

Part A: Thesis

Hiding No Scars

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 free-verse narrative and prose poetry focusing on rural life and people, as well as my personal relationships. Poetry through its play with language has the ability to say things with immediacy and allows unnoticed things to acquire relevance. It gives me a framework within which to express difficult themes such as family relationships, death, solitude, and poverty. In writing these poems I have drawn on the work of Constantine P. Cavafy, particularly the poems 'Ithaka', 'The City' and 'As Much As You Can' which showcase his consistently simple narrative style that covers profound subjects. I have also been influenced by Paul Celan's poetry in his collection *Breathturn Into Timestead* where poems such as 'Corona', 'In praise of remoteness' and 'Twelve Years' demonstrate how poetry can have pace through tightly controlled yet experimental structure. I have also drawn on Anna Akhmatova's symbolic poetry, specifically the poems 'Now the pillow's', 'He loved three things, alive' and 'Prologue' from the selection *Anna Akhmatova: Selected Poems* which has its intention the re-creation of the past in the present.

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I

Invitation

Come take a bite of my bitter loneliness.
Sharpen your teeth, and exercise your jaw.
The thing is well cooked.
Low on sugar, no sweeteners,
no additives, just 100% loneliness.

To give strength
I will sprinkle it with sad memories.

There won't be wine, or beer,
or whisky, or rum.

The table is set, with a new tablecloth
and utensils wrapped with
the finest napkins,
and the chair has been pulled out.
Come, take a seat.

God come to me tonight

God come to me tonight
to see whether I am ready to dream,

if not
keep me awake.

Inside me

I pushed the door, entered my head – a crowded place.

Standing, no chairs, my knees weak.

I fell into my lonely heart.

I searched it with a candle that burns on both sides. The candle burned the carpet.

There is a blazing fire, nothing (and no one) can put out.

I have tried with my cold thoughts.

I didn't know

I used to think the sky and the ocean
were blue, not black. I didn't know
the sun was all colours mixed together.
The moon grey or off-white,
rain clouds dark-grey, or black,
stars silver.

I didn't know
it was just reflections,
sunlight scattered in all directions
by gases and particles.

I used to think saying a lot got you heard,
opening your eyes made you see,
and that only through ears can you hear.
I used to think good was always rewarded with good,
respect with respect,
love with love.

I used to think human beings didn't bark and bite,
I didn't know until my whole body was marked by their sharp teeth.

History of my birth

It happened in October 1995.
Behind in rent,
by a month or three;
my father, the beast, kept demanding –
that mother pays her rent.
Drunk, in October,
his imprecise compliments were
for the first time,
greeted with a smile.
He demanded to be let in;
for the first time, she let him in.
When inside, he, again, demanded to be let in.
She again let him in.

He slept there.
A few weeks pass,
she tells him she's pregnant.
He doesn't want to believe it.
This would be his tenth.
But he cannot kick her out.
She knows her situation.
She's 25, this would be her fourth,
she doesn't have work.
I was born.

Shortly after,
she falls pregnant again.
My father is not the father,
someone else is.
He kicks all of us out.

I opened my eyes for the first time – I am five;
I had five siblings,
all of us living with our mother
in a one-room house at Imbali unit 13.
That's the exact day I met the father who was not ours.
He was on top of her,
in front of all six of us,
knowing we were only pretending to be sleeping.

Most of this story was filled in by my uncle
who was always with my father in the nineties –
until my father one day pointed a gun at him,
and never bothered to apologise.
My uncle told me – there is not a single woman
your father did not sleep with
in those cottages
when he was still in charge of them.
Not even one.

I once asked my father why he did not marry my mother.
He laughed and said they were young –
I gave him a long time to add on to his statement,
he never did.

Exactly Like Them

I would see my mother
smoking something through her nose.
I would think
Never will you see me doing that.
I would see my grandmother and uncle
drinking together.
I would think
*Never will you see me doing that,
especially with the little money they have.*

Upon their death,
I went to live with my father.
A heavy smoker and drinker.
I would listen to him coughing
in the toilet and in his room
every single day and think
Never will you see me doing that.

I would watch him closely
when he was drunk.
He would struggle to walk, talk,
even open his zip.
I would watch him start unnecessary fights,
being laughed at,
wasting money he didn't have.
I would watch him forget his name,
my name, our surname, every name.
I would watch him fall in love with women
who I know he wouldn't have fallen for sober.
Sometimes I would watch him beating them up,
throwing their belongings outside our yard.
Never will you see me doing that
I would say to myself.

As my father and I grew older,
our personalities changed places.
By this time I had done all the things
I said I'd *Never do*.
But still, I would look at my father
and say
Never will you see me doing that.

He changed.
Stopped drinking completely.
Got rid of all his friends.
Took no female (on earth) seriously.
Started hating everyone and keeping them at a distance.
He never took a big risk again, or any risk at all.
Never got involved in other people's problems,

no matter how minor they were or how much time he had.
His greetings and other human contacts were all pretentious.
I sat again and thought,
Never will you see me doing that.

Now I sit here thinking,
that so many of those *Nevers* I've already done,
and see no reason not to do the rest.
They say *Never say never*—
I say *Never say anything.*

God Silence

I don't want visitors,
they will see me struggle with my God silence.
They will see me wrestle with Him,
sometimes down, sometimes up.
Sometimes running away,
from myself and Him. Sometimes hiding
at the corner of my imagination,
my face against the wall.

I don't want friends,
they make me forget my God silence.
They open my mouth,
I become a gaping crocodile in the sun –
then I sit on the devil's lap and lick his ear.
The bastards laugh hard at my light jokes
and nod and add comments.
I swim in oceans of false compliments.

I don't want a lover,
she will want me
to love her more than my God silence.
I will break into tiny pieces
trying to please both of them

I don't want anyone in my family,
they always want to show me their better god,
or, better (or worse), remind me of what he can do.
My God lives in the vague state,
and that's where I want to and should always be.

They hate my God,
they say He doesn't answer,
'He is silent'.
True, He *is* silence,
He doesn't answer.

Broken Sounds

My whole life is a rainy Monday,
when it is a Friday,
it is one without pay.

My whole life is a January
full of last year's debts.
Never December,
and when it is
it is a December spent in solitude.

My whole life is a poem with unfinished lines
written by a person who doesn't understand poetry –
broken English stitched together
with first words that come to mind.

Something is not right

My left eye is seeing
something different from what my right eye is seeing.
My right ear hears something
while my left hears something else.

My heart is deep somewhere
and my mind is all over the place in the sky.
My soul has taken a step outside my body
tired of the contradictions and lies that make up Me.

I am always running,
destination unknown –
my left foot is not going
in the same direction as my right foot.

My dirty room

To the ants that feed on my mistakes when I eat,
the fast spiders that I always miss when I try to kill,
the lizards that hide behind my father's photographs,
and my always-incorrect wall clock.

To the attention-seeking bugs
who share my mattress and pillow,
the flies in the kitchen,
the mosquitoes the size of a bird,
the thousand cockroaches
that wait for the lights to be turned off
then roam the whole house
like prostitutes roaming the streets at night.

To the hundred rats,
that play with my mind,
and leave me seeing things,
like the fat snake under the sink and its snakelets.

Though you make my life miserable,
and my nerves, sometimes, stretch and burst –
I hold no grudges.
I see you,
I know you see me too.
But I am not angry,
we are all in this together.
This poem is for you.

||

I have these dreams

I have these dreams
where my father is back.
Moving around the house,
reconstructing things I have dismantled,
sorting out what I have forgotten to sort out.
He gives an ear
to everything I have to say.
I tell him about a girl I love
who'll never love me back,
a close friend I now doubt;
one by one as I tell him my problems vanish –
my muscles and joints, guts, chest
brain and heart calm down.

When it's time to wake, however,
burdens and strifes stare me down
from all sides of my bed;
debts, hunger, threats,
and diseases –
reminding me I am an orphan,
and there's bending and sweating
to be done, before I can get
another chance to sleep and dream.

Cost of living

Petrol price up

food price up

bus fare up

cigarette price up –

I can't afford liquor.

Clothes prices up

electricity up

water bill up

debt interest up

rent up –

I can't afford a house.

I can't afford a car.

I can't even afford a lover –

what will I do with

her hunger and thirst?

God spilt tea on me

When I wake from a deep sleep
and yesterday's storm is gone
and manna surrounds my bed,
who do I thank?

When my only bucket falls,
when the woods I have gathered
refuse to light,
when the tea, done and ready for a sip,
spills on my naked thighs
who do I thank?

Dream set in heaven

I am with my two friends.
During a quiet sermon
one of their hands plays with Christ's
cell phone and platinum watch.
When He starts looking for His things,
everyone suggests I should be searched.
God's two bodybuilder angels,
Gabriel and Raphael,
without hesitation,
search me.
The stolen items are found,
with other shiny items I didn't know were there –
watchstraps, necklaces, bracelets,
more watches,
and a thin colourless diamond engagement ring.
Everyone is angry.
An assault begins,
one even Christ in His prime
wouldn't have stood.
I try to run,
they catch me.
They hit and punch and kick me again.
I wake up coughing
and turn on the lights,
I am only coughing saliva,
I thought I would see blood.

Run from me

Handcuff all the angels,
torture them however you want.
Send them to get back all the blessings
they have unfairly distributed.
Dethrone God.
Throw Him in jail.
Starve Him.
Don't allow Him any visitors.
Hang His son Christ.
Not His portraits, rosaries or sculptures.
But Him.
Hang Him again,
and put all the nails
not in His hands, but in His neck.
Hang Him from the ceiling of the highest darkest cloud.
Baptise Him with boiling chemicals.
Pour petrol and paraffin on the floor of heaven.
Set it alight –
let there be no difference between hell and heaven.
No time shall be wasted reading any scriptures,
nor kneeling or closing one's eyes.
Fighting and running are all there shall be time for.
It will be a sad sight for saints,
as everything they once owned and had
will be handed to us, the sinners.

In heaven

I eat from God's plate and drink from God's glass –
I use God's shower,
wipe my face with His towel,
and brush my teeth with His toothbrush.
I wear God's clothes,
sleep in God's bed,
share His pillow,
and dream God's dream:
all people loving and living with another,
all people in agreement.
During the day I put myself in God's shoes,
and try to mind God's issues,
though my worldly heart won't allow me.

My bed

It used to belong to my father, now it belongs to me.
It used to be soft, now it's not.

It knows my most sober dreams,
and my most drunk dreams.
And all the other dreams in between –
the dreams I dream to occupy
my restless mind with something.

It knows my heart's deepest sorrows.
My insane moments of temporary bliss.
My addictions and habits.
I've written a thousand poems and stories
while smoking on its lap.
It's aware of everything inside my head and heart.
It knows all my embarrassing secrets and shameful miscalculations.

I feel sorry for it sometimes.
It knows what pain is.
It knows what depression is.
My father watered it with his tears
for many years when his body was filled
with sickness and pain.
When he was wasting away to nothing,
when you could see all his bones,
when he was about to go to the world of the dead.

This bed doesn't only know bugs, it knows all kinds of other animals too.
Animals more dangerous.
Animals you won't believe exist.

It has been burnt a thousand times with cigarettes.
It has been peed, vomited, and spat on.
(I don't know about shit, but I am sure it knows how it smells –
maybe it has seen it too, I don't know.)

When I think about it, surely it complains saying:
'Teamhw is always on top of me,
this is no longer love,
it's punishment and abuse.'

If it could push me to the floor,
it would have done so long ago.
And if it wasn't the biggest thing in the room
it would hide and make sure I don't find it.

Smoker's Dilemma

The whole room smells.
Every piece of furniture,
every piece of clothing.
There is always a cloud inside my room –
but it never rains.

Blue packs,
a lighter there,
a matchbox here,
small zip-lock bags,
'Rolling with the times' sheets.

Even when penniless
the ashtray is always full.

If I can't afford gummed paper
the Yellow Pages will do
until just the cover is left.
And if I run out of the lion's sticks I turn my stove to six,
wait until it is red.

I'm caught in a self-imposed prison.
Invisible chains on my hands, feet, and neck,
lungs, bladder, kidney, stomach and throat.
No one is bothered
whether I escape them or not –
not even me.

Soon I will be handed X-ray scans,
a cancer diagnosed,
and told the number of years left to me.

It was poetry
for Robert Berold.

When I started school I could write my name. Surname. The place I come from, eMgungundlovu. And I could draw a cat. In Grade one teachers gave me poems to read and recite in front of visiting teachers. Though I couldn't read the English written inside. I couldn't play with anything else except books. In grade three my sister and I used my father's room with a desk as our office. Grade six I read *A Rock and a Hard Place: One Boy's Triumphant Story*. The book about a small boy who got AIDS from his parent's drinking friends. I wasn't the same after. One of my step sisters forgot her diary before she left for work. I didn't go to school that day. Her eyes were closed. Everyone's eyes were closed. Only I saw poetry. The end of that same year. I walked from UMgungundlovu CBD to eMkhondeni. Shuter and Shooter publishers. Fifteen kilometres to and fro. With me hundreds of handwritten pages. Topics like. AIDS. Being rejected. And triumphing over it. Someone took the papers out of my hands and read for few seconds. Turned some pages and read for a few more seconds. He gave me my papers back. Put his hand on my shoulder. Smiled. 'You think too much...', 'Go play with other kids son and enjoy yourself...', 'You are still young!', 'Don't stop writing though!' Grade seven. Mrs Peters. Senior librarian at Bessie Head Library in Pietermaritzburg. Miraculously. Selects books that got me captivated by reading forever. I didn't do anything else after. I couldn't wait to see her at the end of every week. Grade nine. The shy Mrs Nsele tells me I shouldn't do anything except writing. I read my pieces to my friends every single morning. They could not be bothered. Grade ten. Mrs Peters looks at my library card through her eye glasses which were always at the tip of her nose and says Bessie too was born in UMgungundlovu. On my birthday. I searched deeper. Her mother passed away when she was six. My mother passed away when I was six. Grade eleven. I read Antonije Isaković's short story 'April Fool's Day'. Life was never the same. I was certain of what I wanted to do. it was poetry. Two years later my father looks at me and asks me what I plan for my future. My mouth slowly said Law. He smiled. Opened his wallet and gave me bus fare to go ask what was needed. He was sick. I couldn't say anything else. so I put my head down. For four years. Writing only a handful of poems. When it was time to find a job. I locked myself in my room and chose to read and write as I want. And starved. No one could talk to me. My father who could have told me something was dead. For years things remained like this. I had the luck of meeting a brilliant writer. Forced a correspondence. It didn't work. I lost my mind. Found it again. Lost it again. And one night. Miraculously. I met an old man. Who told me things will be fine.



eShebeen

The big mute bouncer at the door. The boys who play pool the whole day and dance to every guitar the jukebox is forced to play. The older man drinking cheap beer by himself in the corner. The always drunk uncle who never needs anyone to dance with. The other uncle who no longer hides the conversations in his head. The new guy who's drunk but tries to look like he's in control. The other drunk guy who touches everyone's girlfriend. The guy who doesn't drink but is always there, the loud energetic guy who talks and laughs across the room. The shy awkward guy who feels guilty for being there. The man in suits at the counter, and the one dead drunk on the toilet's floor. The confused intellectual who doesn't stop talking, and the ones next to him who are laughing, hiding their confusion. The uneducated ones. The young child whose short hands can't reach the counter, but who will be served because they know his mother. The church goer who comes every Saturday afternoon, to buy church wine. The bar lady who keeps them all buying. The cleaner who knows everything. The dirty guy collecting crates and bottles at the back who was once the biggest spender in this same bar... The owner. They are all me.

