

Arete

A poetry collection by
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Arete (ah-rey-tay): excellence of any kind—especially a person or thing's full realization of potential or inherent function.

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Poetics Statement

This collection meditates on the word “arete.” As stated in the epigraph, the word is defined as “excellence of any kind—especially a person or thing's full realization of potential or inherent function.” The word originates from the Greek, a concept that refers to excellence in moral virtue. To me, my morality relies heavily on fulfillment, that being the fulfillment of myself and the fulfillment of others. With this concept in mind, I began to notice that my desire for excellence is incredibly similar, if not the same as, my desire for my own self-fulfillment. To put it simply, I wanted to explore the phenomenon of the self and consider what it takes for someone to be satisfied with themselves. As a somewhat frequent meditator, I have found that meditation is my portal to fulfillment. In meditation I’m forced to be alone and quiet with absolutely nothing to distract me; it's wonderfully terrifying. In this liminal space of meditation, my selfhood demands to be addressed. As my mind goes quiet, I am left with nothing but the form of my body and the wavering thoughts of my mind. Although meditation is typically conducted to “shut off the mind,” I wanted the meditations within this collection to be reflections of all that was loud in my mind. I forced myself to hear the loud thoughts. Why was it there? What does it mean? Is it fulfilling? Unfulfilling? What makes a thought fulfilling or unfulfilling?

In addition to the meditations, I went on multiple solitary outings. The purpose of these outings was to observe my selfhood and the selfhood of the strangers around me. I wanted to explore the notion of how other people’s individuality plays a role in my own. When I am in some place, alone, how does that make me observe other people who may be alone? People in couples? People with a friend or family member? Additionally, I chose specific outings that I believed would fulfill me in some way or another, like taking myself on a date to a new bookshop or going to my comfort movie theater. On these excursions I would bring along my

journal and take notes or write ridiculously detailed entries about anything and everything I noticed was happening around and within me. Later on, I would revisit my journal, read the entries, and translate them into the poems that now live here, in this collection.

In my research, I strived to recognize my full potential, not in my passions, not in the people around me, but in me, alone. Basking in my loneliness, I conjured up the questions that pooled in my brain without my noticing, all of which, I believe, are answered through the poems.

In this poetry collection, *Arete*, I use the poems to reflect on my selfhood. What is selfhood? How do we navigate it? How do we recognize it? While these questions may not be answered directly, I hope, more than anything, that they are merely considered and examined within yourself, the selfhood of the readers.

May you be fulfilled!

Anna Avent

Meditation #1

In a park. Alone. The sun is setting and my body can be found on a bench. As I close my eyes the frequencies of youtube.com surge through me. Ringing sounds interrupted by babied cries and cogging wheels. Selfhood can be made uncomfortable when we are reminded of the flesh, how it rolls, how it lays, how it moves. I'm conscious of my moving lungs. Inhaling air in a manner of fulfillment, like a smoker inhaling smoke. Stagnant & calculated. Envisioning a cloud before me, one created out of nothing but attentiveness and hope. I scan my body. Feet uneven. Knees uneven. Head tilted. In the stillness of the world surrounding me, my body lives on a margin of mathematical impossibility. Orange appeared. Sunlight, possibly? The passing of a stranger in an orange sweater, this figure beaming through the blackness of my closed eyes. In a place like this, anything is possible. Orbs, moving. I don't know what they are and I don't know what surrounds me. People, I know. I know a couple sits to my right. On my walk to this place I saw them hold hands. They stared into the courtyard, mouths moving, eyes locked. Here, energy isn't stagnant, it pushes and pulls. Sound energy tells me there is a baby to my left, crying for mommy, impatiently expecting fulfillment. It feels all too familiar. I remember where I am, the park. All around is fulfillment. Duties being met. A mosquito lands on my hand, it fulfills itself by taking a small sum of me. A sting for blood, for life. The tree's leaves fall into my hair. Although sparse in branched nakedness, they fall for fulfillment. The seasons are changing. The boy and his skateboard. The mother and her child. Me and the stillness. Here I am reminded there has never and will never be a pause. Earlier when I needed to breathe or straighten my spine or clear my head or take back what I said. Time is fulfilling its duties. It's pampering its evermoving line. Keeping it straight, or so far beyond. Behind my eyes, duty calls. She fulfills herself with the stillness of the moving.



