

Commonplaces

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

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by

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My thesis is a collection of short to medium length poems. All of the subject matter is sustained by reflections, anecdotes or stories. The pieces in the collection are concerned with experiences linked to the seemingly ordinary and mundane. In this regard, I am inspired by how Alan Ziegler (in "Tales of Teaching" and *Love at First Sight*) and Raymond Carver (*All of Us: The collected Poems*) find stories in subject matter which is so commonplace, that it is often ignored creatively. Likewise, the lyricism and modes of expression of William Carlos Williams, Federico García Lorca and Luis Cernuda have informed how I write and structure my poetry.

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Bird Bath

Imagine writing a poem
that could make weavers ruffle their saturated feathers
in the cool joy of the morning
and give the thrush a small beak
of sipped joy
in the heat of the summer sun.

Unseen Paths

the red-tipped feather of a loerie
droplets of dung from a duiker
the rustle of earthy leaves
where a frog
or mouse
have scuttled off

these unseen paths whisper
as I walk along mine

The Bougainvillea

It takes pride of place
in the garden.

Watered and pruned,
cared and nurtured –
its thorns whisper of
a different past.

The Hermit-Crab's Shell

The hermit-crab's shell
is not camouflaged.
It is part of the rockpool.
It lives.
It is a piece of something bigger.
I think of that,
when I stand under the shower
and wash the sea -
water off my body.

Lovebirds

there are lovebirds in St. Francis Bay
now wild

they call to each other
clear and true

they flitter between all other birds
all singing their own songs

Driftwood

Sea-eaten,
a tree has been given up
by the shore.

Unrooted,
it lies on its side
waiting for a spring tide

as its tangled branches wilt,
and new shoots seek out the light.

Dust Devil

Silent and still
the dammed water
comes alive
as a dust devil
erupts onto the surface,
changing
itself
and the places it has been.

Thirst

Inside
the succulent lives.

When needed,
it is watered
at its base.

It has been protected from
wind and heat and cold.

It has never felt the water of rain on its leaves.

The Dragonfly

A dragonfly glides over
the swimming pool.
Its black-veined wings
flitter ripples on
the chlorine-clean face of the water.

Its tail touches the body's surface
where bees and flies and christmas beetles float lifelessly.

Today

out of
the sea of
warm-
damp air,
a toadstool
appeared –
large and delicate,
with wispy filaments
underneath it –
like the gills of some tiny fish

Raindrops

Tiny globules of rain fall.
Wildly, they rush towards
the Earth.

Some spiral in eddies of wind.
Some land like jewels
placed on a finger.

They all sing.

Tin gutters clap their cupped-hands
and the leaves of the lilies,
like paper tambourines,
beat a slow, sharp beat.

Climate Change

The foal shat itself before it died.
Warm, black liquid
seeped into the dry riverbed.

I have seen the picture.
I will go home today and
smile at my daughters.

I will tell them everything is fine.

Play in Five Acts

I

While it takes the arms of two people
to wrap around the Yellowwood,
it still celebrates
every spring rain
with chlorine green fingers
of newness
at the end of its branches.

II

The Yellowwood is lucky.
When the field was levelled,
someone must have decided,
in this case,
beauty transcends
convenience.

III

In the shade of the immovable tree,
the Kiewiets built their nest.

The groundsman must have seen them,
for rocks and bricks
fortified their home
soon after.

Tractors and pedestrians
temporarily
made their way
carefully
around this new life,

but after Saturday's game,
nothing remained.

IV

In the middle of the field,
where the giant Yellowwood grows
and the Kiewiets tried to nest,
there is a grass pitch.

Watered, pounded, covered, dried:
for children to
plan and play
lead and learn.

V

A man waters that pitch.
His hand
– old and black –
holds the nozzle in a fist.

He prepares it
for an afternoon
of weekend
white -
clothed
fun.

He is watering the land –
touching the land.

Land that is.
Land that was.

Quotidian

Alarm-clock woken,
he has sat for hours
before the light of day,
busied by the admin
of the imagined
and the feared.

Hoping he has done enough
to keep the hounds away,
he uncurtains the already-living world.

Framed through the window,
like a metronome as it walks,
a willy wagtail taps its tail.

Early Morning Writing

The heard world whispers at this time:
crickets vie
and a dog
awake and alert
barks in the distance.

The stairwell
is a mineshaft
from the living space
to down below
and I search for nuggets
of meaning
while the world sleeps
and is alive.

Control

Contained, I shutter myself
from the world.
When it encroaches,
I stare, dark-glassed,
into the distance
and pretend not to see.