Leaders

They dress in clothes you will never see in the stores you go to.

Sleep in hotels you don't know exist.

Eat food you cannot imagine:

coffin bay king oysters, and lobsters, red sicilian prawns
served with Italian cheese, and roasted peking ducks.

When meat is stuck between their teeth,
dentists get involved.

Their wine is so expensive

you can buy a vehicle with a single bottle.

They are the ones who own farms you see on the freeway,
hectare after hectare –

where crops are always green

and sprinkle pipes are rain that never stops.

They also own everything in the cities –

the big flats, the megacorporates, and the grand hotels.

They have interests down the mines as well –

silver, gold, platinum, oil and iron.

And deep down in the sea –

pipelines, yatches and cruise and other Special Purpose ships.

And high up in the sky –

planes, networks and satellites.

They know where the next road, school, clinic, and mall

will be built, and for how much,

and by who.

Newspapers are full of their scandals,

but people love them –

they think the leaders will one day make them rich.

They wave hands at unnecessary meetings,

conferences and rallies,

sometimes even at court cases.

The monies they deal with have so many zeroes they need a special calculator.

They buy motor vehicle after motor vehicle,

have houses on top of houses,

within infinite views to the horizon.

Swimming pools only a few metres smaller than the ocean.

Their children know nothing about the taste of our ordinary lives.

Election Manifesto

I will come visit your little shack,
wash your stinky feet,
hold your dirty nose-running shit-smelling children,
buy you a 2.5kg maize meal, a 2.5kg brown rice,
and brown sugar, and salt,
and teabags, and four, or five 115g fish, or bean tins,
and pads and toothpaste,
groceries of no importance.

I will give you t-shirts to wear when you go to town,
my fat well-fed face on the front and at the back.

I will push your disabled son's wheelchair,
and pretend never to tire.

I will tell my bodyguards
not to push, beat, or shoot you.

I will ask you what you need,
houses, roads, schools, clinics,
electricity, water, land.

Let you think you'll get it.

I have to go now,

I don't have whole day.

I have a mansion to get back to.

Parties and dates to attend.

And at Waterkloof military base
a new rich couple is landing.

I have exotic cars to drive,
a new convertible Porsche cabriolet

whose height ends at my hip,

the latest Land Rover,

bigger than every shack I have seen here.

I have to go now,

I don't have all day.

Russia is having a two for one special on facelifts –

I and my mistress and my wife and I have a plane to catch.

We will take our children, and their friends, and their friends'
friends, and their siblings, and their cousins, and their instant cousins.

I have to go now,

I have things to do!

No-one has noticed

The place is Pietermaritzburg, Edendale Hospital,
the waiting room.

There are a lot of benches here,
they know we don't mind waiting.

The benches are full.
Some people brought people,

others brought themselves.
Security guards are standing everywhere,

waiting for people to ask directions.
Cleaners are cleaning the floor.

Correctional officers brought prisoners.
The passages are crowded but everyone is busy.

There is no time for the dying.
A dying patient turns his head,

he sees another dying patient.
One man is coughing behind him.

On his left, another patient is waiting for the other to finish
with the oxygen so it can be his turn.

The one in the corner is dead. No-one
has noticed.

West Street, Pietermaritzburg (called Zim Street)

Again, the sounds start,
'Phumani! Phumani!'
shouts and cries follow,
they are kicking the door
pointing at everyone with rifles –
with real bullets.

Yesterday they took everything she sells,
the sweets, the chips, and biscuits,
and the money she had saved in a tin under her bed.

At her door
they kicked and kicked
until the door was on the floor.
Inside there was
just her
and five small starving pairs of eyes
eating from a plate
the size of the youngest's hand.

They do what they came to do
to kick down doors and send plates flying.
She and the children obey
the kicking
in silence –
not a single word or scream.

When they have left,
she starts again,
fixes the door,
searches for food,
goes back to her trade,
starts to save again,

as if they will never come back here.

Zibonele Skhakhane

He slap with a pepper-spray next to his sponge.
A hatchet, a taser, and a big dagger under his pillow.
His sleeping shoes were strong leather
construction safety shoes.
Laces tightly fastened
not even a smell could get out.
He slept with a helmet on.
Locked his room with two locks.

During the day,
he had two pistols in his waist
(a third one in his side bag),
and a Rambo pocketknife.

After a short conversation with him
he had to search you –
he would ask you to put your hands up and separate your legs.
He always stayed sober,
and always looked over his shoulder.

The man was tired of everything.
And who could blame him?
His side of the story was never known.

Petros Mwelase

Big hands, dirty from clean work,
or clean waiting to lift someone up
whom life has brought down.
Others come first –
even if sleep made them late.

A never complaining heart.
No anger for him,
no revenge.
Unshaken by compliments,
criticism means nothing either,

Always calm, ready for a laugh.
Always ready to give an ear.
Always Petros Mwelase.
Always.

Mabhece my mother's mother

her pale skin could no longer take in whole day's sunshine
nor half a minute of cold rain

her eyes could no longer see, her ears
could no longer hear the fast music

her body used to move to, her throat
and liver could no longer tolerate

the spirits they were so familiar with
she now drank with her eyes

and her imagination
her feet, knees, waist stiff

the dances she loved and excelled in
could not any longer be performed

everything now could only be done with inner eyes
she sat and stared

IV

Heading nowhere

I have spent three full days sleeping
in this rock-hard bug-filled bed of mine.
No bathing.
No eating.
No reading.
No opening of windows.
I am now outside my body,
and everything about myself is strange.
My heart beats like
mysterious drums of death from far away.
I was scared stiff when I first heard it.
The more I focused,
the closer the sound came,
until they were inside my head.
My breathing makes a machine sound my ears never heard.
My empty stomach is a load too heavy to carry –
it holds me down.
I can't move. My legs are weightless.
What do legs do, can someone remind me? I no longer know.

My mind is where the light bulb should be,
looking down on me, I feel like I am nothing.
Can the mind mind its own business? Is it possible?

My world is not in this world,
it has nothing to do with me,
everything lacks personal meaning.
Numbness hurts more than pain,
silence pierces worse than the worst curses.
Am I not afraid of death? My sister always asks.
Again, the answer is *No*.
You cannot be when it visits you every day.

I never get the picture

Playing with tiny puzzle pieces
enough to fill a black bin bag.
Encouraging myself
'I am getting somewhere'
or 'Persevere, it will take time...'

They say rotate the sky to maintain freshness
and keenness, but not me.
I never get into the rhythm,
I never get into a flow.

I place, and fit, and put together,
follow a pattern,
that never lead anywhere.
Whether I start at the centre,
or corner,
the results are always the same,
I end up where I am,
puzzled. I try

to ignore what I am not looking for,
forcing my eye on patterns and colours.
I find my hand full of other pieces that
don't fit together.
I mix, shuffle, and jumble.

When I settle
on themes, major and minor,
those easily identifiable with unique lines and exact gradients,
group colours together,
arrange them around the edge of the table,
every piece laid out near where I think it should go –
when it's time to put together
they never fit, all connections vanish.
Pieces I thought had gotten out of the way
re-emerge, unsolved, and harder than ever.

Instead of experience, and time making it easier,
it gets harder and harder.

The pieces remain jumbled in the black bin bag.
I never know what the whole picture is,
we never get the full visual,
what it should look like,
I never get the full picture.

Poetry

Literature a political movement.
Poetry a soldier
sent to terrorize
and shake the people.
To bring awareness to real truths.

But Poetry fell in love
with the women of the people,
indulging in drinks and dices.

Today Poetry sits in brothels –
drinks and sleeps,
bottles and loaded guns next to his head,
Poetry is not afraid of a bullet,
or a bottle in the head.
Poetry is not concerned.
Poetry has fallen asleep.

Second and third thoughts

I don't know the time,
the watch I am wearing doesn't work.

Pretending to read a book
written in a language I can't speak.

Wearing reading-glasses
that have no prescription.

I am, however, smoking a real cigarette,
and drinking a real beer.

*

I am fine without a mother and a father.
Without friends or a partner.
Without decent food or decent clothes.

I tell you these things,
not for you to pity me –
no one needs to think of me.

I was thought of long enough by God
on the unconscious side of His mind –
He loves me more than He should.

Three thoughts

- I. You took all the blankets to your side of the bed and forgot in this cold night my side also exists. It was as if I was sleeping outside in the grass. This is not the first time I am being bullied in my own bed because of my generosity. First it was my stepbrother. He used to take the whole pillow to himself as if 'I' didn't have a neck.

- II. I talk when I am asleep
There are a lot of fights I fight every night I know nothing about.
I ask questions and give answers
I clap hands
I scream.

How loud, and for how long, I will never know.

- III. My heart beat shakes the whole bed when I think of my dreams, the ones at night and the ones during broad daylight. All over a sudden I am a coward, I want to escape and go straight to the warm hands of my dreams, the ones at night.

To the woman who thought she loved me

You called my writings a waste of time.
Told me nothing goes or comes
in my life.
That my life's purpose is
to stare at old papers
written by old bitter dead men.

You said you don't understand
why I'm wasn't like other men.
Why I don't chase prominence or money,
or your friends.

You said if my pens and papers were alcohol
we were going to lose our livers and faces.
And if they were real work
you would still be here.

You told me – “Go and find a real job
and work like other men!” –
But never saw,
that you were disturbing me
while I was really working.

The pages

I rush home to tell the pages
my love has been rejected again,
but it says nothing.
I get no pat on the back,
no encouragement.
No counsel.
It just stares straight into my eyes,
but says nothing.
I try to speak louder,
but it doesn't help.

What am I to be if even the pages reject me?

A closer look

I am summer
a church
a light laugh
a religious chant
life-changing luck
a throne

*misinterpreted as autumn
confused as a shebeen or a whorehouse
misheard as a cry of despair
misunderstood as a war-cry
mistaken as pain
sat on like a toilet seat*

Being ordinary is the fashion

Being ordinary
Nothing big about yourself to talk about
Nothing big to show
Seeking neither perfection
nor praise
Just being satisfied with being you.
Not explaining
Not correcting
any wrong said against you
or any twisted statements.
Hiding no scar or imperfections,
free from what others think
of you.
Not rushing,
just moving forward
with whatever feels right.
Being ordinary,
Now that's an interesting fashion
A trend no one should miss.

Part A: Portfolio

Hiding No Scars

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Creative Writing

of

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by

Sanele Mhlongo

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Introduction

I wanted to do the MACW to expand my knowledge on the art of writing. I wanted to meet other writers and see what they considered to be of value and what they thought was not. I wanted to be introduced to writers I did not know, and to learn different writing styles and techniques. I wanted to learn new ways of interpreting pieces of writing, and also to be introduced to other genres. I also wanted to get feedback on my writing and improve my self-editing skills, and I also wanted to learn more about writing minimally for purpose of making my writing more powerful. I also wanted to be in the same space with fellow writers and to be inspired by the passion they have for the art of writing.

In this portfolio I have structured the research weekly. Included in it are works done in seminars, reading groups, Thursday poetry groups, feedback groups, books read and other works done in the course.

Week 6

This week I read the book *Shorts: An International Anthology of Five Centuries of Short Short-Stories, Prose, Poems, Brief Essays and Other Short Prose Forms* compiled by Alan Ziegler. Through this anthology I was introduced to writers I didn't know. The book is well-structured; it starts with old writers from the sixteenth century and takes readers on a journey until they meet modern twenty-first century writers. I was inspired to write a poem from what I read in this anthology and that poem is on page 26 of the Thesis titled 'It was poetry'.

In the reading group I read the poem 'eMadikazi' by Mpumie Cilibe. In this poem I liked how Cilibe was straightforward in her storyline and how her words were simple. I was also deeply touched by the message the poem carried, which concerned drugs and the negative influence they have on our societies; and how, today more than ever, we need principled leaders. As a result of this reading I created the poem 'Smoker's Dilemma' on page 25 of the Thesis.

Week 7

This week's seminar dealt with 'politics and poetics of punctuation'. Excerpts with unconventional use of punctuation were read. From the analysis of those excerpts I learnt how punctuation, or the lack thereof, can be used as a writing technique.

I learnt how punctuation can control the pace of a piece of writing, and how it can help the story move forward. From the excerpts I saw how it can build tension, how it can release it, and how it can give meaning to sentences that would otherwise not have any. When done properly, I saw that it can louden, silence, slow down, speed up, and even stop a thought, a sentence or an image, etc.

The excerpts read were from *Zone* by Mathais Enard, from *Tram 83* by Fiston Mwanza Mujila, from *Intervenir/Intervene* by Dolores Dorantes, 'Radio and Mirror' from *The narrow road to the interior* by Kimiko Hahn, from *Beauty is Convulsive: The passion of Frida Kahlo* by Carol Maso, from *Broken Glass* by Alain Mabanckou, and an extract from *Rigadoon* by Louis-Ferdinand Celine.

The poems read were 'Poeticsoftheexclamationpoint' by Eleni Sikelianos, 'Aliss at the fire' by Jon Fosse, 'Ars Poetica' by Carmen Gimenez Smith, and 'Ode to the Corpse Flower' by Benjamin Garcia.

For the assignment, which required us to choose excerpts that inspire us and create out of that inspiration, I chose the excerpt from *Beauty is Convulsive: The passion of Frida Kahlo* by Carol Maso and the excerpt from *Intervenir/Intervene* by Dolores Dorantes. What drew me to these stories was their layout on the page (their unique structure), and most importantly what the selected parts had to say, and their vivid interesting images.

When doing the assignment I saw that proper use of unconventional punctuating can make complex sentences easy to digest and hard subjects easy to grasp. And that it can also arouse deep tangible feelings. I was able to apply some of the techniques used by the writers into my own work and I enjoyed seeing the new meaning that came out. As a result of this reading I created a poem called 'Cost of living' found on page 19 of the Thesis.

The book I read this week was *Murder* by Danielle Collobert. It dealt with something I learnt in Monday's class on the 'politics and poetics of punctuation' seminar. In this book Collobert also breaks all punctuation rules. In the whole book there are only two question marks. She ends questions with full stops, writes long paragraphs without the use of commas or full stops, and sometimes, unexpectedly, uses very short sentences that come in quick succession. This affected the pace of the story and added a strong poetic feel to the book.

