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## REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

A lot of anxiety preceded the actual start of this portfolio and the poems that go with it.

The whole saga began four years ago at the University of Fort Hare. I chose Fort Hare because of its proximity to my home in King William's Town. In my naivety I thought that I had signed up for a Creative Writing Masters Degree in English. The university department thought that I was going to produce a research thesis, with a few poems thrown in to illustrate my startlingly new ideas. In the end there emerged a lot of poems gleaned from my note books and a glutinous mass of uncoordinated research about which I had little or no idea. The whole project fell through when I finally realized that the university did not offer a degree in creative writing and most of the poems would have to be thrown out. This was not what I had intended. I had been writing poetry for many years, and I wanted my poems to receive critical evaluation, and perhaps to form the substance of a degree, whatever the outcome, negative or positive. I did not want them to be swamped in a polemic of academic research.

In desperation I took my bumbling, ever-evolving and bulky 'magnum opus' to Rhodes and was met with a very sympathetic hearing from the Faculty of Humanities. From then on the poems and the commentaries have taken shape as far as possible according to the requirements of the Masters in Creative Writing as offered by Rhodes. I have not been part of the taught course, which I regret, having entered by another route. My portfolio has had to be retrospective and has developed from the creative diaries which I have kept for many years, from rough work associated with the poems, from my reading of other poets, especially Eastern Cape poets, and from records of years of informal historical research into the part of the world I love. It has therefore become more a reflective account of past creative processes and thought than a contemporaneous journal. This can't be helped. Released from the burden of having to write an academic thesis, instead of the creative work which was my preferred aim, I have mentioned in my portfolio mainly those poets and authors

who have influenced me, supplying only one or two examples where there could be many more, to illustrate key points. The comments are sometimes rough and ready, as I try to remember and reconstruct thoughts and feelings which found their way into the poems.

My initial intention is to try to show how, as a poet in South Africa, I suffer from a creative identity crisis. I am a white English-speaking male. I live surrounded by isiXhosa-speaking people. Is my poetry, or will my poetry be, relevant in the 'New' South Africa? Is English, the language of the colonial oppressors, the appropriate medium in the post-apartheid milieu? Will my subject matter be relevant? These questions and my attempts at answering them, form the basis of the poetry and the portfolio that accompanies the poems. My absorption with finding a creative 'voice', my concerns with the environment and a questioning of what post-apartheid poetry should write about all seem a bit Quixotic, especially to me! But at another level, they are deeply serious.

So here goes.

Part of the challenges faced by poets, of all language groups, is the dominance of English as the *lingua franca* of much of post-colonial Africa and more specifically, post-apartheid South Africa. I have an uncomfortable sense of the negative impact of an imposed and alien language on the dilution of indigenous languages and cultures. I am fourth generation African. I have a strong feeling that I belong in Africa. This feeling is reinforced by having an enthusiasm and commitment for trying to protect the environment. Another related concern is my effort, in whatever way possible, to promote racial harmony. From these emotions emerge the poems in this thesis. The poems are a personal way of expressing these feelings, of coming to terms with being a white man in Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The poems try to establish my place in the milieu of Southern Africa. They are rooted, firstly, in a specific area, the Eastern Cape, and secondly in a sense of the wider world – European roots and the influence these have had on my search for identity. Factors impinging on this search for identity are mostly religious, historical and environmental. Other factors include familiar aspects of post-colonial debate.

I realize that this is a big chunk of issues and their appearance together leads to some overlapping and a sense of confusion. However, the search for an awareness of one's own place in the grand scheme of existence is no small matter, and for me far from easy. However fraught the struggle for identity has become, this seems to me better, more worthy, than blandly denying the problem, or making silence an excuse for indifference. Poetry, and the attempts to write poetry, have provided me with a clearer understanding of my life, have provided inspiration and a modicum of self-esteem.

Another major influence in this search for self has been a ten year association with the ECCA Group of poets. Originally based at the University of Fort Hare, Brian Walter, Cathal Lagan, Norman Morrissey and the late Basil Somhlahllo formed the group. All the other members of the present group (Mzi Mahola, Mariss Everitt and Lara Kirsten) are closely connected with the Eastern Cape and have spent much of their lives in this area and share similar ideas about many of the themes about which I write. I have found their poetic strivings a support and complement to my own, a family of voices I both participate in and overhear, voices struggling with similar issues which strengthen and define my own emerging poetic identity.

Brian Walter expressed the search for an identity and dissatisfaction with 'Englishness' in his poem *Hue and Cry* (2007, 7). Walter analyses his own lineage: German, Scottish and African. He laments that, '.... insidious English has seized everything I am'. Yet, because he has embraced English, '....

the practical tongue of trade', people classify him as an Englishman. The language has 'shaped and defined' him to the extent that he wishes he could cut it out of him until he is able to, '.... find for myself, without it, what I am'. There is regret that an identity that he feels should be considered wholly African is obscured by ethnicity and language usage.

The poem *Crossroads* in the thesis suggests similar sentiments. The poem tries to convey a sense of the history surrounding the arrival of a group of white people in the Eastern Cape, where the white women, including my mother's great, great grandmother, were carried ashore at Algoa Bay on the shoulders of naked black men. The poem attempts to illustrate a symbolic view of the burden placed on the indigenous population and the lasting effect of this, that still today there is a feeling in me that an unfair interdependence began, but that time has slotted me (and my ilk) into the fabric of South Africa and the Eastern Cape forever. Another aspect of this poem is the acknowledging of the fact that others of my forebears were soldiers in the British Imperial Army. The seminal thoughts behind the development of this poem are explored in greater detail later in the portfolio.

In a similar vein Shabbir Banhoobhai's poem *you cannot know the fears i have* (Ravan Press, 1984) deals with reconciling his presence and that of his unborn baby in Africa. Here the poet addresses his future daughter and expresses his concerns and anxieties about bringing a child into a world, at that time a world with a very uncertain, bleak and violent apartheid-ridden future. This was of particular concern for people who were not white or European. He feared an 'eclipse', a symbolic blotting out of the light of life under apartheid. The poem contains the paradoxical statement '... shadows of a sun-darkened land ...' which reveals deep acknowledgement of the oppression suffered under apartheid.

In terms of the spiritual aspect, Banhoobhai states that he will give his baby a sense of her 'earlier home'. The child will be given knowledge of her history and the culture of her ancestors

(Banhoobhai's grandparents came from India and were Muslim in faith). In other words, he is striving for an 'Africanness' without losing the sense of what his cultural and spiritual heritage is and from where his family originated. He carries his cultural baggage proudly. This is unlike Walter's feelings concerning his lineage, but serves to illustrate the complexities inherent in the blending of cultures in a society progressing towards a new identity. This progression is given prominence in the final line of Banhoobhai's poem, when he says to the child that, '.... your name shall bring light'. This strongly suggests that the poem will transcend the label of 'protest poetry'. It endorses a sense of hope, even joy, and a potential for success, not only for the child, but by extension, for the nation as well. (In the extended writing section of this thesis, the poem *1978 - Black Madonna - South Africa* signals a desire for acceptance across the racial divides; divides that so polarized the country prior to 1994. It also highlights a sense of hope for racial harmony that was so elusive during the apartheid era and hopefully foreshadows the end of post-colonial tension.) Post-colonial tension has been discussed widely by poets and academics from elsewhere in Africa, especially in places like Nigeria and Kenya.

Much of my struggle with my African identity is a matter of emotion. For instance, Gabriel Okara's poem *Piano and Drums* (Heinemann, 1978) encapsulates emotions surrounding the clash of African and colonial cultures. In the poem the sound of African drums arouses the sense of ancient Africa; the images of a rawness and energy in the nature of panthers and leopards killing prey, and the quiet pace of family life without the intrusive presence of Western culture, are stressed. These are counterpoised against the sound of a piano concerto symbolic of the 'sophisticated' western world in which he finds himself and the beat of tribal drums in the vastness of Africa. The final stanza reveals the dislocation caused by imperialism as Okara states he is, '.... lost ....' in the '.... rhythm of jungle drums and concerto'. The search for an identity that suits the modern person in post-colonial Africa is not over and remains alive for black Africans as well. I am not alone in the search.

In terms of understanding some post-colonial aspects of South African poetry I would like to begin with a few comments on 'Protest Poetry'. Briefly, Protest Poetry was often subtle criticism of apartheid, its laws and enormous cruelty; subtle in order to avoid censorship and more vicious punishment. At times it was also poetically unsubtle outbursts of rage. The main focus of this poetry was to register defiance of and opposition to apartheid in all its manifestations. Much of what was written was for the record, proclaiming that the Struggle within South Africa was alive and vibrant. The poetry was also an attempt to attract the attention of ('conscientize' in the vernacular of the era) sympathetic white opponents of apartheid, to draw them in and to provide encouragement to those involved in the Struggle within the country. To take only one example, Mongane Serote quoted here in the introduction to his *Selected Poems* (1982, 10) by Mbulelo Mzamane, was a leading proponent of protest poetry, firstly as a means to appeal to the 'White community in the protest tradition, ... for a change of heart', to abandon the racism of apartheid. Serote, however 'gradually despaired' of the Whites ever having a change of attitude. Serote moved to writing very militant poems containing his 'rising anger, hatred and despair.' (1982, 10). The tradition of protest poetry had a deep effect on me, forcing me to look more closely at my own limited experience as it must appear to my fellow Africans on the other side of the apartheid suffering. It led me to see how impossible it was to speak for others, yet how necessary it was to acknowledge their bitter experiences as a force in one's own life.

With the coming of democracy after 1994 there appeared to be a vacuum of inspiration. Andre Brink, for example, expressed the view that 'a widespread gloom is settling on many writers from recently liberated countries, in the curious conviction that, suddenly, there is nothing left to write about' (Secker and Warburg, 1996). In conversation with me, Cathal Lagan of the ECCA Poets observed that there had to be a return to 'kettles and clocks' (a phrase he had heard which had been coined by Professor Michael Chapman, according to him) as subject matter for creative writing.

This struck me as profoundly true. Post-colonial writing has been going on in other parts of Africa for some time and embraces a rich diversity of different themes.

Many writers in the rest of Africa (Okara, Achebe, *et al.*) tend to focus their writing on how to restore pride in African culture, which had been dominated and devastated by the imperial powers in the educational, economic and spiritual spheres. Culture is intimately linked to language, and post-colonial writers have concentrated much of their energy on reconciling the *lingua franca* of the world (English) with their own indigenous languages. High on their agenda is the protection and nurturing of their languages, as they are aware of the struggle in Britain, for example, to keep alive the Welsh and Irish forms of Gaelic or the original Celtic language as a means to ensure the survival of their ancient cultures.

In the Eastern Cape, and more specifically in the Stutterheim area of the Eastern Cape, German linguists have been studying the diaries and recording the speech of the few surviving Wendish (also known as Sorbian) speakers, descendants of the Slavic/German settlers of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century. These settlers were given land in return for their service to the British in the Crimean War of 1853-1856. The Wendish language has disappeared in Eastern Germany, and a dictionary using, among others, Eastern Cape sources is being compiled (there are Wendish groups in America and Australia, also dedicated to the preservation of their language and culture). The care lavished on this tiny language remnant contrasts strikingly with the large-scale neglect of serious attention to language issues in post-colonial Africa. The importance, then, of language cannot be exaggerated, as Africa strives to assert not only its political independence, but its cultural and psychological liberation from imperial oppression in all its forms.

As far as poetry is concerned the new wave in African writing is aptly summarized by Chinua Achebe when he says African poetry has a different function to European poetry. European poetry

is a 'tool of individual expression', whereas African poetry is 'created for the good of society, to serve the needs of the time' (Routledge, 1993). Achebe's assertions become intimately connected to the position of English in post-colonial Africa. In the context of language, English remains a dominant presence for the poet if a wide audience is to be reached. Where English dominates, linguistic alienation takes place (for example, Mzi Mahola's comments referred to later in this discussion) and the writer needs to be aware of this, as it implies that the indigenous languages are being relegated to inferior status with negative effects on the culture of the local population.

A major problem with cultural imperialism is illustrated by Peter Horn when he states in an interview with Robert Berold (Gecko, 2003), that the

- greatest mistake which South African writers in English have made, in my opinion, is that they thought they had to write as if they were living in Britain or America, which meant that were presenting back to the world a second-hand product.

A natural corollary of acknowledging the tendency of the English language to present a 'second hand product' in the African context, is an attempt to find ways and means to achieve a southern African sense of poetry in the collection. In other words, as an English-speaking poet in South Africa, a certain alienation from 'Englishness' is experienced, accompanied by a tendency to seek an alternative, more differentiated local identity. The co-existence and mingling of different languages in our country can result in a more recognizably South African linguistic and social identity, 'drawn from the rich fabric of the Aboriginal culture' (Routledge, 2007). Writing in English need not be a hindrance to the writing of poetry, particularly if, as Okara has stated,

- living languages grow like living things, and English is far from a dead language. There are American, West Indian, Australian, Canadian and New Zealand versions of English. All of them add life and vigour to the language while reflecting their own respective cultures. (Routledge, 2007)

Reinforcing what Okara has said, Achebe maintains that he feels

- the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home, but altered to suit new African surroundings. (Routledge, 2007)

As far as local post-colonial writing is concerned, Mzi Mahola shows that linguistic alienation is not reserved for white English-speaking poets only. Asked by Robert Berold if he wrote in isiXhosa as well as English, Mahola replied, 'I tried in Xhosa, but I did not find the passion. Maybe it's because when I started reading I was not reading in Xhosa, I was reading in English' (Gecko, 2003). In terms of subject matter, among many other things Mahola has chosen to express disgust and even rage at the corruption that has so bedevilled post-apartheid South Africa, as illustrated in his poem *A Cemetery of Hopes* (Seaberg, 2011). He describes how a bereaved father, standing at his third child's grave, observes that 'poverty ate their flesh away/though we also queued' to vote, 'buoyed by hope of a better life'. The poem continues to tell how a 'potbellied politician' in an imported car arrives to pick up a beautiful lady he had forgotten and left behind. As an afterthought the politician addresses the funeral crowd with tired Struggle slogans. The listless crowd responds, 'though hunger had blunted/their enthusiasm'.

Another of Mahola's poems, *Games of the Age* (Seaberg, 2011), laments the fact that he is subjected to 'mockery and ridicule' by his children because he loses 'keys spoons socks remote controls' which play 'hide and seek' with him, illustrating Lagan's comment about 'kettles and clocks'. Many of South Africa's post-colonial poets find themselves drawn to material divorced from the narrow perspectives of Struggle polemic. This question of 'polemic' is usefully discussed in many essays in Ingrid de Kok's and Karen Press's collection *Spring is Rebellious* (Buchu Books, 1990), and these have informed my thinking about how and why we have to move on from the poetry and poetics that shaped literature during the struggle years, while yet keeping its lessons as a continuing pressure in our work.

Albie Sachs in particular discussed the problem of how to plot the progress of literature in the post-apartheid era.

In his early post-liberation essay, *Preparing Ourselves for Freedom* (Buchu Books, 1990), he remarked that in order to liberate the artistic corps, the concept of ‘culture’ must be released from the ethos of oppressed and oppressor, so that as a nation we may be freed from the prison of the ‘multiple ghettos of apartheid imagination’ (Buchu Books, 1990).

Perhaps liberation from more than just the ‘ghettos of apartheid imagination’ is necessary, if I look at what transpired when Robert Berold asked Kelwyn Sole whether he could trace his ‘literary roots’ (Gecko, 2003). Sole informed Berold that his roots were Rimbaud and Blake as main influences, but concluded that he wanted to avoid his ‘literary roots, racially speaking – for at the time it was a maze with an entrance and no exit’ (Gecko, 2003).

Perhaps it is time to acknowledge that the maze does have an exit. The poems in this collection are an attempt to illustrate that there is plenty to occupy poets, in particular those poets who are attempting to find a voice and inspiration in post-apartheid South Africa, no matter what their colour or creed or their choice of subject matter. The struggle for personal and poetic identity is also a struggle for aesthetic liberation – but a responsible liberation.

Another rich source of inspiration is the environment. A large section of my collection of poems is dedicated to ‘ecopoetry’ – poetry that takes the ecology and environmental issues as its sources of inspiration.

Much of South African ecopoetry has been pioneered and written by Chris Mann and Douglas Livingstone, among others. Ecopoetry embraces a holistic approach to poetic material, placing emphasis on the fact that humans must consciously regard themselves as part of the natural world. This approach should help to guarantee that the rights of animals and plants are protected, in a small way, by encouraging a more consciously responsible approach to the environment. Flora and fauna

need space and place in order to co-exist alongside, and with, humans. Indeed it is the responsibility of humans to ensure that protection of the environment is implemented and sustained as an urgent priority.

