

**Blue Ring of Fire**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Creative Writing

of

Rhodes University

by

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November 2017



## Abstract

My poems are reflections of shape, colour and emotions expressed through imagery. Their unsentimental landscape-realism echo my own feelings as well as broader human dimensions of contradiction and uncertainty, without trying to resolve them. In the same way that photography is the art of 'painting with light', my poems seek a language that evokes light and darkness. They aspire to what Keats said when writing about 'negative capability': "Poetical character has no self, it is anything and nothing, it has no character and enjoys light and shade". My poems explore what I have learned about form - how line-length, syntax and musicality can add grace and energy to language. Poets that have influenced me include the classical Chinese poets such as Du Fu and Li Po, and the Generation of 27 Spanish poets, such as Antonio Machado and Leon Felipe.



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I



## Tonight

We wake  
to the breath  
of a curious night.

Stars pin-hole  
the sky.

You lie draped in  
creased sheets.

I want to stay  
completely still,  
tattoo this moment  
within.

## Driving Away

Water birds have flown off  
the weir is dyed sunset  
pencilled by autumn gusts.  
Nightfall exhales,  
dusts the shrouded carpark  
pressed with tyre prints.  
My hands start learning  
to hold emptiness.  
Stained Karoo dorp walls  
scratched by thorn  
imprint our whispering.

## Gran's Ash

We stand on  
Linmeyer's koppie,  
a short walk from Gran's house.  
Hollow brass urn  
    holds her ash.

There is little left  
to give away.  
Photo albums filled with  
the forgotten;  
the walnut clock that  
chimed solitary on  
Sunday afternoons,  
blankets we'd all  
    slept in,  
that smelled of  
generations.

No words between us,  
just her dust  
    that blows away  
on evening's breeze.

Our inheritance —  
gentle plain talk  
memories of Sundays,  
    crumpled boxes  
filled with things we'll  
soon pass on.

## **Bird Feeder**

Scarred pitted skin, wrinkled  
by an enquiring sun.

His face hangs – a folded kite  
emptied of wind.

Shoes swallow whole  
the feet that once filled them.  
He breathes in sighs and shudders –  
his thoughts stream in the wind.

Pigeons fuss around,  
to clean his traces away.

## **Last Night**

Last night's kisses  
stained sheets  
with blushes,  
folded over creases.

Dark lilac clouds  
shredded the sky.  
You walked away  
leaving a silence  
that dared to be broken.

## Another Season

I thought we'd last into winter  
when the rain might come.  
I hoped your hands would warm  
my quivering body  
soaked too long in a berg stream.  
I wanted to inhale you like snow proteas  
that flower when summer ends,  
and to have my eyes fired  
by the blaze of fynbos in spring.  
I want time to ice over,  
but you are already  
in another season.

## Trying Again

It's sunrise when you arrive.

Peeling tin roofs. Cape turtle doves.

Sky smoky blue. Light on the fallen leaf.

Frost hangs in the winter sky.

You step out of a taxi

hair untied.

One word closes the gulf,

stirring motionless air —

a warm sheet over us

embedded with stars.

## Epilepsy's muse

You breathe inside me  
from

    a dark mouth.

Your autumn glare mixed  
with evening's shadow.

A dry

    stream mouth

pleas for wetness  
from an overhung sky.

Broken twigs carry  
faded leaves. How things

    have sunk away.

I wait

hoping stars will glisten

    on a muddied puddle.

Winter now

edges in, loosening

your grey hair

to curtain my sky —

    a nun's habit that hangs

wherever I look.

## Parting

My dried-out tongue  
can't form the words  
I need to say —  
and you are going.  
Sunken, dry dams —  
the migrant birds  
will leave early this year.  
Cracks at the edges  
have lengthened  
in the torn sand.  
Berg winds blow in  
parched clouds, to hang  
like soiled curtains  
needing to be washed.

## The Letter

Summer's blaze came  
early this year.  
Fire seared the fynbos  
leaving ash-grey twigs.

Your letter  
lies on my desk,  
fanned in an arc  
of furrowed pages.

Words burn on paper.  
It's not an email  
I can delete  
or wash away  
with Autumn showers.

## **Red Hibiscus**

My Father was sitting outside  
in the early morning softness,  
waiting for me.

Where have you been?  
It was only yesterday, he said,  
I rubbed my child's body dry.

Who wrinkled your shirt?  
Who filled your arms  
with these flowers blazing red?

## Cape Winter

Summer, that other  
side of spring,  
comes early this year.  
Its side-on beams lift today  
from an uncertain chill –  
burnishing this sky.  
The early morning dew  
frosts over,  
or glints back  
as I walk by.  
Now that there's breath  
between us, more seasons  
are possible each day.





||



## Purpled Cinders

Namaqualand flowers bloom  
only once a year,  
cover the land  
in yellow purpled cinders,  
then wither away,  
to sink under  
summer's blistered sand.