As a writer she is very observant, and has a deep understanding of psychological problems. She also has a vast vocabulary. The whole book was also filled with cliff-hangers. All the time I had to stop and look at the page as a whole and ask myself 'What is she doing now?',

'What is she up to?' and the surprising thing was that she was always onto something. Her work is the kind that one can always get more out of, always, if one has time to pause and look.

From the book I also saw deliberate poetry throughout, sentences ending with similar sounding words (homophones). The images were clear and beautiful. Examples of poetic lines that caught my attention were: '... the one who receives the morning sun, through the gates.', 'what must one hold on to when one no longer recognizes one's own hand', 'we will kill him in a thousand ways. I am well versed in murder', and the image she made about the ocean- calling it 'an internal sea in [her] head'. The waves rise and roll, break against her cliffs, she says. It could drown or break her, but on the contrary, its existence makes her live, though with difficulty, because it is a weight on her.

Week 8

This week I read various short stories including Joel Matlou's 'Man Against Himself' which talked about the experience of miners in the mining scene. I liked the simplicity of the language and felt it matched well with what the story was about. This simplicity also made me as the reader trust the voice.

I also read Sheila Heita's 'The Girl Who Was Blind All the Time' and Derek White's 'Capturing the Shadow Puppets'. In Heita's story everything unfolds quickly and this worked and made me 'feel' the loss of control by the blind girl over her situations. This story raises awareness about blindness and gives the reader few real minutes in a life of a blind girl. When reading the story closely, I wasn't sure whether it was about real blindness or there was something else more to it, and I think such an open-ended way of writing works and makes the story more powerful, and haunting. Derek White's 'Capturing the Shadow Puppets' had a very beautiful, yet unusual, story line- catching the invisible Gods. I also liked the setting of this story, the village/rural place kind of setting. In this story too, when one reads closely, one becomes unsure whether the story is really about Gods or there's something more, which the writer did deliberately, and which I believe worked too in this story as it added more mystery. By these two stories I was inspired to create the poem 'Zibonele Skhakhane' which is a surreal portrait found on page 33 of the Thesis.

Other stories I read this week were Kate Bernheimer's story 'A Riddling Tale' and Jereme Dean's 'In Retrospect, The Days Were Fresh and Easy'. Bernheimer's story had very beautiful clear images, especially images of different plants. The story was relatable and had a theme that is of interest to me- parents having relationship problems with their children. Jereme Dean's 'In Retrospect, The Days Were Fresh and Easy' was also great. The writer was very personal and left nothing unsaid. The linear way the story was structured made it easier to digest and did not take away the personal feel. Applying techniques from these two stories I created the poem 'Exactly Like Me' found on page 11 of the Thesis.

Week 9

This week I read Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* and J.M. Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country*.

Bessie Head has an amazing ability of pushing a story forward using very simple words. Her refusal to be sophisticated works really well for her writing and gets her message easily through. She also has a skilful way of handling dialogue, and getting back to the narrative after a dialogue.

The narrative voice in Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country* was sophisticated in an interesting easy-to-understand way. Reading the book for the second time I noticed something he does that sets him a little bit apart from other writers- he explains a little further. Even on sentences that seem simple. He uses that as an opportunity to be creative. He doesn't say things in a straight way. Instead of 'day after day' he prefers 'sundown after sundown'; instead of 'minds' he uses 'fields of visions' and adds lines like '... when all the lights are out I smile in the dark. My teeth glint, though no one would believe it.' Which I found to be very artful, and which I appreciated as a reader.

Like Bessie Head, he too writes very relatable dialogues. They flow neatly and unhindered. The way their African characters talk is exactly how people I grew up with talk, and every time I read their dialogue I am reminded of someone I know.

I was drawn to these two books and these two authors because I too like to write about rural people and their villages. These two authors in these books showed that they know how people in the villages and farms think and behave. They ensured to give us both the good traits and the not-so-good traits of such people. They also showed a deep and mature understanding of poverty, which is the cause of most rural people's problems. As a result of these readings I was inspired to create the portraits 'Mabhece My Mother's Mother' and 'Petros Mwelase' and 'eShebeen' found on pages 35, 34 and 28 on the Thesis respectively.

Week 10

This week I read a paper by Denis Hirson titled 'The Contract Between the Reader and the Writer'. It explained the importance of playing our end as writers in the invisible contract between ourselves the writers and our readers. It explained that readers have certain expectations when they pick up a book, and the writer, though allowed to play around with such expectations, the paper warns, he should not drift too much from these expectations. It goes on to say there shouldn't be a distance between one's self as a writer and one's self as the first reader of the work they write. It says the first contract must be set up between one and one's self. It also speaks about the need for elements of surprise in a story/poem and the need to tickle the reader's curiosity. It explains the benefits of this but at the end also warns against sudden swaying of attention on the part of the reader, and the tension and frustration that might occur if one thing is promised to the reader but another given. In applying the element of surprise lessons learnt from this paper I created the poem 'History of my birth' on page 9 of the Thesis.

This week I also read Georg Trakl's *Selected Poems* introduced by Robert Bly and James Wright. Trakl's poems were well crafted and witty, and the voice was mature and calm and the images clear. The poems were written in a traditional style and had a traditional structure which worked perfectly with the serious themes of Trakl's poems. It added depth and brought order.

Other poems I read this week were Kafka's 'Dearest Father'. I liked the subject matter and resonated with it greatly- the father and son relationship. It had a respectful and sincere yet straightforward voice. As a result I wrote the poems 'I have these dreams' found on page 18 of the Thesis and revisited the poem 'Exactly Like Me' and 'History of my birth' with a more sincere and understanding eye. The poems revisited are on pages 11 and 9 of the Thesis respectively.

Week 11

This week I did an investigation on Blas de Otero's style and read *Some Elements of Structure In The Poetry of Blas de Otero* by Harris Mary Arthurlene and his poetry found in *Miguel Hernandez and Blas de Otero (A Bilingual Edition)* edited by Timothy Baland and Hardie St'Martin.

Otero's style uses simple words and relies heavily on imagery as its key poetic tool. He writes personal, meditative, social and religious poetry. Though he denies it, his influence were stated, by different people with undeniable proof, as San Juan de la Cruz, Fray Luis de Leon, Antonio Machado and Unamuno. Which I found very interesting.

Upon reading all the poems I summarized Otero's style as focusing on: playing on the double meaning of words, very short lines, mystic and dream-like atmosphere, and a confused search for answers.

Often in the poems the pace is slow, and there is serenity and tranquillity. The voice is often mature and the feelings written about were always full of depth.

In this investigation I also learnt more about introductory epigraphs which were very prevalent in Otero's work. Arthurlene explains in the introduction that 'the principal purpose in using the epigraph is mostly to orient the reader to the theme(s) of the poem and to give the poem some additional force while lending authority to the writing.' That 'it summarizes the theme of the poem and gives the reader a point of departure for understanding the content of the poem.' Though in my current work I do not make use of epigraphs, I will surely use the assistance and boost they give a poem in the future.

As a result of this investigation on Otero's style I created the poems 'Heading nowhere', 'Second and third thoughts' and 'Three thoughts' found on pages 37, 40 and 41 of the Thesis respectively.

Week 14

This week I read essays and articles, extracts, interviews on poetics. They included 'Written in Stone: How subject dictates narrative form' by Tiff Holland; 'Axial Drawing' by George Quasha; 'Slowness' by Amina; 'Language Is Site of Our Collective Infection' by Lara Glenum; 'The Crazy Party Guy, or, A Disruption of Smooth Surfaces' by Brian Evenson; 'Desperate and Beautiful Noise' by Tun Seibles; 'The Beautiful Voyage' by Barbara Guest; 'Someone is Writing a Poem' by Adrienne Rich; 'Projective Verse + The Practice' by Williams William Carlos; 'Creationism' by Vicente Huidobro; 'The Killer' by Kathy Acker; 'A Voice Within A Voice'; 'Poetry and Knowledge' by Aime Cesaire; and 'Theory and Function of the Duende' by Federico Garcia Lorca.

From these writings I got to see what is it that makes writing possible and got to see other writers' process of writing more closely. It made me think deeply about my own process of writing and what exactly makes writing possible for *me*, and what I can do to improve. It was amazing seeing how other writers saw writing and hearing them talk about what they think propels it forward or hinders it.

The essays that caught my attention most were 'Slowness' by Amina, which dealt with *her* writing process. From this essay I learnt a lot and resonated greatly with a number of passages, one of which said 'when I write, I follow the mind of the text I'm working on, which makes it hard for me to connect to the idea that literature/fiction should or shouldn't do anything. I start from an open place and trust that the elements that need to be in the story will find their way. I don't think, especially about accessibility or audience. Some of my stories are accessible to some people, and some of them aren't. I can't control that. My imagination gets everything and it determines everything too: form, language, narrative voice, character, setting, and so on...' I couldn't agree more. The first part of this statement is what happens to me when I write. I follow my mind and trust my instincts. And I always have a belief that what really needs to be in the writing will find its way to the writing.

The essay 'The Crazy Party Guy, or, A Disruption of Smooth Surfaces' by Brian Evenson was also insightful. From it I resonated strongly with the following phrases 'I have always thought of good writing in general... as something meant to disrupt the apparently smooth surface of things...', '...I don't mean that in the sense of avant-garde being an excuse for having writing be messy- though I do fear that sometimes messy writing uses words like 'avant-garde' or 'experimental' to justify itself', and 'avant-garde writing should feel like it can use any tool at its disposal but that it will use it in a careful and systematic way, with the impression of purposiveness... it should make some effort to depict a surface before... disrupt[ing] it. And disruption in more than just an intellectual way...' and felt that this advice was really useful to us young writers who are keen on creating something unusual and new.

I was also fascinated by Garcia Lorca's, 'Theory and Function of the Duende'. The whole concept of the 'duende' was interesting to me and I resonated with the points Lorca was making through the concept. He explained and applied it to other art forms as well (even in sport) to make us see how it works. This essay really changed my view of the art creation process and what really makes art possible, and so powerful. Lines like 'It's not a question of skill, but of a style that's truly alive...'; 'Emotion is impossible without the arrival of the duende...'; and 'A real, poetic escape from this world... Naturally when this escape is perfected, everyone feels the effect: the initiate in seeing style defeat inadequate content, and the novice in sensing authentic emotion...' really caught my attention. This whole essay was very inspiring and from it I was shown that serious artists can create amazing work and succeed even when all odds are against them. That 'anyone' can excel in his chosen field/art regardless of their physical disabilities, age, strength, or anything, as long as they are willing to hand themselves over to their art and risk being vulnerable and uncertain.

Other lines I can't leave out from this essay were 'what is most important of all finds its ultimate metallic value in death...'; 'the duende, by contrast, won't appear if he can't see the possibility of death...'; '... the *duende* wounds, and in trying to heal that wound that never heals, lies the strangeness, the inventiveness of a man's work...'; 'the *duende* loves the edge, the wound, and draws close to places where forms fuse in a yearning beyond visible expression...'; 'it seems as if all the duende... is concentrated in... a nation that reveals the finest anger, bile and tears of mankind.'; and 'The bullfighter who terrifies the public with his bravery in the ring is not fighting bulls, but has lowered himself to a ridiculous level, to doing what anyone can do, by playing with his life: but the toreador who is bitten by the *duende*.... makes us forget that he is constantly throwing his heart at the horns...'.

I really grew from reading this essay by Federico Garcia Lorca. I got to see closely the difference between a serious artist and an artist who is not serious.

Week 15

This week's seminar dealt with the 'uncertainty of language in Maskandi music/poems'. Different Maskandi songs were played and thereafter lyrics were read and analyzed. I got to see how Maskandi musicians compose their art, what they rely on, and what separates their art from other forms of traditional music/poetry. I noticed that they do not explain things fully and rely on the listener to fill in what they leave out. I also noticed that Maskandi artists rely heavily on repetitions and having powerful backup voices to support or reiterate what the main singer was saying. I also noticed that there was a lot of biographical information being shared by the artist about who he/she is and what he/she has done and which rural area or village he/she came from. I also noticed that daily activities and objects were used throughout the song.

What captivated me about this music was the constant use of names of rural places and rivers, clan names, and chief/king's names and surnames. I felt it showed how proud the musicians were of the places they came from and who they are. Such confidence really drew me in. I also found their fear of city life interesting, and mysterious.

As a movement I found Maskandi to be very different. And I think that's where the beauty of it lies, in that as a genre it doesn't try to be like anything else. Whatever is considered its weakness, it uses it as strength, e.g. lack of sophistication, unawareness of modern ways of living, etc.

To the question of whether Maskandi can be described as poetry- I *would* agree that some Maskandi songs *are* poetry. Some of the songs we listened to in the session were really well-written and had rich images, metaphors, wordplay, philosophical insights, and everything else that one would find in traditional poetry. When I first approached the seminar my guards were up and I approach it with the perspective that all poetry should be a certain way (traditional) but listening to the explanations of others, reading and listening to lyrics, I threw out that view and got to understand what was happening in these songs and my eyes were opened and I was able to see the poetry in them.

In the reading session we focused on South African poets Joan Metelerkamp and Alan Finlay. I learnt a lot from what was read and explained. I also did the reading by myself after. Joan Metelerkamp's 'Leaves to a tree' was amazing. I enjoyed the consistency with which he pushed this long poem forward without losing sight of the necessary poetic language and the story she was sharing, while also making it accessible by using the simplest of languages. Alan Finlay's 'Little Land' was also amazing because of its short sentences, the clear and sharp images, the disciplined traditional structure and a beautiful witty conclusion which incorporated everything that had been happening in the preceding lines of the poem.

Reading other poets' work in such a setting as the reading group, I have seen, is very enlightening. I found that hearing what other people liked and what they didn't, what they

thought worked, where they thought they lost interest really helped in making me think carefully about my own writing and what errors I have been committing, e.g. not adding enough details in my poems, making long that which should have been short, over-explaining, etc.

I also attended the Thursday Poetry session. The Thursday Poetry session is a session outside the course but which is hosted by the ISEA (Institute For The Study of English In Africa) which funds and is part of Rhodes University. The session looked at the 20th-century poets, and focused on Nazim Hikmet, Denis Hirson, Adam Zagajewski, Claribel Alegria, Jann Kaplinski, Federico Garcia Lorca, and Robert Berold. The richness and diversity of 20th-century poetry was explained to us by the hosts, Mangaliso Buzani and Stacy Hardy. The themes and structures of the poems were analyzed. We got to look deep into the poems, looking exactly at what made them and what made them so impactful to us as readers. My favourite from the session was 'To my Room' by Robert Berold for its frankness and simplicity. As a result I created 'My dirty room' found on page 16 of the Thesis.

The Friday feedback session was also insightful. A lot of things were pointed out in the poems I submitted for the week. Suggestions were made on the titles, the structure, the order of stanzas, and the content itself. I also learnt a lot from other participants' poems and the feedback they received and felt it also applied to other poems I have written and that the feedback they received would help me greatly.