Mitosis

i know
no -
thing
i know
i know
no -
thing
and from
knowing
that i
know
no -
thing
other
kno -
wings
will come

Where We Are

A colour occupies a space.

It builds on it,
secures it
then leaves:
never to return
to where it is,
and was,
always feared.

Tending

The orange clay
which covers my father
gave way to
kikuyu
rooigras
and
veldgras.

I cut and rake,
month after month,
year after year.

Down the Garden Path

The paved path
slices
through
lawn,
suggesting
to us
where to
walk
and where not.

Makhana's Kop

Pine-tree clustered,
the koppie lies adrift
in a sea of rippling shacks.

It is an island.

I want to explore it,
but I am trapped in my own sea.
On my own vessel.

Viewed from afar.

Fading

Only ever in my dreams
you appear
less and less,
but whether I find you
on desolate shores
in colossal empty halls
or next to the clear
algae-sided pools
of a forgotten kingdom,
I sit with a feeling long after you have gone
searching for a smell
to hold onto
looking for a memory
to breathe in.

Anamnesis

Packed and compressed
(flesh, fear, fatigue)
my thoughts sit like cells

I want to hold a memory
and feel its stringy dirty past
in my hands

inspect it
like the palpable
discharge from a wound

Wooden Floors

Dead floor
crucified
nails weep
rusty tears
to fix you.

What Mary Magdalene
will hold up a cloth
to see your true image?

Train Tracks

Like dead bodies,
the sleepers are lined up,
one after the other,
under kilometres
of rusted iron.

The trains no longer run here,
the holocaust of their deaths
unseen
by those
who walk on by

Rio do Infante

The Fish tadpoles from
the tip of the Nardooseberg
meanders into
a border of blood
and finally leaks into the sea
to suck on the breast
of something larger.

Waiting

On the slasto verandah,
we sit in a new space,
now just mother and child.

Unable to talk,
we revert to:
neighbours
food
plans to get through the day.

When all else fails,
the newspaper.

Eulogy

The night you died,
I captured anecdotes and memories,
like a boy netting butterflies.

The next day
I built a eulogy.
Chiseled it to what I wanted.

Then wrote it out
one final time.

Named

My surname was born in England
and like the carpenter called:
I am and I am not.

I live here now,
between the Yellowwoods,
Aloes and the Cabbage Trees.

Yet who I am lives in the earth –
between their roots.

The Present

Mud pies in the kitchen outside?

now now

Build this puzzle with me?

now now

Tea with my dolls?

now now

Bike ride?

now now

A walk?

now now

Now?

now

Now...

The Gift

I built you a bookstand
from scraps of ply
and a little bit of my time.

Varnished and sturdy,
it was a replacement
for the one on loan.

Yet, when I visit you,
the old one holds
a book in hand,
while mine stands
shiny and untouched
on the mantelpiece,
next to all the trinkets I have
ever given to you.

Parenthood

I think I am
become
a new person.

My fleshy shell
feels familiar
to my hands,
but my mind senses
a change:
I share my dessert,
am a jungle gym in the afternoons
and sleep soundly
with tiny feet
digging into my back

disrupting
my
dreams.

Learning to Swim

Soon after you learnt to swim,
you touched a new space.

With breath held
in your small fists of lungs,
you went under water
in search of the
sharp
white tiles
of the shallow end.

And I was there.

Climbing

I had waited
for the right time
to bring you here.

You played on the lower
rocks
then made your way
higher
and
higher.

You were always safe:
from a ledge
you asked me
to climb up and join you.

It was an easy climb
to get to you,
but when I sat
next to you
and looked down
there was nothing I could say.

Separating

I wish I could write you into an explanation.

Where letters,
then words,
could be chiselled into a page,
like your smile
into my memory
when you swam
away from me –

wingless and free.

Love Poem

You don't need to understand
how light refracts,
to pause at the sudden sight
of an arced band of colours
in a rain-filled sky.

You don't need to know
that the asteroid
colliding with the Earth's atmosphere
is the cause of a silent-
wish under cold Karoo heavens.

The alliteration in the line before,
the zoomorphism to come
are not the essential parts of this poem.

You are a cat
and when you preen yourself in the morning,
I can see no way to understand you.

But I do love you.

I love you.
My rainbow.
My meteor.
My poem.
You hold me
breathless on
new shores.

You Are

Imagine this poem is you.
Would you want it to be simple?

As easily understood as
the words on this page?

Or would you rather look to it
to be unfathomable.

A lone spider on a kitchen wall.
A lost snake writhing on a manicured lawn.

The Bricklayer

Brick upon brick
I am tired of building.

I used to lay words,
but now, they just stare at me.

They're ready to be used,
but I avoid them,

and sit here
with wordless feelings.

