

Application for Sabbatical Leave, Spring 2017
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Description of Project

Statement of Aims and Objectives of Project

Please consider my application for sabbatical leave for spring 2017. I plan to revise my second full-length poetry manuscript and submit it for publication.

Though this second manuscript is largely a response to national and international current events, it also explores how suffering and violence are routine and part of the American landscape. For example, my poem "Comic Relief" examines the general public's disbelief of the rape and sexual assault charges brought against Bill Cosby; and another poem, "The Grand Opera of Boko Haram," is a dizzying response to the kidnapping of 270+ girls from the Chibok Government Secondary School on April 14, 2014. As much as this collection bears witness to the atrocities surrounding the speaker, it examines the ways in which we are complicit. A good example of this is in my poem "Jesus Doesn't Talk to Me," which was published in *The Prague Revue* on June 1, 2015.

Background Work

After the birth of my daughter in March 2013, I had to change my composition process. Instead of hours in front of a computer, I would draft notes/poems by hand, and I found myself audio recording potential ideas/lines in the car or whenever I did not have the ability to physically write them down.

In May 2015, I was fortunate to receive a two-week writing residency at the Vermont Studio Center. This two-week period permitted me enough time to transcribe the eight-hour backlog of audio drafts I had accumulated and to cull material from two handwritten journals. Though I only drafted four or five poems during the residency, I now had 25 full, single-spaced pages of notes for future poems.

In July-August 2015, I spent three weeks in Nicaragua, where each day I composed a new draft (2-4 hours); revised poems written between January 2015 and July 2105 (2-4 hours); researched material for drafts-in-progress, ranging from legal and popular culture definitions of "deadly force" to the earliest historical examples of graffiti (2 hours); and read contemporary poets' collections which explore similar themes, including Michael Broek's *Refuge/es* and Saeed Jones' *Prelude to Bruise* (1-2 hours).

That dedicated writing time yielded a windfall of 60 poems, in varying degrees of completion. Currently, three have been published or accepted for individual publication in small press literary journals; 24 are quite polished and are under consideration for individual publication in small press literary journals; another ten are near completion; and the others require additional research and/or substantial revision.

Statement of Procedures/Methodology

The poetry journal *Rattle* has a weekly series called "Poets Respond," where poets submit a poem in response to something that appeared in the news within the last week. Though most of the poems I write are responses to current events, I have been unable to participate in this project because I am the type of poet who needs to spend a long time with my triggering subject.

Though I can clearly see the themes of this second collection, I need more time with the completed poems, and I need time to write companion poems for those that already exist. For example, my poem "On the Cave Wall, the Great Black Bird Carries a Girl Into the Sky" is an origin story for why a tribe of people becomes obsessed with killing a bird. In my retelling, a young man lies about the death of a young woman he loved. For the completed manuscript, I would like to write a modern origin story that echoes the images and themes of this piece, as I see a connection between the stories transmitted from one

generation/culture to another and what people consider normal/deviant. To draft this companion poem, I will start with handwritten journal entries and an audio draft (if necessary). Next, I will research urban legends that echo the original myth I studied for the first poem. Then, I will spend two-ten hours writing an initial draft fusing the handwritten and transcribed audio material with my research. After I have a reasonable draft, I will share it with two of my writing partners. I will consider their comments as I continue to revise. When the poem is done, I will submit it for publication in small press literary journals.

A completed poetry manuscript is typically 48-60 pages, and each of the 35-50 poems in the collection is revised multiple times. Poets are expected to publish the individual poems in literary journals, and unless a poet is quite established and has a multi-book contract with a large press, she must submit the completed manuscript to open reading periods and book contests offered by university presses or small, independent presses. In my timeline, you will see my progress on all of these interrelated parts.