The anthology I read this week was *The Ecco Anthology of International Poetry* edited by Ilya Kaminsky and Susan Harris. In the introduction Kaminsky explained that in this anthology they were focussing specifically on translations, the impact translation has had in the growth of poetry, and how it has helped poets access not just different countries and continents, but different generations too.

Reading work that was written hundred/hundred and fifty years from today and not being able to tell the difference from the poetry of this century really dazzled me. The old poems had a freshness and urgency I was surprised by. This made me see that good poetry doesn't grow old, and that translation can really help keep it alive.

The poems I chose for Tuesday's reading session from this anthology were: 'Corona' by Paul Antschel, 'Your Shoulders Hold up the World' by Carlos Drummond de Andrade, 'A Man in His Life' by Yehuda Amichai, 'The City' by Constantine P. Cavafy, 'Autumn Day', 'Orpheus, Eurydice, Hermes' and 'Sometimes a Man Stands Up During Supper' by Rainer Maria Rilke, 'Nights. Street. Lamp. Drugstore' by Alexander Blok, 'Man, That Ape' by Moishe Leib Halpern, 'To the Earth' by Anonymous, 'from Poems to Czechia' by Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Opposition' by Mitsuharu Kaneko, and 'Motto' by Bertolt Brecht.

The poem I liked and resonated with the most from the above list was 'Opposition' by Mitsuharu Kaneko for its energy, unhidden anger/confusion, and for its decisiveness in

things said. As a result I created the poem 'God Silence' and 'Something is not right' which are found on pages 13 and 15 of the Thesis respectively.

Week 18

This week I attended a seminar on 'The Political is Personal' which dealt with 'writing that is political yet not political- writing between the spaces'. Poems by Safia Elhillo, Terrance Hayes, Aja Monet Bascquie, Suheir Hammad, Emily Jungmin Yoon, Jenny Xie, Ocean Vuong, Tina Chang, Nomtha Ndyoko, Ching-In Chen, Mxolisi Dolla Sepeta, Lily Hoang, Kimiko Hahn, and Itumeleng Qhali were read and analyzed. I got to see different ways one can write about politics without being explicit or obvious. As a result of this reading I was inspired to create a number of poems. The ones included in the Thesis are 'Election Manifesto', 'Leaders', 'No-one has noticed' and 'West Street, Pietermaritzburg (called Zim Street)' found on pages 30, 29, 31 and 32 respectively.

This week the ISEA Thursday Poetry Class looked at four great Greek poets: CP Cavafy, George Seferis, Odysseus Elytis, and Yannis Ritsos. Regarding Cavafy I fell deeply in love with his simple style. The way he changes perspective and brings something unexpected against the foundation of normality, which he always starts his poems with, it worked perfectly for his poems, and so was his perfect timing with repetitions. Seferis's poetry was rich in imagery, and was dense and very compact. He was the complete opposite of Cavafy yet both of them were concerned with the exact same things and wrote about the exact same facts. It was a great joy reading their work side by side. Seferis's seriousness, and the way he uses deep feelings, a deep tone, dark images worked for his poems and gave them a unique strength. His images were deep yet clear and to the point. The other two poets were not dealt with and their poems were postponed for the following week (see page 58 of this document).

This week I also attended a Writing in Community (WiC) class where we met with students from another continent (America) and got to interact with them as to what we had learnt in the course. I also got to meet with members of my WiC group and we did an assignment together which was to investigate the surrealism movement from an African point of view.

From the first WiC class, I got to hear and understand better what the other groups will be working on for their presentation, which was- 'the workings of silence, stillness and quietness in writing' and 'how writing under conflict/harsh conditions brings stylistic innovations'. Hearing the other groups talk about the research they have done sparked an interest in me in the subjects they were working on, especially the topic on silence, stillness and quietness which I have been exploring for some time. Interest was also created on the writers the members said they want to use to explain their material to students- writers such as Sipho Sepamla, Leslie Sehume, Mirriam Tladi, Blaise Pascal, Erling Kagge and Sara Maitland.

My group and I also had a chance to say how far we have gone with our own research. We told the class everything we have done on our topic which was 'Surrealism in the African Context' and we also received feedback which we were happy with, and from there knew exactly what is needed from us and how we will handle our presentation.

The assignment I did this week entailed either imagining a scar in my body that I have forgotten, or remembering a favourite item of clothing that I might have lost or that I do not wear anymore. Its aim was to identify the source of joy or pain that the memory has evoked within me. The assignment required me to write three poems. I enjoyed greatly from this exercise the simple act of taking my mind back to things that happened long ago and trying to see the connection it has to the reality I am living now or how it impacted the person I grew up to be. I also learnt a lot from the poems read, mostly the poems 'A Love Supreme' by Mphutlane Bofelo, 'Kippies' by Steve Kwena Mokwena, and 'Cassandra Wilson will Sing' by Keorapetse Kgositsile. From this reading I was inspired to create the poem 'Being ordinary is the fashion' from which the title of my Thesis is taken. This poem is found on the last page of the Thesis, page 45.

Week 19

This week I attended a seminar on 'Real Writing is Rewrite'. It dealt with taking writing that is established and changing it, and seeing how one can re-contextualize it. Extracts were discussed and I got to see how writers, for a long time, have been doing what the seminar asked of us, to create using other writers' specific established works.

We were then given an assignment that required us to create using other writers' work. From the provided extracts I used 1 Kings 3:16-27 from the King James Bible Version and an extract from *What we talk about when we talk about love* by Raymond Carver. I created a poem that dealt with a man arguing that a child does not belong to this person and that person, but that it belongs to him, which was what the above Bible verse and extract were about. The poem did not make it to the Thesis, however I enjoyed a lot creating it and learnt a lot from the assignment.

I also created an additional prose piece influenced by Ernest Hemingway's 'Hills like White Elephants' taken from the short story collection published by Charles Scribner's Sons publishers in 1927 called *Men Without Women*. It dealt with abortion like the above prose piece. Because of its genre it is also excluded from the Thesis, however I learnt a lot too from creating it and getting feedback from it.

In the Thursday Poetry session, we continued with Greek poets. We continued from Goerge Seferis, and then read Odysseus Elytis and Yannis Ritsos. What I noted about these Greek great poets was their precision with structure, and the simplicity of their poetry. Elytis uses everything in his poems, the sky, the sea, the moon, the animals, people, the sun, trees, the soil, flowers, etc. He does this even for poems that are not very long, and sometimes even in short love poems. He also relies strongly on repetitions and seems to know exactly when to use them and when to refrain from them.

With Yannis Ritsos, his obsession with describing everything around him wherever he is, together with the simplicity of his language, worked beautifully to set him apart and create a unique interesting voice. His poems were beautifully silent, had a fresh feel in them, and there was not a single trace of anything being exaggerated, anywhere. His uniqueness, and consistency with this style worked very well in making his poems memorable.

The collections I read this week were *Paul Celan Selection* edited and with an introduction by Pierre Joris, and *C.P. Cavafy: Collected Poems*, translated by Evangelos Sachperoglou, and edited by Anthony Hirst and Peter Mackridge. This was a follow-up on a great poem I read by Celan called 'Corona' and the beautiful poems by C.P Cavafy read in the Thursday poetry sessions.

In reading Celan's poems I noted he maximizes the use of commas and short lines. This then affected dramatically the pace of his poems. Uncertainty builds up and he adds to it with surprising lines and it becomes such bliss to read. He also uses strong and vivid images throughout his poems. They are all simple, yet all have deep depth. For example, in 'Below'

where he says “Led home into oblivion/ the sociable talk of/ our slow eyes.../ And the too much of my speaking: heaped up round the little/ crystal dressed in the style of your silence” and in ‘Flower’ where he says “Growth./ Heart wall upon heart wall/ adds petals to it./ One more word like this, and the hammers/ will swing over open ground.” Even in his saddest poems, the reader could still feel Celan’s playfulness and liveliness. For example in ‘Threadsun’ where he says “Threadsun/ above the grayblack wastes. / A tree-/ high thought/ grasps the light-tone: there are/ still songs to sing beyond/ mankind.” As a result of reading Celan’s work I created the poems ‘God spilt tea on me’ and ‘A closer look’ found on pages 20 and 44 of the Thesis respectively.

Reading *C.P. Cavafy: Collected Poems*, I noted that Cavafy’s poetry was very very unique. It was so simple and so narrative that when reading it one sometimes forget he’s reading poetry, but somehow, however, with little focus on the words used and their order, the beauty becomes more visible and the reader is soon reminded that he is reading the best of poetry there is. Most of his poems are stories. But none of them are usual normal stories. There’s always a life lesson, so powerful that you don’t forget it for days after reading the poem. In all his poems he’s deceptively simple, and one who doesn’t have the patience to read on can easily discount him and write his poetry off, but the more and closer you read him you see that he is a genius. He avoids the use of metaphors, or any figure of speech and uses them only sparingly in very few poems, most of which are not widely known. Usually his poems are a direct story, but with a careful look you see that the story itself is a metaphor, and a very very powerful one. As a result of this reading I re-revisited the poems ‘Exactly Like Me’ and ‘History of my birth’ found on pages 11 and 10 of the Thesis respectively with more confidence and with a more precise and decisive aim.

This week I also attended the Writing in Community class where I got to understand clearly what will happen going forward and what is expected of us. My group and I also got a chance to explain how far we were with our own preparations for the presentation and we again received useful feedback. I also got to understand further and better other groups’ topics.

Week 20

This week I read book reviews and wrote a literature review. The book reviews that caught my attention the most were by Iain Sinclair, Tlisi S.A. Sachikonye, Dimakatso Sedite, and Vonani Bila.

Iain Sinclair's review looked at *Collected Poems by Edward Dorn* published by Carcanet Press in 2012 and was found in the *London Review of Books*. The style of writing was positive, exciting, quick, and very knowledgeable. Poems from Dorn's collection were used throughout to make explanations and Sinclair knew how to break them down without being too analytic. He did not do it as other reviewers normally do it. He first offered an explanation, and/or a story, and then, only to support, offer a poem or a stanza at the end of that explanation or story.

I liked the inclusion of what close friends, and family, and other people who knew Dorn said about his work and himself. This created a homely feeling in the review, to the extent that, at times, I forgot I was reading a review. However Sinclair knew how to bring the reader back, with an analysis of structure, themes, tone, and images. I also liked that he was one of the few reviewers who remembered to deal with the cover of the collection he was reviewing, telling us what relation it had to the content of the collection and what it attempts to say.

I found the other book reviews in the South African poetry publication, *New Coin*, and they were written by Tlisi S.A. Sachikonye, Dimakatso Sedite, and Vonani Bila. Sachikonye looks at *Everything is a deathly flower* by Maneo Mohale published by Uhlanga Press in 2019. Sedite looks at *Allegories of the Everyday* by Brian Walter published by Dryad Press in 2019. And Bila looks at *a naked bone* by Mangaliso Buzani published by Deep South also in 2019.

Sachikonye starts by breaking down all important poems in Mohale's collection and offers clarity regarding the poems where it's needed and also puts the poems into a wider context for the readers. He then offers a detailed description of the poet's (Mohale) style which gave the reader the exact picture of what Mohale focuses on. I also liked the positive summative conclusion of this review. It brought all said points together and assured the reader that everything was dealt with and nothing was forgotten.

With Sedite's review, I fell in love with her writing style. Her word choice was beautiful, and so was her unique style of presenting information in a review. She began by describing Walter's style and focuses, and his experience in writing. She then breaks her analysis into three parts as Walter's book was also divided into three parts. This brought clarity and made the information being shared easy to digest. She also tells us in the review why the book has three sections and what relation these sections have to one another. This made the book more meaningful and made me as a reader appreciate the effort the poet put in, which I would have otherwise overlooked had she not brought it to attention. I also liked

that she did not only praise the collection, but she also offered opinions as to how certain things could have been done better, which I felt was important in a review to show that she has looked at the book from all angles and that she wasn't just reading with a blind eye. The lines she closed with also worked for me '...it is also important however to read a book for what it is, to listen, and allow it to tell its own story.'

With Bila's review, I fell in love with the in-depth analysis provided, from style, to breaking down of images, to people who influenced the poet being reviewed. He started the review by explaining who the poet is and the achievements this specific collection has accumulated for him. I felt this worked and brought more mystery to the book and had the power to make a reader who has not picked up the book want to pick it up. It made the collection's relevance visible. The use of the poet's own words throughout the review to answer and explain certain questions that arouse also worked in creating information that is complete and this made the review more trustworthy and more interesting. The inclusion of other writers' and publishers' views also worked for the same reason. I also liked how Bila kept putting things into a wider context, which made me see the deeper meaning in the poems analysed that I would have otherwise not noticed.

This week I also read Charles Simic's essay on prose and narrative poetry which inspired me greatly. It made me look at prose poetry in a totally different way and made me respect and understand it more. As a result I was able to revisit the poems 'It was poetry' and 'eShebeen' and tighten their structure and make them more compact. The poems are found on pages 26 and 28 respectively.

This week's Writing in Community session was a presentation that dealt with 'Silence, Stillness, and Quietness'. The session taught us how and when silence between characters occurs, and how silence, stillness and quietness can be created or enhanced using setting and scenery.

My group and I met again after this session and we spoke more about our presentation and the material we plan to present to the students when our time to present comes. The meeting itself introduced me to a lot of surrealist writers I didn't know, and it made me see different ways people view surrealism and what they associate it with. We also planned how we will present the material to the students and discussed in detail the assignments we plan to give them. We scanned and typed extracts and poems and sent them to students as a reading pack.

Week 22

Books I read this week include *Anna Akhmatova's Selected Poems* selected and translated by A.S. Kline and published by Poetry in Translation. This selection was grounded in simplicity, yet relied heavily on images. Akhmatova's poems have amazing poignancy and vividness. There's also control and discipline (in their structure), which made poems easy to understand and digest. Her poems also touch on very interesting subjects e.g. family life, unreciprocated love, being an outsider, dangers of being too dreamy, etc.

I also read the children's book *The Big Scary Adventure* by Elana Bregin. The book worked, firstly, because of its beautiful cover and back cover. It was bright, funny and welcoming. Secondly because of its funny and poetic dedication – 'For all the animals, birds, insects, snakes, frogs, fish and other amazing and beautiful creatures that share our world with us – and the plants, trees, rocks, rivers, deserts, and oceans that are home to them and us'. Thirdly, because of its storyline.

The aim of this book was to bring awareness to the beauty of nature and the importance of treating animals with love and consideration and the importance of protecting them, especially the ones that have horrible superstitions spread against them, such as snakes, owls, baboons, etc. When I finished reading the book my perspective was completely altered.

I also liked how Bregin ended the chapters. She ensured to end them with very beautiful suspense-filled lines which obliged the reader to continue reading on. I also liked how the book hinted at the albinism crisis in this country and the sad things people are doing to people with albinism and felt the book brought the needed awareness- in a very very smart beautiful way.

