

## Abstract

This thesis was born from two summers on The Mountain, one learning via ZOOM, an Independent Study with the Director, inspiring classes and faculty: and a supportive, nurturing, challenging, and inspirational advisor. It was also born of life experiences, a love of literature and writing, of poetry, people, places, and intellectual endeavors. It is my hope that these weavings come through, a literal textually in the text, containing in it an underlying element of spirituality and embodied thinking, an attempt to veer from any threat of religious dualism that splits the human person into “sacred and profane.” Nearly fifty pages attempts to subvert this habit in Western thought, whether ruminating on Mary Oliver in the Ogeechee River, or recalling a Eucharistic celebration when I could not stop thinking about Jesus’ own body as the location of absolutely everything. This began the thinking of my own body as a particular location for events—life-changing, healing, traumatic etc., as a resting place of sorts within myself.

The thesis itself is divided into five sections, each with an image of a tattoo, one of my tattoos, as the site of what I have called “exquisite pain.” The act itself is a re-claiming of the body, specifically a queer body that it deeply devoted to “the church,” or the “ecclesia,” the body, and not necessarily the institution. They represent struggle and launching places, and places for memory. The collection weaves with the images and their meaning, but practices what in liturgical language is known as “anamnesis,” or the process of remembering and looking forward. It would have been easy to take the poems and match them all with the particular image and themes they represent, or simply to order them based on topic, though that felt inauthentic to the journey.

What is more, in my life as a priest and essay writer of theology, I have woven some prose in the collection to provide context, offer some explanation (loosely), and give voice to some of the poems in a broader way. They reflect the liminality and hybridity of the body, and connect in that way as a part of the manuscript.

It is important to note that the collection carries through with both theme and context, style and feeling, image and word, and most importantly, looking back and pressing forward. This is the “anamnesis” spoken of earlier. When first ordering this on a dining room table with painter’s tape keeping pages together, I thought of Susan Grimm’s “Ordering the Storm” and the multiplicity that exists for this—sometimes making sense and sometimes looking like all life’s events falling from heaven during the arc of Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. The reader may think they’ve moved from religious “stuff,” and then be startled back to it in another section, because that is the scope of my life. Things are not linear (necessarily).

Many of these poems were composed while visiting Georgia while I lived in Massachusetts, and when my life fell apart. They were written from memory, from a deep part of myself that was able to speak out of trauma and pain, and eventually gratitude.

As I finish this from Savannah, where I now live, and where I am learning to heal, this collection has given me that gift.