find my voice as a poet. When the stanza lists “No structure,/ No lines,/ No order or rhyme,” it is meant to be self-contradictory. There clearly is some structure, whether loose or not is in how you read it. The collection has recurring themes and motifs and many of them have to do with my family, particularly the men in my life. The end of this stanza also shows the fleeting nature of creativity. Sometimes things are lost, sometimes they are destroyed on purpose. Either way, nothing is set in stone.

There is no one way to read this collection, though I purposefully spaced out some of the more emotional poems, as I believe levity is important so as not to overwhelm the reader with one particular emotion. Some poems might spark laughter, some confusion, and others might draw on strong emotions (hopefully unforced and without too much sentiment). It is important to keep in mind as one reads the collection that, again, not all poems are one hundred percent from my experiences. In some ways, all writing is autobiographical—drawing from similar experiences and emotions—but that does not mean that all the events are accurate to my life. For instance, my poem "Sticky Note" was inspired by Frank O'Hara's "Lana Turner Has Collapsed,"

and also incorporates the style of William Carlos Williams. The poem is not from my own perspective but from the perspective of a woman who finds her husband is cheating on her and subsequently leaves him a message on a sticky note. It reads:

I found the note you left me on
Yellow paper with blue ink stuck
To the counter a big smile after
The words “Be back for dinner,
Love you”
And in the afternoon I made
Mom’s lasagna and the phone
Rang ‘Gonna be late too much
Paperwork to finish’ and I knew
Jessica was there with her tight
Skirt and dangling earrings and I
Could hear the laughter as the
Location on the phone said 52nd
& Broadway when you work on
46th & Madison and the oven
Dinged and I burnt my hand on
Pan cause I forgot to wear mitts
Clumsy me Clueless me haha
Your dinner is in the microwave

The poem does not directly address the issue but instead indirectly reveals it, putting together the same pieces that the narrator had to in order to discover the infidelity in the first place. The poem is devastating and searing in its realizations and elisions. Its slippages in line and syntax aid to the chaos that is the note. It is but a residue of a life and of memory. Her burn at the end is an example of how that which becomes immortalized is not always of our choosing.

This collection is the start of something I hope to continue in my years to come as I continue to develop my voice as a poet. I want my poetry to last, to have meaning beyond what is on paper. I want to connect deeply with the readers whether they have been through similar situations or just have an understanding of the feelings, emotions, and experiences shared in my work. I hope to continue to write in my Notes App and share the randomness and beauty that is the human mind—the human experience. And I encourage anyone reading this to do the same.

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Ode to My Notes App

The safe in which I keep
My most intimate thoughts
And Netflix passwords;
The “I love you buts”
And “remember to grab milk;”
Ideas for new stories
That will never be written
And birthday reminders
That I’ll soon forget are there

You are a medley
Of famous quotes,
Vocab words and
Confirmation numbers,
Spliced between the
3 AM poetry,
(most left half written)
That you have grown
Far too accustomed to

You are my memory
In digital,
Typed on a 5” screen
Uploaded to
The cloud,
You are a
Catalog of thought
My art, my work,
And the place I store
Brownie recipes.

The poetry of you
Is a reflection of me
An experiment of life
No structure,
No lines,
No order or rhyme,

A couple taps away
From being deleted.
So, before I change
My mind

Here's another
One
For your archive

“I hate (Cleveland) Ohio” – A guy from NC

I fucking hate Ohio.
I hate waking up to gray skies
And parking in the streets.
I hate the hot ass summers
And the winters that just don't end,
And the drivers up here suck (no offense).
I hate the potholes and the Tim Misny billboards
That stare you down as you drive I-77.
I hate the cold shoulders and lack of southern hospitality.
I hate that y'all took “the birthplace of aviation;”
You know they tested their plane in Kitty Hawk, right?

I hate that when the snow first falls I still get excited
And the city lights make me feel like I'm in a movie.
I hate that when I go to a game
I root for the home team.
I hate that when I take the back roads
I can drive hours looking out over the green.
I hate that when I *can* see the sunrise over Lake Erie
It takes my breath away.
I hate that I've just begun to find a new home here
And good friends that I'm going to miss.
I hate that my time here is almost over.
I hate Cleveland, Ohio
Sometimes

To the Girl Who Made Silly Faces

Dad had collapsed again,
This time in a salon, of all places.
I sat in that waiting room unsure of what was happening
But sure that I was supposed to feel sad
Because, everyone else was feeling sad
And mom paced around the room, waiting.