I was also captivated by the multiple poems recited by the main characters (Londi, Jasper, snake, owl, chicken, etc) throughout this book and felt they rhymed well and had powerful messages in them.

The book, I also felt, took the correct form in being a children's book, and I felt the writer did everything perfectly to ensure a child's mind can grasp what was said. I resonated with everything said, and felt telling it to children while they are still young is the best thing to do, as those are years that decide what kind of adults they grow up to be.

The only thing I can say can be improved in the book is its use of IsiZulu terms, which were not written the way the speakers of the language write and pronounce them.

Other than that, it was a really powerful book, and everything inside it was sincere, insightful and very beautiful.

This week I also, again, met with my COIL Writing In Community group. We discussed and drafted the plan we'll use for our presentation. We got the chance to discuss surrealism in

detail for the last time and looked at angles at which one can approach his part of the presentation. I learnt a lot from the meeting and enjoyed the interaction with my group members and fellow writers who are at the same writing stage I am in and who are facing the same writing and thinking problems I face.

This week I also attended the ISEA Thursday Poetry session where the *New Coin June 2020 issue* was read and I got to hear my poems that appeared on the issue being read. This was very inspiring. The other poets read were Lebohang Mojapelo, Richard Fox, Shirley Marais, Ayanda Bille and Phillipa Yaa De Villiers.

Week 25

This week I attended a seminar on 'wording the unworded' which dealt with writing about things that are on the edge of our understanding or perception, things we have no words for yet and we are uncertain about. Things we cannot fully recall and which question ourselves and our perspectives and whose answers remain unsaid in our realities.

The seminar notes included an essay by the 2020 Nobel Prize winner Louise Gluck titled 'Disruption, hesitation, silence'. The essay spoke about the importance of strict economy with words and the importance of leaving certain things unsaid in a poem. The story of Holbein's drawings at the beginning of the essay made me see clearly Gluck's point of leaving certain things unsaid. She says the drawings that were not finished or were still in progress, 'drawings where parts were sketched or had a fluent line indicating an arm or hand or hair' attracted more eyes from viewers in Holbein's show. She points out that this 'leaving certain things unsaid' adds to the mystery and the intensity of the work and that it encourages more engagement on the part of the consumer of that work of art.

The comparison she makes between John Berryman and George Eppen's poetry also worked in proving her point. Particularly, in this comparison, I was struck by Oppen's poem 'Street' and felt its simplicity greatly complimented the subject matter and made the poem memorable. The use of very short lines and only having three stanzas worked and created discipline and control. Because of how careful everything was crafted, I was able to feel and resonate fully and deeply with the main theme, which was poverty.

The conclusion of this essay also worked greatly and summarised the whole essay beautifully. She closes by saying 'a danger of an expansive poem is that tension is lost... a sense of the importance of exact language, a sense of being in the presence of the crucial [is also lost]. Not every temperament inclines to elaboration... [and] what I have said has been meant not to eliminate a method, but to speak for the virtues of a style which inclines to the suggested over the amplified'. I also liked the point that followed this one and said 'economy depends on systematic withholding of the gratuitous' and felt it summarised the key point of her essay. From this seminar and its readings I was inspired to create the poems 'God come to me tonight' and 'I never get the picture' found on pages 6 and 38 of the Thesis respectively. I also got to revisit the poem 'A closer look' found on page 44 of the Thesis and cut off all unnecessary details.

The seminar notes also included Adelia Prado's interview which I also found very enlightening and liberating to poets like myself who hold the same religious beliefs she holds (Christian beliefs) and who also like myself come from formerly colonized countries. Reading the interview made me see that there is nothing wrong with embracing such religious beliefs and incorporating them into one's work. I also liked Prado's honesty, openness, and frankness in answering the questions the interviewer put to her. After reading this interview all the fears I had of sharing poems about Christianity and my

relationship with God were removed and I was given new confidence. As a result the poems 'God spilt tea on me', 'Dream set in heaven', 'Run from me' and 'In heaven' were brought forward and are now part of the Thesis on pages 20, 21, 22 and 23 respectively.

With regards to Padre's poems, they had a very disciplined structure. The simplicity of the language made their wit irresistible and made it come out strongly. The historic facts she kept sharing inside her poems were interesting too and relevant and gave strength to her images since the facts shared were very close to what she was explaining or analyzing or describing.

Week 26

This week I attended a seminar that dealt with the language of dreams- 'writing sleep, memory and dreams'. It looked at the relationship one has with his dreams and how that can be incorporated into one's writing. It also looked at 'the language of dreams as a way of listening' and 'sleep as a way of connecting, remembering and foretelling stories... [and also] as a source for the imagination'.

It also looked at dreams as a language of poetry, 'and not as a form that locks the story in... rather as a falling that allows the story to spill out'. The seminar did not focus on the editing process, but only on what within us etches to be said and how it can best be said before our own voices get in the way.

We then looked at our relationship with dreams based on our earliest memories of them, and the lecturer spoke about how writing about this can open up room for multiple symbols and associations.

Poems read in this seminar were 'Emergency' and 'Hold Up' by Joy Harjo, 'Spring-Break' by Anne Carson. Extracts read were taken from *Freshwater* by Akwaeke Emezi, *Your Name Shall be Tanga* by Calixthe Beyala, from *The Book of Sleep* by Haytham El Wardany and from *Dream I Tell You* by Helen Cixous.

In this seminar's assignment we had to write four poems about our dreams, either about our dreams themselves or our relationship with sleep and/or dreams. The resultant poems are not on the Thesis, however their content and the approach learnt from the creation process were used to rewrite and strengthen the poems 'I have these dreams' and 'Dream set in heaven' found on pages 18 and 21 of the Thesis respectively.

In this week's reading session I read 'Living in a Flat in Eldorado Park' by Fazel Johennesse, 'The Road' and 'My Father's Voice' by Chris Van Wyk and 'Black Mamba Rising' by Ari Sitas. The participants enjoyed these African poems and showed understanding towards the anger that some of these poems showed. This was because they were written as part of the resistance against the cruel apartheid system and the poverty it brought to those who were discriminated against. The voices in the poems were complimented for their rawness and directness, and the structures for their poignancy. This made me revisit my own political poems, with a different view, and remove all the words that hindered what the poems really wanted to say.

This week I also received feedback on my poems from my supervisor. The feedback was clear and I was able to follow and apply all the recommendations. What was pointed out about the poems was that some of them need more details and that certain parts needed to be explored more. I added details to all poems and I explored further their ideas, which in the end positively gave me a lot of content to choose from. The voice in my poems became mature, and more decisive.

Week 31

This week I read Elena Bregin's *The Antbear Cabin* published by Wobbling Earth Press, and C. P. Cavafy's *Complete Poems* by Daniel Mendelsohn published by Alfred A. Knopf, which was very different from Anthony Hirst and Peter Mackridge's selection quoted earlier.

In reading *The Antbear Cabin* by Elana Bregin I was struck by the careful planning that went into the plot. The plot had a lot of interesting and mysterious turns and twists. Things said earlier in the book were returned to later with an amazing twist. This made the book hard to put down as the reader was constantly in wait for a new twist.

I instantly fell in love with the book's two main characters, Esther Winter-Fire Daniels and Emanuel Pathfinder Kabeya. This was because of their openness, vulnerability, and honesty. Through their carefully chosen words and actions, they were very relatable, and I liked how the author did this beautifully without relying on stereotypes and generalisations. The whole story was vividly told with great detail and there was no part where I felt certain aspects were not made clear or clear enough. This had the power of bringing me as the reader into the deep mysteries unpacked by the book and made me feel everything that the characters felt.

There was also a lot of information shared about plants, animals, war and the consequences of war on ordinary people which I found very interesting and enlightening.

I also felt the ending was perfectly planned and fitted the book. The book ends with Emmanuel reuniting with his family and finding out that her mother did not die in the war but is still alive. This warm ending moved me, and made me understand the power positive endings can have, especially on a book that had a lot of dark and sometimes hopeless plot twists.

In reading Daniel Mendelsohn's *C. P. Cavafy Complete Poems* I was firstly blown away by the introduction which contained a lot of very interesting information about Cavafy, from biographical, to style of writing, to influences, etc. I felt this information helped me understand Cavafy's poetry better and made it easy for me to understand its context. This added greatly to my appreciation of the poems and made me feel I was reading work of someone I was familiar with.

In the poems themselves, I was struck by the simplicity of the words, the lack of sophistication, the narrative conversational stance that almost all poems take and the deliberate ignorance of traditional poetic devices.

The poems that stood out for me were the widely recognised 'Ithaka', 'The City', 'Waiting for the barbarians', and 'As Much As You Can' for their open and uncompromising self-examination, and their often forgotten or often overlooked life lessons that always conclude his poems.

This week I also edited poems with my supervisor and I was made aware of a lot of mistakes I have been doing in my writing. Seeing my supervisor pointing them out and suggesting changes helped a lot. I found out that I often over-emphasize points and therefore repeat things I have said. I also found out that my poems sometimes lose their rhythm when trying to make certain points, which sometimes are unnecessary to the poem as a whole. I also found out that details are what give the poem substance, and that, how they are incorporated or not incorporated in the poem, determines the success of the poem. The suggestion my supervisor made was that I cut certain words out that appeared more frequently. Certain points and emphasises that didn't help the poems were also pointed out and new approaches and directions were suggested as to how I can refrain from what doesn't work in the future.

My supervisor also gave me an exercise of making the abstract concrete. It entailed going to a selected random emotion generator to find an emotion and then create a poem using that emotion. The exercise was exciting and challenging and I learnt greatly from it. What I recorded did not amount to a poem, but I can already see the direction I want to take with everything that I have gathered. I have also found that the exercise makes me notice things around me that I didn't notice before and makes me look at things with a deeper eye as I am now more curious about how all my senses respond to situations. It also helps me think of new ways I can add freshness and new ideas to my poems.

Writing In Community Report

The Writing/Reading in Community Project was between Rhodes University MACW students and second-year creative writing students from CUNY LaGuardia Community College (USA) and was in progress for six weeks. The Project coordinators were Dr. Allia Abdullah-Matta from CUNY LaGuardia and lecturer Vangile Gantsho from Rhodes University.

We were immersed in the contextual reading of texts, mainly written by African writers, and engaged with themes raised in these texts as part of the international exchange. We used these texts as content and form models for the creative writing pieces that were created as a result.

We met every Monday afternoon. The project began with a mini-seminar and was followed by two sessions with Dr. Abdullah-Matta and Vangile Gantsho where we were helped to develop the content of our workshops and reading packs. This helped a lot in making us get a grip of what our topics were about and gave us different angles with which to look at them.

Group members kept meeting during the weeks preceding the presentation in preparation of the material they wished to use for the presentation of their seminar.

The lecturers would introduce the group presenting that day/week and thereafter the group would present its seminar. PowerPoint presentations, videos, songs, and pictures were shared to make the points the seminars were about. We would then get an opportunity to ask questions and make comments. Thereafter we would be separated into small peer-to-peer feedback groups monitored by one lecturer.

The members of the first group were Stoffel Malaba, Subrina, and Fortunate Jwara. They presented the first seminar that dealt with 'writing under conflict/harsh conditions'.

The prose pieces looked at and analyzed for this seminar were: 'The Gladiators' by Alex La Guma, 'The Suit' by Can Themba, 'He and The Cat' by Ezekiel Mphahlele, 'The promise' by Lewis Nkosi, 'I am not a tramp' by Leslie Sehume, 'A very important appointment' by Casey Motsisi, 'Clean up the mess' by Siphso Sepamla and 'The Day of the Riots' by Mbulelo Vizkhungo Mzamane. The poems looked at which I all loved were 'City of Johannesburg' by Mongane Serote, 'Nightsong City' by Dennis Brutus, 'The Efficacy of Prayer' by Casey Motsisi, 'Dear God' by Can Themba, and 'The Children of Nonti' by Mafika Gwala.

The assignment for this seminar was to think about an experience one went through, where one felt greatly discriminated against based on, for example, race, culture, sexuality, gender, upbringing, age, etc. It asked the students to write about that experience as a way of defying systematic oppressions- but from a place of not necessarily using direct language but still conveying an intense powerful message in the writing.

The members of the second group were Nelia Cunningham, Sibongakonke Mama, and Gaireyah Fredericks. They presented the second workshop which dealt with 'quiet, silence and stillness in writing'.

From this presentation we learnt that silence between characters occurs when the writer becomes silent within him or herself. This, they explained, happens when the writer focuses on the silence around them- 'the impulses that their senses absorb, which in turn start shouting and draws attention to the noise the writer didn't hear before, provided the writer listens carefully.'

They explained further that by using the senses to record external noise one can channel silence into their writing when they write. This, they said, allows the reader to become a witness to the world the writer is painting, to be drawn in by the writing, and to be touched in such a way that their sensory memory cannot help but respond to the writer's piece of writing.

The assignment entailed writing about one's relationship with silence, and incorporating everything explained in the seminar in that writing.

The poems that were used by this group to illustrate the points they spoke about were 'The Sound of Honey' by Graham Dukas, 'Tearing Apart' by Kerry Hammerton, 'I cannot think of all the pains' by Mxolisi Nyezwa, 'The Sound of Rain' by Eduard Burle, 'Heart's Hunger' by Karen Press, 'In Another World' by Rasaan Malik, 'Empty hells' by Omar Berrada, 'In Detention' by Chris Van Wyk

Xolani Mahe, Thobeka Kenene and myself presented the third and final workshop that dealt with 'surrealism'. My knowledge of surrealism was greatly expended in my research of surreal material to present to the other students. I also learnt a lot from my group members and the research they did on this subject.

In the presentation I explained what surrealism was, its history, its origins and its characteristics. Thobeka Kenene presented and explained surrealist poetry and Xolani Mahe analysed surrealist prose pieces. Our presentation focused on African surrealism and our theme was 'writing from a cockroach's point of view' as Dambudzo Macherere once wrote. The poetry that was presented was 'Purge' by Indigene Corefio and 'Heat and Sweat' by Mongane Wally Serote. The prose focused on extracts from *Notebook of a return to the native land* by Aime Cesaire and *The Seven Solitudes of Lorsa Lopez* by Estina Benta.

I also grew a lot from seeing how others tackled the topics in the feedback sessions that we had after. I noted their approach and their techniques and felt they would be of help to me in the future when I face similar challenges while writing.

There was a closing session where we played a cross-word which aimed at reminding us of the things we read and discussed during the seminars. We all took turns to answer and got to see which readings had the most impact on us. A collaborative short chapbook was also created which had all the students' pieces in it.

The experience from this whole project was very enriching as we got to engage with other writers from other parts of the world and got to see how they viewed the art of creative writing, and how they viewed Africa and how they respond to African writing.