Dog-Eared

The bus was full
Hands sinking into
Themselves
Squeezing into a space by

Myself

Doing it all for me
For her
The girl
Who did not know
Why do
Magic Tree Houses
Suddenly feel

So far away

Papered scent
Papered and pampered
Senses

What do you call
Passion
If it surrounds you in
Four walls

Paired People
Like their always have been

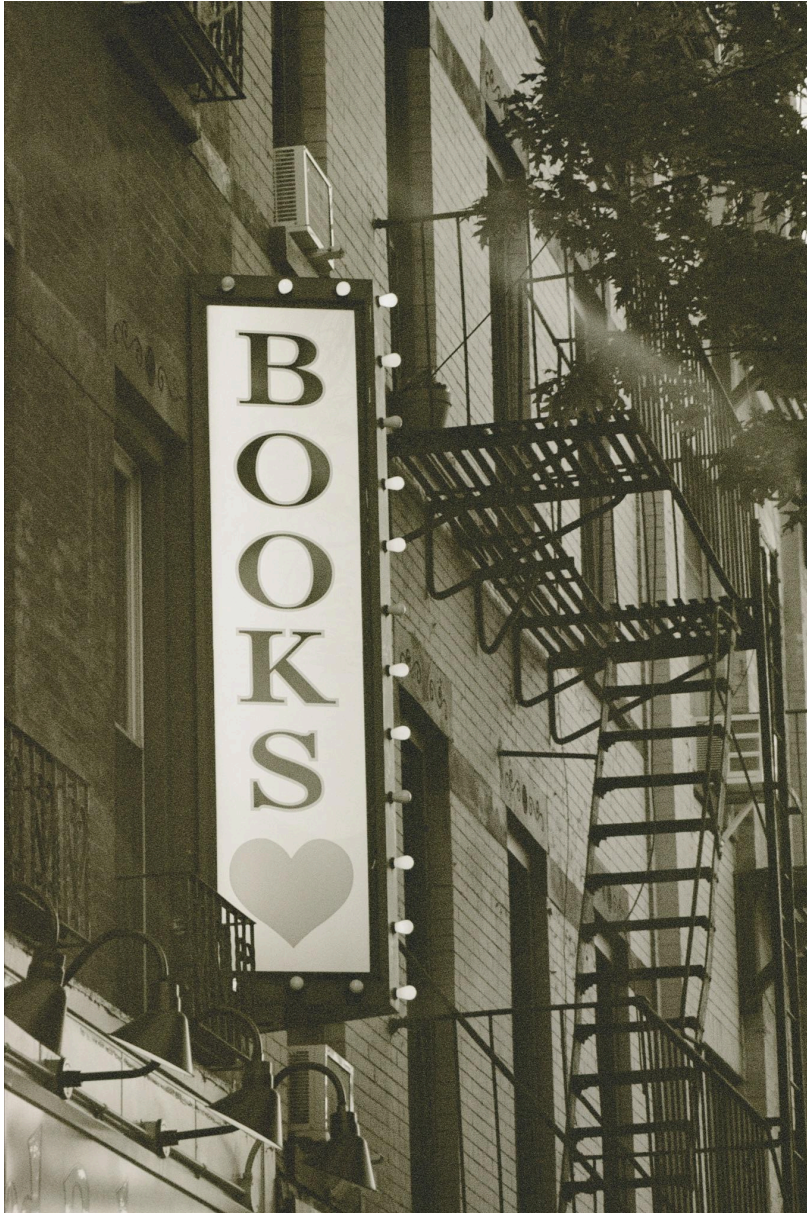
We are all on
The same page
Living for the thrill
Of the escape

No noise
for my eyes
To deceive me

Just my future

Translated scripture
A testament unbeknownst to
The written word

It's scribe only something
We touch
I feel
Pressing in all around me



Mourning After

The dogs are running
Like they would
Any other day

The walk over
Shallow and depleted

“Did you hear?”
Ringing off of
Salt crusted lips

Biting at the skin
That today feels like
Anything but my own

I’m trying
To remove myself
From it all

The self comes out
In confessional
With mom

Whispering through the
Wooden cracks
Her veiled silhouette

How can I convince you?
I know
they aren't on my side

Thinking back
They never have been

God forbid I say
In an attempt to relate
To what you speak so highly of

In a forbidding circumstance
You would turn away
And stare at the wall
My bloodied grievances
Reflect onto

