

EVERY  
INADEQUATE  
NAME

NICK THUAN

EVERY INADEQUATE NAME

POEMS



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*This first one is dedicated to my sister, Robyn*

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... *No need,  
he thought, to see the bell. It was not the bell  
he was trying to find, but the angel lost  
in our bodies. The music that thinking is.  
He wanted to know what he heard, not to get closer.*  
— Jack Gilbert, “Haunted Importantly”



... *Then you remember  
the necessary and sufficient. This isn't it,  
but you don't know where else to begin.*  
— Sue Sinclair, “Roses”



I

THE BLANK-LEAVED BOOK





THAT LOBSTER HAS BEEN THERE FOREVER

I draft choral arrangements for tectonic plates.  
I'd forgot to mention a few important  
points: I was there at the gravesite  
but did not bring my shovel,  
I've never wept in a twentieth-century  
building for anything other  
than my own lost loves and friends.  
Please, don't tell the architects.  
Stones groan like a stomach ache  
when they move. Bones tick  
like a clock hand when  
you tap them with a blade.

I think I'll split a pomegranate  
and display the halves like dentists' x-rays  
to a patient, star-filled night.  
I think I'll diagnose the earth  
with an affliction it has learned to cope with.  
When I say, *I will never forgive you  
for letting it come to this,*  
you won't speak. You'll already know.

## HOW POP SOUNDS

You and a friend are listening to music.  
Pop Music. You know what Pop Music is –  
though you may not like it.  
Forget you. This is about falling in love  
with something dated.  
About leaving, losing touch, then years  
later hearing that same love skewed  
in a new band's blood. About turning  
the volume up, and pressing repeat  
until you're touched again.

This is about wave, new wave, and new  
new wave. How your first time lasted exactly  
two minutes and thirteen seconds –  
the perfect length, you thought.  
Awkwardness, elation, guilt, and confusion  
key to a verse/chorus,  
rising and falling. Anywhere  
and anytime. Over again  
and again and again and again.

*I'm sick of this song, your friend says.*  
*This must be the worst music*  
*ever invented.* When was the last time  
the sugar wore off? The last time  
you looked him straight in the eye  
and told him how you heard this same song  
sung by a boy  
at the edge of a candlelit dock  
over the lake where his best friend drowned?

You don't know shit, you want to say.  
You don't know how Pop sounds.

THE COIN O'RAMA LAUNDROMAT, A DEDICATION

For anyone who's held the door open for someone  
with a particularly heavy load. Anyone

pretending to watch the weather report  
while a stranger's delicates swirl  
around in that first meeting between  
her Friday of lovemaking,  
and her Wednesday, say,  
alone with an *In Style*, munching Corn Bran  
straight from the box,  
and trimming her fingernails.

I am trying to finish a Russian novel,  
but this hum is a pacemaker  
and this is for anyone who has buried  
their hands into clean clothes and felt  
the memory of two mugs  
from last Saturday morning  
still warming the palms of their hands.

Isn't the temperature balmy?  
Don't all of our pockets call like bells?  
Doesn't pouring powdered detergent sound  
like the slanted roof that first day in spring  
when all the old snow fell?

This is for all the proprietors  
who close up late, know laundry is often done  
when there is nothing left to do.

This is for the Coin O'Rama  
after it empties. The last one there –  
the Korean woman with slender fingers  
picking lint and old dryer sheets deep  
from the bowels –

how final the moment must feel

when she closes the lid  
of the trash can  
filled with clouds.

MORNING ROUTINE, WITH SHADOW

Say, *yellows, greys, dark blues*,  
and dress yourself in them.

Say, *my bones are the fortress that will not fall*,  
and scrub-shine those teeth with vigour.

Say, *dry, unkissable lips*,  
and then balm them.

Say, *snow*. Say, *drizzle*. Say, *wind*,  
and condition

according to memory, to the image outside.  
*Voila!*

You are prepared for the weather.  
Say, *there will be subtle, unforeseen shifts*.

*Right shoe*, say. *Left shoe*, say.  
Double knots.

Remember to lock the doors when you leave.  
Whisper, *I am always behind you*.

## LITTLE COWBOYS

Like R, after throwing the metal pipe clear across the surface of the ice pond, bragging he too could slide it. His knees bloodied up in the breakage. Like C in the psych ward, saying, “Look, I’m holed up here, but you know, I’m not crazy” – tongues and their infinite variables. They rolled us. We couldn’t bring ourselves to tell A, the exchange student, that “Does a bear shit in the woods?” is not a common expression. We liked that he trusted his phrase book; the idea of scouring downtown haunts truly foreign, nuzzling the language out. Like me thinking I’ve a move or two down pat, till she says, “No hon’, there hon’, yes hon’, that’s where the song is.” Bears in a balancing act on the slick. Go there crazy, the foreign implores, just finish your sentence, your riff.

NOT PEE WEE

In the green petri dish of Experiment Football  
everything looks either cute or ridiculous; this  
depends on whether or not you're a parent

with some stake in the game; or, like us,  
are just suckers for chaos  
and helmets like snowballs, or skulls

from a species of fat-headed humans  
wanting no more from their children  
than to *kick some ass, bust some heads,*

*get out and do 'em proud.* Here,  
shoulder pads can't find any shoulders.  
Equipment blurs the line

between protection and burden –  
which a few of us up in the bleachers,  
in our own way, understand.

In the green petri dish of Experiment Football  
one little monster realizes he runs  
faster than anyone, and when it happens

he's weightless, ruleless, and the distance he gains  
is infinite yardage. He breaks the seam,  
the tie, our hearts,

breaks those things once,  
that's all it takes to tip us  
from green out to grey streets,

our spirits scrambling  
through these bodies we're given –

pushing the bones aside  
and every inadequate name.