‘Ecopoetry’ can usefully be described as having concern with ‘space’ and ‘place’ (Levey and Mann, Alternation, 2009) – major frames into which mankind and animals fit. Mann espouses the concept of the ‘interdependent nature of the world’, meaning, I take it, that all life forms are crucial for our eventual survival. Mann’s main point is that poetry, along with the insights and knowledge acquired from science and technology, is vital in creating an awareness of the role of man in preserving the delicate ecology of the land (Alternation, 2009). Poems in my collection that attempt to attest to these concepts are *Waiting for the Wilderness* and *East Beach – Port Alfred – i* and *ii*.

The Renosterberg sequence of poems also tries to use Mann’s ecopoetry as a rationale for expression, combined with an awareness of other influences, such as the historical impact of the National Suicide of the Xhosa, and the ecological consequences of the proposed hydrofracking of the Karoo. The poem *The Wall* combines a sense of history with the search for an identity in ways that underlie much of the poetry in this collection.

I think the best way to sum up what I am trying to express in my writings is to quote Gavin Younge’s reference to the ‘tangled heritage’ (Buchu Books, 1990) of South African poets. This heritage is, for me, epitomized by a search for identity, anxiety about the environment and a sense of being ineluctably an Eastern Cape poet. All this is combined with a concern for the cultural crucible that comes with acknowledging that eleven official languages enrich and confuse the post-colonial experience of South Africa. It would seem to make sense, chauvinistic sense maybe, that to promote communication and a sense of coherence across languages and cultures, English is the best tool.

So, as we emerged from the long shadow of the apartheid hangover, Andre Brink summed up the anxieties felt by writers (me included) that, as quoted above, ‘a widespread gloom is settling on many writers from recently liberated countries, in the curious conviction that, suddenly, there is nothing to write about’ (Secker and Warburg, 1996). Brink, however, had earlier foreseen that poetry would not be stuck in the ‘Struggle’ mentality and that the emotions and angst felt by poets (and by me in my small way) would provide rich sources of inspiration. In his introduction to the anthology *A World of Their Own* (1976, 10), published at the height of the anti-apartheid rebellion, Brink writes, ‘there is a formidable body of new poets ... that belong, inescapably, to South Africa in their search for timeless symbols of their land ...’. He goes on to write that ‘the return to things past implies neither recollection in tranquility nor looking back in anger, but a meticulous evaluation of tokens and totems as the hieroglyphs of a timeless continent ... in other words the exploration of the past is part of the larger quest for *identity* (italics mine)’ (1976, 11).

The ‘formidable’ poets in this anthology, typical of its time, include Guy Butler, Douglas Livingstone, Chris Mann, Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali, Sipho Sepamla, Mongane Wally Serote and Stephen Gray. On reading this anthology, I am struck by Stephen Gray’s poem *Black Venus*. The poem concludes by stating that the black woman he described was not by any means, ‘made for servitude’ (1976. 56). The theme of this poem finds an uncanny echo in my poem *1978 - Black Madonna - South Africa*. The pain of apartheid’s forced segregation is implied and, to my mind, reveals that the desire of many right-thinking people was for racial harmony and mutual respect, even when apartheid was at its awful apogee (this poem, like many others, is discussed more fully later in this portfolio).

Poets who have influenced my poetry and my thinking about poetry, are many and various. First up is Robert Frost. As quoted by Robert Graves in the introduction to *Selected Poems of Robert Frost*

(1963, xii), Frost said that ‘poems, like love, begin in surprise, delight and tears, and end in wisdom’. I am not sure if I ever achieve this sort of epiphany in my poems, but it is a lofty goal to bear in mind and for which to strive. By far my favourite poem in the collection is ‘Grade 4 and more’, and it comes closest to Frost’s idea. For me there are both tears and delight at the memory of early awakenings and frustrations, and finally wisdom of a sort.

A second influence is the Polish poet, Wislawa Szymborska, particularly comments encapsulated in her Nobel Lecture in 1996 (1998, xiii), where she touched on a problem that many poets have concerning their identity as poets when she says, ‘they, (poets) publicly confess to being poets only reluctantly, as if they were a little ashamed of it...’. She however, states that despite this she ‘still places poets in a select group of Fortune’s darlings’ (1998, xvi) These ideas are contained in my poem, *He talks the language of poets*, or *Flirting with Hubris*, in which the problem of being a poet is the subject matter of the poem. Certainly, her statements reflect some of my own attitudes – I do not ever admit to being a poet in the pub after watching a rugby test match on the television, what with all the testosterone washing about. Equally, though, I do feel special being a poet. No matter what judgement is passed on the quality of my poetry, writing poems makes me feel one of ‘Fortune’s darlings’. I take encouragement in my search for identity from what she says.

Thirdly, Antjie Krog in her transliterations of the San stories and legends into poetry cleared up a technicality for me, when she explained her use of the term ‘Bushmen’ in preference to ‘San’ when referring to the original inhabitants of Southern Africa. She writes in her collection, *the stars say ‘tsau’* (2004, 7) that ‘the term “Bushman”, although still controversial and regarded by some as insulting, is currently preferable to the term “San” which means “vagabond” and is seen to be pejorative. “Bushman” is the term ... supported by several “San” groups who prefer the term “Bushman”’. I had always felt uneasy about the correctness of ‘San’, and this confirmation resolved

a problem for me in that it showed that self-definition could be preferable to an identity imposed from outside. We have the rights to our own understandings.

Fourthly I wish to refer to a new anthology called *Unbreaking the Rainbow – Voices of Protest from the New South Africa* (The Poets' Printery, 2012.) edited by Amitabh Mitra. This anthology illustrates what was being considered by Albie Sachs, Andre Brink and Michael Chapman about what is going to inspire poets in post-apartheid South Africa. The ideas in the introduction to this collection are, to me, startling, in that Amitabh says that he will not call the poets published in this book 'Struggle Poets'. He states that 'the struggle they dreamt of was never really achieved, I would call them Rebel Poets' (2012, 9), because they cannot implement the dreams of the original 'Struggle Poets'. The poems are not, by any stretch of the imagination, a return to 'kettles and clocks'. The first poem in the anthology, *A poet's dilemma* (2012, 13) by Naomi Nkealah lambastes political corruption. She remarks that '... when the president appoints his son/*The Minister Ultimate of Finance*/ They run to me for angry words/Angry words to throw at the president /Like stones at a thieving dog'. Her sentiments parallel Mzi Mahola's condemnation of the fat politician's behaviour at the funeral of a child and the tired reaction of the crowd, cowed into apathy by poverty, starvation and hopelessness while the corrupt politician prospers.

Another example of the Rebel Poets' anger comes from Raphael d'Abdou's poem *Loxion workers* (2012, 47), 'we are the ones/who earn/1-2-3-4/ hundred rand a week/ but are still expected to say/thank you dear madiba/viva cosatu/ Nginyabonga mr boshoff....

(18 August 2012 – as I wrote this particular section of the portfolio, miners were dying at Marikana under the guns of the police. They were demanding higher wages. The rage highlighted in d'Abdou's poem is finally coming to a head with tragic results.)

There are poems by 37 poets in this book – most of them demonstrating anger of some degree at the betrayal of what the Struggle was meant to achieve.

I have also found it helpful to ask other poets to view my work. This has nothing to do with this portfolio. It is my attempt to use practicing poets as sounding boards in a more formal manner. Otherwise you often don't get honest responses. To try to gauge what a well-known and well-respected Eastern Cape poet's reaction to my work would be. I will quote his comments below, some time ago I asked fellow ECCA Poet, Norman Morrissey, to comment on my poetry. I was trying to gauge my place in relation to other members of the ECCA group, and also to sense where we were in relation to our 'place' and the country as a whole.

Morrissey wrote, in a private communication:

‘One of the notes that Quentin Hogge strikes time and again is a register of his place in the Eastern Cape as a region haunted by history. This feel for strata of personalities and events underlying any present imaginings is there, for instance, in *Holy Trinity Church – King William's Town*.

In this poem three meditations span their own trinity of sections called, ‘The Imperial age’, ‘Apartheid Interlude’ and ‘Spectrum Time’. Underlying apartheid's ‘cowering church in chains/frightened of itself and the evil without’ lies the ‘militant church,/built by soldiers, white swallows, military men/of the colonial machine/ ... when might was right’. Then, the prospective ‘Church Triumphant’ of ‘a new congregation/purged of past burdens’ is placed by the ‘militant’ and ‘cowering’ churches of the past with an ironic continuum in which ‘now... our sins are normal’.

But Hogge's historical alertness isn't only a social concern – nor is it restricted to the provincial. The poems *En Route to Grahamstown* and *En Route to Grahamstown – Revisited*, are rich with a sense of the elephants; 'we... hunted them down/ their ghosts are on the road,/you see them if you have the gift' and they lead you to 'ponder the ways of men'. And perhaps the most dramatic of Hogge's historically-oriented poems is *The Memorial Service* in which a poet speaks in comment upon a tablet commemorating the dead of the Bechuanaland Field Force campaign of 1897, after a priest has intoned their names. The historical register goes abroad into the wider Southern African theatre, and thence into a feel for past human events that reaches to David's 'five smooth stones from a stream in *Slingshot* and leaps across to 'the stone of Polyphemus (that) crushes out the life/ of Acis' in *Sicily*.

What shows in his poems is an attentiveness to human history whenever and wherever – an insight that is reflected in action in the 'sunken villa of *Mosaic*, where a porcelain depiction of 'a slime/ covered vestal' is exposed by divers to 'a scowling audience of women': the vestal of the past continually being revealed by acts of Hogge's imagination.

There also many poems that reflect Hogge as the husband, 'In the liquid loveliness of you/ I am' (*Ergo Sum – Night Noise*), and as the father. A good example of the latter persona is *To Tristan (11) and Jessica (7)*, where the children become a 'backseat chorus' as the family passes roadside signs 'on the way through Windsor/to plastic things built of Lego'.

Another response I treasure takes the form of two sentences from a letter written by Don MacLennan to Cathal Lagan in 2008. Don wrote; 'Quentin writes from the centre of experienced incidents. He is like an interpreter of shared humanity'. His comments were in response to Cathal's asking him to comment on a few poems we had written together. These 'waymarks' speak to me as indications that I may, at last, be on the right track as a poet.

I have italicized all the titles of poems in the following discussions.

## COMMENTARY AND NOTES ON THE POEMS

Now follows a series of comments and thoughts on the poems. The commentary covers the three broad headings, 'Seeking an Identity', 'Land Dreams' and 'Scouting the Post-Colonial'. The placing of the poems into these categories was difficult – some poems could well fit into all three groups – but I have tried to create a satisfying sequence in each section, while at the same time building the larger structure of the full collection.

The actual sequencing of the poems within the categories proved difficult. I have tried to follow Robert Frost's dictum about starting poems with surprise, delight and tears, all of which should end in 'wisdom'. (This is a tall order, consisting, in my case, of surprise, tears and not much wisdom!) I will also intersperse extracts from my diaries, records of snippets of writerly information and perceptions, which I have kept for many years and of which the following is an example:

*(Diary Extract; 20 August 2012: spent yesterday at tea with Cathal Lagan and Jim Phelps, the publisher. There was a lot of conjecture about the future of publishing and the sustainability of book stores, what with the electronic media introducing the kindle as a replacement for books. Phelps described the whole of the book-marketing and publishing business as a 'sunset industry'. According to him (and the industry itself) it is dying. I wondered about poetry and the kindle. What if some myopic person had lost their spectacles and decided to enlarge the font drastically? What would happen to the carefully constructed line lengths, the rhyme schemes and even the rhythm of the poems? Would the poem be one long enjambment, reduced to utter nonsense? Will poets have to learn how to construct poems with the kindle in mind? Perhaps we will have to precede each poem with instructions as to how to read it. Punctuation would be a problem. In parenthesis would have to appear something like, 'Pause here', 'enjamb now', 'breathe you idiot' and other such foolery for the readership suffering from the frontal lobotomy of the electronic age.*

Personally I will miss books terribly. I love the feel of them, the very smell of them. I enjoy being in their presence. Indeed I spend hours, whenever possible, browsing through second hand book shops, picking up books at random and just caressing them. I search for initials of previous owners or the list of book club members who have read them. A special bonus is when some previous reader has left a comment or criticism, or a bookmark with personal details, some clue on which to hang the history of ownership of the book.

I remember working as the night porter in a hotel in Sankt Johann imTyrol in Austria and finding a battered copy of E M Forster's novel *Howard's End*. The book was secreted under the counter at the entrance to the hotel in which I stood guard through the small hours of the night. There was much annotation in the margins of almost every page and underlinings galore. I read them with great glee, agreeing sometimes and getting annoyed at others when the criticism was moronic or just wrong. The nights on duty were long and the book was soon finished. After that, in order to pass the time, I amused myself by adding my own comments on the comments and making up absurd quotes from philosophers I had never read. Comments like, 'Kiekegaard would not tolerate this, but Nietzsche on the other hand would applaud' and 'this is pure Freud, the heroine wants to murder her mother, make rampant love to her father and barbecue her brothers – this is a leap of faith, a leap into unimaginable sin'. Then I underlined every third adjective and crossed out all definite articles and wrote next to each correction, 'there, that's much better now'. (I left the book where I had found it.)

I am reminded of something that happened in the Settlers Motel (now the Rhodes Graduate Village). At the end of a bibulous meal I wrote a very silly and puerile poem on a ten rand note with an indelible felt-tipped pen. The poem was an absolute shocker, with forced rhymes and no iambs or any sort of rhythm. I then tendered the note (money being worth a lot more then – 1975) in payment for a round of drinks and thought no more about it. Two weeks later, in a shop in Kenton-on-Sea I saw the note in the till. I asked the assistant if I could have it in exchange for a clean note. Under my poem someone had written 'P T O'. The comment on the reverse side was, 'His poetry is poor, but his circulation is wide'. As I recall the life expectancy of a ten rand note in those days was approximately six weeks. This was to be my longest moment in the public eye, albeit anonymously.

The opening line of the poem went something like this:

'On this ten rand note  
A poem I have wrote'

Plus a few more moronic lines of equal stupidity, which I cannot repeat without emitting an involuntary squeal of embarrassment.

## **SECTION A: SEEKING AN IDENTITY**

### ***Crossroads***

In this poem I am trying to get at the tension between two radically different identities as they manifested themselves from the very first in my family history, which is also part of a broader South African history. My female ancestors were indeed borne ashore by naked men. The visual

image goes back to a memorable conversation I had with two remarkable South African women many years ago when I was still a schoolboy in Grahamstown. I was listening at the dinner table while the well-known theatre historian and academic, Dr Thelma Gutsche and Dorothy Rivett-Carnac (author of *Thus Came the English*, Timmins 1961) held forth about what the prim and proper Victorian Settler ladies must have felt when they were carried ashore from the ships in what was to become Algoa Bay by naked Xhosa men.

Considering the prudery then in vogue, the shock must have been considerable! Did the nudity make itself felt as savagery, or innocence? Did it register as cultural bareness, or exotic excitement? Africa was 'naked' to European eyes; what did Europe look like through African eyes? We will probably never know, but the idea of my ancestors being *carried* on to African soil for the first time by naked men, by the very people around whom the evolving issues of African and South African identity would swirl and eddy for generations to come, struck me as a powerful first statement of the problem of identity which Africa thrust towards my people all those years ago.

Mrs Rivett-Carnac was my 'aunt' (in reality she was my maternal grandmother's first cousin and had grown up in the same home) and a formidable intellect. Dr Gutsche was equally formidable. Both women espoused fierce feminist ideology long before such ideology became fashionable or even generally known. Another memory of that dinner was when I made a schoolboy pun about nudity, which I thought of as a witty comment and a telling contribution to the discussion. Two sets of basilisk eyes turned on me. There was a silence and then Mrs Rivett-Carnac said quietly, yet with venomous forbearance, 'Punning, Quentin, merely demonstrates the last vestiges of a decaying mind.' This was to be my very last effort at participating, despite many subsequent meals in the company of these brilliant women. I learned a lot, in particular how to keep my mouth shut and my mind open.

This interest in a search for identity has manifested itself in an awareness of a sense of guilt at past injustices committed by my forebears. The present generation is not responsible for the past and in many cases the apologies have been made. The carrying of the women ashore became symbolic to me of 'Africa's burden'. The exploitation of the indigenous peoples and the resources of the colonies is summed up in the alteration of the old saw, 'The Whiteman's Burden', when referring to Africa and the Africans. The on-going culture clash initiated by colonialism is a challenge and unless it is resolved will remain and possibly become, more of a burden for all of us in South Africa.