That's when I started to get upset,
Frustrated that no one wanted to play Power Rangers.
And as I threw around stale Cheerios
I saw you. You weren't much older than me.
You wore a blue top with spaghetti straps and unicorns.
Your hair was yellow and on your foot was a pink cast
Which you let me sign later.

I remember your gapped front teeth,
The eyes you crossed,
And the tongue that could touch your nose.
I laughed and you changed your face,
Furrowing your eyebrows and
Imitating my pout.

I remember your mom telling you to cut it out,
And when she turned you pretended to poke at her butt.
When I calmed down you hobbled over,
Picking up the Yellow Ranger and asking me my name.

And I can't remember your name.

For those few moments in the hospital waiting room
I forgot where I was.
Before your name was called you gave me a hug
And told me to hug my mom
So I did, but I didn't know why.

You left and I went back to my toys and cereal,
Making funny faces at mom,

Waiting for my dad to come play.

For Lily

I'll sit and wait for you
Where the wander lily grows
And the sweet pine sap
Sticks to bare toes.

The sun doesn't rise there,
It only sets
And the lonely river fisherman
Catches salmon in his net.

The mountain to the east
Takes up all the sky,
Casting shadows on the meadow valley
Where peacefully we'd lie.

The moon is always full,
Lighting up the night.
The unmarked stars
Countless in our sight

There will be a peaceful rest
A land, absent of distress.
Where the wander lily grows
There, I pray my Lily goes.

That F[REDACTED]ing Fiat

I don't have a favorite car,
But I do have a least favorite,
It is a Volare Blue Fiat 500
License plate [REDACTED]

That little Italian is always
Teasing me, hiding behind
SUVs and Sedans
Half their size but
Occupying their same space

I see no shadow in that spot,
Which invites me to park
With perfidious encouragement,
Getting me all excited
Before cockblocking me
With a foreign 4-cylinder engine.

It's smug Torinese grin
Telling me
I should have woken up
Just an hour sooner.

My Father's Wedding

I found an old photo of you
In an envelope that read **Kodak VPS 5026**.
In blue ink were the words "Wedding Day."
I brushed the dust off the undeveloped film,
Careful not to leave my fingerprints.

I held it to the light
Trying to make out the figure dancing around the room.
There you are at the forefront in a rented tux,
Your impressive belly, not quite impressive as I remember it,
Held back by the white dress shirt.

You stand with your back straight and tall,
Your left hand crossed over your chest,
Your right, high above your head,
Like a matador
After taking down a bull.

You look so happy here,
At 23. So young to be married.
Younger than I am now. But
I suppose you knew
How much time you have left with that heart.

And you wanted to share it with the girl
Who'd been at your side since you were three.
Who you played barbie with when no one else wanted to
The girl who said she wanted to marry you
Before she knew what marriage was.

That night, I was told, you sang your heart out to Billy Joel,
Drank far too much wine, danced with every aunt and cousin.
And you got up on stage and belted out the Joe Dolce song you used to love,
And everyone laughed when you got mom's Chinese cousins
To sing along to the words, *A Shaddap-a You Face!*

I imagine that you told your Ma you loved her,

That she was still your girl.
And your brothers wouldn't let you sit and you didn't want to anyway.
And at the end of the night you slow danced with your Uptown girl.
Whispering you love her
And promising more nights like this,

Where you're still dancing
In the silent negative,
Trembling in the fingers of your son.