Stars also  
find themselves  
again, at night  
burning holes through  
a black sky,  
waiting for moments  
to be forgotten.

## **Return to Amsterdam**

Black canals  
carry narrowboats  
discarded butts, shopping bags  
and stiffly floating fish.

Sounds funnel through  
stone curves, lifted  
on a returning tide –  
and evening's outbreath.

Lake water fingers through  
dark canals, carrying echoes  
of what we once tried  
to say there.

Black water swallows  
flit on the dropped wind  
among drifting stories.

## Wild Dog

In the wilting sun  
her shape darkens  
the ant hill.

Ears flare into pinions,  
plucking indistinct sounds  
from a burnt sky.

Stiffening in the wind's trace  
she ghosts from the mound  
towards her pack below,  
swirling in dust eddies —  
quivering to follow a scent  
to exhaustion.

## Twilight houses

Blue aloes frame  
the town's ruddy walls,  
fading in twilight's shadow.

Glowing stars brighten  
over the few hundred houses,  
as a white crane  
drifts home to roost.

Windows rattle at the breeze  
waiting for lamplight  
to glow through,  
wondering how long  
tonight, might last.

## **A Land That God Forgot**

Sutherland. No spring, no river:  
empty sky. Where a  
fissure tore open,  
to roar basalt from its belly.

A place where land barely  
Inhales the shining air.  
Water froths from underground  
dragged by rusted windmills.

Wind turbines sunk into sand  
circle their silent faces,  
drinking power and light  
from a fired expanse above.

The sky an endless blue,  
hangs white clouds out to dry  
to storm belligerent rain  
for spring-time's flowered blush.

## Goshawk

Hell's wayfarer  
hanging on the wind,  
a ragged, grey shadow  
ironed by gusting air.  
His javelin head  
lit by crimson eyes  
clears the sky below.  
A feathered barb that  
slices the tall grass.

## Shapeshifting Proteas

They survived in  
fire-torn lands,  
seeds dropped  
by summer flames  
onto blistered sand.

Now scalded red  
pincushion proteas  
sit in my veranda pot —  
glazed by  
its own oven breath.

They bob in afternoon's  
berg-wind,  
attracting beetles to do  
one thing they can't —  
pollinate themselves.

Fire-tongue pistils  
Inquire into where I  
might end up  
in this belligerent future  
that awaits us.

## Couple on the Stairs

I see their grey heads first,  
bobbing up the narrow stairs  
in clothes from years ago,  
mingled with their softening grey.

They hold hands, as if tomorrow  
might be as uncertain  
as the faded floral print  
on her dress.

His polished shoes  
Breathe in the muted light,  
brushed to the suppleness  
of ten thousand strokes.

I make to stand aside  
but they separate around me,  
re-joining as a river folds  
around mid-stream boulder.

## Ancient's Passage

He ghosts across our path  
the inevitability of motion  
that folds bush-veld back.

Swaying trunk –  
a folded grayness,  
that strokes to sense  
succulent leaf cover.

Discards litter the floor –  
gratefully accepted  
by life unable  
to stretch into the green.

He's touched every tree,  
coming to know each  
over a lifetime.

His mouth mills in silence,  
to transform succulence into pulp  
dung plods warmly back to earth,  
for bush scarabs to roll away.

Grey solitude holds his coursing heart,  
in passage within this subsiding day.

His eyes - embedded gentleness –  
weep softly.

## Evening Star

Venus has  
prodded its glow.  
Cape Town's  
cathedral bells  
echo off cooling walls.

I've become  
this city.  
A busker who  
weaves a saxophone  
over scattered coins —  
turning into music  
the longer I play

## The Gift Shop

The owner, crowned  
by her tight grey bun,  
brushes the air  
with wrinkled hands,  
guides her willing helper  
to hidden shelves  
and unseen spaces.

She speaks in a dialect  
of pointing, laced with  
clicks and sighs.  
It's a language  
both they  
and the aged counter  
understand.

## Sideways-on

Afternoon lights sky to amber,  
coils itself ring by ring - a snake  
in a shadowed hole.

Winter's skin peels away -  
leaving a pitted sheen.

Noon's topography  
is almost done,  
as the polished skin  
of a dwindling day  
starts the sun's decline.

In a sunken summer  
widening its light,  
I gaze down  
at a dried-out snake sheath –  
invisible eyes, tapered tail  
light as a bridal veil.

Afternoon's light now  
comes sideways-on  
cutting sky's legs away.

## The Plum

She loses herself  
in the plum,  
chosen from a  
brown paper bag,  
sucks with  
closed eyes  
to shut out  
passers-by.  
The busy street  
tides round her,  
leaving a mouth  
full of sweet juice  
and a faraway gaze.







## **Blue Ring of Fire**

The dust road ahead  
cuts dead straight  
through the stony  
semi-desert folds,  
like someone's drawn it  
from above.

To one side, a small  
plaas window lit  
winks into the dark,  
emboldened by the whistle  
of a burnt kettle  
sitting on its blue  
ring of fire,  
calling out into  
the starlit cold.