Part of this burden is coming to terms with being 'Europe's discard' – in my case, on my mother's side, a descendent of the 1820 Settlers. They came to Africa seeking an improved life, their situation at home being one of poverty and hardship as a consequence of the depression following the end of the Napoleonic Wars. They came in innocence, believing the propaganda of abundant arable land in a depopulated country.

Another forebear, Captain W S Hogge, a commissioner (circa 1852) under Governor Harry Smith, was allegedly murdered by poisoning in Bloemfontein because he favoured the Basuto land claims above those of the Boers. (Recent research, as yet unpublished, by a relative in England indicates that this poisoning theory may not be true. Captain Hogge caught some terrible fever and died as a result thereof. I prefer the conspiracy and murder version – far more scope for poetry.) There are layers of emotions when dealing with the past and writing poetry helps me to sort them into a coherence that promotes understanding.

So, I am at a 'crossroads' – dearly desiring acceptance as 'African', but conscious of an elusive wish to remain loyal to being English. This clinging to a foreign identity I describe as a defense against becoming 'Kurtz', as described by Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*.

I worried about the word ‘natives’ when writing of the Xhosa men who were tasked with carrying the passengers ashore through the surf which prevented the lighters from actually reaching the beach. ‘Natives’ actually fitted with, to my mind, the meaning of ‘aboriginal inhabitant’. Yet there lurked a sense that ‘native’ had pejorative connotations associated with the hated apartheid use of the word. Also, who were the ‘aboriginal’ people – what about the Bushmen and the Khoi? Typically, as with the construction of poems by me, the drafts are far too prolix. Rigorous editing took place before the poem felt ‘finished’. Indeed a large chunk was removed and became a poem on its own (*1820 and all that*).

### ***1820 and All That***

This poem gets its title from the book *1066 and All That*, by W.C. Sellar and R.J. Yeatman (Methuen, 1930) which took an irreverent look at the history of England after the Norman Invasion. This poem deals with an invasion, but the mood is one of questioning: Is it that important? The colonial chapter of our history is over. The post-colonial chapter of the nation’s present and future is underway. Assimilation has begun and is gaining momentum, symbolized by the alien starlings (formerly ‘European Starlings’, now ‘Common’ starlings), introduced in previous centuries at the coast and now endemic to the sub-continent. This bird is a permanent resident, as acknowledged by *The Robert’s Bird Guide* (2007, 306). The poem tries to suggest that while we must not ignore our history, it is time to move on by trying not to repeat the mistakes of the past.

## ***Trappings***

A poem inspired to an extent by the Marguerite Poland novel *Shades* (Penguin, 1994) and the image scatter of the English missionary's wife preparing, serving and drinking tea at times of crisis (her son's suicide, the discovery of her daughter's promiscuity). The ritual of drinking tea is associated with England and has been perpetuated wherever English colonists have settled. In the poem the drinking of tea indicates a link with the colonial population in direct contrast to the indigenous people.

The title is pregnant with connotations. The people in the house are trapped behind a fence, an inadequate barrier against the indigenous people and influences. They are trapped within their milieu of tea and 'civilization' and their rejection of the indigenous culture as inferior. They perceive the 'man' in the accoutrements of war, as a threat to their transplanted way of life. The N P van Wyk Louw epic *Raka* (Tafelberg, 1937) lurked in my subconscious when this poem was being developed. All settled societies face invasion, drought, disease, foreign aggression, and civil war among many other cataclysms, which would threaten their 'way of life'. Now 'transformation' in the post-apartheid era, the setting right the inequalities of the past, disturbs us – some of the white people feel excluded from the mainstream of events. Paying our dues is uncomfortable, yet necessary. We are trapped by the flow of our history and must adapt to the inexorable tide of change. 'Trappings' also refers to the equipment carried by the dancing man. The 'trappings' of war and the 'trappings' of a culture that would have to adapt to the new ways that came with colonialism.

The isiXhosa translation was done by my friend and colleague Sipho Adam. Mr Adam is a teacher of isiXhosa and is fluent in English. He said that he found translation difficult as the nuances of English defy transformation into similar shades of meaning in his language. He also pointed out that

some isiXhosa dictionaries have inadequate corresponding words for the English. With all this in mind he consulted other isiXhosa-speaking academic colleagues and has told me that they feel that they have done as much justice to the original as possible. At a reading of this poem, at the Amathole Museum in King William's Town, the largely Black audience applauded this poem. Those of us who regularly read our poems in public would know that applause is a rare occurrence. The poem had struck a chord with the people.

In my experience audience appreciation at poetry readings is rare. I am reminded of a few lines from Wislawa Szymborska's poem, *Poetry Reading* (1998, 51):

- 'O Muse, where are our teeming crowds? / Twelve people in the room, eight seats to spare  
.... Half came inside because it started raining, the rest are relatives. /In the first row, a  
sweet old man's soft snore: he dreams his wife's alive again...'

### ***East Beach - Port Alfred i***

In this poem an attempt is made to externalize a crossroads of a spiritual sort. The growing awareness of the importance of the afterlife begins to occupy a lot of thought as I approach my allotted 'threescore and ten', according to the scriptures. The *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (OUP, 1960), lent to me by an Anglican priest, motivated a search for answers as to what happens to the soul after death. Lonely places, such as a deserted beach, surrounded by the creatures of nature and the beauty, the sound of the sea and all the visual stimuli are places where an individual may find solace and if lucky, sense the presence of God. There is then a sense of sorrow at having to leave, at death, the beauties of nature for the unknown and the possibly unknowable (unless blessed with faith).

The format of this poem (and the next one) is influenced by the Persian poet Rumi, who often used the three line stanza to great effect.

## ***East Beach – Port Alfred ii***

Here, I try to write a corollary to the previous poem. There are other aspects that are important to the death-initiate, such as leaving loved ones. Coming to terms with the afterlife and the abandonment of all here on earth seems to require a cleansing of the soul. This may be found in a lonely place where a sense of identity is manifested through contact with nature. In the wilderness there is a freedom from cultural identity. The shackles of modern living, all the worriesome burdens of marriage, mortgage, monotony and parental responsibilities are brought into perspective and a clearer sense of identity is manifested.

## ***The Milky-Fiery Way***

There are a number of variations on the mythical origin of the Milky Way. The most often quoted is that Zeus slipped his illegitimate infant Heracles onto the breast of Hera (his wife) while she was asleep (previously she had tried to kill the baby by sending venomous snakes into his cot. He strangled them). Hera hated the child and his mother, the mortal woman Alcmene of Thebes who was beautiful enough to attract the serial philanderer Zeus. The milk Heracles imbibed gave him semi-divine powers, but his rough treatment of the source woke the goddess who flung him away in disgust and pain. The overflowing cascade showered drops of breast milk into the night which formed the Milky Way.

The African myth is somewhat different. A bushman, renowned for being not very good at hunting, left early one morning to kill a buck for his family. His wife dutifully lit a fire towards evening in anticipation of cooking the meat. She waited a long time. She gave up putting precious fuel on the fire. The fire died, the embers glowed for a while, went out. In anger the wife grabbed the dead white embers and flung them away, up into the sky. Thus the Fiery Way of Africa.

The sequence of poems which follows deals with my relationship with my wife. I include them with a degree of hesitancy. I feel as if I am naked, inviting others to peer at my private emotions. Then I remember that I have read them at ECCA Group readings without a qualm. The public performance is an ego trip, soon completed and then out of mind, while the printed version invites inspection which may reveal things better kept private.

In terms of seeking an identity, the poems about my wife articulate how she has given me sense of self-worth and confidence.

### ***Ergo Sum – Night Noise Amalgam***

This poem was dedicated to my wife on our twentieth wedding anniversary. It is included as an important part of my search for identity. Often we define ourselves according to our relationships with others. A stable marriage, although initiated late in my life, has meant that I am better able to cope with the anxiety of who I am, or should be. The mirror holds no threat, when over my shoulder I see my wife.

### ***Vinyl***

The anchor in my life is my wife. This poem (and the next one *Wild Night*) was written to demonstrate that the relationship is of enormous importance to me. I can operate from a very stable emotional base and I never cease to be amazed and very grateful that quite late in life I found a mate. We share many interests – music of the 60's and 70's, a fanaticism for reading, a dedication to our two children and a fascination with wildlife and birds.

## ***Wild Night***

The storms of life are much easier to cope with if one has support of family. There are times I lie awake and merely look at my partner and a sense of security surrounds me. These poems to Penelope have elicited much positive comment from women in the audiences at various ECCA Group readings at Hogsback, King William's Town and East London. This sense of security supplies me with the temerity to try to produce poems.

## ***Another Day***

Yet another poem with my wife at its core. Most of the time she displays symptoms of hyperactivity. She gardens, she sews, she organizes the children and other things happen. Often I wake up earlier than she does and I am careful not to wake her. This human tornado needs rest, living as she does on the cusp of exhaustion. Also I am a little selfish about this – I derive great joy from just watching her at peace.

## ***He Talks the Language of Poets / Flirting with Hubris***

Poets are often outsiders. The commercial nature of modern life (not to mention the largely excruciatingly bad school education offered in South Africa) excludes the mass of people from creativity outside of mammon and lust. They live their lives in a narrow channel of restricted vocabulary, limited to the argot of television-speak. Many minds are numbed to the possibilities of words crafted into meaning. I take enjoyment in sometimes 'showing off', around the bar counter, an extended, complicated vocabulary and a convoluted sentence structure. The reaction of golfing peers is interesting. Some feel inferior, even resentful, but there is also a discernable undercurrent of envy. An undefined desire to be able to unshackle the mind is manifested, a desire to give articulate

vent to lurking ideas, ideas that defy expression as a result of inadequate vocabulary or a lack of practice outside the narrow confines of commercial activity or sport. Perhaps one of the roles of the poet is to demonstrate the power of language in an unintellectual milieu. Truncated minds revert to the miasma of desired adultery, often unrequited, unexplained and inexplicable except via crude language. I realize that this discussion runs perilously close to arrogance and generalization and that not all sporting clubs are like this. In mitigation, however, I am humbly grateful that my mother, a teacher, instilled an early love of reading and writing in me that have remained a priority for me throughout my life.

## ***Paradise Glimpsed***

I include this poem at the end of the sequence dedicated to my wife as she has brought into my life an involvement with family. In a search for an identity, having an extended family is very reassuring and adds a sense of perspective to life. As a school master of many years I have rigorously obeyed the dictum given to me by my first Headmaster, John Gardener. He said, ‘Never touch a pupil in love or hatred’. The reasons for this advice are obvious – one avoids possible accusations of sexual abuse or sadism or plain favouritism. It did have, however, the result of me never getting too close or personally involved with the pupils. The introduction to my wife’s large, boisterous and affectionate family and reconciliation with my own family changed this reticence. That the two three year old babies chose me to shelter on while an adult party grew lively gave me an extraordinary amount of pleasure and a feeling of belonging. And, of course, gave rise to this poem.

## ***I Used To Think***

This is a poem of some confusion. The fact that Wislawa Szymborska comes from Poland reminded me of the European tendrils that dangle from my uprooted heritage. The crossroads in this poem refer to the fact that the plains of Poland have been, for centuries, the battleground of Europe and Szymborska's plea to live 'in the intervals between wars' (1998, 255) inspired me to explore the emotions connected to conflicts caused by invasions, particularly the colonial invasions in South Africa.

So this poem wrestles with the conflicting emotions of being a white man in Africa seeking a sense of personal Africanness. This is an elusive sense and the following description of a rally may go some way to crystallizing what I mean.

Recently I attended a trade union rally which highlighted for me the difficulties for the ordinary white citizen in finding acceptance among a crowd of black people. This was graphically brought home at a SADTU (South African Democratic Teachers' Union) rally in King William's Town where my wife and I (the only white people present) were snubbed. The feeling of rejection was palpable. Eventually, a coloured comrade, whom we knew, joined us on the periphery of the crowd and stood with us. Finally he advised us to leave, our presence was not seen in a good light. In fact there were muted mentions of *impimpi*, the word used for 'sell-outs' or the much loathed informers in the apartheid era. The word often triggered horrific retribution, such as necklacing. While this was a highly unlikely outcome in our situation, it was disturbing and made us both feel extremely queasy. Combined with the uneasy feeling of fear at the incipient violence was a disappointment at the utter rejection which our presence engendered. We were there in good faith, in support of our colleagues seeking better working conditions and wages.

The final stanza of the poem is a semi-surprised cry of anguish at the slow process of racial integration and the fact that with advancing age I will not witness the final, and hopefully, harmonious amalgamation of the nation's peoples.

When this poem was being written and edited I tried to make a joke out of some of it. I wrote that 'you wouldn't touch her with a barge, being a Pole.' A laboured and silly pun on the old saying 'you wouldn't touch it with a barge pole'. The poem is far better without it.

## ***Invaders***

Very little vegetation grows beneath a grove of Australian Gum Trees, small animals do not scurry in the non-existent undergrowth, moles burrow elsewhere. Most birds shun the groves, or pass through, roosting just for a short while. These trees are reported to consume hundreds of liters of underground water every day. Their environmental impact is harmful and immense. They grow tall and strong at local expense. As they proliferate, the quantity of indigenous flora and fauna shrinks. They become a symbol of how colonialism corrupts the local environment, in the broadest sense. And yet soccer, embraced so fervently by the local population, is a foreign import and adds to the enigma of the aftermath of colonialism. This indicates a commonality, this universal game crosses language and cultural boundaries, shows a potential towards assimilation within our national boundaries. We are reminded that not everything about colonialism was evil. The football players mentioned in the poem were unaware of the gum trees and their significance. In the same way they were oblivious to my presence and I am left with the impression that possibly the youth are above or beyond colonial labels and stigmas. Perhaps I am a step nearer to being accepted as an 'African'.

## ***Self***

An attempt at the haiku format. This was written after watching and enjoying a rugby test on the television, then catching sight of myself in a mirror and wondering what it was all about.

## ***Sunday***

This is another attempt at the haiku format. A short comment about how to cope with life. Cynicism versus Pharisee-type hypocrisy.

## ***Blockage Averted***

In this poem there are echoes of Ted Hughes' *The Thought Fox* from his anthology *The Hawk in the Rain* (1979, 14). In discussion with Cathal Lagan, a member of the ECCA Group of poets, he reminded me that the blank page or bare computer screen should not be seen as an obstacle to creativity. Lagan said that the blank screen (or page) 'beckons'; that it provides a challenge and that an idea must germinate. Words have to fill the screen, fill in the blank space. Often these words are rubbish, bad ideas, poorly expressed. Occam's Razor then has to be wielded and the recycle-bin filled. On occasion, when the words work, a poem is begun and goes into final production.

## ***Poem in Progress***

The tiny spider became symbolic of how much else happens while we (humans) blunder on. In terms of human significance the spider's apparent manic charge reminded me of Breughel's painting *Icarus* as mentioned in Auden's poem, *Musee des Beaux Arts*, (Harper's, 1938) in which we are told that the Old Masters 'were never wrong' about suffering – life goes on and on. Major catastrophes occur and the tiny spider hunts, oblivious to hydrofracking, nuclear melt-downs, tsunamis and all manner of cataclysms. The spider's ultimate demise is of equal importance, or is not, in the vortex of time. (I have been reading the Tao.)

## ***Spider***

This poem gives a sense of an identity eventually formed. It seems to complete the series on a search for identity. It is, however, a *faux* identity, a temporary ending as time and life continue. In my notes for this poem I ask the question, ‘Where does the spider fit in?’ The idea seems to me that the spider is a fellow outcast, among humans. I feel an empathy for the spider. Spiders fall victim to human fear and are often killed and I feel a victim of a crisis of identity, which sets me apart. This feeling of identity with the outcast spider gave me a sense of belonging, albeit with another pariah. This is a start of a kind in the process of the growing feeling of becoming a real part of Africa. The notes for this poem commented that a person who observed me handling the spider with care and then releasing it was surprised. This observer actually voiced disapproval, asked why I did not kill the spider before it bit somebody, and then moved away from me. His reaction to my treatment of the spider increased my sense of isolation or alienation – a misfit. Eventually I decided to exclude that part of the poem, another person’s prejudices about arachnids seemed unimportant. I was happy to identify with the spider.

## SECTION B: LAND DREAMING

### *Waiting for the Wilderness*

From King William's Town there is a short cut to Port Alfred along a rough stretch of dirt road. The road cuts across from outside Peddie down to the bridge on the Fish River at the coast. The land in this area used to belong to white farmers, descendants of the 1820 Settlers. These farmers were removed when the land was incorporated into the Ciskei Homeland. On a remote stretch of the road there is a ruined church and a ruined manse. The cemetery is peopled by the remains of Lloyds, Timms and Weirs, all of 1820 Settler heritage.