Welcome to Sublimity

“Welcome to sublimity,” I heard him say.
My skin was clammy, my eyes dry.
The candlelight flickered, casting shadows up above.
The room breathed around me,
the popcorn ceiling reaching for my face.
Muse played, pulsating through my body like a new heartbeat.
(M-m-m-m-m-m-m-m, mad, mad, mad)
Spinning. Everything was spinning. Or was it tilting? Back and forth.
The white elephants on his tapestry marched in circles
Along the flowing red sea of silk.
The vibrations and flashing lights twisted at my intestines,
An ever expanding barbwire pit. I wanted to yell
But I could not speak, I had no mouth and could not scream,
The acid burned my tongue, the devil was in my throat.
“Why did I ever listen to him?”
I ran outside. And as the sun washed over me
I could breathe. The cool air filled my lungs,
I stretched out in the grass watching the clouds turn into cotton candy.
The sky: blue, then purple, then blue again,
Before the stars freckled the atmosphere.
And he came out to lay on the field with me
“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?” he said, “being here, fully present?”
I was at peace for a moment. Until the Earth stopped breathing
And he went on about chemicals and how I should be feeling
and what I should be doing with this time. Like a woodpecker
Knocking and nagging, knocking and nagging at me.
I ran again, back to my room, laying on my bed, soft Filipino music played in the dark,
And for a moment I understood a language I had never heard spoken before.
In minutes it was gone. The euphoria had faded and, though my mind returned,
My body continued to flinch as waves moved through my nerves.
The music faded. And the vivid colors of life were washed away.

So I forced myself to sleep
For maybe in dreams I could learn to feel again.

Oil Worship

Three great silos of sand
Stood tall on the frac pad altar;
Monuments to the gods of oil.

I listened as
The choir of engines hummed
One industrious song, and the
High Priest raised his crosier drill high
Before plunging it into the mountain below.

As they filled the earth,
Choking her with chemicals,
Sand, and water. She fed us back our
Sweet dark elixir.

The lifeblood of the American Way.

How I Get The News

I found out about the war in Ukraine
Through Tik Tok.

Between learning how to make pickles
And which crypto to buy, I watched
As the woman walked up to the soldier
with a handful of sunflower seeds.
I shook in my bed as the bombs exploded
Through my screen the children crying
As they say goodbye to their fathers,
I listened to the jet engines hum a song of resistance
And the Ghost of Kyiv made more ghosts.
I prayed with the faithful, whose churches
Reduced to rubble, still believed.

And then I watched a video on the history of peanut butter.

Sticky Note

I found the note you left me on
Yellow paper with blue ink stuck
To the counter a big smile after
The words 'Be back for dinner,
Love you'
And in the afternoon I made
Mom's lasagna and the phone
Rang 'Gonna be late too much
Paperwork to finish' and I knew
Jessica was there with her tight
Skirt and dangling earrings and I
Could hear the laughter as the
Location on the phone said 52nd
& Broadway when you work on
46th & Madison and the oven
Dinged and I burnt my hand on
Pan cause I forgot to wear mitts
Clumsy me Clueless me haha
Your dinner is in the microwave

Melody

She masks the dissonance in man's mind
Speaks calming whispers to discordant souls
Makes light the heavy hearts with song

She dances on the ivory keys
And tip toes on the trumpet valves
She moves along the cello strings
And whistles with the flautist's mouths

Melody, she moves me
Sustains my heart when day is long
I'll cherish her forever
I'll miss her when she's gone

My Brother's Scar

It's a scary thing to look at,
That scar on his chest.
To know what it meant
and how he got it.
To think, Dad had one just like it.

I always wondered what they saw
When they opened him up.
Did they see my brother?
Did they see his memories
Flowing in those veins?

When they sliced his chest,
Cracked his ribs.
Did they hear him singing?
Proudly belting Piano Man as we
Played it on repeat down 45?

When they hooked him up to a bypass.
Did they feel his thick calloused hands
Hug me and tell me
Dad would be proud
That I walked that stage at graduation.

When they stitched him up
Did they catch a glimpse
Of the love he has
And still has to give?

Did they catch all that
when they gave him this scar?

Love Hurts The Body (A Collage)

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.

This morning he told me
i like your body. i like what it does,
The gaunt thing
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
and fastened by red ribbons

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame
Every scar is mine
Each nerve more loosely strung?
The black Maria that I see—
sadness takes me all over
I lie on my back at midnight
Deep into that darkness peering,

To be in love

Cold Desert Moon

We laid there in the \$10
Gas station blanket,
Trying to make out
The constellations
Dulled by the floodlight
Of the desert moon.
The freezing wind,
Biting away at exposed skin,

We huddled together, tightly
Embracing,
Our legs and bodies interwoven
As I tried to share
The oversized winter coat
I had let her use for warmth.