## Lights

On the back of a stained diesel train  
clattering into the vastness  
a battered hand-lantern pokes  
at the dark.  
Sparse farmhouse lights  
prick at a black night sky.

In the passing town  
a single flashlight wobbles  
to slice at the silence  
of evening's power failure,  
framing walls, stoep  
and a barking dog.

The eyes of a hooded owl  
glow into the night,  
outlined by a  
silent quiver tree.

## Tin and Rust

This place we've come to  
in a faded afternoon  
is the bustle of forgetting.  
We have been here often,  
where the sky is rusted over.

Her eyes are lowered,  
lips pressed tight —  
like petals that we once pressed  
with blotting paper  
between nameless books

The tin sky waits for us,  
nomads arriving back at the place  
we once left from —  
our *wadi* with its bed  
of hardened cracks.

## Venice Subsiding

Shadow sets on evening water.

Winter's stole

    not yet fully drawn,  
traces clouds that frown  
onto a curtained sky.

The tide is out, leaving  
damp walls

    it holds its breath.

Then swells back under  
sunken stone buildings –  
wooden stilts lean on water.

Gondola oars and *vaporetti* motors

    ruffle black water sheen.

The canals narrow,  
arteries in an aging body.

People mill past on cobbled pathways,  
breathe in and walk sideways-on.

A City drowns

    in its own tears –  
gulls look on from  
slanted wooden posts.

## Siren over the Sea

A wail hangs each morning  
in the misty air – the siren calling  
fish workers to an aging factory

Late risers get a second blast  
echoing through empty  
lime-washed houses

The rusting factory walls  
holds the sunrise catch -  
fish slumped in plastic crates

Silence hangs  
over the harbour  
until the tea-time shrill

when rubber-booted workers  
smeared with scales and spines  
weave through the wire gates

share rusks and cigarettes  
washed down with sweet tea  
watched by pale gulls

Then back to work until  
battered fleet readies to leave –  
the siren heaves

a final winded sigh  
amid the chug of diesel innards  
and beheaded kabeljou.

## Spring Seizure

Moon pulls the sea-blanket  
behind her,  
over the reef,  
up the shore  
to the end of the beach.

Those nights when  
it's hard to sleep  
I churn the bedclothes  
fearing my body might sink  
beyond reach.

When morning comes  
there's rumpled seaweed  
on the shore, with  
dank sheets clinging  
to a curved form.

## **If We Had Said Yes**

Sand taps at the windows,  
on late afternoon gusts.

A silent TV screen  
flickers in burnt white,  
as the shadows lengthen.

Wooden floors creak -  
to tell each other  
where we are.

We lie down  
on the brass bed,  
swallowed by  
its worn mattress.

The sunset hangs around  
long enough for us to  
light candles.

Few words –  
mostly the rustling  
as fingers turn pages,  
or the scrape of  
wine glass on wood.

## Blue Friday

Tall blue Aristeia stems  
sway in  
    the wind.

They reach up to  
ruffle sky's underbelly —  
lagging spring clouds  
    curtain over  
the September sun.

You keep your  
own clouds drawn,  
    so you cannot see.

Wind draws  
    a deeper breath now,  
to leave little untouched  
by its flurries.

## The News

It was a phone call  
I almost didn't take,  
until the phone buzzed itself  
to the table's edge  
and its strobe light woke me -  
a phosphorescent glow.

The words I was  
about to hear, had taken  
forever to arrive.

The kitchen fluorescents  
flickered and groaned,  
until they found their rhythm.  
I wandered around dazed,  
enfolded by stumbling thoughts.

I wanted to visit  
all the empty rooms,  
switching on lights  
even though dawn  
was still fast asleep.

### **Night-time's Caller**

She's crouched at the bed's footboard  
on clutching, scarred feet.

Partly shadowed face,  
distended eyes

glow as kilns —

over a half-open mouth.

She swallows stray light,  
keening in an unworldly moan,

wraith-like hair shrouds

dry, cracked lips.

My body's a saline sheath,

padlocked in an

unbendable clinch.

The dampened sheets

and filigreed hair strands,

coil on whiteness

in enquiring wisps.

## De Rust

After dusk, night's folds get jabbed  
by flickering streetlights  
and the petrol station's afterglow  
in this tiny dorp,  
no one's out this late —  
beyond the odd curtain twitch.  
I've never been here before  
and may never come back.  
The pump moors me,  
the attendant drifts back with  
a card machine blushing yellow.  
We both nod 'naand.

## Seasons Own Themselves

It's that time of year again  
    when spring pretends its way in.  
A season that waits for permission  
    to fully become itself.  
Some days warmed by berg winds,  
others chill in early mist -  
as they hide in their uncertainty.

My season is warmed too  
by delicate sun at times  
never fully arrived.  
    I'm frozen in uncertainty –  
I hover on the edge of my winter,  
waiting for a wind to coax me through.