From my notes I recorded that my bakkie was rattling because of the rutted road and in order to take a break from the noise and to investigate the old church which had intrigued me, I stopped there. A cold wind, befitting the sadness of the place, was blowing. All was a mess. Graves untended, a collapsed roof in the church from which Lantana was sprouting. The Yew trees and gums surrounding the ruined complex battered at the manse, church and graves, lifting grave stones and cracking walls. I dislike these exotic plants as they supplant the acacias and other indigenous flora.

Is Christianity a form of ancestor worship? Perhaps this is why it lasts in Africa. Anyway the Transplanted Trinity has abandoned this place. I felt a poem in my water. The pathos of the bricks melting.

It was a place of contemplation – the buildings of the Church of England in ruins, the trees of Europe, South America and Australia thriving. A few years later, passing along the same stretch of road, I came upon a gang of workers eradicating the alien vegetation, trimming the grass and sprucing-up the graveyard. Time and politics had expelled the transplanted religion. Time and potential tourism had expelled the exotic plants. An equilibrium of sorts had been re-established.

## ***St Matthew's Mission***

This educational and religious seminary is the setting for Marguerite Poland's novel *Shades* (1993). The mission has similarities to the ruins along the Fish River road mentioned in the previous poem, but differs in fundamentals. The church is still in use as a place of worship. The missionary's house and outbuildings are abandoned. The alien trees either smashed or stunted. The rose garden, so important as a *leitmotif* in the novel (where the mother of the heroine would go in times of stress, after serving tea) is a mess of weeds and dying, anorexic rose bushes. Sublimely providing an umbrella of luscious leaves over house and garden is an enormous milkwood tree, flagrantly indigenous. Back at the church, I noticed growing high on a buttress, another milkwood – a sapling from a windborne seed – strong, with its roots powerfully embedding themselves in the crumbling masonry. Yet the 'transplanted Trinity' still clung precariously to its litany and congregation. Since that visit there have been renovations to the church. I do not wish to revisit, the poem is complete, that moment in my spiritual and poetic journey recorded.

The draft versions of the poem reveal how the process of editing must take place if my poems are to be 'poems' rather than prose artfully arranged on the page. Cathal Lagan, my Anglican vicar, friend, mentor and fellow ECCA Group poet, says that my *métier* should be prose. Indeed I spent time during the last fifteen years as a weekly columnist for two local newspapers, *The Mercury* of King William's Town and *The Daily Dispatch* of East London. The former paper closed down and the latter dispensed with my contributions as a result of transformation. The point is, however, that I am comfortable writing prose (and have written three unpublished and unpublishable novels), but find the challenge of poetry is a great stimulus and source of emotional comfort.

## ***Fish Kraals at Klipbaai***

Near Oyster Bay along the road from Humansdorp is Klipbaai. The area is remote, few roads penetrate. The area is also almost pristine fynbos, there is little human interference. South American lantana and Port Jackson Willow, exotic and destructive vegetation, are invading, colonizing the dune fields and pushing aside the indigenous flora. There is, however, a sense of history, a brooding aura of prehistory for there are numerous and enormous shell middens (10 meters or more high) evidence of millennia of exploitation by the original inhabitants. The source of their protein overloading is an extensive system of fish traps in the bay. Still today large fish remain in the pools after the high tide has fled and the limpets are huge; the feast easily harvested. The investment in labour, hours of seasonal maintenance was Herculean but profitable. Sheer muscle power and highly organized communal organization resulted in vital nutrition. A side-effect of the communal labour was social. The Bushmen moved in small family groups for most of their nomadic exploitation of resources. The time spent at the fish trap site meant that intermarriages could be arranged and the gene pool kept strong and healthy.

The end of the ancient people's use of the resources came about as the new settlers spread across the Eastern Cape. The middens grew no more, the alien plants began their *coups d'etat* and now, with the advent of the nuclear age the present system of occupation (a few fishermen's holiday or weekend cottages, a riot of bird life, insects, snakes and rodents) will be removed or exterminated and replaced.

A few years ago the area was proclaimed a site for a future nuclear power station. Human advancement perforce equals environmental destruction – the paradox of progress. Also, the rumour-mill flourishes and grinds out snippets of dirt. The murmurs are that the site is unsuitable for a power station but vested interests have paid the backhanders for the site to be selected and approved. The rubber stamp has decreed – long term investment in corruption counterpoised by the long term investment of the aboriginal people.

A similar train of thought is expressed in Brian Walter's poem *Default: Ngqura* (2007). In this poem Walter bewails the destruction of the Coega wetlands near Port Elizabeth to make way for the massive harbour development. Although saddened, even angered, by this destruction, Walter's perspective is that 'progress' or change is inevitable. Other situations he cites are the destruction of Southend (the home of the Indian people of Port Elizabeth before their forced removal during the apartheid era), the end of the salt factory's 'paddy fields' and the negative effect on the bird life as examples of this 'progress'. The site of the Hindu temple has also been desecrated – it was built on the fulcrum of river and mountain as dictated by Hindu custom. The mountain has been largely removed and the river corralled by concrete. The environment and religion all bend to man's will.

From my notes emerges the comment that as the fynbos dies into the sand of the dunes it forms compost which in turn transforms into soil. The plants do not die in vain.

## ***En Route to Grahamstown***

The first in this trio of poems came about after a conversation with my late mother-in-law Elizabeth Griffiths, the well-known East Cape artist. She was born on a farm between Alexandria and Bushman's River Mouth. She was a font of local lore, having spent most of her long life in the Lower Albany area. She told of how, in her childhood, the family would travel by ox wagon from the family farm outside Alexandria to their house at the beach at Bushman's River, a distance of about forty kilometers. Chickens for fresh eggs, a milch cow and numerous slaughter animals accompanied the entire ménage. From the farm to the beach, she said the wagon would follow the old trail, pioneered by the elephants of old according to her.

A propos of this I mused that the Blaauwkrantz Pass on the way to Grahamstown was extremely dangerous with its sharp bends, wrong angled cambers and flaking surfaces. Elizabeth countered my contention that the elephants had chosen a very steep way out of the gorge, by saying that the

old road had followed an ancient elephant track through the gorge and up towards Manley Flats. She was correct. The old wagon trails always, as far as possible, followed the elephant paths. The elephants had a knack of using the contours to their advantage when negotiating steep terrain. The elephants were seldom, if ever, in a hurry and sensibly took, not the shortest, but the easiest and safest route between two points. It made eminent sense then, for the transport riders of the ox wagon era to use what had become well-defined pathways suitable for draught animals such as oxen. Steep slopes are very dangerous to negotiate for wagons and animals, especially down hill, when braking became a massive problem.

Recently I was lucky enough to be taken on a guided tour of some of these pathways by Leonie Yendall, co-owner of the farm through which the new road passes and which has ignored the ancient ways. The paths are still easily visible as wide ruts through the bush, now partially overgrown. There is a third poem brewing.

The poem is also a lament for the elephants, exterminated along with other big game as man colonized the land. Thank goodness for Addo!

### ***En route to Grahamstown - Revisited***

After golf at Port Alfred one evening, in conversation with Bruce Yendall, the previous owner of the farm through which the new road passes, I queried my mother-in-law's story. He confirmed her version. He then added that the new road took a different route through the gorge and up the steep mountainside. The road took the shortest way up and down the gorge. There have been, over the years, a number of fatal accidents on that stretch of road.

## ***En route to Grahamstown – Catharsis***

The poem sequence about the elephant paths in the Blaauwkrantz Valley has attracted some attention and interest from a small group of Rhodes Alumni from the early 1970's. This interest occasioned an outing to the site of the paths after contact was made with the owners of the farm on which many of the paths are still visible. Very fortunately the owners, a married couple, Leonie and Rodney Yendall, are passionate about preserving the ecology of the land upon which they ranch Nguni cattle. Rodney Yendall, nephew of Bruce Yendall to whom the previous poem is dedicated, found an elephant jaw, intact and still with teeth in place. He has leant this to the appropriate department at Rhodes which, he told us, is reluctant to return it as they have no other evidence of this nature. Someone on the expedition wondered where the tusks went and raised the legend of an elephant graveyard. Rodney was skeptical. His theory, which is probably correct, is that the tusks would have been found by passing humans and taken for resale in Grahamstown or some other market. More than likely, however, the elephant had been shot for its tusks. The teeth and jawbone would have been of no commercial value.

It is fascinating to follow the paths of the elephants. The terrain is steep, treacherous and the deep valley is dissected by a fast-flowing river. The elephants eased along the contours and took a circuitous route down and round the cliffs. It becomes obvious that the elephants followed the least arduous and least hazardous way through the gorge. The distances that they traversed are far greater than that of the present road, but then elephants were seldom in too much of a hurry.

Once the elephants were exterminated and ox wagons were used to transport people and goods the old paths were favoured by the transport riders. Steep slopes are very tricky for a span of oxen pulling a loaded wagon. If the ascent is too steep the span may be too weak to crest the rise. Also, the brakes had to be applied, even on the up journey to prevent the wagon from slipping back and

dragging everything down the incline, thus creating even more strain for the span. Similarly, if the descent is too steep control is reduced and the risk is run of the wagon overhauling and killing or maiming the oxen and any human in the way.

Another dimension to the sadness at the demise of the elephants was the disturbing revelation by Leonie Yendall that there had been the destruction of the Bushmen caves rich in rock art to make way for the new road. This was information that I did not know and found very upsetting, as rock art is a passion of mine. According to the surveyors' records the caves contained a treasure-house of art. The caves were an obstacle to the new road and were blasted into oblivion. The rubble caused by this vandalism was used as backfill for the road. Recently, however, geologists have warned that the road is built on an unstable rock formation and is likely to collapse without much prior notice. Although one should not be pleased at the thought of the imminent collapse of the road, this news gave me a frisson of satisfaction - the revenge of the environment, for the Bushmen and the elephants.

In terms of creating this third poem in the sequence, I had problems. The repetition of the 'tumor of rage' motif cropped up. My wife, often the most precise critic of my poems, was unhappy with this dull rage at something that is past and cannot be rectified. I removed much of the offending reference, but still see the remainder lurking in the lines. I have tried to end the poem on a positive note, as the Yendall couple symbolizes for me hope that progressive farmers will protect and enhance their legacy of land and its rich history.

Below there follows extracts from my notes to illustrate how I go about producing a final draft of a poem. It has been my habit for many years to carefully date all scribblings, ideas and basic diary entries in notebooks. The first jottings are untidy, often merely an attempt to capture an atmosphere, to record impressions of the landscape and to absorb any other information on offer. As I grow

older this is a vital process as memory fades fast and much may be lost unless recorded. I could produce similar material for most of the poems in the collection, but that might be redundant. The notes for the elephant poems must stand in for a vast bulk of ‘undergrowth’.

The notes begin with the date 29/6/12. It was at this time that the information about the destruction of the Bushmen rock art was sprung on me. This upset me greatly. I have been to numerous cave sites over the years as rock art is a pet pastime and I never miss an opportunity to see the paintings. That caves could be dynamited seems to me a barbaric act.

Later on that same outing we were taken to the Blaauwkrantz railway bridge. This is the bridge from which most of a passenger train plunged early in the twentieth century. Along with the extermination of the elephants that pioneered the paths through the gorge, this struck me as a tragedy on a large and basically unnecessary scale. Greed had been the cause of the last coach of the train derailing because it was overloaded with profitable stone for an addition to the Grahamstown Cathedral then under construction.

The initial idea for the poem, which I rejected without recording it, was to write after the fashion of Thomas Hardy in his poem *Convergence of the Twain*, included in George Macbeth’s edited anthology *Poetry 1900 to 1975* (1985, 4) in which he describes men building the Titanic and nature building an iceberg that would sink the ship. I realized that a poem about the bridge disaster needed a separate poem and abandoned using it in a poem about the elephants.

Almost a month later (21/7/12 and 22/7/12) I began plotting the final elephant poem in earnest. Most of the basic ideas were written down, but in far too prolix a form. Long sentences and convoluted vocabulary jostled each other off the pages and reduced any meaning. At this point I followed my usual habit and transferred the poem to the laptop and printed a version. The printed versions

seem to lend themselves to severe editing. A process that is obvious to observe on the version dated 22/7/12. By 23/7/12 the poem is very nearly complete and then only one word is altered in the second 23/7/12 version. The poem now appears in its final form in the extended writing portion of this thesis.

On the advice of my supervisor I attempted to scan in pages from my note book and typed versions of the poem, to show how I went about developing a poem. The scans, however, proved to be of a very low quality and are reproduced in the Addendum (109). The problem was that I had written the notes in pencil. This was unfortunate as the notes did not reproduce well. What follows are transcribed portions of the notes to illustrate the process.

### ***Blaauwkrantz 29/6/12***

*The day calm, perfect sun, warm – not hot nor cold. Windless no ruffling breeze stood above the elephant paths gazed down saw the road, hewn from the cliff face never walked on by elephants. Walked beneath by Bushmen.*

*Walked along the railway to the bridge from which people fell to their deaths unused now, the metal melting into rust.*

*I focus on the destructions:*

*Elephants – tusks for ornaments and space for man*

*Road – the caves blasted and filled with rubble priceless rock art destroyed*

*Bridge – marvel of engineering containing potential for human destruction – not the fault of the bridge. Overloaded train – the final coach jumped the rails and dragged all but the tender and one coach into the ravine.*

*NB – no native names; the non-people invisible to history, another sin to beg forgiveness for.*

These rough notes written into my notebook while actually on the walking tour of these sites, were followed by two rough pencil sketches as the ideas were recorded before being distilled into typed 'hard-copy' versions. I like to edit hard copy, before correcting the poems in the computer.

*N Root to Gstringtown # 3*

*For Rodney and Leonie Yendall - custodians 21/7/12*

*It's not only that the engineers got the road so wrong – the shortest route up the Blaauwkrantz.*

*It's what they perpetrated on the on the way for*

*the surveyors' records reveal that Bushmen had been here*

*left their glorious record on walls of caves*

*blasted away like the elephants to make way*

*(concept of Art as a shrine) vandalized*

*For the ways of man. Backfill rubble*

*Feelings of outrage never to disappear*

*ameliorated by L and R*

*custodians of ways*

*keepers who know and if you are*

*fortunate will share those ways*

*redolent of ancient knowledge*

*Rodney says Leonie reveals with a tinge/hint of satisfaction*

*The geologists say the pass is built*

*On unstable rock*

*The road is expected to collapse*

*I can hear: elephants trumpet their glee*  
*Ghostly Bushmen click approval, oxen low*  
*In delight/*  
*Man's rubble/stupidity not adapted, doomed*  
  
*Walk with us down these ways and you can*  
*glory in the bush, aloes, loeries*  
*listen to the belly rumbles*  
*of elephant cows calling calves to comfort*  
*see the shaman paint his pictures*  
*delicate and beautiful; (vandalized shrine)*  
*Ride down the krantz on creaking wagons*  
*Hear the crack of whip history, a herald*  
*Of the return through these words*  
*To better moments.*

The hard copy versions of the poem followed in quick succession, with corrections all over the pages.

*En Route to Grahamstown number 3*

22/7/12

*Leonie and Rodney Yendall*

[Dull](#) Rage like a tumour  
[forat the](#) engineers so wrong  
[onabout](#) the road  
up the Blaauwkrantz.  
The surveyors' records reveal

that Bushmen had been,

~~had~~ adorned caves in the cliffs

with delicate hands

blasted away

like the elephants,

~~to make way~~

for the ways of man

The tumour of rage

reduced by Leonie and Rodney

custodians now.

If you are fortunate

they will share

~~these~~ ancient ways of wisdom.

Leonie reveals with some satisfaction

~~the~~ geologists have judged the road

~~(where the caves were vandalized)~~

is built on unstable stone –

~~the cliff,~~ the road ~~and all~~

is expected to collapse.

As the tumour of rage

~~recedes~~~~diminishes~~ you can hear

(if you have the gift),

elephants trumpet their glee,

ghostly Bushmen tongues click delight  
and oxen low in slow happiness.

Cleanse the tumour

| by walking the ~~ancient~~ ways.

You will glory

| in the bush, the aloes ~~and~~ loeries

and listen

to the belly rumbles

of elephant cows

calling calves to comfort,

see the shaman paint

| pictures, ~~in caves~~ delicate and lovely.

| Ride down ~~the~~ krantzes

on creaking wagons

hear the whip-crack of history

herald

| the return ~~through these words~~

to better ways.

For the final draft of the poem I settle for a change in the title, adding the word ‘catharsis’.

