

BENEATH EACH WING, A LIGHT

By

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A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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by

Marco Alves

These poems are dedicated to my parents.

That a person who lives near the Alps, in Turin, which is nearly as cold as St. Petersburg, should travel around his bedroom, is understandable. But in this climate, with this God-given air, in which orange trees grow in the back garden and the undergrowth is a mess of myrtle, even Xavier de Maistre, if he were writing here, would at least go as far as the backyard.

—Almeida Garrett.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT.....	vii
MORNING	1
MEDITATION ON RUINS.....	2
HISTORY BOOK.....	3
AUBADE.....	4
SEPTEMBER VIGIL.....	5
BIRD OR <i>PÁSSARO</i>	6
ADAMASTOR	7
NOSSA SENHORA DE FÁTIMA.....	9
THE PROCESSION	10
SMATHERS LIBRARY.....	11
IN THE PORTUGUESE COUNTRY	12
IN MEMORIAM	13
GLORIA PATRI.....	14
THE VILLA.....	15
FLOWER BOYS	16
LUCKY MOTEL.....	17
QUEEN ELIZABETH I AT THE PALACIO DA BREJOEIRA.....	18
PIEIDADE	19

A GOOD MAN.....	20
THE STORY OF AN IMMIGRANT	21
<i>O PRESTIGIO</i>	22
NOSSA SENHORA DO FARO	23
HOLY COMMUNION.....	24
FIRST LOVE	25
SAY GOODNIGHT.....	26
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	27

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Chair: William Logan

Major Department: English

The twenty-five poems collected in this thesis travel across the Atlantic and back again. They are tides that wash ashore fractures of history, countries, and relationships. If these poems have anything in common, it is exploration; they are immigrants themselves, seeking an identity.

MORNING

Newspapers were piled upon the kitchen table,
two in Portuguese; the other, English.
Moisture erupted on the stainless steel
of the colossal Italian coffee pot.
A paper bag neglected to trap the smell
of that day's lunch: fried codfish cakes, a roll.
The dishes dried in the wake of light. They clinked
in harmony, worked by the soap and water;
made loud bass notes, slipping from a rushed clutch.
Cabinets, as they rolled shut, beat like drums.
Then, talk would launch between two Latin voices.
Nothing was kept from family. This meant,
even in sleep: keep those eyes *bem abertos*.
Two hours remained before the next alarm.

MEDITATION ON RUINS

The anole reigns unflaggingly
in this land of flowers.
Its green flourish
is an army besieged
in the battlements of this courtyard,
defending against heretical chameleons
or the feline Alexander.
Cinder blocks and bricks
are its temple.
This is its Rome.
This is its Évora.

HISTORY BOOK

He dotted a line across the Atlantic Ocean
to a small, green unnamed country.

AUBADE

He knows his way; his masterful hands are led
by the scented dark. We go all night, but life
happens again. He is called by his wife,
a dismantled engine tucked away in bed.

I ask him plainly, *Stay*. The morning spoils
his mood. He collects the dry clothes, the smokes,
and steps around the several dry yolks,
whose rubbery smell outlives the body oils.

The daisies tire in their foggy, milky vase;
they worked all night, unlike the shriveled groom
on the cross, shrouding His forbidden bloom.
I kneel, awaiting His day's coming grace.

SEPTEMBER VIGIL

The graveyard harbors
two rivers, except
for bouquets of flowers,
candles lit in petal fists,
floating past the Battery,
past that missing floor
where a boy, hands
against the windowpane,
commanded
an unsinkable ship.

BIRD OR PÁSSARO

I never thought to ask. She pinned the clothes
and the cage fell. Adjusting its brown coat,
the one bird fled, flitting along the grass
until it understood its wings and vanished.
The other lay in the damaged cage, its beak
bloody, alive. Things happen. That is until
one day on the porch of her remodeled home
she marked a swallow in the *oliveira*.
In words I had yet to learn, she spoke to it.
And would I learn? Flies on the schoolroom walls
seized my attention more than those textbooks.
Why did I understand? That fluent bird
glided unfettered through fruit branches, wires,
Vinte anos sem saber falar Inglês.

