

**A Poetic of Disunity: Selves and Silence**

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**Abstract: A Poetic of Disunity: Selves and Silence**  
by Stephen Lawrence

This thesis comprises a creative work, the manuscript of a book of poems, *A Spiritual Problem is a Chemical Problem*, and an exegesis, *A Poetic of Disunity*, which explores topics that arise from the collection of poems.

**A. Creative component: *A Spiritual Problem is a Chemical Problem***

The creative component of this thesis consists of a manuscript collection of poems. The poetry in part draws upon less commonly employed poetic discourses – political and scientific – amongst more ‘customary’ poetic topics such as sex and death.

The collection proceeds generally from larger-scale, sometimes expansive, voice-based pieces, progressing towards restraint and condensation, moving towards minimal word-use and silence. However, several earlier poems express a density more likely to appear in later poems, and some later pieces adopt character or expository speaking voices.

The ‘problem’ invoked in the collection’s title is addressed in many of the poems. The inherent contradiction of the title’s assertion allows explorations via disunity and multiplicity: as well as individual poems invoking topics such as politics, sex and science, the collection’s structure is at times intermingled and discontinuous.

**B. Exegetical component: *A Poetic of Disunity***

The exegesis explores topics that emerge in the context of the collection’s progression from expansiveness and use of multiple voices, to its creative application of small forms and silence.

Writing about the collection’s author in the third person – the poet ‘Lawrence’ – I eschew self-reflexivity to offer a decentred consideration of traits of my poetic, such as disunity of theme, diversity of voice and avoidance of privative writing. The latter characteristic allows a distancing from fixity and directly autobiographical writing, to more readily reconfigure self and release voice into poetry.

Other key traits discussed are disunity, explorations of self and employment of appropriation. Reverberation between personal and public/political discourses is also a major topic of the exegesis. As well as regarding the collection’s responses to modern political events, it looks at selected contemporary Australian poets who, in recently published collections, merge public and personal: Barry Hill, who depicts a political and spiritual journey towards a version of self-understanding, followed by Jennifer Maiden, J.S. Harry and Robert Adamson. The latter three poets specifically address the private and social affects of global events – particularly, the September 11 attacks and the war in Iraq – which aligns with one of ‘Lawrence’s’ poetic interests.

The latter section explores the collection’s movement towards a miniaturist ethic, dissolution and silence. As well as fragmentation, these smaller pieces, self-scrutinising, seek to elide themselves. Disassembling themselves into tinier fragments, the poems made a show of bringing his writing to an end. They cease to be poems: the collection’s emergent ethic is to wrap itself in silence. The collection traces movement towards “giving,” as the poet says, “the language back to itself”; it is a means by which one may come to terms with the subsuming, and the absence, of self.

## **Declaration**

This work contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to Stephen Lawrence and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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Signed .....

Stephen Lawrence

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