

You

Rough. Refined.

Tomás Tedesco

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I dedicate this book to you.

Me—Poetry is a good place to meet yourself.
You—Ohh, that's heavy.
Me—Is it?

Promise

You are the deep well
I love drinking from.
Your suave stone creek
digs into the rooted
shambles of my being.
I try to make sense
of things, but the lines
blur between us.
On this planet,
your wax melts and drops
on the candlelit paper,
and our separation
makes the oneness
more obvious.

You Ask, “Who Lives in You?”

I reply,
I craft my violent peace
from opposing parental heritages.

The steel rulebook of my mother’s
mother brought me to college.

The resilient empty stomach
of my father’s father brought me work,
couchsurfing, immigration and vanlife.

Their different lives, strategies,
and diverging neural pathways
resulted in me, a split personality.

I.

My mother lives inside
the shadows of my
downcast forehead.

One day, I hope the crunch
of my mother’s ashes
will vanish so I can
hear her again.

II.

The thud of the stool-slap
that my father gave me
lived in the right hemisphere of my brain,
but I let it go, and now he lives in my smile.

III.

My brother's voice
lives in my laughter.
We share, after all,
the same operating system.

If you want to know me,
learn to love the echoes
of those I love.

IV.

Even those who have hurt me, live.
I dissolve them in stomach acid
and make them into my food.

The counterfeit ideas my
grandparents and the church
told me live in my mouth.
I've been working them down
my digestive tract.
One day, I hope they reach

my final sphincter.

v.

The blind breath
of her lips lives
against mine inside
the womb of my car.
Baby hands finding
each other belonging
together.

Do you ever pay attention to the background?

Elegía para los Desaparecidos en los Vuelos de la Muerte

No estaba vivo siquiera,
pero como lo siento
cuando pienso en ustedes
en caída libre
sobre el océano Atlántico.
Pájaros dormidos,
no en vuelo,
pero en picada,
con sus corazones
amorfinados,
amortiguados.

Seguro que sintieron el impacto contra el agua
como una punzada dentro de un abrazo,
como el mordisco de un conejo.
Las burbujas dejaron sus cuerpos
y tus pulmones se acordaron de respirar,

tratando de decir
que fueron secuestrados,
que fueron torturados,
que fueron interrogados,
que los militares estaban en el poder,
que tus padres y tus madres no
encontrarán todos tus cuerpos,

que eran agua y que al agua volvieron,
que las lágrimas serán tantas como el océano
en el que los lanzaron
como gorriones congelados.

El océano me contó
que hay globos que no flotan
en el agua del océano Atlántico.

Como lo siento que no estaba vivo para morir con ustedes.
Como lo siento que no estaba vivo para evitar que murieran.

Elegy for the Desaparecidos in the Death Flights (Translation)

I wasn't even alive,
but I feel all of you
free-falling over
the Atlantic Ocean
like drugged birds,
not flying, but diving
hearts pumping morphine.

The impact against the water
probably felt like getting stitches
while giving a hug.

The bubbles left your bodies,
and your lungs remembered

you were kidnapped,
you were tortured,
you were interrogated,
the military was in power.

Your fathers and your mothers
didn't find all your bodies—
You were water and to the water
you returned. The tears
will be as many as the ocean

in which you were hurled
like a frozen pigeon.

The ocean told us
balloons don't float
in the waters of the Atlantic.

I wasn't alive to die with you.
I wasn't alive to stop you from dying.

My Life Is a Joke

*God, your heart
must give you great pain.*

Let me be a jokester, let my life be a joke
for you.

I pray I can make you laugh,
because even if I can't erase your
pain, at least I can make your Akashic records blink
out of your consciousness for a second.

I'm sure your mind lives for those moments
when your creation does something strange,
and I'm sure your immortal heart dies
whenever someone kills something.

I can't even imagine something
bigger than what surrounds me.
I can't imagine how big your love is.
That's why some people don't believe in you,
but that doesn't mean you are not here.

My muscles communicated like wires.

You Go and Say

I.

You go and say,
that if you could travel back in time,
you would not go back
and change your horrible
traumas, because they made
you who you are.
I admire your strength, but
my regrets whisper
under the surface of my sternum.

I go and say, I agree with you but
actually, I do regret some things.
You go, and say,
I learned from my regrets,
and I am who I am thanks to those experiences.

My regrets go, and say,
ojalá que no me hubiera echado la culpa
por la muerte de mi madre
durante mi infancia perdida.
Ojalá que no hubiera peleado
tanto con ella cuando estaba viva.

You go and say that because of my regrets,
I won't repeat the same mistakes.

I go, and say,
my regrets are needles
stabbing my chest,
and accepting them
is not good enough.

II.

A node of silence gulps in my throat
and I become a noodle swimming
in Knorr chicken juice.