ADAMASTOR

On the southern end of the island, a wildlife preserve prevents any access to the remaining beach.
An odd word, preserve, my grandfather said many years ago when he mentioned, for the only time, the story of his immigration.
I sit on a wooden ledge overlooking the ocean.
The summer residents have deserted the island and one can see the rusted bottom of the garbage bins.
Beyond this last viewing-area, the nettles are still, even in the salty breeze.
A pelican sits on a splintered pillar of wood, the remnant of an old pier.
It gazes out at the blue expanse much as Grandfather gazed in those days, unmoved by its beauty. What had he lost?
Those waning imperial years forced him to abandon his newborn boys and a woman.
Like this pelican, he was reintroduced below the equator; he folded his map into his pocket and began fishing the warm, bronze waters of Brazil.
You find yourself preserving customs, spending a fortune on imported cod, drinking port, and only tipping those girls with an accent from home. You neglect to keep promises of sending money back to that village. Ah, what's the use?
Those officers will just pocket the envelope, he said.
I saw a nest once from a boat on the bayside; from the binoculars, it was just a thick bramble of dune straw and shrub leaves. There was one egg, unguarded, gleaming in the sun.
It's rare for any birds of prey to venture over the bay from the mainland. This is where sea ends and land begins.
You don't mean for things to happen.
They just happen, he said.
Even after years of absence, he returned to the head of the table.
There is a calm disposition to the pelican, which accepts the salvage and re-creates the life it has always known, except that something indelible calls once in a while, calls the bird to this pillar

to watch a woman in disguise.

The pelican stares so intently that it becomes the pillar of wood,
much as Grandfather became the sand
that he always stood on, gazing out at Tethys.

There is a mountain there that was once a man.

NOSSA SENHORA DE FÁTIMA

Your hands unwrapped
the soccer scarf from my bedpost,

took down photo frames
from the bureau and night stand

they dusted,
boxed my old books.

A U-Haul pointed south outside
where immigrants stood (thirty years, now)

waiting for work.
I stopped praying,

but not before you sealed the bedroom door
night after lulling night,

asking in Portuguese,
“Have you said your prayers?”

You pointed to the icon, “Take her.
She protects you.”

I never implored her.
I never asked for prayers

or for rosary beads
to stretch the length of our rooms

like an umbilical cord.
Atop the dresser

I left behind, the Virgin
guards my empty shelves.

THE PROCESSION

An island of light drifts through darkened fields.
The widowed man clutching the cross is flanked
by acolytes who steady the altar candles.
Weary from wives' confessions, the priest grapples
the Bible in his crippled, bejeweled hand.

Bearing the baldachin, four veterans
perspire under the grace of a patron saint
arrayed with rosary beads and hyacinths,
such prosperous and vigorous petitions.
The summer night is filled with common hymn.

Between the balcony's polished gratings, scarred
knees kneel; I track the winding red backlight
of Nando's muddy motorcycle rounding
the bends, until the island halts with shrieks.

SMATHERS LIBRARY

after Randall Mann

They've gutted the building,
ripped out the heart
cataloguing solicitations of love.

The demand for space erased
the rejections on sweaty bathroom walls.
Only an erect hard carapace

of brick and stone survives
like a used condom. The building
is the skeleton of a man's body

where a second-floor entrance
led to his heart. The door shudders
in the wind of Florida's sex drive.

The pulse draws me through
to the *thinning warp of the mirror*
where I see faces of past lovers,

hear their echoes inside a shell
no longer protecting the bound words
"I love you";

their eyes no longer reflecting
my eviscerated heart
searching for reconciliation.

IN THE PORTUGUESE COUNTRY

Settling like sheepskin rugs,
the clouds obscured the valley.
Boys wrestled with bedbugs.

Petite tongues dug in troughs
of dirt—small hungry hearts
that kept from playing rough.

Blissful, they sang the verses
of kings from empires past
hailing forbidden curses.

One piglet spooned the other.
Above, the rain descended,
soundless, on a stone cover.

IN MEMORIAM

One could say
he was a drag artist. Garden green
was his most brilliant armor.
He draped his scaly hide
in beige curtains,
his routine aplomb
and seduction. He'd flash
his red throat
at scrutiny.
That was his ballet
of defense.