Staring into her moonlit eyes
My body numb,
My heart alive.

Shivering she pulled me closer and
I asked for the cold
To last
Just a little bit
Longer

Ephemeroptera

ephemeroptera,
they call me,
short-lived
with wings,
my day
a lifetime of
fleeting moments.
my purpose...

i am born,
i breed,
i die.
i am the mayfly.

and may i fly

high above
the water,
may i break my
larval shell,
may i spread
my wings and
escape this
cursed existence,

may i live to
see tomorrow,
to see the sunrise
above this pond
filled with dancing
frogs and trout
who call for me
to dance with them.

may i live to
find love
in this dark

cloud of kin,
and may our love
be fruitful.

for if i cannot
fly tomorrow
may my children
fly in may.

The Morning Commute

Here lies the fawn
On a backcountry
West Virginia road,
Its tawny fur speckled
With white stars.
Its struggling legs
Outstretched to catch itself.
A Ford F-250 logo
Imprinted on its head
Mixed with sanguine juices
Viscous amber oil and
Green mountain grass,
An American lithograph.

Here is Bambi's mother
Hidden in the deep green
The sky behind her, gray.
Far away from her slaughtered
Calf, the inadvertent sacrifice
Of a morning commute.
Head turned upward,
Her face unaware,
Yet, motherly eyes peer deep
And loss enters,
Felt before known.
And the butchers drive away.

Stories

That summer is spent inside
Taking the road less traveled
By, with Robert Frost, unraveled
My thoughts and dreams collide.

Harry Potter's lightning scar,
R. L. Stine's Goosebumps,
I run amongst the tree stumps,
Where the Wild Things are.

Imagination running free,
The boxcar kids and
Me, would take the train to Neverland
And dream of what could be.

My mother tucks me in and holds me tight,
Telling me of my father's love
As he watches from above
Living in the story of my dreams tonight.

Honthorst's Betrayal on Canvas

Here he sleeps on his lover's lap,
The man who slayed a thousand Philistines.
His oil painted skin, dry and cracked
From age.

The last judge of ancient Israel.
The strongest man of God.
His faith rested in uncut hair
His trust, in his woman.

But who is this I see
that comes with candle lit?
Who shushes me as if I am complicit.
What is it I see in Delilah's hand?
Why does the strong warrior look weak?

No! I want to scream
Wake Up! Wake Up, Dammit!
But the damage is done
And the man who slayed lions
Has been undone by love and a haircut.

Father's Day '03

I sat at the little table
Eating cookies with other fathers
Waiting for a brother who slept in

I watched as they played games
And read the poems they had written:
"Daddy I love you
I love you more than a shoe..."

The fathers tried to include me too,
They would ask me my favorite movie
To which I'd say the Lion King
And start singing Hakuna Matata

When classmates asked where my father was
I said I didn't know
Because at that time I wasn't sure
What street Heaven was off of
And I couldn't say what was holding him up

And when the other fathers left
And my brother didn't show
I started to realize
Maybe Mufasa wasn't coming back.

Odessa

Dry eyes stung as I picked out
The obsidian crumbles that had
Seeped through fogged goggles.

Crawling out into the West Texas sun,
My skin protected by the layers of dirt and oil
Which once belonged to a radiator,
Now painted onto my face and beard.

The heat melted me.

Sweat dripped on brown dirt,
Black, like watercolors on paper.

The air was suffocating.

And I learned that water only helps
So much when it evaporates before lunch time.

As I sat, dehydrated and dazed
I saw two dogs with beards of porcupine quills
Leaving bloody sand behind them.

And I soon came to realize
why they called this place Odessa.

home

It was a Friday,
or was it Thursday?
You were walking
ten paces ahead
and I had stopped
to tie my shoe

We had just
graduated and
you wanted to
say goodbye to the sky blue
streets called

home

I ran to catch
up but you
were stopped
at the planetarium off E Franklin
waiting

under the shadow
of the dial's needle
You said you
Loved me and
I held my
cross

You went to
Seattle and I

I'm sorry

Four years go
by and the air
has changed

The old well
spouts proud
colors and the
chapel on the
hill hoists an

ally flag

Today I stepped Out on a
rainbow
crosswalk and it seemed to fit me nicely
I think you
would like it here
with me

home