Prior to my sabbatical semester in spring 2017, I will complete the following tasks leading up to the creation of the manuscript:

Fall 2015/Spring 2016:

- Handwrite journal entries and record audio drafts for new poems with related themes.
- Revise ten drafts that are near completion and those that require research/revision, particularly those in the Deadly Force Sequence and those related to white privilege.
- Assemble a chapbook (a small collection of poetry, usually 20-28 pages) of the most closely related poems to submit to national chapbook prize contests. This chapbook will end up being one section of the completed manuscript.
- Submit individual poems for publication.
- Apply for two-week writing residency for summer 2016.
- Read six contemporary poetry collections, including Reginald Dwayne Betts' *Bastards of the Reagan Era* and Rowan Ricardo Phillips' *Heaven*.

Summer 2016:

- Transcribe new journal entries and audio recordings.
- Revise ten-fifteen drafts that are near completion and those that require research/revision.
- Submit individual poems and chapbook for publication.
- Read ten contemporary poetry collections.

Fall 2016:

- Handwrite journal entries and record audio drafts for new poems with related themes.
- Revise five drafts that are near completion and those that require research/revision.
- Submit individual poems and chapbook for publication.
- Apply for two-week writing residency for summer 2017.
- Read/re-read three contemporary poetry collections, focusing specifically on manuscript arc (the narrative established when the poems are read as a whole).

During my sabbatical semester, I will complete the following tasks to prepare to submit the manuscript for publication:

January/February 2017:

- Complete detailed assessment of all poems—identifying form (narrative versus lyric, stanza pattern, rhyme scheme), point-of-view, prevalent images/metaphors, and use of specific words.
- Identify missing companion poems.
- Review literature on manuscript arc and design.

- Research manuscript submission open reading periods and book contests.
- Submit individual poems and chapbook for publication.
- Read/re-read ten contemporary poetry collections, focusing specifically on manuscript arc.

March/April 2017:

- Arrange the individual poems into five different collective versions, each with its own narrative arc, and share these versions with writing partners.
- Integrate feedback, create new manuscript order, and resend to writing partners.
- Revise poems in response to relationship with others in the collection.
- Draft and revise companion poems.
- Submit individual poems and chapbook for publication.

April/May 2017:

- Integrate new feedback from writing partners and revise manuscript order.
- Revise any remaining poems.
- Submit individual poems and chapbook for publication.
- Prepare manuscript submission materials, including cover letters and contest-specific paperwork.
- Submit manuscript to those presses currently accepting submissions and prepare manuscripts to send to additional presses as they open their reading periods/contests.

Importance or Value

On November 25, 2014, the poet Danez Smith published his "[Open Letter to White Poets](#)," urging white poets to consider "What frees you to write odes of the low country of America, to mention the trees and not their wicked history, to write the praise song of night, but not sing of what dark bodies hide cold in daylight?" I am not interested in art for art's sake. I am committed to a poetry of social justice that aspires to enact change and asks a lot of its reader. This collection is necessary in the poetry community and beyond the traditional circle of people who read and write poetry.

Further Research or Study

In my Procedures/Methodology section, I have outlined the tasks I will complete prior to assembling the manuscript in spring 2017. I will also apply for two two-week writing residencies, similar to the one I attended in May 2015 at the Vermont Studio Center, for summers 2016 and 2017.

Outcome

My first poetry collection *The Things a Body Might Become* has been a finalist and semi-finalist for eight open reading periods/first book awards, and it is currently under consideration by fourteen different presses. Because I am actively submitting my first manuscript, I am familiar with the process and prepared to submit this second collection. I anticipate sending it to university press prizes, such as the University of North Texas Vassar Miller Prize, and to independent presses, such as Black Lawrence Press' open reading period and KORE press' annual prize.

Similarly, I will continue to actively submit individual poems for publication in small press literary journals. Out of the 42 poems in my first collection, 33 have been accepted for individual publication, demonstrating a very strong publication record.

I will also share my poetry at World Above, the monthly series I facilitate at Stockton's Dante Hall and reach out to local venues/reading series to be a featured poet. In the past year, I have been a featured poet at the Moonstone Arts Series, the Dodge Poetry Foundation's Lunchtime Poems Series in Newark, *The Fox Chase Review's* Poets on the Porch Series, the Princeton Public Library, and Poets Live! at Montclair Public Library. I plan to disseminate poetry from this new book at some of the same and similar venues.