*For Leonie and Rodney Yendall*

Dull rage like a tumour  
at the engineers so wrong  
about the road  
up the Blaauwkrantz.  
The surveyors' records reveal  
that Bushmen had been,  
adorned caves in the cliffs  
with delicate hand,  
blasted away  
like the elephants  
to make way  
for man.

The tumour of rage  
reduced by Leonie and Rodney  
custodians now.  
If you are fortunate  
they will share  
the ancient ways of wisdom.

Leonie ~~recalls~~[reveals](#) with some satisfaction  
geologists have judged the road  
will collapse,

is built on unstable stone.

As the tumour of rage

Diminishes you can hear

(if you have the gift),

elephants trumpet their glee,

ghostly clicks of Bushmen tongues

and oxen lowing in slow happiness.

Cleanse the tumour

by walking the ways.

You will glory

in the bush, the aloes, loeries

and listen

to the belly rumbles

of elephant cows

calling calves to comfort

see the shamans paint

pictures, delicate and lovely.

Ride down the krantzes on creaking wagons

hear the whip-crack of history

herald

the return to better ways

## ***Encounters***

This poem is the result of a life-time of observing birds and some of the highlights embedded in my memory. Although bird-watching is a deep passion of mine, I have never graduated beyond being described as an ‘enthusiastic amateur’ by serious ornithologists. I do not go on ‘birding expeditions’, or take field trips to far flung swamps. I do not endure the attentions of mosquitoes and leeches just in order to record ‘lifers’ (a new bird for a personal list).

Common or garden birds, I know and derive great joy from observing. As in the poem there are rewarding interactions at times. Rescuing a starling trapped by twine high in a tree, resuscitating a stunned dove, or cooling sunbirds with a garden hose bring me closer to nature and are experiences of joy. Even releasing a furious and aggressive shrike gave great satisfaction. This poem, however, did not have an easy genesis. I tried too hard in the original drafts to introduce a sense of danger or foreboding on practical and symbolic levels. The first title was *Eagles in the Sun*, and then I went on to describe fairly intimate encounters with small birds. There is always danger from birds of prey, but in order for them to symbolize the criminals or the dangers facing society today vultures would have been a better choice than eagles. Then it became clear that the birds in the poem, as it was developing, had been in close contact with me. I have never had a close encounter with an eagle or a vulture. I have therefore left the last line as a hint of something powerful, possibly dangerous and all-seeing out there – a reminder of forces beyond our control.

The final paragraph of my notes for this poem read as follows;

*Today in the summer greenness of my garden when heat is most oppressive, I spray water over wilting plants and a sunbird comes to shout at me. I spray him, so he fluffs his feathers and bellows at the sun – I see no eagles in the sun.*

Prey or people are not supposed to see eagles in the sun. They attack out of the sun so that they can remain unseen. A tactic adopted by fighter pilots in the wars since the invention of aircraft. I substituted 'sky' for 'sun'.

My notebook also contains the beginnings of a poem that has yet to see the light of day. A by-product of producing the thesis is that by trawling the note books much inspiration is revealed. During a stay at the Blanco Guest farm near Tarkastad I saw two Black Eagles (Verreaux's Eagle according to the new nomenclature), hunt in tandem. The nesting pair took off from their eyrie and then split up. The male bird flew very high and into the early morning sun. His mate flew at a much lower altitude and approached a cliff ledge from below. The male bird remained visible to a large group of dassies (Rock Hyrax). The dassies all remained on the ledge, exposed and watching him. It was obvious that he was not hunting them. Unfortunately for the dassies, their attention remained fixed on the male bird overhead. Meanwhile the female bird approached below the level of the cliff face and attacked from below. With deadly accuracy her talons gripped a dassie as she suddenly appeared over the rim of the ledge of dassies. With her mate alongside, she returned to the eyrie and the meal began for both birds and the chicks (this was before the Cane syndrome so prevalent among eagles had taken place). I know there is a poem here, somewhere, I just don't know what it is. Yet.

### ***Puff Adder in Eden***

The much maligned and possibly falsely accused snake that tempted Eve should command respect and a good dose of fear. Our dogs were killed by a Puff Adder. A greatly emotional tragedy that upset the family. Shortly thereafter a baby Puff Adder appeared in our garden. My wife, usually a gentle soul, mashed and mangled it – revenge fuelled by adrenalin and an all-consuming hatred. Yet

I felt a pang of pity for this outcast among God's creatures. Some years ago my garden was infested with rats. I acquired two Skaapstekers and a few Brown House snakes and released them onto the plot. Soon the rodent problem disappeared. Unfortunately my neighbour, bowing to the hysterical pressure of his cat loving wife hunted and killed all the snakes. No amount of pointing out that the snakes were too small to even consider regarding a cat as prey would dissuade them from this slaughter. There was an irrational hatred conditioned into them by generations of fear. Unfortunately the snakes would stray into the neighbour's yard and so meet their end. The rats soon returned, the neighbours moved on. I replaced the snakes. Our cat is nearly ten years old and has yet to become a meal for a Skaapsteker or Brown House snake. The house snakes are constrictors and utterly non-venomous, the Skaapsteker is mildly venomous and would give a human a headache and some discomfort.

The influence of D H Lawrence's poem *Snake* (1985, 48) is obvious. We are conditioned to pathologically fear snakes, even the harmless ones. There are records of people being bitten by a non-venomous snake and dying anyway – death by auto-suggestion. The snake, as is often pointed out, is not mentioned in the Bible as the tempter of Eve. Originally the creature was referred to as a 'serpent', in other words as some sort of reptile, possibly even a lizard or a scorpion or a Komodo Dragon. Indeed the ancient Greeks venerated various snakes, especially the Aesculapius snake, a reptile associated with healing and named after the son of Apollo and Coronis.

The poem is a warning to treat venomous snakes with respect, and as integral members of the ecology. The Puff Adder relies primarily on camouflage to escape detection and therefore does not retreat as almost all other snakes do when humans or animals approach. A step too close will most probably result in a dangerous bite – immediate necrosis at the site of the bite and extreme pain. Because of this and the fact the Puff Adder is the most widely distributed snake in South Africa and that they have adapted to all environmental conditions from semi-desert to sub-tropical areas

(except mountain tops and dense forest) means that they are responsible for the majority of snake bites in the country. The reference to Lilith (Adam's first wife in Eden and a prototype Dybbuk) tries to reinforce the seriousness of the need to avoid this snake and to accord it respect.

From my diary I record an incident during my courtship of my wife. We were returning to Port Alfred after an evening with friends in Grahamstown. Just before Stones Hill the headlights of the car picked out a Puff Adder making its way across the road. Puff Adders cannot move at speed on tar. My wife leaped out of the car and chivvied the snake to the safety of the grass verge. Perhaps it was the beers in my system but I can clearly remember the look on the snake's face and its body language as one of, 'Oh Bugger, now what?' This incident added a profound respect to my already growing affection for my future wife.

## ***Disturbance***

A snake, a mildly venomous Night Adder found its way into the corridor of the school I work in. It was early in the day and there were no pupils about. The cleaning staff put up an astonishing noise, but were too afraid to approach too near the snake. I caught it and released it into the bush bordering the school grounds. What caught my attention was the obvious fascination combined with fear exhibited by the cleaning staff (all women). Like D H Lawrence throwing a stick at his snake this crowd wanted the snake dead and yet hesitated to deliver the death blow. The crowd parted as I carried the snake past them to be released, yet drew near fascinated by the abomination. Was this how Eve felt? Was she attracted by the snake rather than the fruit on offer?

## ***Echoes of Acacia***

Recently a prolonged drought had all but destroyed the candelabra euphorbia trees in the Double Drift Game reserve. The reserve is vast and has a range of biomes. On the slopes of the Fish River the thickly wooded *krantzes* contain acacias and euphorbias. The tall skeletons of the euphorbias emerge, gaunt and white from among the shorter trees that have recovered, that withstood the drought. On close inspection I was able to learn the reason why birds were congregating on these dead trees. The euphorbias are soft, their wood fleshy and pulpy, even in life. When dead they decay easily and fast especially in the moist aftermath of drought. Insects colonize the trees and breed. The larvae and insect eggs attract birds which squabble and scrabble at the insects' nests. A recurring motif emerges in my poems – that of the circle of life (an idea also explored in the *Sandile's Cave* poems). The trees die, rot and provide nutrition, shelter and a breeding area. This in turn provides food for the birds, even nesting sites for Black-collared Barbets. Not much is wasted in nature.

## ***At Night***

Here, in the Eastern Cape geckoes are invaders from the Kingdom of KwaZulu Natal and have almost exterminated the local lizard population. I view the geckoes with mixed emotions – dislike because of their destructive intrusion and resentful approval of their penchant for eating mosquitoes and other insects. Like most invaders, they settle in and thrive. There is, however, always a cost to the indigenous creatures – a struggle for space and resources takes place. Often the invaders are successful. Sometimes it takes a long time for the balance to be restored, if ever.

There now follows a sequence of discussion of nine poems set on the Renosterberg.

For many years I have had access to a game camp on the slopes of the Renosterberg. After the Kompasberg near Nieu Bethesda, the Renosterberg is the second highest mountain in the Karoo. The camp has a cottage built near a dolomite spring, high up the mountain. It is a beautiful and remote place, where inspiration and peace combine. My own awareness of the inspirational potential of the mountain was first stimulated by Don MacLennan who loved the Kompasberg and spoke of it as a mystical place. MacLennan's book of poems *Under Compassberg* (Rhodes University Printing Unit, 2003) provided the inspiration for many of the poems in the Renosterberg sequence. The Renosterberg camp has plenty of antelope species and no really dangerous game. There are aardwolwe and a shy caracal, but one can walk freely in the knowledge that no large cat is stalking one, nor a surly buffalo waiting to charge with armour plated skull.

### ***Renosterberg: Star Dust***

One warm summer's night, amid much excitement the children joined my wife and me under the stars for the night. The air in the Karoo is reputedly amongst the cleanest and clearest in the world. On cloudless nights there is a sense of being surrounded by stars. This enraptured the children, their small hands reached up as if in contact with the celestial bodies. This was a profoundly moving experience for me as the gestures invoked feelings of an immense peace and well-being. It wasn't long before the children slept.

The scorpion encountered as the mattress was removed the next morning was a pathetic specimen; almost colourless with tiny pincers and no venom sac at the end of a truncated tail. For me the appearance of the scorpion was a reminder that the veld and its denizens can be dangerous and should be treated with care. The desire of the children to nurture the scorpion was both touching and

alarming – a process of teaching discernment about handling or getting too close to our fellow creatures in the wild had to begin.

My wife, often a very discerning and even acerbic critic of my poetry, pointed out that I had missed an important ingredient to this poem – we were sleeping under the Scorpion Constellation. I tried to include it, but my slim grasp of astronomy meant that it eluded me.

### ***Renosterberg: Cloud Song***

‘Out of the mouths of babes’. My six year old son and I had walked in the veld; veld-craft education on the agenda, after his desire to handle scorpions in ignorance. He was learning fast how to identify spoor and gauge *bokdrol* for freshness and specie. Spotting the rare and shy rabbit was a bonus, but I felt irrationally inadequate at being unable to gratify his desire to catch the rabbit for a pet. I was irritated by my absurd feeling that I was failing as a father in some way. With the clarity of childish perception he sensed this regret in me and made it up to me by alluding to the noiseless clouds and thus reminding me of the beauty of the area.

### ***Renosterberg: Witness***

My son brought to the learning of ‘veld-craft’ an enthusiasm and talent which soon surpassed his teacher’s expertise. That he has gone on to become a skilled hunter has left me regretting slightly launching him down this path. At the start, however, it was enormously gratifying to witness his growing competence and efficiency at tracking, identification and ability to master the ways of nature.

At that time I was ploughing my way through a King James version of the bible and thoroughly enjoying it. There is glancing reference to the Book of Revelation (11:4), where olive trees represent hope during a time of great threat and then a resurrection of hope ('...there are the two olive trees .... standing before the God of the earth'). There is also a passing reference to Genesis (8:11) when the dove returns with an olive frond; peace after turbulence. There are also references to Psalm 37 (verses 25 and 26) where there are mentions of old age and blessings.

There is an oblique echo of the sun god Mithras. I had been influenced by Roy Campbell and was envious of his journey on the way to Roman Catholicism and monotheism. This is a comfortable liturgy, the pagan merging with the Christian.

### ***Renosterberg: Time Shards***

Sitting high on the mountain and looking across the valley at the mountains opposite it is easy to follow the evidence of receding levels of the water from the great inland lake of eons ago. The difficulty is in raising images of what it looked like – Blake's eidon ability is a source of envy. This poem is an effort to conjure in words the ancient vistas. Not being an archeologist also means that my time sequences are dodgy – I don't know how soon after the demise of the dinosaurs the Bushmen arrived. To me it is not hugely important – the evidence of both dinosaurs (fossil remains in abundance) and the Bushmen (rock art and stone arrowheads and other tools) are present. Furthermore I'm not sure about dinosaur dietary habits so I hedge my bets – 'ate sedge and themselves' – carnivores and herbivores, all bases covered. The information will probably not bear scientific scrutiny but the sense of millennia passing is what is important.

## ***Renosterberg: Cold Blood***

Initially this was a much longer poem than was necessary. The original demanded the rigorous application of Occam's Razor. It had references to stalking kudu for photographic purposes, to my son's increasingly efficient ability to track antelope over rough terrain and a spiritual drought being experienced by me. I ended the poem by begging for rain to be sent to water my parched soul. It was pointed out to me, by fellow ECCA Group poet Cathal Lagan, that I wasn't Gerard Manley Hopkins. It was a point well taken, albeit with a pinch of embarrassment. I hope, however, that the accuracy of the description of the frog metamorphosis makes the point that there are survivors from the ancient past with tactics and strategies to deal with the harsh climate and the depredations of man. Heaven help them when the hydrofracking process ruins the water supply of the frogs for ever. (The poem *Fracking the Karoo* enlarges on this theme.)

## ***Renosterberg: A Prayer***

This is a celebration about the permanence and transience of the landscape. The kippersol trees will grow through the fissures in the rocks, but will die and be replaced. The rocks will remain until some cataclysm destroys everything.

## ***Renosterberg: Full Moon***

One night on the mountain I was unable to sleep, so I walked out into the light of the full moon. I had been reading up on the Bushmen and learned that they followed the seasonal migrations of their protein sources – mainly buck. As the buck came down from the mountain ranges, away from the cold towards lowland winter grazing the Bushmen would follow. This trek was not without danger – all manner of predators would join the queue; leopards, lions, caracals, wild dogs just to mention a

few. In my mind in the moon-light I saw them and a connection to the Biblical Noah was made and I wondered how random or hit-and-miss the passenger list on the Ark was. How arbitrary the Expected Time of Departure was, depending as it did on precipitation and the will of God? I knew that the chameleons would have struggled to reach the gangway and I rejoice that they still grace our world. Perhaps a word is needed about Mantis. The Bushmen venerated the praying mantis. Mantis was a capricious deity, capable of changing form, being vindictive but ultimately a ‘god’ worthy of respect and worship.

### ***Renosterberg: Dream***

Sitting on the mountain the same night as the previous poem the peace was disrupted by a sudden and fierce wind. From somewhere in the id I was able to find a sense of perspective. My own insignificance was revealed as I realized how dwarfed I was by the immensity of the night sky, the great size of the mountain and the vastness of the Karoo in every direction – frontiers of time and space largely unexplored and unexplorable except in the imagination. This seemed to be a plea for inspiration, a desire to bring the ego under control.

### ***Renosterberg: Heat Haze***

The inspiration for this poem came after rushing out to buy and then read, *Stories that Float from Afar* (David Philip, 2000) – the Lewis-Williams edited publication of the Bushmen folk tales collected by Wilhelm Bleek over a century ago.

At about this time a nasty squabble, hand bags at dawn, broke out between the late Professor Stephen Watson and Antjie Krog about which of them first used the story about the death of the white springbok in a poem. Accusations of plagiarism and rebuttals flew. I did not dare join the

fray, being a complete unknown, between these two heavy-weights of the literary establishment, but I smiled smugly and privately, knowing I had beaten them both to it. There are white springbok on the Renosterberg, their strangeness is remarkable and eye-catching. Shooting one of these beautiful and rare creatures seems grossly unnecessary, an aesthetic attitude endorsed by the Bushmen.

Here is the original version of Kum 40 (Story 40, page 233) as translated in Lewis-William's book (David Philip, 2000).

### **The killing of a white springbok**

People do not kill a white springbok. They merely look at it. They feel that the springbok will disappear altogether. The springbok will not come to a place where a white springbok has lain dead. All the springbok go away altogether, completely. Therefore the people merely look at a springbok which is white, even if it is near to them.