The Poet Today

Sewered words
contaminate, clean
while wells,
deeply dug,
run and run and run

The Border

This poem is not for you.
It is for me.
To sit.
Stupefied.
Staring at the border -
the space between pen and paper.
Where everything,
and nothing,
exists.
Simultaneously.

Like us.

Poem on a Bench

This poem sits
alone on the park bench
no tap-dancing,
tightrope walking,
juggling of images
or super-scintillating
sound devices
no rhyme or rhythm
certainly no repetition or
clever wordplay

There will be no performances today.

This poem is a fatigued circus performer,
who wants to sit alone on a bench,
waiting for some unsuspecting
reader to sit quietly with him.

and watch the world
go by
alone
together...

Do not read this poem out aloud

Do not read this poem out aloud.
The world is too full of:
screaming
broadcasting
shouting
to be heard (herd).

Let it rather sit
quietly on this page.
Where
letters
can be mixed with
punctuation
and agitate an itch
in the mind.

Do not let this poem be read
out aloud.
Fight the temptation.
Read it in your mind,
and then read it
to your self
again.

Settle on words
and unfold them (like a crafted origami swan).
Hold them
and marvel at the lines
so clean and

s
t
r
a
i
g
h
t.

How they come
to-ge-ther to form
shape &
purpose.

Do not.
Be tempted.
To read.
This poem.
Out loud.
Read it.

Silently.

Let its parts
dance
refracted and inverted
on the
lenses of your
Eyes (I's).
Let its codings
tickle
the tiny receptors in your brain.
Let it sit with you like the touch
of a lover:
so gentle,
that you still feel the pattern of
their fingers after they are gone.

Read this poem aloud
and it will die
in a well-Intentioned hospital bed.
It will suffer,
nailed to a cross,
with no (know)
hope of resurrection.

(Un)Sticky

i(key)sticky
word
stuck in the head
fix(ed) to the page...
what do you want
from me?

what must i do
with you?
stare
care
bare (my soul)
scratch your little-itch?

you sit their pre-mag-ni-mous in
your voluptuousness...ness

...ness

...ness

...ness

silly and contrite
your meaning(S)
are how you sound and how I say.

You
a relationship!
a marriage!
... i take you to be my lawfully wedded wife
or husband ...

let's celebrate
and hope the honey
moon
lasts for
ever.

Tricks

I am a magician.
I can do any trick you desire.
Metaphor?
I am a lion.
Pun?
I am a line.
I know what you are doing.
I know what you will do (I don't need tarot cards for this).
You will watch:
carefully speculating about
my craft,
my intensions.

When eye do \$
 o
me
 thing
 out
oftheord... inary,

you will immediately search
for meaning: hoping to catch a glimpse of significance.
Hoping to see intention,
once sawed/in/half,
returned
whole (hole)
to herself.

What you never see (what you will never see) –
maybe because I protect the illusion;
maybe because you don't want the illusion
bro;k[en –
is me at the end of the performance,
alone in my caravan,
darning my socks and props.
Unplastering my ancient face.
Alone with my tricks.
Knowing their (there)
pointlessness.
Knowing that the ace is always the fourth card.
That the string was never cut.
That there are two doves.

What can't I show you?
What don't I show you?
That I know.
Eye see
my tricks are as hollow
as the built stage

above the trap door.
My tricks distract you.

Distract you from the important questions.

Can I walk onto stage
and say
no more tricks?
Can I say this:
look here (hear) instead:
Poverty
Distraction
Violence
Devastation
Inequality.

And the truth?
I am the cause.

I offer you tricks:
Because they are neat and easy.
I feel in control of where
the eye (I) of you looks.
You feel important.
Clever.
Searching for meaning
and
i
n
ten
tion.

Well here/hear:

what should we do with this reality (reality)
unhidden by tricks?
Dust them with glitter?
Wave a wand over them?
Cover them in black silk –
my darning hidden from view –
and make them disappear?

Too late for that.

No more tap-dancing.
No more images which

this one truth I know

the seas are dying and my
daughters will never see dolphins
swim freely

too late for that

sit like bloated props
and sap the blood
from the body of my performance.

Check the hope you brought
to this performance at the door
and leave.

Go and do!

I could give you a trick.
I could give you hope.
I could say action will help.
Action will bring rays of hope to the tired tree of the world.
See (sea) –
meaningless.

so abandon it (as Dante commands)

no smoke and mirrors

hope is a pointless trick

look at yourself

and know (no) action will do

Manifesto

I will write a poem today
by beading –
together –
syllables.

Strung with threads of thought,
I will see if the piece
is a mere trinket
or something else...

But I will write a poem today.

END