Gone too soon
Trapped in a void
Full of every decision
You have ever made

And through it all
1461 days
You can rely on my selfhood

On the moral hierarchy
I refuse to let you step
On my wrists
On my ribs

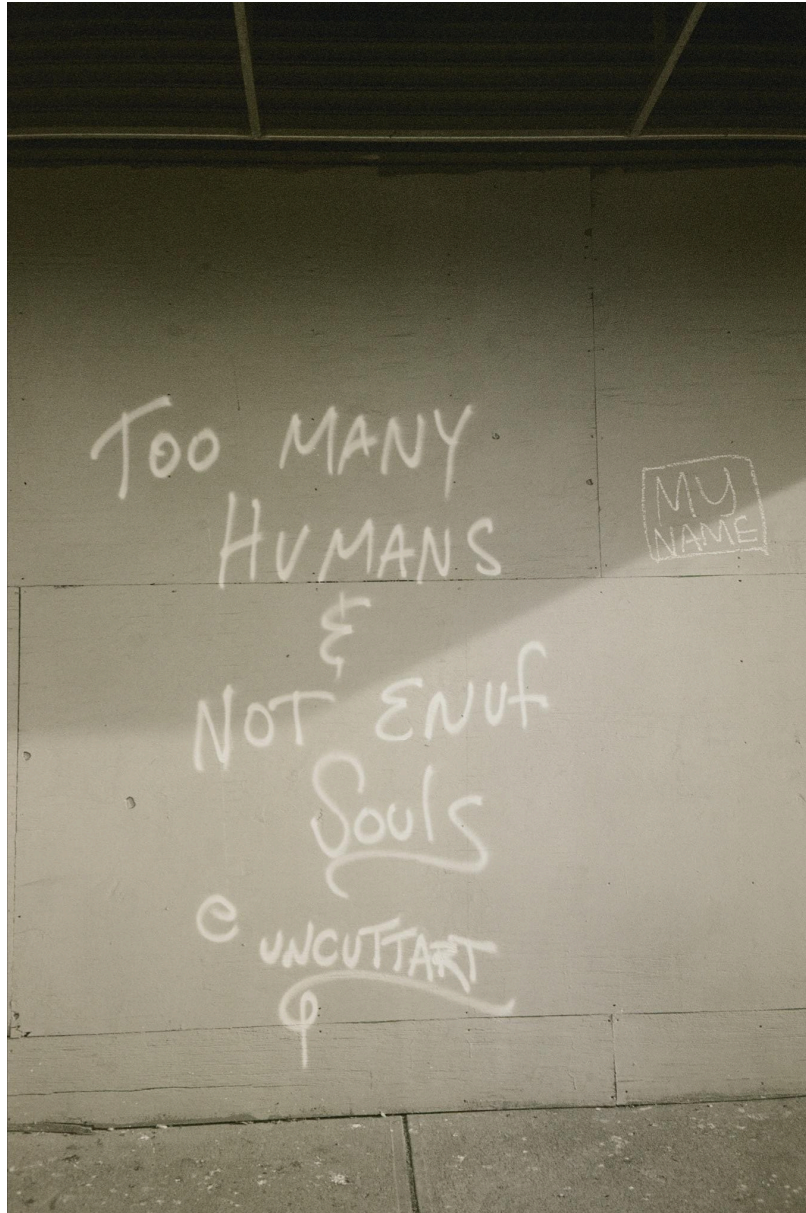
On their wrists
On their ribs

You cannot crack open
My skull and
Politicize my brain
Rearrange it for your
Get rich quick scheme

Rev your engine
As my corpse rattles
In the rear view

Sweet Bitch
And my decaying head
turns

I just really hope you pray
Nothing ever happens to
Me



Meditation #2

Too anxious to sit still. The week of finality. My chin aches from pimples growing into one another. In my room, selfishly. Surrounded by stuffies. Inhaling through snot. I'll admit the difficulties once they are made clear. Proud of myself for taking the time. To do list, tsunami, nightmares. Keep finding ways in the deepest of breaths that dry it all up. The air, dry and cold, pressing into my sinuses. A shrill tingle shot up my spine. Maybe it's mindfulness making its way to my brain. Fulfilling in the mindset that what can be, will be. The anxiety, the throbbing, the fog. All here for the sake of being and observed for the sake of fulfilling. Ten minute slots of thinking in silence. 1430 more minutes to think while doing. Gratitude is hard to shape on days like these. Nagging nows. The brain pulling itself here and there, up and down. 10 minutes for it, for me, for her. Slow down honey, we're in a hurry.