I did not try to give an accurate transliteration of the story. I added a modern context in response to seeing a *doppie* of a large caliber rifle lying in the veld close to where the springbok had been seen.

Here is Antjie Krog's version of the story (2004, 35).

### *the killing of a white springbok*

one should not kill a white springbok

one should just look at it

because it feels as if the white springbok just wants to disappear

an ordinary springbok will never come to a place

where a white springbok once lay dead  
all the springbok will abandon that place

that is why you lower your bow-arm  
and only look at a springbok that is white  
even if it is very near

### ***Renosterberg: The Wall***

A dry-stone wall was built on the mountain. It starts on the *vlaktes* before ascending the steep slopes of the massif. It is estimated that the wall is about four kilometers in length. The farmer, John van Lingen, told me that the previous owner's great-grandfather had been approached to provide work for a group of refugees from the National Suicide of the Xhosa in 1857. The original farmer had no work but took pity on the refugees and set them to work on constructing a wall. In return he provided food and shelter. It was cruel work in terrible conditions and the wall, as far as John van Lingen thought, served little or no agricultural purpose – it is too low to exclude predators, it marks no boundary and is incorrectly sited in his opinion. There are no details on how long the construction took or what ultimately happened to the people. Apparently there were numerous bands of refugees in the area and a little acknowledged fact is that many of the local farmers did what they could to relieve the plight of the starving people, despite not having an abundance of wealth or resources of their own.

In order to check on all this I spoke to Dr Manton Hirst, then, now retired, Curator of Anthropology and Ms. Stephanie Victor, Curator of History, both of the Amathole Museum in King William's Town. They confirmed that there was a lot of charitable work done by various groups for the refugees of the Cattle Killing, including the Middelburg farmers. They also pointed out that some

unscrupulous men exploited the refugees by virtually selling them as forced labourers at slave wage levels. Indeed it was felt that the farmers also provided succour as they feared that the desperate people might resort to violence and plunder.

About the walls they could not provide much information. It was known that there were similar walls in the Tsolwana Game Reserve, not far from Middelburg, in the direction of Tarkastad. Originally it was thought that the walls were built by the British Imperial Army. The sites of the walls, however, have thrown doubt on this theory. The walls are in deep valleys and can have little or no strategic military value. They are too low to provide protection from attack from an enemy or predators. They are not situated near water – the British military in Southern Africa soon stopped building fortifications on the top of high ground (as was strategically necessary in Europe and other theatres of war in those times). The enemy in Southern Africa did not have fire-arms or artillery and so forts were built near rivers or springs – a far more important reason in the dry and harsh climate often encountered in areas of conflict. Other reasons for the construction of these walls are still under investigation and are yet to be confirmed, so there is still a possibility that they were built by refugees from the Cattle Killing.

On a hot day I started a personal pilgrimage where the wall began and walked its entire length – from flat ground on the *vlakte* up the rock-strewn slope – to where it petered out on an almost vertical, boulder infested gradient. It was heavy going. All the while I was aware of a presence; mountain reedbuck ewes watched me, scampered away, small unidentifiable birds whirled away, but it was not them I sensed. I believe in ghosts and do not fear them. So it came to me that the Shades of the Ancestors were watching and wondering why this *umlungu* (white man) was toiling and sweating where they had suffered. Suffered the physical torture of labouring in extremes of heat and cold and the spiritual torture of dislocation from all that they had held dear. So I sat; not on the wall, but next to it, trying to find a gesture of respect, a posture of prayer. The poem is an appeal to

the Ancestors to return to their ancestral places in peace, to allow, hopefully, the past to blend into the future, not by forgetting the past and the suffering, but by accepting them and then moving on. I have tried to avoid arrogance in this appeal. Perhaps the poem is more an expression of a personal need for reconciliation in an acknowledgement of inherited guilt for past atrocities, part blame for which can be laid at the feet of my ancestors.

Once again the isiXhosa translation is by Mr. Sipho Adam. He made very little comment about the content of this poem. I sensed a deep distaste in him for the subject. The memories and the knowledge of this tragic event still hurt the people and cause them unhappiness. It is a subject, for them, best ignored; buried in the psyche. I am deeply grateful that he persevered in what was obviously an unpleasant task for him.

*Esiqithini* – this is the isiXhosa word meaning ‘on the island’ – Robben Island, the infamous prison for political internees in Table Bay. Many of the Xhosa kings and leaders were incarcerated there, right up to modern times.

## ***On a Karoo Farm i***

Abandoning the Renosterberg for a winter break we stayed on the farm of John Southey, north of Middelberg. The guest-house is isolated and peaceful, with underfloor heating (in contrast to the Spartan cottage on the Renosterberg). Early one morning I chose a bushy spot and sat with binoculars and note book and quietly wallowed in the silence. By sitting very still I became regarded as part of the scenery – a large heron pounded past a meter from my head, a startling moment. Having settled once more I was again roused from semi-slumber by the manic aerobatics of a double collared sunbird aligning itself before probing with its scimitar beak a winter bloom next to my ear. Nothing else moved on that part of the farm. There were poems in the air; all I had

to do was record the haze of inspiration. Sometimes inspiration is elusive and difficult to pin down. Indeed 'pinning down' is too reminiscent of butterflies pierced onto a display board, lifeless and brittle. The note book was filled to overflowing with free-flow words from which a living poem or two were to emerge.

## ***On a Karoo Farm ii***

It is strange to me that away from the urban bustle I can conjure a sense of history's continuum, can feel comfortable in the company of nature and ghosts. Things real and metaphysical get tangled together and the glory is in untangling and sorting the sweet mess in the mind. The Karoo is the place that transports me into what Chris Mann calls 'The River' – a state in which creativity flourishes and words flow easily. It is as if the senses are aroused, honed to new awareness. This heightened sensitivity became apparent at the blockhouse, a relic of the Anglo-Boer War of 1889 – 1902. These portable military forts were made of corrugated iron – basically they were big, round water tanks adapted for the army. Inside there is space for a squad of at least ten men, there are ten gun ports at about eye-level and a small doorway. The structure could not have stopped Mauser bullets, standard weapon of the Boer Army, the steel is too thin to provide protection. I wondered how the soldiers felt about this inadequate shield. The albums in the guest-house revealed photographs which showed the tank embalmed in a thick layer of earth over which stones were tightly packed, up to gun port height. The spaces between the gun ports were lined with sandbags and more stones. The protection was formidable. The photographs also revealed men of the Coldstream Guards in full uniform and in formal pose before the blockhouse. They all looked happy, smiling at the camera, one man petting the regimental dog, also in uniform. The war had probably moved on and the men were relaxing away from the front line. A connection was made for me between the ancient times and more recent events: the dinosaurs followed by man's war; we are surrounded by death at all times.

### ***On a Karoo Farm iii***

The farmer's wife took us down to the river that forms the boundary of the farm. She has lived close by all her life and says that even in the fiercest droughts of the arid Karoo the river has never ceased to flow. A symbol to me of the continuum of history. She took us to a fossil bed where the soil sediments had been eroded from bedrock and had exposed a welter of fossils. The rock was speckled, freckled with bones. I was awe-struck. I have seen fossil beds elsewhere, followed dinosaur footprints across outcrops of sandstone, but never have I seen so many remains concentrated in one relatively small area.

She had allowed scientists from some northern university to remove a few fossils but then, to her credit, had requested them to stay away, saying, 'This is a cemetery'. The scientists have stayed away, although legally within their rights to take as much as they want. For me this was a special place, the ancient river forever baptizing the skeletons of the great creatures of the past. I was glad the scientists had respected the farmer's wife's wishes, there are enough bones of history to satisfy the scientists and we keep renewing the supply.

I have a recurring image of baptism, of baptism as an on-going process, the continual reaffirmation and renewal of the spirit. The river, the sea, the rain embody this eternal process, are symbolic of all that goes into making life on earth. The river washes the fossils in times of flood, the tide baptizes my mother's ashes on Middle Beach at Kenton-on-Sea, the rain from the roof of Ely Cathedral baptizes the plague babies in their cemetery beneath the wall. It is fitting that the fossils lie in peace.

## ***On a Karoo Farm iv***

Most boys are fascinated by guns and my son was no exception. I let him handle the rifle mentioned in the poem. The next morning the farmer taught him the rudiments of weapons drill and followed this with some target shooting. The boy's excitement was extreme. The effect on me was one of regret and sadness. I had seen what guns and bullets do to people during the Lesotho coup of 1970. I have also witnessed the sufferings of buck wounded by inaccurate gunfire.

In a perfect world my child would not have been exposed to guns.

Now, in his second year at university, he spends vacations on the farm. The farmer trusts him enough to send out on his own with a rifle. The boy often brings home meat for the family. He can skin and butcher an antelope. He can prepare biltong.

## ***Fracking the Karoo***

Perhaps it is relevant to explain the influence of ecology on my poetry, particularly as it pertains to the Karoo, this fierce elemental area. The Karoo has many attractions for me: isolation from everyday life, the extremes of climate (from the bone-chill of winter to the scorching heat of summer and the mildness of autumn and spring). The remoteness of the Renosterberg allows me to concentrate on the surroundings and this liberates the imagination (in my wife it liberates an irrepressible desire to walk vast distances through the veld, so we both have our wishes fulfilled). The imagination is freed to explore the influences of time (the prehistoric, the Bushmen, the Xhosa, the Whites and the present).

With the threat of the hydrofracking process so unambivalent, a despairing sense of the future is engendered. The poem *Fracking the Karoo* tries to illustrate the emotions raised by this process of thoroughly poisoning the aquifers upon which the delicate balance of the entire region depends. As with the thoughts concerning the corruption surrounding the siting of the nuclear power station at Klipbaai, it would appear that despite the universal condemnation of hydrofracking, the bribes have been paid, the officials bought off. Also there are too many issues of reputations at stake and threats of exposure to take the right way and obey not only conscience but the long-term preservation of a beautiful part of the world. There are alternative sources of energy (wind and solar, for examples), but none so potentially profitable. The aristocrats of avarice will triumph again.

Brian Walter, a member of the ECCA Group of poets, also condemns this hydrofracking process in his poem *Of Shale-beds and Shamans* (Seaberg, 2011). The significance of the emotions in these poems is the sadness at the potential destruction of a pristine area. This destruction runs counter to Chris Mann's (a pioneer and doyenne of ecopoetry) expressed philosophy that man should accept responsibility for the protection of the environment by making both 'space' and 'place' for the flora and fauna with which he coexists and on which he is dependent. Mzi Mahola another member of the ECCA Group also writes poems that express anger at the amount of corruption so prevalent in South Africa today.

## SECTION C – SCOUTING THE POST-COLONIAL

### *Refugees in Austria: 1980*

In post-1976 South Africa the drawn-out dying spasms of apartheid became unbearable for me. I ran away to Europe – an outcast, persona non grata on a South African ‘green mamba’ passport, forced to work illegally, doing menial jobs. Tasks like cleaning toilets, ferrying bedpans in clinics, washing dishes, digging holes, earning Drachmas by donating blood once a month at a filthy Greek clinic in Piraeus Harbour and anything else most Europeans were reluctant to do.

In Austria I was lucky to get work in an après ski bar alongside an Australian girl who had an English father and an Indian mother. Her gene mix bequeathed her indescribable beauty. We became friends. I kept my nationality a secret for as long as possible, but soon enough apartheid’s hideous shadow fell between us. She had suffered at the hands of some South African yobbos who had slung racial insults at her in the bar before my arrival. There was a problem of trust which came to head as we sat on the Hahnenkamm in Kitsbühel. She has left me with an emotional ache from a scar which will not heal, not even with the placebo of writing poetry.

### *Camargue*

I have been an admirer of Roy Campbell’s poetry for many years, having been thrilled by his *Horses on the Camargue* (2004, 44) while I was still at school. Recently my family took a barging holiday from St Giles in southern France down the Rhone River, across the Etang de Tau and then along the Canal du Midi. I keenly anticipated seeing the fabled white horses and the famed bulls. This came to nothing. There were white horses, safely corralled and amiable. The bulls were puny little creatures peacefully cropping grass in dreamy meadows, our small South African Nguni breed of cattle look big in comparison (in the Cathcart district I overheard a farmer say, ‘I had one egg and two Ngunis for breakfast on a slice of toast, Boet’).

One very hot, sleepy afternoon on the river I heard a gunshot. This was followed by loud music from a public address system – some sort of festival was in progress in a nearby village. We moored and went to investigate. A crowd of locals lounged safely behind steel barricades. The atmosphere was torpid and a little languid drinking was going on. There was another shot, the crowd became slightly animated and suddenly a posse of riders exploded from a side street. They had surrounded a tiny, bewildered steer and bullied it up a ramp and into a truck strategically parked nearby. The steer's horns had been pruned to bluntness and to further ensure the safety of the horses and riders, the horns had been padded with thick leather covers. The chase was repeated with fresh dwarf steers. There seemed little point to the whole operation, other than a fair spread of ungulate dung on the roads.

The most excitement was caused by a group of louts at the bar who argued, then fought with broken bottles and knives. Another gunshot fired into the air broke up the disturbance and those bleeding were removed by the local gendarmerie. As far as the horses and bulls were concerned, there was grave disappointment for me – hence the ‘tongue in cheek’ tone of the poem. Civilized, overcrowded Europe has little space left for free range animals. And I wondered how Roy Campbell's ghost would react to this bowdlerizing of the essential spirit.

### ***Aigue-Mortes: The Camargue***

‘Aigue’ is archaic French for water, and ‘mortes’ means dead. ‘Dead Water’ because of high salinity. From ancient times to the present the area has been and is a prime source of salt that is mined and exported via the river Rhone and the canals of the area. Added to this, the water table in the Rhone Delta is extremely high. Mass burials are a problem, whatever the faith. Aigue-Mortes, is

a walled city, still vibrantly alive, fully occupied and in an astonishing state of preservation. It is the city from where Saint Louis, the French king launched his famous crusade in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century.

The massacre referred to in the poem was a double cataclysm. The potted explanation given by a passing tour-party guide (translated in haste by my wife) was that the Huguenots attacked the Catholic garrison in strength and slaughtered the defenders. Their post-battle rejoicing got out of hand and much drunkenness occurred. So much drunkenness occurred that they forgot to post sentries. The civilian population, mainly Catholics, opened the unguarded gates and the Catholic army, bent on revenge, stormed in and another slaughter took place.

The actual story is a bit more interesting albeit rather macabre. The action took place during the Hundred Years War and in 1418 the town was seized in a raid by the English-allied Burgundian forces. Royalist Armagnacs, Catholics, came to try and retake the strategic fortress town. One night the local citizenry opened a small gate while the Burgundians had let their guard down by excessive revelry. Rather than bury the bodies (no easy task in the fetid marshes surrounding the town) the victorious forces stuffed them into a tower, layering them with salt so they would not putrefy – leaving them literally in a pickle. What eventually happened to the bodies is not recorded. For me, the place was filled with ghosts regretting the folly of man, a creature that so consistently resorts to killing its own kind in vast numbers and often for the most irrational of reasons. As the poem grew I tried to incorporate the English connection but came to see that this would be a distraction from the main theme, which is that religion is often to blame for man's awful atrocities against his fellow man.

## ***Ios Ferry***

I had seen the big Australian frequent the small taverna where I washed dishes and glasses. He was a retsina addict. He would drink a bottle of it with breakfast along with yoghurt and fruit. Then he would swim a few kilometers out into the Aegean Sea. All muscles and smiles he was a favourite with the local people.

The evening before the ferry trip I watched from behind the sink as he consumed vast quantities of retsina. His farewell party lasted well into the small hours – long after I had gone to bed. I cleared up his and his fellow revellers' mess early the next morning. There was broken glass, vomit, half-empty bottles with cigarette ends submerged in them – the usual detritus.

That he was badly hung-over the next morning when he boarded the ferry came as no surprise.

I got a real sense of New World 'brashness' meeting Old world 'civilization' as the Australian stretched out and took up a whole bench. The Greek islanders were orderly once they were on the boat (their queueing was different; rowdy, chaotic and involving a lot of shoving and jostling). They sat in their own spaces, allowing room for others. The Australian was the opposite. His behaviour suited him and his comfort at the expense of others. Once again the idea of Raka entered my thoughts. I waited to see what would happen. Would the alien invader triumph as in Raka over Koki? Or would the established pattern assert itself?

By this time in my travels I had been in some of Europe's roughest places (seeking work from North African touts); Rotterdam Docks, Piraeus Harbour, the Reeperbahn in Hamburg and

Marseilles. I had seen some nasty work. But never had I seen a knife appear so swiftly as that morning. It was long and thin, a stiletto, and seemed part of the big Greek's arm. A prosthetic extension. The air went very still on the deck of that ferry.