Crushed
by the window sash one morning,
he glowered a silver-blue
with spots of green,
as if to say:
I am no one's queen.

GLORIA PATRI

1

School's out and all his quiet prayers are answered.
After a year of dreams of having Christ
fall from his tongue, after a year of lying
to latticed confession windows, boxes,
he boards a plane with other summer-retreaters,
a rosary in disaffected procession
through the airport, following stewardesses
who never fail to wipe tears off new faces.
Similarly, his first lone flight was like
a kid's first day of school, a tiny hand
muscling through the fence-link to mother's fingers,
alone, until self-preservation forms.
He says, in harmony, a paternoster
watching a city fade beneath each wing.

2

A light appears through the thick plastic oval
next to a tiny pressurized air crack.
Outside, beneath the clouded turbulent road,
lay the flat ocean. He is spoken to
in Portuguese, as if a line in the earth
implied a border. A land begins to shape,
its cover, as in history books, green
except for terraced, terracotta roofs.
Stone turrets, castles, weathervanes on spires
guard the awakening hill from circling wings.
One boy pukes after hours of wavering
between two homes, two sets of friends. The wait
ceases, the longing to embrace a woman
and open fields where prayer is least expected.

THE VILLA

If not for those observant men, indeed
mad Yeatsian old men, I would have lost
all recollection of those stubborn years.
That day, spring opened windows to release
the stale apartment air. The park was abuzz.
The church's brick glowed, and the old men sulked
through their slow hoarse discourse.

Swallows drew near

an olive tree, and a hydrangea bush
had overgrown the weathered granite wall.
I stood there in the villa, without so much
as a nudge. A broad leaf flitted in the wind;
I tried to reach out or look back but could not.

The men examined the heyday of soccer:
glorious summers when one was arrested
for failing to present a radio license,
for bastardizing the French, for public pissing.
Only then, sitting there, sparked by old men,
I saw my uncle in a heap of straw
in the open barn, a slaughtered animal.

FLOWER BOYS

seeds sprinkled from loaned
English planes,

stalks in a swarm of black guerillas
short of any sweet nectar,

immortals in war gear
picking through white-dust crops,

decapitated carnations
on the scarlet sub-Saharan ground,

sprigs of vine
from a peninsular garden,

roots buried in the desert
with no distinguishing parterre

LUCKY MOTEL

“Le liseron du parapet se souvent-il d’un autre corps” –Jacques Dupin.

Your hand no longer grabbed my crotch
or pinched my ass. You’d gotten off.
Fast love was the big trucker pounding
the Russian girl

next door, punctual as our lust.
Prom night had come and gone, and we
still met to fuck on the other side
of 1 & 9.

You bought *Playboy*, a box of condoms,
an ounce, and some cheap beer. Peptides
got the best sex of us. Lovers
in the false night,

we leaned against the frozen railing
and searched through the frost-covered window
of your Accord for that first kiss:
in the front seat,

you clutched the steering wheel and asked
after slight vocal shifts and loss
of trivial subtext, if there
were one motel

in the whole world I’d rather be?
You moved your hands. I never knew
where, only that vines tightly braced
the balustrades.

QUEEN ELIZABETH I AT THE PALACIO DA BREJOEIRA

The fields of corn are Sunday Mass assemblies.
The vines are ripe with offertory stalks
of bulbs. Some ox carts roll over aisles
of cobbled stone that open to the gates.
Two village dogs attempt to scamper in
but are shooed off by keepers shoveling
the fallen waste. Exotic shrubs are trimmed
of their improper tangle. In the fountain,
below the lily pads, trout squirm. Lace drapes,
hand-stitched, are cast aside; veranda doors
are opened. She walks along the balcony,
her weightless fingers brushing the new iron.
For days her eyes, sensing his principles
and love, have watched the shepherd and his flock.
Why has she traveled south? To taste the wine,
to own this land for one more green day? Then
the shepherd and his flock will turn toward home.

PIEDADE

In memory of Zé Fagundes

The first light crept through the pine trees and shook
the corn blades (or was it the rude field mice?)
before it keyed the cracks of the rolling shutter.

Below the house, a couple waved a lance
harmlessly at the vineyard, pasting it
with pesticide. They've lost their spoken French.