I travel through time and space
and sounds and words,
and soup and caldo,
and I wish I reach you,
before it is too late.

I have learned that hate equals ache,
and I'm discovering a new faith
of loving my brothers and sisters
beyond the sparks of steel clashing
into each other's throats.

III.

Someone else's throat goes and says,
all my poetry is intended to hurt you.
I go to my childhood and say
that you can't break me if I'm already roto.

IV.

I remember that,
before flying to the United States, I put a piece
of home on the soles of my shoes.
The rubber met the concrete floor
outside LAX International Airport,
and Argentinian dirt moved out of my shoe,
and onto another country.

v.

I go and say,
I'll beat you to death with kindness,
because nutrition is important,
and besides, you never know,
things might be going good,
but then you get a reality check,
like seeing children burying
their mother's placenta
under a volcano,
to make sure they can't go back
the way they came.

VI.

Some go and say,
the children feel lost,
they work towards alcoholism.
The spirit of departure sighs,
and sobriety lights a cigarette.

VII.

The boundaries of the self
are none of my business,
but let me tell you:
everybody is affected
by what is happening on the streets,
all your struggles are precursors
to homelessness,
and dying is going back
to being nameless.

VIII.

Immigrants go and say,
we came here to get back
what you stole from us,
that's why we lied
to your immigration officers.
We are here because you destroyed
our economies.

You planted rifles in the hands of niños
and coups on the ciudades and campos,
and then you watered them with the CIA.
The soldier seeds sprouted,
plowing us with Agent Orange,
and Agent Bullet gave us many kisses on our foreheads.
You harvested your dollars

with our blood.

There's no washing machine that can
remove the stains.

You can't build a wall to hide your mess.

No matter how loud your TV screams,
we will cantar louder and say,

“we are the proof, somos la evidencia.”

There's no law that can stop us
from coming back,
and from getting back
a little bit of what you stole.

We came here because we were
lucky enough to be alive.

Someone else didn't,
someone else wasn't,
we are here for them as well.

IX.

Someone else goes and says,

Argentina es mi hogar.

I go, and say,

I can no longer say the same.

Home is never the same place
and even though, todos
somos hijos de alguien,

I don't belong anymore.

Sometimes I try to remember how it feels
to be rooted in certainty,
how it would feel to have my dead body
surrounded by the wood from the tree whose
green leaves covered my eyes from the sun
when I was a child.

We immigrants aren't lucky enough
to die where we were raised,
nor to be seen as we disappear,
because we live everywhere.

For us, there is no home graveyard
besides postcards pinned on the fridge,
and pictures of your favorite foods
on Google Images smelling like your childhood.

x.

I come and say,
one voice of mine is ten thousand voices
singing, crying, screaming, speaking,
celebrating, rioting, hurting, laughing,
wailing, telling, protesting, recordando.
That's what my body has to offer.
That's what we have to offer.

La memoria dice,
we are not separate.
We are all together
like the branches of an oak tree,
como las ramas de un jacarandá.

*If you are going to miss heaven,
then why did you come here?*

White Rabbit Lying Against Black Cobblestone

I will die under a full moon
on a night that has already passed.
I will die in nature, held by a woman,
transposed against the waves.

I will die the way I was born,
in a state between dreaming and living,
between trees, between comfort and cold,
between flesh and gaze.

I will die like an animal in love,
surrounded by those who love me.

I fall asleep on the floor
when I visit my brother.
We share time until
exhaustion lifts me
beyond my ability to
stay awake, then my
heartbeat is clipped.

The moon molds into the clouds.
I have dissolved many nights,
accompanied, unaccompanied.
I have prepared for this moment.

*Inject hydrogen peroxide into your heart,
and let the white bubbles do the cleansing.*

Parentheses Are (Optional)

Sobbing in front of an iPhone screen
I text,
“this beautiful part of my college life is dying.”

(She) texts,
“I want to hold you.”
I go (to her.) I never used to go (to her.)
I blow my nose while I walk.

I hear (her) again.
We use (her) apron as a tissue,
and we drink (her) tea,
(and she says,) “Let’s cry, because we can’t be together.”
My legs are crossed, back arched toward the ground,
and it is fucking beautiful,
and it never ends.

How can you cry over losing someone,
if their face is so close?
I kiss (her because her)
eyes are staring at me, feeling
the pull of routine, I begin
the pushing of habit.

That’s why they call it making out
because you make up as you come out,

Dead Line

Dear Dead Line,
At the bottom of the ravine,

the sun is baking your body
next to a roasted lion.

The gallop of the hyena-turtles
beats the red sand.

Thirst, clogged throat, and mucous wind
swallow the asphalt bones.

The desert is your tongue; it doesn't
forbid, doesn't forget or forgive

—like claustrophobic lovers—
sleeping inside the janitor's closet.