The Australian may have been a muscular, steroidal giant but he wisely saw no future in a fight with a knife-artist. I was greatly relieved when the Greek used the knife to pare and share a cucumber with me.

## ***Sicily***

The Lestrignons were a race of cannibal giants on Sicily. The Cyclopes were a race of one-eyed giants on Sicily. It gets worse, for, what with the highly active volcano, Sicily was a nasty and dangerous place for refugees. Galatea was a beautiful sea-nymph for whom Acis died a horrible death because he competed for her love with Polyphemus, a Cyclops of immense strength and an extremely ugly temper.

The poem uses Ovid's version of the tale about Acis, Polyphemus and Galatea. Other writers of antiquity; Homer, Theocritus and Vergil all had differing versions, thus providing a poet with a wide choice. I experimented with the format of the poem with no real goal in mind, other than it seemed to fit at the time. I have left it as first written despite snide comments by my fellow ECCA Group poets.

## ***Slingshot***

I worry about the Arab-Israeli conflict – so ancient, so intractable.

## ***The Passover***

An interest in the poems of the old poet of Alexandria, Constantine Cavafy, was sparked by reading Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* (Faber and Faber, 1962). The particular poem that inspired this poem of mine was *Ithaca* (Harcourt, 1961), in which Cavafy advises the reader and traveller to appreciate all that can be experienced on the journey to Ithaca. On this journey, wisdom and enjoyment will be gained – the journey is beautiful, the reader is told not to hurry. This is a metaphor for life. An optimistic metaphor, as my experience (described below) on Delos shows.

My poem is experimental in that I use longer lines than I usually do. The thrust of the poem is dislike of the package tourists who infest the Greek islands every summer. So few of them, or the ones I saw, tried to appreciate the wealth of Hellenistic history and culture so obviously before them everywhere they go.

My own frustration was that the wind on Mykonos blew so fiercely for four days that my much anticipated visits to Delos were cancelled. Finally a short day trip was organized. This was unsatisfactory, but at least I got there. The disappointment was alleviated by a really wonderful time on the Acropolis in Athens and later wallowing in the rich history of Rodos. On Rodos the Crusader walls and buildings are in constant use as dwellings and shops, something I found very moving. The ancient structures preserved by a thousand years of regular maintenance.

## ***Stonehenge***

My first visit to Stonehenge was in 1975. The Salisbury Plain was bleak with rain and a high wind. It was virtually deserted. I parked on the side of the road. I was alone except for an elderly employee of the National Trust. He allowed me to wander at will among the giant stones on condition that I did not deface anything by carving my initials or those of my girlfriend. I did not have one – he was trying to be funny.

My imagination was able to run riot; I even saw Tess of the d'Urbervilles lying on the sacrificial rock, among a ghostly group of druids and other wild Celts dressed only in woad, doing savage things to young maidens. (I changed my medication shortly after that.)

Now, however, things have really changed. There is a huge asphalt car park, a souvenir shop and a restaurant selling plastic food in biodegradable containers. Also, a pricey entrance ticket has to be purchased. Entrance to the stones is via a tunnel under the highway. There was litter everywhere when I visited recently. A huge coach disgorged what appeared to be half the population of Tokyo. I have never seen so many cameras festooned on individuals. Each person had at least two – a movie videocam, a single lens reflex 35 millimeter camera with scores of telephoto equipment and a tripod. A sort of walking tribe of technology.

The stones were cordoned off and there were more security guards than tourists. I could get no nearer than about twenty meters. The whole place was a commercial nightmare gone crazy.

This was so different to my earlier visit. The druids and the maidens and Tess and the Celts all vapourised. The poem that was brewing from thirty years previously disappeared and the present one emerged. I should have written a poem when the experience was still fresh. Somebody said that you never step into the same river twice. He was right.

## ***Mosaic***

Near Thorney Island, a few miles from Portsmouth in southern England a Roman port and fairly large settlement have been discovered. Archeologists were busy when we visited the site. A mosaic floor rested under shallow but very clear water. In a stiff upper lip way the ladies who watched the man take his turn at exposing the submerged vestal, were unhappy. Perhaps they would have preferred the female diver to expose what was obviously turning out to be a naked female form. I think the ladies' disapproval stemmed from the fact that the male diver appeared to be in an indecent hurry to expose some decorative Roman soft porn.

## ***The Innocents of Ely***

Deep in the soggy fens near Cambridge is Ely Cathedral. On a visit I saw an outer wall leaning alarmingly out of the vertical. Repairs had begun and then summarily stopped. Massive props supported the wall. At the wall's base archeologists burrowed. The repair work had been halted to allow the exhumation of a long row of skeletons of babies buried at its base. Carbon dating and research in the cathedral's archives revealed that the babies had been born, according to the ancient cathedral records, during an epidemic, whether the plague or a form of influenza was not made clear, indeed it could have been both. They had died, almost at birth or were still-born, before they could be baptized. They were therefore buried beneath the gutters of the cathedral roof – holy water providing eternal baptism. This is an image that has stuck with me and I have used it elsewhere in the thesis (*On a Karoo Farm ii* and *Tiny White Elephant*.)

Paradoxically, Ely Cathedral is the last church in England in which a Black Mass was celebrated (?). According to an elderly priest who told me that during some conquest or other (he was not quite

clear here) the congregation of the cathedral asked the Lord to kill off the marauders or, at the very least, assassinate their leader, a cruel savage of more than the usual barbarity in those barbaric times. Nowhere can I find confirmation of this, or its putative dates. Maybe the old priest had been at the Communion wine and was having a bit of ecclesiastical fun at my expense. And until I can verify the tale, I can't really use it in a poem. In some poems I stretch the truth, I exaggerate, I know, but I can't use this Black Mass snippet for fear of retribution, divine or temporal.

### ***Farewell from Zurich Airport***

Zurich Airport is one of the most efficiently organized of the many international airports through which I have travelled. The young family I observed struck a chord with me as I could sense the reluctance of the father and mother to part. The small daughter (about four years old) added to the poignancy of the moment. Their situation seemed to echo my own. I was en route to my birthplace in Africa, back to family uncertain how I would be received after an absence of some years. Years of limited communication.

### ***To Tristan (11) and Jessica (7)***

While the children were young we, my wife and I, tried to fill their memory banks. Part of this programme took us to England. The visit to Legoland was a reward for them after being dragged around a number of historical places. One branch of my father's family had all been soldiers. Another branch had produced Anglican priests for a number of generations. The graves of various generals, colonels and corporals engendered no excitement from the children. The parish churches where often The Reverend Hogges, father and son, lay buried in some state beneath the altars, along with their wives and many offspring who died in infancy, impressed my children even less. History is indeed an adult pursuit. (See Norman Morrissey's comment quoted at the start of the portfolio for a reference to this poem.)

## ***Kowie River – Rite of Passage, 1996 and Kowie River - 2006***

These two Kowie River poems trace the inevitable advance of experience and maturity which means so much to both child and parent. My son graduated from a child fishing for fun to being a ruthless and efficient angler. Once again my emotions are ambivalent; I dislike the killing of living creatures. Yet I eat meat and fish. In defence of my son I am glad to say that he never takes more from the sea than we need for the pot and he scrupulously returns any undersized fish he catches.

The poems try to catch the poignancy of experiencing one's child growing up and regret at the concomitant loss of innocence.

## ***Kowie River Breakwater/ Sea-change***

This is another poem inspired by the Kowie River and the East Beach at Port Alfred. That a young township lad now surfs from the beach upon which he was previously banned under apartheid shows how much progress is being made towards normality in matters racial. The white surfers also display a total lack of any racial attitude. This really gladdens my heart as I recall how difficult it was to mix with other races as I grew up in the 'old' South Africa.

## ***Odour of Autumn***

This poem picks up on the idea of hunting and my ambivalence towards it. I have no problem with hunting for the pot. Killing for trophies or sport appalls me.

## ***Tiny White Elephant***

This is a memorial to my mother, who, as luck would have it, did not give ecstatic birth to a Buddha and then die. The very thought of this would have been alarming to her. Her will required that her children (my sister and I) scatter her ashes on Middle Beach, Kenton-on-Sea. She stipulated that she be put to rest at the low-water mark so that her remains would be washed out to sea from the beach she loved so dearly. My sister and I carried out her instructions to the letter, amid much opposition

from my mother's sisters, a regiment of outraged aunts and other cognate family who wanted a permanent grave with an expensive headstone suitably engraved, that could be visited.

There is also a connection with the idea of permanent baptism, this time by the tide. Elsewhere in the portfolio rain and river baptize for ever. This poem came about when I read how the Buddha's mother had had a vision in which she gave birth to a tiny white elephant. Shortly after the birth of her own son she died 'of joy', knowing that she had produced an extraordinary being.

### ***No Tears for the Austere***

I have had reservations about putting this poem in the public domain. It is a deeply personal account revealing perhaps too intimate an explanation of my relationship with my father. As a child I grew up in awe of this stern man. He had commanded a tank squadron during the Second World War (1939 – 1945) in North Africa and Italy. He was hideously wounded outside Rome, where he lost his right eye, much of his hearing and also sustained a peppering of shrapnel in his lower legs. He was a patient in one of the first batches of men to be repaired by the famous pioneering plastic surgeon, Dr Jack Penn in Johannesburg.

On my father's recovery he returned to a family in distress – three brothers still on active service, a younger brother still at school and the family farm deep in debt. His aged father had been unable to cope alone. My father paid off the crippling debts, slowly. He paid for the education of his youngest brother and helped the other brothers start new lives in New Zealand after the war ended.

He took to golf – one of the few outdoor sports where the ball is motionless until struck and therefore easier to excel at for a one-eyed man. He was soon a scratch handicap player and remained a single-figure handicapper well into his retirement.

My sister, four years my senior was his favoured child. She was a huge success at school – deputy head girl, sporting colours in many codes and a brilliant matriculation pass to cap it all. An American Field Scholar she later contracted a glittering marriage to a future captain of commerce and produced grandchildren.

I was different - a ‘collector’ (a euphemism for ‘thief’) of ‘trophies’ such as road signs, lawyers’ shingles and vehicle number plates, among other things. I was not a master criminal, just a nuisance and the despair of my parents. I excelled at no sport and, against all expectations, barely achieved a mediocre matriculation exemption. After a basic bachelor’s degree and a diploma from Rhodes University and a few years employment I went into self-imposed exile in Europe, having annoyed the security police. I was good at annoying people. It was my main talent at that stage.

The years in exile were hard; working illegally, avoiding the immigration officials and prison. Indeed I spent two days in the lock-up at Felixstowe Harbour while one of the regiment of my aunts arranged for my release by promising to send me home.

I returned to South Africa in the mid-1980’s, broke and broken, to the care and compassion of my parents, now retired to Port Alfred. The adjustment for my father at having a large cuckoo back in the nest was extreme, but he undertook it manfully and with dignity. I found employment as a teacher nearby.

Whenever possible we played golf, went fishing together and drank whisky in moderation. Yet there was still a reserve about him, an austerity I never managed to penetrate. In my imagination it seemed that his glass eye was firmly focused on my soul. As if he was wondering if it was some hereditary flaw that had made me such a wild youth – Wickham to his Darcy.

The few years of happy reconciliation ended when a stroke struck down this dignified man. He was dead in three days; his wife and daughter holding his hands and his son lurking in the background at the foot of the bed, like an unwanted undertaker looking for business.

In the construction of this poem I struggled with the reference to ‘Hamlet’s King’ – perhaps the wording should have been to ‘King Hamlet’. I chose the former in order to try to illustrate my position as a prodigal son who came to love and respect a father (in the same way as Prince Hamlet had revered his father). Unlike Hamlet, however, I had no unfinished business to perform, no tasks for retribution except a sense that I had not mourned sufficiently. Yet my tears have all been shed in the heart, privately. The proud, remote, one-eyed man’s spirit had been spared the embarrassment of overt emotions, which he shunned. He had never felt sorry for himself despite the permanent shrapnel in a knee, the glass eye and unreliable hearing aids. He still appears to me in my dreams, a quiet spirit, who gives comfort.

### ***Sandile’s Cave: Amathole Mountains***

It is not only the ecology of our surroundings which form part of my son’s education and my involvement with him. The history of the location is important. King William’s Town was, for a time, the military head quarters of the British Imperial army during the troubled times of dispossession. The black servants in the town – who tended the needs of the white people – had a relay system for conveying information to the Xhosa warriors. Intelligence about troop preparations, troop movements and numbers would be passed out of the town and then along the ‘bush telegraph’ to the waiting Xhosa command. Once the Xhosa knew that troops were on the move they would watch from a position high on a mountain in the Amathole Range. The whole of King William’s Town lies below, about twenty kilometers distant; columns of moving men easily observed. The Xhosa would then know in which direction the troops were going – north towards present day Stutterheim or north-west towards Debe Nek or north-east towards the Kei River. The

Xhosa would then take the appropriate measures, such as where to deploy their soldiers or to hide their families and present an abandoned land.

The cave itself is big, indeed there is a system of deep declivities in the cliff high on the mountainside. The system lies behind an outcrop of rock, the look-out point over the valley in which the town is situated. In the caves men, women and children could hide for considerable periods of time. Often the Xhosa would take evasive action and melt into the countryside towards Keiskammahoek and the Hogsback range.

It is a tough climb from Maiden Dam up the at times vertical mountainside, to the cave system. The hike is through dense forest and has many fast-flowing streams to ford laced with slippery rocks. My young son took it all in his stride, asking young boy's questions – 'Did they fight here, Dad?' his interest in history had been piqued. We would rest, eat a naartjie, drink from a stream and I would embroider the narrative of history by creating imaginary battles and skirmishes. I would show him how important the exploitation of terrain is, how vital the control of high ground is, the use of cover and how to aim to take into account the influence of elevation on the trajectory of bullets and spears. He was fascinated by the Xhosa tactic of concealing themselves in thick bush and silently, skillfully, slitting the throat of the last British soldier in a single file patrol, before they disappeared into the bush.

The ugly reality of war only intruded when the poem came to be written. Pain, fear, suffering and death were obscured for my son in his youth. The horror of war should be better coped with when encountered later in life. The excitement of experiencing the wild place and its echoes of the past were enough for him, a rich deposit in his memory bank to be opened and understood at maturity. Perhaps the poem, if he reads it, will trigger a memory trace for him.

In the poem, the great fallen yellow wood tree symbolizes a connection between past and present. It is a bridge to assist the crossing of all our people from the trauma of our common history to the optimism of a shared future via an exciting (if turbulent) present.

### ***Sandile's Cave - Reprise***

A recurring idea in my poems is that of decay and regeneration in nature (*Echoes of Acacia*). The tree in both Sandile's Cave poems is another example of this. After nineteen years the tree's usefulness as part of the ecology is not finished. Insects and fungi flourish in its damp decay. My son's youthful exuberance of the first visit was tempered by a burgeoning maturity. His initial and young enthusiasm was sobered, much like the country's emergence from apartheid into democracy. And indeed the glory of the view from the cave revealed a serene valley basking in sunlight. The frenetic human traffic of the valley goes unnoticed at this high remove. This seemed to mirror the sense of a nation finding an equilibrium; the aura of unquiet history so noticeable in 1991 seemed to have dissipated, indicating that the nation had moved on, the Shades, their vigil not yet over, were resting easier on the mountain.

### ***British Graves at Isandlwana***

This poem also explores the theme of colonial conflict in South Africa. The Imperial War Graves Commission diligently buried with full military honours the remains of the British soldiers killed for Queen and Empire. No such luck for the Zulu soldiers. Research revealed that the Zulu (and the Xhosa) believed that the spirit of a dead soldier killed by one of them would not leave the surviving warrior in peace. Thus the dead enemy had to be eviscerated so that his soul would be released to join his ancestors. This act of respect would make it possible for the warrior to continue to slaughter more enemies.

Two words used in this poem, 'gralloched' and 'fell', are used to mean more than just the shorter dictionary meanings. 'Gralloched' means to eviscerate, and contains overtones of a large cat, like a lion or a leopard, clawing onto its prey with its forepaws around the neck area, then using its

powerful hindlegs to tear out the entrails. ‘Fell’ indicates a swift attack carried out with great speed and ruthlessness, an ambush of annihilation. I tried to capture how the Zulu *impis* surprised and routed the British force under that buffoon of a general Lord Chelmsford. A small whiff of class conflict intrudes into this poem – the colonel (I don’t think it was Durnford – my memory is a bit hazy here) was accorded a headstone, while the other ranks mentioned only get immortalized on a list. Perhaps modern monuments to the fallen will, in South Africa, treat all the heroes equally. The subsequent heroic defense of Rorke’s Drift appears to have had little to do with senior officers who were absent or scuttling for safety. Two subalterns and a handful of squaddies held the line.