On sleepless nights, his rifle's gleam is plain
in sight, aiming at foxes pilfering
his coop. I know. I also find it hard

to manage the lost barks of the small dog
and the child's hands removed from the clean walls.
The one alarm is habit. Shifting days

around in our crazed heads, what is the truth?
He charged his son-in-law with poisoning
the dog. As much as it hurts not seeing

your one grandchild, she kept her waiting hand
on the pump-lever, spraying, and attending
to this one man because no one else was there.

A GOOD MAN

He opened his doors to all the homeless souls.
Returning to the apartment at late hours,
there'd be card playing, wine, and soup-filled bowls.
His wife would lie in bed, bereft of powers.

THE STORY OF AN IMMIGRANT

A black Citroën rumbled beside him—the cars were smuggled too. A door opened and he stepped into the backseat. There was no exchange. He rubbed his hands and observed the unlit roads until finally the car crossed the Hudson through the knotted beams of the George Washington Bridge.

The city seemed always visible, even through the small windows on the island where he was taken from cell to cell, room to room. A cluster of lights flared like the glint every night on that vessel navigating the rolling sea. Had he left the ship? Is he allowed starboard?

Days of interrogation. When the interpreter walked in, he recognized the man as one of his own. Back home his father warned him never to trust the ones no longer on our side.

He took his first steps into the wind blowing off the Hudson. He knew little. When officers asked about factories, their owners, if he was simply labor or affiliated with the mob, he said nothing.

A light snow drifted down every canal of cobbled stone. The river flowed like the Douro as it shouldered terraced vineyards in the upper valleys.

The rendezvous led him to a brick building; he was instructed to meet a broad-shouldered man at a late hour near the pier, and walk behind him to the back of a restaurant. There he was to do as he was told.

He was thrown into the streets, an immigrant. By morning he was swept across the East River into Brooklyn. By afternoon he was again crossing the Hudson.

A slit in the boxcar revealed the city standing upright in the dawn. Someone understood his reticent answers, the dull gaze, that he was not a communist, only a poor countryman who had traveled south, the Atlantic in the right corner of his right eye.

O PRESTIGIO

I had begun to see,
over the pines and eucalypti,
the southern tip of Spain.
There the Rio Minho opens its mouth
to the Atlantic, where two beaches join in a slight
embrace of sand.

Like a barge sunken
in the cramped depths, the Ínsua fort floats
beyond the jaws of these two countries.

The waddle of anchored fishing boats
has lost their charm today.
There is a woman beside me;
her ankles sink
into the sand. We watch
two divers shield
the ancient granite façade with buoyed oil-trapping nets
that protect the first strip of Portuguese coast
from the ruptured ship's slow and gross discharge.

Moorish prisoners, heretics, and fisherman
have all died off this absent-minded shore.

I screen the woman from the sun. Her gaze
ignores the divers and calls
not for the patron saint but for Neptune's grace.

Beyond this spectacle, traveling east
into the hills, another woman
in a black, simple dress retreats into a home
whose battered walls have failed to undress
a husband's death for sixteen years.

NOSSA SENHORA DO FARO

Little has changed since the Salazarian decades
when, visiting this chapel, she would wonder
why she believed the whisperings in her ear,
why she allowed her hair to be pinned down.

Inside the chapel painted tiles of farms
along a river basin circle a figure
that has not aged. At her clay feet, the faces
on coins and paper have grown faint from disuse.

Outside, against the parapet, she rests,
preparing for one last uncertain look:
below, the city expands beyond the fortress;
the quilt of straw and maize unravels; the river,
a blue fault splitting Portugal and Spain;
the hills capsize as the continent succumbs.

HOLY COMMUNION

We had left the cows to pasture. The wooden cart
knelt in the dirt, empty—the field of corn
was yards of ripe still spires. Above, in shambles,
lay father's primary school and, across the road,
grandfather's grave. I stood before the cross,
confident in the wavering light of service.
“It's there. A chalice, pyx, and paten inside.
You've never pictured so much gold in your life!”
Then, rippling from the walls, came the loud tolling
of bells. I snatched the chalice, ran past aisle
after aisle, dipped my thumb in the marble font,
crossed my bare chest, and charged through the church doors.