Alamo

Thank you to the park
It's bubble of transport and transformation
Soles skidding across cobblestone
On the way to alamo

Feet dangling, surrendering over the dark room
Lift a card and you will be taken care of
Lift your head, your eyes, your heart
Look into the light, like they told you not to

Single eclipse found
Once in your lifetime
Holdover for the hope
You will one day see it
Again

It's all connected, you think
Sequeled art ablaze
Inspiration thickened

Give me the liminal and I
Will fill it with nothing more
Than the feeling of here and now

Fortitude
Shelter
Cliche resolves for what it is to me

Like everything nowadays
The future lives presently
Until cobblestone turns foley
And the park a set

The walk a character
My shoes the star



Attention

My attention is needing my attention. To pay attention is where my attention goes. Artistic connection comes from artistic attention. My now needs attention to get things done but, so does my future yet, that's a later attention. Attention comes in blocks of now and later, and right now, it's about to fill a void. When attention gets to be too much she asserts herself as worry. Don't worry, worry is here! Attention is mental and physical. You must grab my attention by pushing here, but my attention may be somewhere else, so please, avert your attention away from me while I wrap up what has my current attention. I pay close attention now to the things to come, meaning the now had attention some minutes ago. It's been tended to. When I'm with friends, I tend to give them all of my attention while still leaving some for myself in the space of insecurity. A motor, my attention runs on pressure, how hard you or I may be stepping on the gas. Time, what a thief.



Bless Your Heart

It's a feeling
like the hum made in the middle of saying amen.
A moving stillness, stopped by flesh.
Closed lips
bashful in their stillness.
Generational lady-likeness.

What gets passed down is typically met in the middle
at a point
where the lines cross.
What are genes but a line?
an infinitely long object with no width, depth, or curvature
It's because of my mother
and her mother
and hers.
Yet we don't know -

Give me yourself while
I consider.
How did it all
come to be?

Did great grandma experience
the smell of disinfected floors against stale cathedral walls?
Stained glass glaring into the corner of your eye
your socked foot squeaking away the seconds.
Velveted pews meeting
scalloped skirts.

The line made between luncheon fundraisers
and the new wing of the church.
“Cranberry scones did that nana!”
And it stood.

Aging rapidly.
At the speed of
a line.
Drawn between

who I am and
what you worked so hard
for me to be.

Depending on where you stand,
the line falters.
Before I began running you warned me.
infinitely long



Supper

I've always been alone in it
Mom fed me, sure
Airplane symbolism
Mush delivered in engine roaring cascades

We begin to perceive ourselves at three
Self concept
It's called

Aging for the mere horror of
Understanding

Seeing the body
Feeding the body

Like it's easy
Simply put
In and out

People surrounded by people or
Person surrounded by people
My bites reflective as they always have been
Magnified for their grotesqueness

No one cares
I repeat
No one

For her
Like a rotation of planets on the
Solar Eclipse

It's regular
Typical
And expected

Yet, how extraordinary
It's terrifying



Meditation #3

On a walk again. A cold winter's day. My thighs are numb and stiff, two pieces of one whole, pushing. Active meditation, something I've never considered, or merely believed in. Even now I wonder, is it meditation if my eyes are open? Nodding off passing strangers with a sense of wonder, "Does she know where I'm placed?" The cold is so violent. Deep breathing through the wind tunnels. With each gust I count backwards from ten knowing the worst of it all will be over before I reach one. Sometimes I get all the way to two. Mother nature is playing one of her silly games. It's a game, right? It's what I must think on days I exit the train and rise from the station to see water pooling on the steps; here we go again, yet another little game. It's dumb, I know. It's simply rain, a forecast that was predicted some hours ago by a man or woman whomst has dedicated their lives to this thing I consider a game. It's merely perspective. It all is, everything, everywhere at every moment, merely perspective. My aching body, forcing itself forward or rather, my working body moving itself home. On my walk, a woman stopped me and asked, her scarf muffling her speech,

"Where is Atlantic?"

I didn't hear her at first. In all honesty, I wasn't sure I should stop, afraid she may be asking for something I couldn't give her. I asked her to repeat herself and she responded simply,

"Atlantic?"

I pointed her in the right direction.

"Take a left at the next block and go straight for some time, it's straight ahead."

The woman blew me a kiss and ran off, shouting back,

"God Bless you! Have a wonderful day!"

"You too!"

I responded. As I continued walking I wondered if my mediation had ended once I had decided to listen to the women. With my response to her, I wasn't living in my own head anymore, my thoughts weren't solitary. The next few blocks I let that question ruminate far longer than it should have.

"She blessed me."

I thought. Or God did or, whatever. She blessed me, with her God, her fulfilling, THE fulfilled. And I continued my walk, basking in it. Not in my simple kindness, not in my praise, the blessing, but in the shere understanding that it all exists, here and now. Within me, within her, within a God I don't believe in. May you bless you.