Literature Review

The first book review I read was by Iain Sinclair on Edward Dorn's *Collected Poems*. Sinclair started by telling us what impact the publication of Edward Dorn's *Collected Poems* had on the culture as a whole and places it in a larger context- 'this publication is a big moment, a bonfire of verities, for the embattled tribe of local enthusiasts, veterans of old poetry wars who are still, more or less, standing.' This created an interest and made me not want to miss out on this 'big moment' described by the reviewer. It also created positivity and mystery.

The positive description of the cover and the explanation provided regarding the relation it has to the content were also enlightening and worked well for this review. Words to describe the work being presented were carefully chosen throughout the review. Words like 'fresh', 'cooling', 'innovative' were constantly used which I felt had a powerful effect on the reader's mind.

The inclusion of comments and analysis by other writers who had written reviews, papers and books on Edward Dorn showed beautifully the extent to which Sinclair has done his research and made us readers trust his voice more, whilst also offering us different perspectives.

The way he used poems from the collection was also great. He chose fitting lines to support every analysis he made, making the collection more appealing. Examples of these lines are 'the duty of every honest American is to emigrate' and 'recycling has grown to be/ a major part of the pollution industry' - which showed the poet's witty use of juxtapositions.

I also liked Sinclair's description of Dorn's most complimented strength, which he said was the skill of observing, with a very careful eye, roads. This I felt prepared the reader and made him aware of what he should expect if he decides to read the collection. It also created mystery, as this skill is rarely heard of. Sinclair says 'Dorn trained himself to be a technical reader of the particulars of roads.' He thereafter quotes Dorn saying 'I was tagging along making notes, looking. I was really looking at the kind of terrible awesomeness of the miscellanea of American upper landscape'.

When I saw the mention of John Barrell's book *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place* I saw a strong link to what Dorn is described as being mostly interested in, which is the description of roads. The mention of Barrell's book here I felt helped the reader understand Dorn better, thus making it easy to enjoy his work and appreciate it.

The detailed mention of the poet's previous works added in giving the reader a full picture of what Dorn writes about and what he's known for. Which I also felt clarified whether the work being discussed is a shift from what was expected. Sinclair says Dorn's first work, though it lacked the maturity it had later, *did* 'set the scene for what he later produced.'

The elaborate description of relationships the poet had with other writers made the review personal and made me sink in deeper to who Dorn was and I forgot that it was a review. It added to the trust relationship and assured me as a reader the reviewer knows the person who wrote the book he is reviewing.

Since this collection had an introduction, by the poet's wife, Sinclair also touched on it and created mystery out of it. Using the introduction he pointed out that Dorn 'was reluctant in putting a collection together and preferred pamphlets and informal books which were published with persons rather than publishing houses and was distributed randomly, with many of these books and pamphlets being trusted to the postal service, as gifts to peers, known and unknown.' This made me understand better the statement Sinclair made earlier on about the publication of these collected poems being special and being a 'big moment' for true lovers of poetry.

He ends the review by talking about the poet's struggle with a tumour that led to his death. This, I think, the reviewer timed perfectly, and *was* needed information to us readers. It worked and created mystery, and compassion and made the reader of the review really want to pick up the book.

The other reviews, were by Tsisi S.A. Sachikonye, Dimakatso Sedite and Vonani Bila. They also looked at poetry collections.

Sachikonye reviewed *Everything is a deathly flower* by Maneo Mohale published in 2019 by Uhlanga Press. She starts by placing the collection into a wider context and describes it as a substantial contribution to contemporary Southern African poetry. Such first lines work and build the necessary interest and curiosity. And since a lot of poetry is being published, on all platforms, these first lines give the reader a feeling that the poet being looked at is a real poet worth noting and reading close.

Poems and stanzas were broken and thereafter interpretations offered. Sachikonye also put lines, stanzas and poems in a wider context for readers. She explained all the innovative techniques employed by the poet- and by doing so made it easy for us readers to approach the work with the approach that will make us understand the work better.

She then describes the poet's style in detail, which again, I think helped put the correct picture on the reader's mind about what the poet focuses on and eliminates unnecessary surprises, and also, so people who like such style can easily identify it and those who are studying it can pick the book up and use it for that purpose. She says Mohale's style is 'conspicuous and inimitable... [and] throughout the book, there appears to be a narrative arch, strongly supported by visceral images and sentiments that the poet injects into her verses.' She then says 'the reader will enjoy the hybridity and porosity of the poems' Thereafter she touches on Mohale's use (and sometimes lack of) punctuation, the structure of the poems, the metaphors (which she says 'at first glance seem wholly unrelated but the

poet succeeds in juxtaposing them together in an exciting, arousing way') and the use of repetitions. This I felt told the reader perfectly what kind of poetry Mohale writes.

Dimakatso Sedite's review looked at *Allegories of the Everyday* by Brian Walter published in 2019 by Dryad Press. Sedite's style of writing was poetic. She beautifully describes the themes the collection deals with, saying '... it bravely faces the fate of death, aging and loneliness'. This gave a reader a picture of what Walter's work looks at and focus was established.

To describe Walter's style she uses key poems and passages to give the reader an in-depth view. She says Walter's poetry has 'a swathe of un-patterned paradox, laden with humility within and about it... and takes readers on a journey of textured and varied experiences, along small coastal towns, within alienating experiences of foreign countries, and back to the familiarity of home... and it puts pieces together in ways that are surprising and unsentimental' Such descriptions, again, work since the reader usually already has a picture of what they want and what they do not want. Such clarity helps also in presenting the correct approach to the work and solves things that might be complex about the content of the book.

Sedite then breaks down the poems and explains why certain techniques were used and what relation that has to the themes. She deals carefully and in length with the absence of punctuation marks, capitalizations, which she says controlled pace/speed, put emphasis, revealed certain emotions, and created musicality and rhythm. All this she does by breaking poems down, line by line. This close analysis I think is important and reduces confusion in a reader. They make the poems and the collection as a whole easy to understand, and lines that would have been otherwise misunderstood or overlooked become clear and meaningful.

Since Walter's collection is broken into three sections, Sedite does the same with her analysis and explains the work per section, which made the review easy to understand. She explains the shifts that take place from each section to the next. 'Section two does not delve deeper emotionally... this creates a variation in a book that keeps the reader interested. Section one... is about the helplessness of being mortal... Section three takes us back to that specificity and emotional depth of section one.' This explanation of the layout, the relationships between poems, sections, and images, I think, is important for readers since they are often overlooked and not understood properly. As they are not obvious, I appreciated Sedite's effort in clarifying them. The order and planning that was put in by the poet became beautifully visible, making me appreciate the work more.

Sedite ends the review by saying what *she* would have loved to see differently. She mentions things such as the recurrent reference to Derek Walcott and Amos Tutuola's work as, at times, disrupting the natural flow of the book. She also mentions the titles of the poems and says Walter could have been lucid on what the respective poems were about.

She closes, however, beautifully with the reminder that ‘...it is also important to read a book for what it is, to listen, and important to read a book.’

The last review was by Vonani Bila. He looked at *a naked bone* by Mangaliso Buzani published in 2019 by Deep South Books. In describing the book Bila says ‘it is confessional and deeply imagistic poetry with a fluid rhythmic feel, word-play, mature humour that is preoccupied with the relationship between the living and the dead that is forever present, the beautiful and ridiculous, the unspeakable and sacrosanct, the familiar and strange as well as the fluidity of endless life’ I felt this was a beautiful way of describing the poems and that it added the necessary mystery to a reader who is deciding whether or not to pick up the book.

He then breaks down the variety of images found in the book- images of bones, dogs, frogs, sea-dogs, Christ, bread, clouds, plants, dirt, etc- and explains the effect they have, when in isolation, and when taken together with other images in the collection. He puts the collection into a wider context and links it to the frustrations and disappointments with life the poet was feeling at the time he wrote the collection, which Bila attests was felt almost by every poor South African at the time.

The themes of the collection, which are death, loneliness, family history and nostalgia, darkness, and mortality- are dealt with in detail and poems that reveal them best are broken down. I felt this gave the reader the exact picture of what Buzani’s poetry does, and *how* it does it. The poems that were too personal were also broken down, separately, and deep explanations were provided. This I felt aroused empathy, and understanding.

I also liked how Bila investigated the influences of the poet. This I also felt was important as it prepared the reader, in some way, for what is to come. It also gave a direction to readers who enjoyed Buzani’s style as to where to look next. I also found that it said a lot about the poet’s taste, interests, and focus, which I found to be very important information.

Book Review 1

Anna Akhmatova's Selected Poems Including 'Requiem' selected and translated by A.S. Kline, published in 2005 by Poetry in Translation.

The selection opens with the poem 'Love' from *Evening* written when the poet was only twenty years old. The poem is made up of three stanzas of equal four lines. The poem opens with the lines 'A snake, it coils/ Bewitching the heart. / Day after day, coos/ A dove on the white sill.' These lines set up the tone for the personal atmosphere which almost all the other poems in the selection (and collections) have, and the poet here blends it well with the familiarity of everyday life and things remaining the same and not changing. This familiarity in atmosphere also features greatly in the poet's later poems such as 'I don't know if you're alive or dead', 'I'll erase this day from your memory,', 'Don't taunt your heart with earthly joys,', 'I'm not one of those who left their land', 'Muse', 'To An Artist', 'Here Puskin's exile began,', 'Incantation', 'Has he sent no boat for me,', 'Some gaze into tender faces', and 'Pasternak'.

The rest of the poem 'Love' (the second and the third stanza) is made of images that enhance the mystery and hint at something being deeper than what is on the page, which was a key feature of the Acmeist imagist movement in which the poet belonged.

The structure- two or three stanzas of equal length- doesn't change throughout the poet's work. This I felt achieves a lot from readers as it shows intent and planning and consistency on the part of the poet and in turn controls the reader's attitude towards the poem, making the reader keep fishing as to what else is planned and or intended. This concreteness and compactness also brought order to the poet's poems and made deep subjects easy to comprehend and digest.

In poems written later that follow the poem 'Love' the poet's reservedness towards explaining in her poetry grew less and less implicit. In the later work, there is also the frequency of unpoetic words and the occasional strangeness of keywords.

A similar pattern of dark images and the creation of mystery is continued throughout the subsequent poems. Grief remains at the core of the process and there is a careful account of objects and concrete details which are direct and do not avoid the aspects of life.

Juxtaposition is also a constant feature in Kline's selection. This is seen in poems like 'My voice is weak, but not my will' and 'Already the maple leaves'. From: *White Flock*, 'My imagination, obediently'. From: *Rosary*, 1914 'We shall not sip from the same glass' 'It's fine here: the rustle and crackle;', 'Ah! It's you again! not as an enamoured lad', ' Seaside Victory Park', 'When of my bitter death' which show this through lines such as 'Already in pre-song anxiety/ And colder than ice are my lips.', ' Like a gift, I will accept separation, not beauty /Only the torment of the ideal.', 'I would like with the toxin of verse /To numb unbearable thoughts', 'wait for death as for a miracle', and 'I'm worn out/ By all the resurrection, death and life'.

Another dominant feature in the selection is the poet's pervasion with fire imagery. This can be seen in poems such as 'And no-one came to meet me', 'We shall not sip from the same glass', 'Oh, and the day was cold,' 'How can you bear to view the Neva,' 'I don't know if you're alive or dead –' 'No one sung about that meeting,' 'It's fine here: the rustle and crackle;' 'Yes, I loved those nocturnal gatherings ' where words such 'flame', 'fever', 'fervour', 'burn', 'give light', 'aglow', 'blazing', 'bonfire' etc are constantly used.

The frequent use of epigraphs in the poems made them easy to digest and understand and offered just the right hint on what was to come. They were beautifully and skilfully maximized, both as dedicatory and explanatory.

Book Review 2

The Antbear Cabin by Elana Bregin, published in 2019 by Wobbling Earth Press.

From the opening lines of this novel, the reader is drawn into an environment that is described with amazing vividness and detail.

From the onset, slight hints are given as to what will unfold. Everything is told in detail and one can't help but be mesmerized by the writer's knowledge of the subjects touched on, such as plants, trees, animals, the human mind, knowledge of colours, and much more. This gave the book a fresh feel and enlightened the reader in many respects and all this was done artfully as the author did not lose sight of the story.

The third-person voice was also chosen smartly as it allowed readers into the minds of both the main characters and gave them an all-round-view of everything that was occurring. It ensured that the story was easy to follow, and understand.

The story was about Esther Winter-Fire Daniels and Emanuel Pathfinder Kabeya who are from two very different walks of life. Esther is a female white writer and Emanuel is a sixteen year foreign international from Congo who came to the country because of the war going on in Congo.

Emanuel's arrival was told with great and vivid detail and the reader was put exactly in the shoes of most foreign internationals who find themselves in countries that are not theirs. The way it was described gave light to the information hinted at earlier in the book.

Most things in the book are explained in great detail, however, the writer also leaves a lot of things unsaid. This had the power of continuing the mystery. The information shared was carefully chosen, and whatever was hinted at earlier the writer came back to in interesting ways and made the book a page-turner. An example here is when Winter-Fire becomes angry at Emmanuel for not looking after the shoes she gave him, which led to them getting lost. Later on we find that the shoes were important to her as they were one of few things left that belonged to her son who went missing and was never found. The patience that the writer had towards revealing such information, I felt, was worth it, and was a satisfying revelation.

The poetic language with which the book was written brought life to it. There was constant use of figures of speech and images, which were clear and easy to digest. The arrangement of words too was poetic and enhanced its poetic feel.

Elana's observant eye takes the reader exactly to the place she is describing. All observations were relatable and tangible. An example here can be found at the beginning of chapter two where the writer paints images of traffic, pavement, roads, and buses and taxis stopping at random to pick passengers up. The unemployment and poverty that exists in the

cities and the kind of businesses people have resorted to were portrayed vividly and one who is familiar with the country could see what was described clearly.

The dialogues were also well written. There was respect for all characters and situations involved. There were no exaggerations, mockery, or stereotypes. Everything flowed naturally with a constancy that makes one trust the voice telling the story.

From this book, the reader learns so much. A lot of awareness is brought, regarding animals, plants, and people from other countries who find themselves struggling in other countries because of war in their own country, the pain of losing a loved one, loneliness, etc. Every chapter had its own beauty and truths about life. The voice remains compassionate, caring, and understanding throughout the book, yet it also knew where and how to maintain a distance where it was needed.

The message I got from this book was that one needs to continue doing what is good and right in life, no matter the circumstances. And to do so even if it feels like it's done in vain.

Book Review 3

C. P. Cavafy Complete Poems by Daniel Mendelsohn, published in 2009 by Alfred A. Knopf.

In this selection by Daniel Mendelsohn, the introduction tells us about the poet and his life. From it, we find out that Cavafy was a private man who held an ordinary job as a government bureaucrat and lived a modest, frugal life with no great fame or recognition until relatively late in life, and even then, hardly great. We are also told that he never published a collection in his lifetime but preferred to make small pamphlets, at his own expense, which he only shared with people close to him.