You will die if you
don't do something,

something like making blue cheese
pizza, and not talking

to people you don't like.
You will die from not saying no.

These are hard times to face the catatonic dust.
Even dead skin cells float in the vacuum looking like rice,

your mamá made you,
in Costa Rica or Taiwan,

but you reach for a talisman
she never meant to give you.

In the dark, you imagine
the door closing,

and then you remember
there never was a door.

Take Care
Tomás

People Are Optional

I'm sitting in the grass
and my belly is cerulean.
I hold my ex's hands,
but our finger vines let go,
the bodies are saying, "no."

In this moment, I get to cry
in a way I wasn't able to cry
when my mother left life.

My life was optional to her.

When I was upstairs,
I couldn't hear the
ambulances that took her
away.

In the opaque room
there was silence.
There was a blanket.
There were machines.
There was electricity
behind the covers.
There was family
blurred by pain.
There was no sound.

“Who’s going to love me?”
I asked a long time ago.

The break up doesn’t matter to her,
because she lives in her body.
She stretches everyday,
and she eats well everyday.
My chest is restrained
by many rubber bands,
waiting to snap.
I’m a ghost.
I ask questions.

My temple veins are pulsating
weirdly in the middle of the highway.
A green worm deploys its squatter-rights
in my stomach.

When I get to the end of the tunnel,
a headlight smashes my left knee,
propelling me head first into a windshield.
The shattered glass flogs me
like frying oil touching water.
Floating in that limbo,
I realize I’m still exploring grief.

Biopsy

All words are written in water.
I'm dissecting love from the lover.
A biopsy is always messy carnage.

—*I don't know binary, but I want to know how to say I love you in binary.*

—*01001001 00100000 01101100 01101111 01110110
01100101 00100000 01111001 01101111 01110101
I Googled it, this is how you say it.*

She Told Me: “Write About Cheese.”

Before she kissed me on the Elysee Champs,
she skewered a block of cheese with a toothpick,
brought the yellow scent to her red lips,
and made the wine dance in her glass.

Avatar

I chant against
the violence of regret,
while the air swings a slap at me.
I whisper,
be compassionate to yourself.

Flowers bloom from my fist.
I hear your open hand say,
*care to hear the language
long forgotten by you.*

Sun nourishes us at 3pm,
like when I touch you
with my words.
Your arms wrap around me, saying,
we are all together.

The Tunnel in My Head

Please, tell me something
people can hear while
holding hands and
I'll speak for the plural "I".

We will walk to the center of the earth
to become a fetus in the ocean.
We will be held by the roots of those
who love us like a nervous system.

I want to tell you:
today I saw someone from the past
who is no longer
a ghost.

If you don't believe me,
stare at the sun for a minute,
close your eyes and press your fingers
against your eyelids.

love is wanting to lay unconscious next to somebody else.

Ocean Prayer

praying
at the bottom of the ocean
without a mask
you can see your face
light blue
hiccuping for air

wondering if
the only way to pray
is to hold someone
by their hands

Waiting for Barefoot Thoughts to Come to Me in the Shower and Kiss My Urethra

waiting to say
let's kiss among bundles of
lavender and basil

I want to want
your hot soup
pouring in my mouth

I want to breathe into the
earth of your stare
I want the drums to engulf us
in linen and cotton
and subway tracks

I want those moments of meaningful silence
and I want those really important meaningless
conversations

I want to learn to be afraid
so when I encounter the incredible person
you are
I will be able to run
to you

and splash into your skin
like sleep hits the sand
and I will say
let's snuggle like jellyfishes swim
I want to hold you like the ocean
wet and dangerous and 70% of you could be me

I want to wring out like soap
out of a cloth
into you
and I want to feel like you are
the calmness I have long sought for
I want us to be my reunion with God
even if I don't seem to believe
right now

Her Falling Hair

you weren't even there
so you didn't see
the hairs hanging from her face
like floating candles
in the night sky

how could your opinion be valid
if you didn't see the lips of the earth
serious from emptiness
prying a taste of wine
glass supported by velvet
the red king at a stalemate saying
check yourself
before you hurt
yourself

how could you know
you weren't even there
when she sat transfixed
with her eyes beneath her hair

The Room of Dreams

I share this sacred safe space
with another traveler
falling asleep in
a black and white tile patio
concrete green staircase
leads to a terrace
where your exhale
gets transplanted into my lungs

I breathe without censorship
laying down
as my fingers
caress words into
the air for comfort
and I'm grateful sharing
this space with you

Dear

this is the song that was playing when
we were holding hands the wrong way

*let's forget what we have.
we can be what we forgot.*

The Safest Moment in Life

The Parents said:

— The safest moment in our lives was when you were born.

Mother said:

—The safest moment in my life was when I decided to commit to my passions regardless of what anybody thought.

