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But I Do Remember the Moon

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

BUT I DO REMEMBER THE MOON

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

CREATIVE WRITING

by

Ellene Glenn Moore

2016

To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences, and Education

This thesis, written by Ellene Glenn Moore, and entitled *But I Do Remember the Moon*, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

Vernon Guy Dickson

Julie Marie Wade

Campbell McGrath, Major Professor

Date of Defense: February 26, 2016

The thesis of Ellene Glenn Moore is approved.

Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences, and Education

Andrés G. Gil
Vice President for Research and Economic Development
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2016

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DEDICATION

For Andrew, without whom none of this would make any sense.

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“Camping” appeared as a broadside collaboration with photographer Luis Lazo as “Untitled Poem” and “Grandes Exitos on I-75” appeared as a broadside collaboration with print artist Julia Arredondo of Vice Versa Press as “Grandes Exitos,” both in the Sweat Broadside Project II exhibition at Miami-Dade College.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS
BUT I DO REMEMBER THE MOON

by

Ellene Glenn Moore

Florida International University, 2016

Miami, Florida

Professor Campbell McGrath, Major Professor

This poetry collection engages with the mutable nature of memory and its instantiations: memory as artifact, memory as place, memory as story, memory as compulsion. Influenced by the lyric meditations of Robert Hass and Li-Young Lee, the intellectual clarity of Elizabeth Bishop, the place-oriented imagism of Bashō and Gary Snyder, and the reflexive, self-conscious impulse of Sharon Olds, the poems tackle a vast geography of recollection—from Kyoto to the Okefenokee to the turnings and obsessions of the author’s mind itself. Using a sequence of date-stamped prose poems as narrative fence posts, the collection addresses multiple modalities in memory by weaving together longer meditative lyrics, shorter narrative and place-based poems, and deconstructed lyrics that employ slashes as syntactical place markers. In testing memory’s capacity for multiple truths, and in discovering its inherent limitations, this collection grapples with the simultaneity of memory as an act of self-preservation, self-creation, and relentless re-creation.

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At Sankaty Head Light

Under threat of rain, waiting for the sky
to break over this point, I tell myself a story.
Once they picked up the lighthouse whole,
broke it from its perch on the bluff
and delivered it inland while the whole sea watched,
worrying the shoreline with long fingers. Some afternoons
I found myself there, waiting for the sun
to break and thinking
of when I was small enough to fit in my brother's lap,
how he made me a sandwich for free when he worked
at Claudette's and I pulled a lemonade from the cooler,
popped open its metal cap on the footbridge south of town.
Or later, when he worked at the Chanticleer,

where in front an angry carousel horse brayed.

Strange how what I remember now is that animal's snarl

reaching towards the cobblestone rotary

where my brother would not hold my hand

as we walked down the middle of the road.

Is it that memory lives in the flesh, in the tongue

as taste fighting towards expression,

not words so much as a shadow of rosehips

squalling along the bluff, the particular weight

of bayberries wrapped in my mother's handkerchief,

the lichenous crack of a dry limb under my tennis shoe?

In the kitchen my brother unthreaded veins from shrimp

and the vermillion sky swore over the rooftops.

How much can we truly remember? Floorboards,

a sunlit shell, sand pine at the property's edge,

how the lighthouse broke the sky in two.

But then, all experience

is a story our remembered selves grow weary of telling,

dredging the ocean floor for recollections

compressed under the water's weight.

I think of my brother in stripes of light,

in shadows reaching across the lawn towards the lighthouse.

Once at midday a cop delivered him to our cottage,

my mother so severe. He had broken

into an abandoned home up the bluff, ocean wailing at his back.

Why did he do it? What does he remember, I wonder—

his red polo, brilliant in the sun, his inadvertent regret,

how I watched him straighten?

Barefoot, I ran in circles around them—

my mother, the cop, my brother, dark as crows

in the billowing grass—my arms out like a plane
waiting to be shot down. At least, that's the story
I tell myself, delivered over and over
from the dark edge of the bluff
while the sea attends to its longings,
the worry it feels for the shore,
the lighthouse swallowed
by an untidy horizon.

Photograph at the Bridge of Sighs in Winter

At one time, criminals brought here might have glimpsed
a last, broken view of light playing the water like a dulcimer,
and sighed—the Italian way—at such beauty,
astonished at their sudden loss,
this new rarity of day conceding to darkness.

Ponte de sospiri, they called it, the words themselves an ache
spoken into being above canal water
opaque as memory, impervious to our grief.