The striking feature of this detailed selection is how Cavafy's poetry was distinct from traditional poetry, in many respects, which was its key strength. Inside this selection, the reader is met with a constantly plain-spoken, unapologetically direct, and appealingly straightforward style, which is, however, rich in poet thoughts, and which most of the time takes a symbolic stance.

There is unsparing, unforgiving self-examination, and concern with the ironies of human action, which the poet always follows up with a life-altering misfortune.

To show how the poet achieves this, key poems from this selection will be analyzed below.

In 'Ithaka' the poet takes heads on the subject of self-imprisonment, and hopelessness, and situations beyond redemption. The poem is an unrhymed poem made up of five stanzas that employ conversational, everyday language. In this poem, the poet takes us on a journey to a life free of restraints and fears, full of promises and pleasures, and all the splendours of the world. He makes us hopeful. What follows, however, in form of repeated advice, bring the reader back to reality in an unexpected way, reflecting to us the things we often forget when we dream, things such as the fact that sometimes the goal itself is usually disappointing, that there is usually less pleasure than the pleasure hoped for and imagined. The advice that the poet gives is that when we are on a journey to realize a dream, we should not rush or hurry the destination, but we should enjoy the journey, and wish it doesn't end, because more than often, the destination is different from what the dreamer expected it to be. This theme, the taking away on the reader the obsession with the desired destination, made the poem very powerful, and haunting. The metaphoric use of the word 'Ithaka', even as a title, worked. It represented all goals and ideals that humans strive for, all the expectations we have of reward to be received in the future for actions done in the present. After reading this poem the reader can't help but think of how life is often exhausted contemplating the goal of one's endeavours and in building up hopes and schemes for the future, while we should be enjoying the all-important journey.

In 'The City', exactly like the poem above, and exactly like most of the poem by the poet, is unrhymed and employs conversational everyday language. And like the above poem, it looks at the predicament of hopelessness. 'The City' explores the belief that one cannot

simply run away from one's problems. That one must face them heads-on wherever one is in the world. That moving somewhere can help a person escape their physical environment, but it will not change their mindset which is what puts them in that situation in the first place. What the poet says is that change comes from within, and not from moving locations. That to truly change the things one sees around him and for one to be happy, one must change your own attitude and viewpoint on life.

The poem begins like the above poem 'Ithaka', by focusing on the 'you' - the person who is talking to the poet, who is deciding that his mind has broken down living in the city he lives in, seeking escape. The person suggests that it is not their fault that their years have been wasted, and he puts the blame on the city that he lives in.

The second stanza then replies to the person and undoes his ridiculous view. The poet says it's 'not' the city that has led to this waste of life, but rather the person themselves by allowing themselves to become who they have become. The poet then suggests that he should think about changing his perspective on life.

The poem is made up of just these two stanzas, and it's structured in a way that reflects the speech/conversational stance that ordinary conversations often take. They are representative of the characters of the poem, each stanza carrying the thoughts and ideas of one and the other.

Strength and uniqueness in this poem are achieved through a lack of specificity. The person within the first stanza tells us that he is willing to do 'whatever' and to go to 'another' city. Both the lack of specificity on location and the action, make the whole poem relatable to every reader everywhere. This lack of specificity on the person speaking to the poet can also be seen as a way of revealing to us readers that he has not truly thought out his plan of escape, that he is rather fleeing from his problems.

The poem 'As Much As You Can' is also like the two above poems in that its narrative, uses everyday language, is unrhymed. However, this poem is slightly shorter. It has two stanzas, and is made up of five lines that were written in a form of narrative advice directed at every reader of the poem. The poem talks about the need to sometimes be alone, the need to not 'cheapen one's life by too much activity and talk.'

Both stanzas talk about things the poet says should not be done as they make life 'strange and burdensome'. These things are 'too much intercourse with society', 'too much movement and conversation'.

This poem worked because of how it brought forward the bright side of being alone and not having too many people around one's self, which I felt is something forgotten by most people.

As a short poem, the directness of everything worked in the poem's favour and gave it an urgent, haunting feel. The two-stanza structure worked and kept the poem together and gave it balance.

Another thing that was of note in the selection was the poet's knowledge of history, Greek history to be specific. This is made visible in poems such as 'If Only They Seen To It' , 'Alexandrian Kings' , 'Alexandrian A.D. 340' , 'Alexandrian A.D. 628-655' , 'In Alexandria 31 B.C.' , 'Theodotus' , 'Seleucid' , 'Thombs of Lanes' , 'Thombs of Ignatius' , 'from Ammones who died aged 26 in 610' , 'In Church' , 'Morning Sea' , 'Aemillianus Monae' , 'The potentate from Western Libya' , 'In Spartta' , 'In Year 200 B.C.' , 'If indeed dead' , and 'The Displeasure of Seleucid' just to name the few.

The rest of the poems in the selection, including 'Waiting for the barbarians' which is also widely recognised and anthologised, followed the same unique narrative stance found in the three above poems. Mendelsohn was successful in portraying, fully and clearly, the poet's style which turns away from conventional poetry, which is almost indistinguishable from prose. The author's sequence of the poems made the poet easy to study and understand, starting with the most recognisable poems and moving up according to the years the poems were written. Throughout this selection, the timelessness of Cavafy's work was brought to the fore and the richness of it was made visible.

Book Review 4

Paul Celan: Selection edited and with an introduction by Pierre Jorris, published in 2005 by University of California Press.

Pierre Jorris is regarded as the best translator and editor of Paul Celan's work. This selection, which was his first on Celan, struck me because it explored different facets that made up Celan's large body of work, from early poems to late poems to poems published posthumously.

In the book, we are first met by Pierre's introduction which reveals to us the vastness of Celan's work. We are told his work includes roughly nine hundred pages of poetry distributed over eleven volumes, two hundred and fifty pages of prose, more than a thousand pages of published correspondence, and nearly seven hundred pages of poetry translated from eight languages. This information about Celan made me understand him more as a person and made me see the urgency that was present in the writing of the poems.

We are also told in great detail about the poet's Jewish biography and his movements between Romania, his home country, and France because of the Holocaust which led to both his parent's loss of lives. We are also told that though he was the most proficient multilingual poet, he wrote (nearly) all his life in his mother's language, German. We are also told he was a prolific translator and translated over forty-three great poets such as Shakespeare, Emily Dickinson, Andre Breton, Aime Cesaire, Henri Pastoureau, Benjamin Peret, Eluard and Desnos, Nerval, Mallarme Apollinaire, Valery, Rilke, Sergey Yesin and Velimir Khlebnokov, Yevgeni Yevtushenko, just to name the few.

In closing the introduction, he talks to us about the poet's late repeated bouts of mental illness which overshadowed his life, and work, which he says is no doubt a result of the traumas experienced during the Nazi years. He tells us it demanded a number of voluntary stays in psychiatric clinics from the poet, during which he was subjected to intense medication and on several occasions to drug and shock therapy.

The poems themselves in the selection strike with their vocabulary, their textual strategies, and their tactical indirectness. They rely on imagery rather than argument, and the delivery is closer to established conventions.

Much of the poet's later work contained dark images and was preoccupied with death, and surrealism, sophistication and paradoxes are mostly present.

Throughout the poems, some contrasts and paradoxes celebrate the beauty of things and their energy while also celebrating their destruction. This darkness is present in all his poems, early and late, including the most high-spirited and sensuous.

The poet constructs paradoxes that tolerate contradictions and he does not mind leaving them unresolved. These paradoxes then create unique expressions which are often present in real life when we speak or go through everyday life. To achieve heightened strength the poet plays around with ideas such as affirmation and denial, mentioning something and then voiding it of its conventional meaning, ideas that one cannot tell whether are opened or closed, agree or disagree, and the creation of complex positions that need to be given up which at the same time the poet is committed to.

Related to the paradox were the dislocations of normal usage of language. In the same way paradoxes were a part of the poet's voice, so was this difficulty in expressing what was felt. This made the poems more powerful and made the reader want to sympathise with the poet, whilst it created beautiful rhythm and musicality.

In the poem 'The Jars (for Klaus Demus)' these paradoxes are apparent from the onset. The poem begins with 'At the banquet tables of time/ God's tankards are tipping. / they drink till they empty the eyes of the seeing and the eyes of the blind... they drink deep of emptiness just as of fullness/ and never brim over like you or like me.' This poem, which is one of Celan's most translated, carries paradox to the ultimate. In a world that is described as having no God, God's tankards assemble to party. Instead of serving to quench human thirst, the mugs drink themselves.

In the poem 'Corona', the poet's feelings of hope and romance are brought to the fore. The poem is made up of seven unequal unrhymed stanzas. In itself, full of paradoxes like the other poems, was however slightly detached from the other selected poems in terms of its spirit, though 'In Praise of Remoteness' comes closer.

The poem as a whole was well constructed that after reading one is not sure whether it's a love poem, or a poem about the desire to say a long-held truth. This is because of the third line in the second stanza 'the mouth tells the truth' and the last three lines of the poem 'that unrest formed a heart./ It is time it was time./ It is time.'

The third, fourth, and fifth stanzas were different in that they are direct and speak about things around the speaker and things the speaker and his lover were doing. This brought freshness to the poem and gave space for the digestion of the images and paradoxes of the poem. These direct objective things include 'The mouth tells the truth./ My eyes descend to the sex of my loved one, / we gave at each other, / we whisper out darkness,/ we love one another like poppies...' and 'embracing we stand by the wind, and people look up from the street.'

In his most famous and most widely anthologized poem 'Fugue of Death', pain, the main theme, gets a different manifestation. The poem is made up of six unequal unrhymed stanzas and depicts the condition of Jews in the grimy concentration camps in Germany. It shows us the savagery and inhumane treatments they were subjected to. From the first stanza, the poet uses metaphoric language and other poetic devices 'Black milk of dawn we drink it at night/ we drink it at noon and at daybreak we drink it at night/ we drink and we

drink' repetition here of 'we drink and we drink' stressing the point of malnourishment and dirtied innocence of the victims of the Holocaust.

The poet presents a speaker who represents his co-sufferers and expresses his thoughts about his mental state. Throughout the poem, there is no coherence and each thought comes and goes, and is blended with different emotions. One emotion being love for the family members killed or confined in another concentration camp. The other being fear, which was directed at the commander who is looking over the oppressed people, and the most important feeling being pain, the main theme.

The lack of punctuation between thoughts worked and can be interpreted as suggesting the deterioration of the speaker's consciousness as he exposes the atrocities the crematorium has wreaked on those condemned to die.

At the end of the poem the speaker, along with the other people in the camp, may be assumed to have been killed. Celan uses this absurdity to remind readers how far they will always be from knowing the full truth of the death camps.

The poem 'In Praise of Remoteness' is a short six stanza poem with unequal unrhymed lines, which in terms of imagery and paradoxes follows closer to Corona. It is a straightforward love poem, and reflects on the poet's deep relationship with his beloved. The deepness of this love is revealed in the powerful and imagistic opening lines 'In the wellspring of your eyes/ live the fish nets of the labyrinth sea./ In the wellspring of your eyes/ the ocean keeps its promise.' This poem, like Corona, also relies heavily on paradoxes, which can be found in lines such as 'Only when faithless am I true. / I am you when I am I... / A net snared a net: we separate entwined./ In the wellspring of your eyes/ a hanged man strangles the rope.' All this play of imagery and paradoxes worked for the piece and gave it mystery and sophistication, and also made it haunting and memorable. It showed how deep love can be and how incomprehensible such a feeling can be.

Poetics Essay

'Written in Stone' by Tiff Holland dealt with how subject dictates narrative form. It spoke about how we as writers sometimes destroy beautiful writing by forcing it into a certain form. Holland explains that one should hand himself over to the writing he is working on and listen to what it says it wants to be. He says we as poets shouldn't fear uncertainty, since 'poetry is enhanced by it'. He also speaks about the importance of being honest when one puts his initial thoughts on the page. He says nothing should be repressed, and once everything is on paper, we should not 'cover it up with extraneous passages'. He also emphasized the importance of brevity when one has poured all emotions on the page. The passage that explained this beautifully was the one that said 'think in 'lines', remove unnecessary pronouns, resist the allure of adjectives and adverbs and let the actions, thoughts, dialogue or descriptions stand on their own... say just the 'thing', whatever it is, and let it rest'.

This essay also came closest to explaining how I feel about the writing process as a whole. Holland says as writers there is no need to know everything all the time and that it's fine to operate in the dark and not know where we going with our writing. The sentence that captures this was the one where he says 'I embraced ambiguity in thinking and writing and believe that is one of the reasons I stayed away from traditional narrative and its demands for clarity for so long.'

Holland continues and says 'a sculptor can see the sculpture in a rock and simply chips away until the form emerges. I didn't want the character or the story to be lost to the stone. I tried my best to chip away until both could emerge but nothing was lost... Betty Superman [Holland's most recognized work] walked out of the stone. I would have been a fool to try to shape the flashes, the novella, into something bigger, longer, or more beautiful. I believe that every subject makes obvious its own form. I just try to pay attention' making the point that form, in some way, determines itself, and we should not prioritize form when creating, but let form be.

'Desperate and Beautiful Noise' by Tim Seibles dealt with finding the answer to the question why we create works of art, why we 'spend so many hours of our lives trying hard to bend the silence, to fashion a voice worthy of a listen?' Seibles starts by explaining that 'voice is not an individual speaking (writing) from a single position- his heart, her mind – but that a voice can be representative or *stand-in* for a community's voice'. He then describes "community" as embracing and cutting across its known boundaries to include members of many different groups who share a sensibility, a particular feeling about life'.

According to Seibles, the need to create comes from the need to offer 'a corrective- a different imperative of human association: emotional frankness, attentiveness to what is felt, a sharp turn toward the knowledge that we all of us are equally lonely, equally vulnerable to the damage that cruelty and greed inflict. If a person found the external world in harmony with her inner world there would be little need to begin the arduous and terribly lonely task of shaping a distinct voice in an effort to assert a truth where previously a void or something contrary to the heart held sway.'

To answer his initial question he says he believes 'there is a profound and pervasive hunger for authenticity, a kind of cancer of the spirit... nagging suspicion. Often we as people secretly hold the hearts of our fellow citizens in contempt. Some may even hold their own hearts in contempt. This makes empathy impossible. Compassion seems naive, and impractical- which makes genuine community [the 'authenticity' he was referring to] the first casualty... any form of human expression that takes seriously the project of opening the heart is subversive to the exact extent that the surrounding culture denies the primary and abiding complexity of our emotions.'

A similar idea was shared by Adrienne Rich in the essay 'Someone is Writing a Poem' when she said 'I can't write a poem to manipulate you... I can't write a poem simply from good intentions, wanting to set things right, make it all better; the energy will leak out of it, it will end by being meaningless than it says... I can't write a poem that transcends my own limits... I can expect a reader to feel my limits as I cannot... We go to poetry because we believe it has something to do with us...'