Father said:

—The safest moment in my life was when we sang a Bob Marley song in the rain—and the pink umbrella was broken, and the water felt warm inside my boots, and *we shared the shelter...*

Brother said:

—The safest moment in my life was when I made myself into a ball in the shower. The water was tipping my back and somehow, I ended in my bed, skin dry. My wet curls printed snakes on the beige pillow.

Sister said:

—The safest moment in my life was after the landslide.

Something so casual about ground not being grounded.

Grandmother said:

—The safest moment in my life was when I knew I would be okay. I knew you had to sever the cord.

And the baby said:

—The safest moment in my life was when you said, I love you.

Clouds on Existential Smoke: A Philosophical Response to Christopher Buckley

During my first communion,
all I could think was
“I’m the only one walking up to God
with my father by my side,
and my mother’s prayer beads in my hands.”
During peace times, most 10-year-olds don’t understand
death.

I look at the light at the end
of the tunnel, and ask,
“Where does my mind go?”
To answer that question
I lay in the summer sun,
falling in love with the sand.

“What about rising from love?”
said my health teacher in high school,
his breath reeking of cheese.
He told us you can make smoothies
for a hundred students with only three
bananas and an opened box of hairy milk.

I like finding your hair in my bed,

but in my mental comic,
there's a lot of your hair,
so then you are basically bald
in the next frame,
looking like an extraterrestrial.

I like scary movies, not because they scare me,
but because if they make me believe in aliens and Satan,
I can believe in the Father of all Heavens.
My Dad's head is often in the clouds,
many times in music,
and sometimes ululando to the grease of marijuana,

which, I've heard, the US government
gave a Latino name when they
started the war on drugs.
All so they could demonize and incarcerate
those who held power
in numbers.

The corollary is not all demons are real,
and not all demons are opposed to God.

If you think about it,
life is just a response to quotes, heard
before or after life.

If reincarnation is real, how do you regulate it?
Do souls have passports?
Do you get different stamps for when
you were a galaxy, a tree, a squirrel, a mountain?
Does the number of souls in life fluctuate
depending on how many souls
are in ONENESS with the Source?

I wish I hadn't lost my Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy
because Douglas Adams, may he rest in peace,
showed me how mundane the cosmos can be.

When I cuddle with you,
I think about alternate realities.
What if in one reality,
your best friend didn't die?
What if you died with him in another reality?
What if my mother survived,
and I never left Argentina?
What if, in an alternate reality,
he is holding you while I perspire a breeze,
deep in the underground,
6-feet under an earthquake?
Would you feel better in that timeline?

Would you feel better if I said
the universe adapts with us or without us
that our souls don't have to be

in a Mexican standoff with reality,
revolver coming out of a holster made of leather,
waiting to shoot a hole in your heart?

Would you feel better if I said
“Stop thinking”?

En la oscuridad escucho maullidos.
Schrödinger must really hate cats.
I hate Schrödinger because
I don't appreciate individuals
who smoke metaphysics.

*Stop resisting.
Things just are
what they are.*

Before I Severed the Cord

I walk into a landscape where everybody is alive. I open my eyes and I'm back in the playground. The steel swing says, "hi," with its rattling chains. The piano whispers to me the '*Go to Sleep*' lullaby. My nostalgia for the end of the future is proof that the beginning is now. I will always be here now. I can predict years ahead into the end of time. I can see the squirrels in the tree. I can remember my past. If we can jump between these temporal slacklines, then maybe we are made from that same rope. If that's true, this universal axis doesn't have to die, and we can finally be happy. Nobody has to cry out of fear. I don't have to tell myself lies, because belief is reality, and I choose to believe in things that give me the will to live unchained. I run into the sandbox. I move between flashes of playing hide and seek in the playground, building castles by the sea, when my familia was whole, when my eyes didn't know what broken meant. I go back to a time where I was always dreaming. A time where I didn't have to fall asleep to smile and relax. I promise next time I fall in love, I'll write about it before falling from love

About the Author

Born in 1995, Tomás Tedesco almost ate a book as a toddler. He learned how to read soon after and has been devouring books ever since. While in City College, he realized that it was important for him to live life with his deeds and with his words. That's when Tomás started writing, and he hasn't stopped.

This collection has some of his best-written poems from his college years. As someone who lived most of his life in Argentina before moving to California, Tomás' hands tap the drums of the English and the Español language. He thinks of two different hands that belong to the same body. Now that he has graduated from UCSC, Tomás plans to compile and publish a collection of poems about living in a van while going to school. Other projects he has in mind are a collection of irreverent poems focused on the tragic lives of anthropomorphic food and possibly some plays. Outside of writing, Tomás is the founder of the Snail Movement, which advocates for homeless students so they can have safe places to park their wheeled-homes. He is also a trainer for the Genius of Flexibility and enjoys working out, dancing and going on joyrides.