The sun collided with skin. A flock of sheep
grazed in the meadow near the cemetery.

FIRST LOVE

Hung by a thick silk band
to the roof beam of the barn,
the sheep twisted slowly. Its neck
had been cut; blood dripped
meticulously into the straw.
Its open abdomen gave
birth to its own bowels.
The chickens pecked like hawks
at the organs. Neat cuts
had been made to the skin
surrounding the head and anus,
and above the hooves.
The blade was passed to me
like a first familial glass of wine.
Was this not a temptation?
A rite of passage? I pulled
the wool with my left hand
and cut, with my right, the fat,
parting skin from muscle.
At times, the skin was a lover's clothes,
yielding passionately.
And there it was: pink muscle.
I had no desire to sink my teeth
into its red exposure.
I believed then that I never would.

SAY GOODNIGHT

for Timothy Liu

She'd pick us up from Catholic school
and ask how many girls we hated.
She'd say, "Remember, play the ace
of hearts." Her humor quickly faded.

Those nights, she tucked us into bed,
struggling to read the letters in black
of bedtime stories from the *Guide*
or *Jane* she stole from Marli's Rack.

Then she'd give up, mumble to herself,
"They always make these women thin,"
storm out, leave us to pray alone.
We wondered what she thought a sin?

Behind shut blinds, what was the dose
of pills and alcohol? What vision,
if any, did she have of love?
Were there scratch marks of a last mission

on her pale, asphyxiated face?
We lay in bed, make-believe lovers,
hoping that her thin hand would return,
and, over our bodies, draw the covers.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

I was born in Newark, New Jersey. I earned a bachelor's degree in English from William Paterson University, and another in philosophy from Rutgers University-Newark.

Wings of themselves do not lift the creature. They require the dynamics of atmosphere to push against in order to get the lift. The phrase is a metaphor for the person, you, is what the other person needs in order to get lift in a way of attitude ... We all know the winds are responsible for the flight of a body using the wings . If there are no winds there is no flight. Same as the wind is the person in our life who allows us to Fly, who helps us to achieve great heights. Place each piece on the two vertical edges beneath each wing, folded in half so one strip secures both sides at each point. - The next tape strip is 3mm wide, and this holds the nose and fuselage together. Take a small square to secure the top of the nose, place half of the remaining strip, cut vertically, on the front of the nose to secure the layers, and place the other half about a third of the way up to lock the nose in place. - Cut another 2mm strip, cut it in half and secure each side of the wings on the underneath of the plane. - Cut another strip and place it vertically on the rear of the plane, at the top and bottom. Each half of the same strip sits on each side of the tail. - Take another strip and place it horizontally across the top of the tail, to secure the wings.

the Wind beneath Our Wings. Dieter F. Uchtdorf. Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. They supported each other, they did the best they could, and they knew the Church was true. It was not the organization that had attracted him, but the light of the gospel, and this light strengthened those good members. In many countries the Church is still in its beginnings, and the organizational circumstances are sometimes far from perfect. However, the members may have a perfect testimony of the truth in their hearts. A curve-tipped secondary on each wing is dragged against an adjacent ridged secondary at high speeds (as many as 110 times per second—slightly faster than a hummingbird's wingbeat) to create a stridulation much like that produced by some insects.[30] Both Wilson's and common snipe have modified outer tail feathers which make noise when they are spread during the. As feathers grow at variable rates, these variations lead to visible dark and light bands in the fully formed feather. These growth bars and their widths have been used to determine the daily nutritional status of birds. Each light and dark bar correspond to around 24 hours and the use of this technique has been called ptilochronology (analogous to dendrochronology).[41][42].

Taxi lights are usually installed on the nose gear strut and/or wings. Their purpose is similar to that of automobile headlights. Author with the 757's Christmas Tree. They are typically mounted somewhere on the wings, landing gear, or beneath the fuselage. Landing lights have a very narrow beam (think spot light instead of flood light) and are pointed slightly down so they illuminate the runway during takeoff and landing. When landing, the lights begin to illuminate the runway when the aircraft is about 200 feet above the ground. Landing and taxi lights are extremely bright.