'Slowness' by Amina Cain dealt with the importance of allowing whatever thought one has to sink in before one trusts that he understands what he wants to write. She emphasizes the need to be 'absorbed' in the subject we wish to tackle and to understand that the words that come initially are usually not the perfect words for whatever is being described, and that the longer one sits with the thought the more he will find words for what is being described. I resonated with her when she said 'when I write, I follow the mind of the text I'm working on, which makes it hard for me to connect to the idea that literature or fiction should or shouldn't do anything. I start from an open place and trust that the elements that need to be in the story will find their way. I don't think, especially about accessibility or audience. Some of my stories are accessible to some people, and some of them aren't. I can't control that. My imagination gets everything and it determines everything too: form, language, narrative voice, character, setting, and so on.' This is exactly what happens to me before I write and when I write. I follow my mind and trust my instincts, and I always have a belief that what needs to be on the page will find its way to the page. The second part of this passage shared a link to the thoughts shared by the above essays that form creates itself and one should not demand to be in control when creating a work of art. Which I agree with.

'Language Is Site of Our Collective Infection' by Lara Glenum was written in a form of advice and poetic thoughts. I was struck by the phrase 'artificially constructed - and then naturalized...' and felt it's what writing is most of the time. Other phrases that got my attention were: 'there is no natural voice, no natural work of art. Everything is artifice, which is to say, everything is style. You are a maker, so make according to your spasms and blindness'; 'take things too far. Shock yourself out of normative language'; 'don't edit the noise out'; 'cultivate a highly tactile sense of language' [meaning, read! A lot!]; and 'perform experiments not with language but *on* language'.

I saw a link on most of these lines to the important idea shared throughout these essays- not seeking control over the creation of a work of art and allowing one's self to be vulnerable, open, and receptive to what the art wants to be. I also took heed of Glenum's closing thought that said 'language is the site of our collective infection. Poems are medical waste. A lot of life-saving experiments and procedures can be performed with medical waste'. It showed well the majestic size of language as a whole, and what possibilities lay ahead for us writers if we are willing to come out of our comfort zones and experiment.

'The Crazy Party Guy, or, A Disruption of Smooth Surfaces' by Brian Evenson dealt with avant-garde and experimentalism. Evenson says 'avant-garde that falls again and again into certain comfortable patterns of disruption becomes part of the literary establishment.' He uses an example of a crazy party guy to explain what avant-garde is and says 'like the guy who does crazy stuff at the party- putting a lampshade on his head one night, emptying the bowl of jelly beans into his pants the next. You don't know what crazy thing crazy party guy is going to do, but he's always at the party and he's always crazy.' He adds something important and says 'but that's part of the problem: that guy is an integral part of the party in a way that delimits and controls him.'

He then gives four levels in which good writing should disrupt apparently smooth surfaces of things and I felt it gave me a different fresh view to look at my own work and to be able to ascertain what's the aim of the work and whether it does what it aims or not. These levels of disruptions were divided as: first, having to do with the status quo and social conventions. Secondly, having to do with our notions of what it means to be a unified self. Thirdly, having to do with the idea of language as a potentially transparent surface for the transmittal of meaning. And the fourth and last having to do with the contingent nature of the fabric of reality itself. I liked very much what Evenson did here and resonated with him greatly and I could follow clearly the direction he was trying to take us as readers, and writers.

I also resonated with the line 'avant-garde writing should feel like it can use any tool at its disposal but that it will use it in a careful and systematic way, with the impression of purposiveness... make some effort to depict a surface before... disrupt[ing] it. Disruption in

more than just an intellectual way...' and felt the advice it gave can really be useful and freeing in practice, if applied carefully. In my own writing I try by all means not to limit myself. I use absolutely everything at my disposal, to create rhythm/musicality, and to give strength to the message I am trying to send. This line depicted exactly that and I also liked that it emphasized the need for a purpose and the need to lay a good foundation before disrupting a surface.

The closing statement was also enlightening. Evenson says 'accessibility should not be the defining issue of the avant-garde... there are texts that deliberately ventriloquize other more conventional voices or conventional ideas in a way that ultimately makes those voices and ideas ring hollow and ultimately seem unsound' which I found to be true, paying too much attention to accessibility does sometimes control what we write and how we write it, and in the process limits us.

'The Beautiful Voyage' by Barbara Guest was written in a style that had vivid images, wit, and insight. It spoke about how the 'language' of a poem does not depend on language alone, but depends also on tensions placed on the structure, variability of meter, fleeting moods of expression, mutability of consonants and vowels.'

In this essay Guest touches widely on the need to allow the imagination to take over and to go wherever it tells us it wants to go. This can be found in lines such as 'context is a logical emergence (even 'emergency' inside) from inside the poem... poetry entering its own domain may, for a time, cast its spell over the poet... you, also, are going to entertain within a poem circumstances over which you must eventually take control, but at first you have no control... when in trouble depend on the imagination...' and 'Picasso, when facing his inquisitors: 'Subject matter? You have to have an idea of what you are going to do, but it should be a vague idea' what Picasso said about subject matter [is that] 'it's always something else in the end' and 'while the poem is in the making it changes as thoughts change. There are certain rhythmical tides and swells on this voyage when the poem gains control of its shape and enters its own rhythmical waters...' These lines I felt gave me a different view to look at the point the other writers kept making and offered more clarity to it, and as a result my fear of allowing the imagination to take over was decreased.

'Projective Verse + The Practice' by Williams, William Carlos also was very enlightening. It spoke about the hole we all have inside of us. The emptiness we all feel when we are by ourselves or in a state of doubt or uncertainty. I resonated with the lines '... we have all seen ourselves rejected... and we have all seen ourselves rejected.' and felt it was true and can be used as a source of inspiration in writing. In my writing such information is important and whenever a poem allows I ensure to incorporate it. I believe such truths not only touch and help the reader, but they also help the poet or the writer.

Other passages from William Carlos's essay that touched on what is said above and explained it better were 'and when one is able to reveal them to themselves, high or low, they are always grateful as they are surprised that one can so have revealed the inner secrets of another's private motives. To do this is what makes a writer worth heeding: that somehow or other, whatever the source may be, he has gone to the base of the matter to lay it bare before us in terms which, try as we may, we cannot in the end escape. There is *no choice* then but to accept him and make him a hero.' and the one that said '... the thing isn't to find the time for it- we waste hours every day doing absolutely nothing at all-the difficulty is to catch the evasive life of the thing, to phrase the words in such a way that stereotype will yield a moment of insight... that is where the difficulty lies.'

Kathy Acker's 'The Killer' spoke about 'realism' and called it reductive since it aims for a harmonious order that is not there in real life. It said 'false realism consists of believing that everything can be described and explained... when story-telling, humans attempt to cling to meaning.' The essay also made me look at details differently and I also saw a relation to what the other writers have been saying about letting go. It also allowed me to be less hard on myself when I can't describe or explain everything that I wish to explain and made me cling less to meaning so as to allow the writing to be what it wants to be. This made me look at things differently and brought calmness I didn't have before and I really think it will affect the way I write going forward, especially how I add details.

'A Voice Within A Voice' by Raymond Federman spoke about bilingualism. I resonated with this essay greatly because I am also bilingual and because I have had a lot of questions regarding the subject and have had an interest in how other writers deal with it. Federman says, like myself, he does not normally question or analyze his bilingualism. That he 'just let it be, let it happen in [him] and outside of [him]'

I also felt he described perfectly the relationship I have with the two languages I speak and write in (English and IsiZulu) when he said 'I write more, and have always written more in English than in French, even though English is not my first language. English gives me freedom to experiment with grammar and syntax. I feel that my French is somewhat ancient, perhaps even fossilized, that it is no longer up-to-date, that it is a language of another time in my life. That does not mean that I write badly or poorly in French, I don't think so, nor does it mean that I have rejected the French language, but that when I write in French I become conscious, over-conscious of using a language which is distant from me. And this, not because there have been periods when I did not use French (I use my French all the time), but simply because French is somewhat foreign and restrictive to me now. To put it differently, I feel like a prisoner in the French language, perhaps because it made me, because it captured me originally, and I feel free in English because it liberated me, because it took me out of the French language and the French culture.' What he says here I related fully with and it described exactly what happens to me.

I also resonated with Federman when he said 'I do not seem to feel that there is a space between the two languages in me that keeps them apart. On the contrary, for me French and English always seem to overlap, to want to merge, to want to come together, to want to embrace one another, to mesh one into the other. Or if you prefer, they want to spoil and corrupt one another.'

This made me understand better what happens in my head concerning these two languages when I write, and think, and now that I know I will be less resistant in accepting my thoughts as they are and in whatever language they present themselves, and nor will I see the languages as opposing one another or being in conflict.

'Poetry and Knowledge' by Aime Cesaire looked at poetry's place in philosophy and poetry as philosophy. I agreed with a lot of points Cesaire made, such as 'the time when mankind discovered with emotion the first sun, the first rain, the first breath, the first moon. At the time when mankind discovered in fear and rapture the throbbing newness of the world... it is in this state of fear and love, in this climate of emotion and imagination that mankind made its first, most fundamental, and most decisive discoveries... I even believe that mankind has never been closer to certain truths than in the first days of the species'. Since I share a curiosity in the subject of the 'first people', how they lived, what they did, what emotions they battled with, what beliefs they had, etc – this point worked for me and really got my interest. I feel such information can shed light on a lot of things we as humans do today. Seeing Cesaire dealing with it in this essay made me want to explore the subject more and for that reason, made the essay more interesting.

Other lines that touched on this point, and stuck me were 'It was both desirable and inevitable that humanity should accede to greater precision...' and felt it explained the long way we have come as humanity and I felt if it can be traced there is a lot we can find which will fascinate us and tell us things about ourselves. I also felt the same thing in the line '... in poetic emotion nothing is ever closer to anything than the opposite... and nothing is less strange than the contradictoriness one discovers in mankind.'

Federico Garcia Lorca's 'Theory and Function of the Duende' was very captivating. The whole concept of the 'duende' was interesting to me and I resonated strongly with the points it was making about the creation of art. Lorca says the duende is 'a mysterious force that everyone feels and no philosopher has explained...' He says it is a spirit that visits one when he is creating or performing that makes him do mesmerizing work that even he does not know how to explain. He says 'it's not a question of skill, but of a style that's truly alive... it presupposes a radical change to all the old kinds of form, brings totally unknown and fresh sensations, generating an almost religious enthusiasm.' He also says people with this duende do what they do with 'charm... effortlessly... with order... [and] there is no way to oppose their light.'

To try and explain the workings of the duende he recalls a story of an artist who was visited by the duende when least expected '... she played with her voice of shadows, with her voice of beaten tin, with her messy voice, she tangled it in her hair, or soaked it in manzanilla or abandoned it to dark distant briars. But, there was nothing there: it was useless. The audience remained silent... she got up like a madwoman, trembling like a medieval mourner, and drank in one gulp, a huge glass of fiery spirits, and she began to sing with a scorched throat, without voice, breath, colour, but... with duende. She managed to tear down the scaffolding of the song, but allow through a furious, burning duende, friend to those winds heavy with sand, that make listener tear at their clothes... her voice no longer at play, her voice a jet of blood, worthy of her pain and her sincerity, opened like a ten-fingered hand as in the feet, nailed there but storm-filled...'

Another story he uses is that of an eighty-year-old woman who came first in a dance contest in Jerez de la Frontera 'against lovely women and girls with liquid waists' and I felt it explained beautifully the point he was trying to make, that once the duende has visited an artist or performer nothing can stop them. He says 'an eighty-year-old woman came first in a dance contest, merely by [having duende]... But in that crowd of Muses and angels with lovely forms and smiles, who could earn the prize but her moribund *duende* sweeping the earth with its wings made of rusty knives...'

I felt this story, like the one above, worked as they explained clearly the writer's points which could not be explained any other way and as a result I was able to understand the writer's points and I could see them at play.

Reading all these essays was a joy for me. I grew a lot from the insights they gave me regarding the process of creating a work of art and what really makes it possible and strong. I can happily say I am not the same artist I was before reading them, and I am very grateful for the writers' selflessness in sharing with us such profound thoughts.

Reference List:

Writer	Essay title
1. Tiff Holland	Written in Stone
2. Tim Seibles	Desperate and Beautiful Noise
3. Adrienne Rich	Someone is Writing a Poem
4. Amina Cain	Slowness
5. Lara Glenum	Language Is Site of Our Collective Infection
6. Brian Evenson	The Crazy Party Guy, or, A Disruption of Smooth Surfaces
7. Barbara Guest	The Beautiful Voyage
8. Williams, William Carlos	Projective Verse + The Practice
9. Kathy Acker	The Killer
10. Raymond Federman	A Voice Within A Voice
11. Aime Cesaire	Poetry and Knowledge
12. Federico Garcia Lorca	Theory and Function of the Duende

Reader Report

On week 37 I received a reader report on my draft thesis which gave comments and suggestions on what can be improved as well as what worked.

The reader thought the draft thesis could be reordered, particularly the concluding part. He said the poem 'Second and third thoughts' should be moved earlier in the collection and the poem 'God come to me tonight' further on. I have applied these changes.

The reader thought the 'God poems' and 'the autobiographical narrative poems' were strong because they contained a sense of sincerity, had simple language, a direct and unique tone and style, and some humour. In some poems the feeling of self-pity or melodrama was detected and pointed out. I was able to see the negative effect these feelings had on the poems or collection as a whole and I have worked on the poems and they became better and more alive.

The reader also noted that some autobiographical narrative poems show flawed humanity reflecting on a flawed self-reflection. The reader however added that with these poems 'although they might not be the strongest poems, they were clear, conveyed a setting and a position succinctly'. Most of these poems have been removed from the thesis so as to make the remaining poems with the same themes more impactful.

The character sketch poems such as 'Mabhece My Mother's Mother', 'Petros Mwelase' and 'Zibonele Skhakhane' were also seen as effective poems because of their simplicity and for conveying a sense of someone viewed with consideration and the suggestions made only pertained to the sequence.

'Poems conveying a strong sense of social commentary' were seen as accessible and offering unique interesting views.

Other themes that the reader thought were handled well in the collection include 'coming of age... searching for a (self) recognition amidst pressures from others – being and belonging in the world'; and the theme of writing, particularly being a poet.

Stylistically, the use of varying lines was said to work well for the collection. The few prose poems in the collections, 'It was poetry' and 'eShebeen' were also said to work well.

The reader summarised the collection as 'strong for its simple language, the accessibility of the images used, the clarity in the emotions expressed, the sincerity in the voice and particularly the surprise in the tone of the poems expressing a commitment and experience of faith'.

Receiving feedback from the reader and my supervisor, and from my lecturers and classmates in the seminars throughout the year has completely changed how I view writing.

It has made me see that writing is a craft, and that it's more than just putting words on a page. The more rewrites the writer undertakes, the better his work becomes. That it takes time. My self-editing and revision skills were improved and sharpened, and I am now able to look at my own work with a critical and questioning eye.