### ***Incident near Stormberg Junction – 1898***

Leliekloof is a farm in the range of mountains that overlooks Jamestown, close to the Stormberg Junction. It is a little known fact that the farm has some of the best, most numerous and most beautiful rock art in South Africa – about eight different caves and rock-faces are covered with paintings. Fortunately, the farmer, Dries de Klerk, is both passionate and fanatical about preserving the art. He has erected shade cloth to protect a thirty meter panel high on a cliff face after a veld fire destroyed the bush that guarded the site from sun and rain damage. Indeed he did not know of the existence of this panel until it was exposed. His reaction was immediate and fortuitous – the panel is preserved. Access to the art is difficult, up a steep slope of loose shale and he made good-natured remarks about how the *Souties* (derogatory nickname for Englishmen) were not too good at climbing *krantzes*. He was only just amused to hear me remark that we were not as adept as those we referred to in a song as *Bobbejaan klim die berg* (the baboon climbs the mountain). With the Afrikaner/English racial antagonism broken he and I became friends. He showed us a gold Victorian sovereign and recounted how his great-grandmother had acquired the coin. He also told us that we were the first he told this, as he had only just emerged from his father’s hatred of the English.

The action at Stormberg Junction under General Gatacre was part of the British reversals of what was known as ‘Black Week’ in the early stages of the Anglo-Boer War. Dries de Klerk mused about what had could have happened to the officer who had given his ancestor the coin. The history of the war did not chronicle the isolated patrols or their movements in the run-up to the battle. It is impossible to know the fate of the officer, but he is honoured in the memory of a Boer farmer and his present family, who, despite the lingering hatred, have obeyed the instruction to ‘keep it’. Dries de Klerk epitomizes for me the true custodian of both past and present. In his way a preserver for the future of antiquities and a disciple of the concept of reconciliation.

At a reading by the ECCA Group at Hogsback the audience reaction to this poem was interesting. The women were discomforted when I read the part where the officer dismounts and fumbles at his belt before the naked girl. The audience was anticipating a rape scene. There were loud murmurs which turned to whispers of relief and satisfaction at the outcome.

### ***Holy Trinity Church – King William’s Town***

Holy Trinity is a beautiful building, designed and built by the Royal Engineers in about 1850. There is a low wall surrounding the garden with pillars at intervals joined by a chain of huge links. The local Xhosa people call it the ‘Church in Chains’ (iCawa yase Ematshieyinini). I saw this as a metaphor for the way in which the church, through the ages, has obeyed more the earthly power than the heavenly. First it blessed the men sent out to kill and dispossess the local people. Then it sat in silence as the horror of apartheid murdered many of the local people. Now, the congregation is massively multiracial, attracting worshippers from Kerala State in India to Ghanians and Nigerians seeking a better life away from the poverty or strife in their homelands.

## ***The Memorial Service***

The large and fancy marble tablet that is the inspiration for the poem is affixed to the wall of Holy Trinity Church in King William's Town. Although the church now has a very multiracial congregation the plaques commemorating the imperial army's victories over the local people still remain quietly on the walls. This is unlike at the Cathedral of St Michael and St George in Grahamstown where politically incorrect words have been ruthlessly obliterated.

The research for this poem was extremely interesting. The library at the Amathole Museum in King William's Town has the original and complete set of Colonel Hare-Bowes' diaries. A conscientious diarist, Hare-Bowes joined the Cape Mounted Riflemen as a young private. He remarked that being a colonial regiment promotion came to those who deserved it and not through the purchase of commissions as was the general practice in the regiments from Britain. True to form, by the time of the Bechuanaland Campaign Hare-Bowes was a sergeant. He rose to the rank of Colonel and commanded the regiment during the Great War 1914 – 1918.

The full names of the units involved are: the Cape Mounted Riflemen (often referred to as the Cape Mounted Rifles, a colonel huffily explained that the men of the regiment were Riflemen, not Rifles), Prince Alfred's Own Company of Artillery, the Duke of Edinburgh's Own Volunteer Rifles (the duke did not subscribe to the colonel's idea about rifles and riflemen, I suppose), 'B' Company Volunteer Medical Staff and the Mount Temple Volunteers.

The Kaffrarian Rifles, now renamed the Buffalo City Volunteers, would have had their name on the plaque covered by a marble block if this plaque had been in the Cathedral in Grahamstown, thus rendering the name acceptable to those sensitive to insulting names. Likewise, one of the girls' schools in the town has changed its name from Kaffrarian High School to Kingsridge High School. Also, the Kaffrarian Museum became the Amathole Museum.

The First City regiment, like the Buffalo City Volunteers, is still in existence and has its headquarters in Grahamstown. As far as I can ascertain all the other units have been disbanded.

It is interesting to note that only two schools in South Africa have had the Freedom of the City bestowed on them: Dale College in King William's Town and St Andrew's College in Grahamstown. Both schools' cadet corps saw action and were under arms during General Smuts's raid on the Cape Colony during the Second Anglo-Boer War 1899 – 1902. Both corps are allowed to parade their colours and to march through the streets of their respective towns with bayonets fixed. Indeed my late grandfather, an Old Dalian, claims to have been part of the defence of King William's Town. Not a shot was fired in anger by either corps, but they had been issued with live ammunition for their carbines and thus qualify as active units in the time of war.

I mention all this to illustrate how deeply embedded in the history of the Eastern Cape is the military aspect. The poetry serves as a reminder of the bellicose nature of our past and to hopefully provide a deterrent, however insignificant.

### ***1978 – Black Madonna – South Africa***

As a child I grew up in Lesotho (then Basutoland). The strict laws of apartheid did not apply; our family doctor was a Masuto and my father's preferred golfing partner. My future, however, was bound to South Africa and I found the strict apartheid laws irksome. Indeed I grew to hate them as racial separation made no sense to me. The apartheid laws were so rigorously applied and transgressions so viciously punished that in order to survive I obeyed and still feel guilty about that to this day. I never forgot and always regretted the moving away from the carefree interaction among my Basuto peers and the little girl who tried to teach me her language.

Years later I took a motorcycle trip down the Tugela Valley, along the back roads. I stopped on the far side of a rural bridge, removed my helmet and stretched. Then I sat and luxuriated in the fast flow of the water and the sun on my back. At that moment a naked Zulu woman, young and beautiful, surfaced below me and waded ashore on the opposite bank. She looked up, saw me, and utterly unselfconsciously waved. Caught by surprise, I dropped the helmet, gathered it and then returned her greeting. This brief interaction took on huge significance for me. That this woman could acknowledge me, smile and wave without rancour, indeed with a modicum of mischievousness, filled me with an ineffable sense of hope for the future. I had a real feeling that when apartheid finally and inevitably came to an end it would be possible for racial harmony to emerge and flourish. Small incidents like this kept alive hope for a better future.

At this stage I had no knowledge of the Black Madonna cult fairly widespread in southern and eastern Europe and scattered in South America. The incident with the Zulu woman, recorded in my notebook gestated for thirty years until I saw a statue of the Madonna in the grounds of a small church in Beziers deVilleneuve, a village on the banks of the Canal du Midi. This Madonna was pitch black.

## ***2008 – Black Madonna –France***

The little village of Beziers de Villeneuve seemed to empty itself of people at midday on the Saturday we stopped our boat and went to explore. On discovering the statue of a Black Madonna in a quiet corner of the churchyard, fascination grew. I was intrigued by this apparently ‘African’ lady so serenely watching over a fountain. Subsequent research added to my scant knowledge and revealed much of interest. At the time, however, it was rewarding just to sit quietly at her feet and dip my hands into the fountain that formed part of her pedestal. The poem (and the *Black Madonna*

- *South Africa* poem) emerged later as the boat trip was digested, notes written up and research at leisure was possible.

The Black Madonna cult has roots that stretch back to well before the Christian era. There are a number of cults which embrace goddess worship at their core: the Roman goddess Diane, the Asiatic goddess Cybele (an Earth Mother deity, associated with the womb of all life) and Isis, the Egyptian goddess, to name a few. The Christian church has frowned upon goddess worship and suppressed the concept of the Sacred Feminine for theological reasons too complex (and illogical for me) to enter into here. Indeed goddess worship for hundreds of years has been actively suppressed and Christianity reduced to a patriarchal preserve, much to its detriment. It seems, though, that goddess worship, far from being destroyed or even dying out, adapted itself to the Christian ethos in the persons of Mary, Mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Mary, Mother of Jesus, is more than likely the Egyptian goddess Isis in disguise. Isis was the goddess associated with medicine, fertility and motherhood – attributes closely linked to the Black Madonna cults to this day. Isis is usually depicted with her baby son Horus on her lap, a parallel to Mary and the Christ Child.

The two Madonna poems stand together, thirty years apart, as a testament to a spiritual optimism. Here follows a sequence of poems that traces my own spiritual confusion. I envy those people of committed religious conviction. Faith seems a step too far. And to attend church regularly seems to me to smack of hypocrisy if I lack conviction. Furthermore I miss the dignity and ritual of the High Anglicanism of my childhood. As a school boy I went to chapel, I sang the hymns, I intoned the prayers, took the Sacrament and went home. All was right and proper. There was a deeply satisfying sense of security that permeated down from the traditions of ancient wisdom.

I cannot go near the ‘churches’ that have drums and electric guitars and hairy priests, so ‘with it’, calling me ‘Brother’ and putting their arms about me to gauge the fatness of my wallet and the level of my gullibility.

### ***Sunday Service***

The antics of the imagination brought on by boredom are strange. Regular attendance at modern Church of England services is difficult for me, bound by family obligations and an iconoclastic frame of mind. My concentration wavers, then ceases altogether. I feel like Spike Milligan who repeatedly counted his nose to relieve the boredom of being on sentry duty in the army during the Second World War 1939 - 1945. My interest in the cults of goddess worship must have led me to see in my imagination, the statue of the Madonna wink and nod in approval of children eating sweets while bored witless by the sermon.

### ***Matins***

Cathal Lagan, vicar of the church I attend is also a very close friend. I envy him his faith and in my mind’s eye I see him as very close to God; a holy man on a higher spiritual plane than most of his parishioners. This poem is a tribute to him.

### ***King William’s Town – forced removal memories.***

The Old Town in King William’s Town was multiracial: coloured folk and white folk lived side by side and generally in harmony in a close knit community. Christians and Muslims co-existed, indeed the mosque and the Anglican church are separated by a side street. The Muezzin yells at the verger who rings the bell at Holy Trinity – in their own ways calling the faithful to prayer. There were drama and music groups. It was a vibrant society largely at peace with itself.

This ethnic and religious mix, a shining example of how different people could live together was anathema to the purists of apartheid philosophy and policy. Ultimately the ghastly Group Areas laws were enforced and the coloured folks were moved to Breidbach, a ‘sleeper’ town about five kilometers into the veld beyond the borders of King William’s Town. The government, in another act of cynical disrespect, provided only sanitation trucks (bucket sanitation trucks and filthy) to move the people and their belongings. Most of the tightly clustered and tiny homes were razed to make way for a shopping mall and a taxi rank. The white people were offered tantalizingly inflated prices for their tiny homes.

The ‘two old people’ referred to in the poem stayed on, refused to move and defied the law. Surprisingly they were left alone, the government probably thinking that being so old the two would soon die and the problem would thereby solve itself. There would be no further negative publicity and therefore ammunition for the local pinko liberal press (Daily Dispatch) so in favour of Steve Biko and his ilk at that time. Their adjoining houses are still there. The old people were traditional healers and made a living dispensing herbal remedies and sound advice. They have died, but their legacy lives on.

There should be poems about Breidbach – the vibrant community of Old Town and its tight sense of unity was smashed and has never fully recovered from the forced dislocation. Drug dens and shebeens plague the new town, while children run riot in the streets as parents work in King William’s Town, kilometers away. There are many such sad monuments to the evil of apartheid. The poem is written in the ‘lest we forget’ mode, for as Santayana warned that those people who ignore the lessons of history are doomed to relive them.

## ***Narcissus in the Mirror***

In case I give the impression that I think that South Africa is a sink-hole of post-apartheid problems, this poem tries to point out that ugly happenings occur all over the globe; in nature and in human society. The behaviour of the two birds mentioned (the preening peacock and the bellicose sunbird) is described as observed by me. The peacock was a pet at the East London Golf Club. It spent a lot of time on a roof looking into a window situated conveniently in an adjacent wall. The obvious enjoyment the bird got from its own image bordered on fanaticism. On the other hand, the tiny sunbird appeared at the rear view mirror of my elderly bakkie, hovered briefly then pecked at its reflection with a beak that was reminiscent of a high speed impact drill on dexedrine. It's a wonder the bird did not eventually retire with self-inflicted concussion. Its dedication to its violent cause was as fanatical as the peacock's was to serenity and self-adulation.

The different behaviour of the two birds before a mirror seems to have parallels in human behaviour – we either like what we see or do not. Often, however, the human reaction is the same – a tendency to cause destruction. I wish we could all embrace the peaceful reaction of the peacock (without including the narcissistic element) as opposed to the violence of the sunbird. There is another aspect – size. In comparison to the tiny, bellicose sunbird, the peacock is huge (and docile). In stature the small men of history have often caused the most trouble; Hitler and Napoleon are prime examples.

As I write this, a poem of balance is brewing. I want to express an admiration for the saintliness of some of our fellow humans. Mother Theresa is in my thoughts. The mirror would have been no problem for her; a saintly and humble soul would have peered back, confident in its calling and secure in its faith. Then again, I wonder if she ever had need of a mirror.

## ***Body Language of Cows***

The ‘ebb tide of freedom’. I am uneasy with this final statement in the poem. It smacks of pessimism. Also, it may be argued that the tide of freedom is at the rush. I have kept the statement hoping that it may provoke discussion. My niece Bridget Swift provided the idea for this poem. Bridget is a missionary teacher in Ingwavuma, a village in northern KwaZulu Natal. She worked out how to assess the dangers presented by unattended cattle on the verges of roads from which all fencing has been removed or in a state of disrepair. Much has changed in South Africa since 1994 and the poem is about awareness of change and how, hopefully, to cope with change and avoid its pitfalls. Adaptability is so important, especially for those of us steeped in the immoral luxuries of apartheid.

## ***Body Anguish (Urban Initiation School)***

Another poem dealing with post-apartheid times. Before 1994 the ritual of circumcision was not regarded as a news item of much worth. The cynicism of the apartheid controlled media meant that items pertaining to black people were not reported in much detail or with any enthusiasm. The initiation ceremonies and whatever the consequences continued out of the scrutiny of the general public. In the post-colonial present, there are fewer restrictions on the press – although this may change. Now the alarming death rate is an annual cause for many headlines in the Eastern Cape newspapers.

As a teacher in a high school that has over five hundred boys, 90% of whom are Xhosas, I observe the two annual seasons of circumcision from fairly close range. A little publicized fact is that with so many mother-only families becoming common among the Xhosa, a growing number of boys are being circumcised in hospitals. This rouses many traditionalists to fury.

## ***Epilogue***

This poem is part of the group about change. I try to use cattle to illustrate a point: “amaBenzi” is a pejorative name, fairly common in post-independence Africa, for government officials and others who drive about in fancy and expensive imported cars, while the proles remain in abject poverty. To me the nouveau riche are as much a danger to the nation’s future as stray cows are to motorists - a sentiment shared with Mzi Mahola and the poets in the anthology *Unbreaking the Rainbow* (The Poets Printery, 2012).

## ***Cemeteries in the time of AIDS***

This is a poem of observation and evasion. I saw the extraordinary burgeoning of graves in rural cemeteries, but did not remark on them. A sort of cerebral denial of the obvious. The stark truth of the matter had to be faced when my youngest child asked why there were so many funerals taking place as we drove through the Transkei. This was a relatively sensitive and difficult explanation to couch in terms that an eleven year old not yet fully initiated into sex-education and its implications. The responsibility for this explanation was undertaken by my wife who, quite rightly, suspected that I would fumble the issue with over-elaboration and embarrassing blushes.

## ***There Came a Time***

Many of the greatest poets have railed against the onset of a loss of creativity or old age. Keats (untimely death), Milton (blindness) and Dylan Thomas (the death of his old father) to mention a few examples. This poem is my expression of despair at growing old with, as yet, unwritten poems.

## ***Grade 4 .... and more***

This is another poem that tries to explore coming to terms with the aging process. The beauty of memory is that people not seen for many years remain as last seen. Often now, as time passes, I do

not relish meeting up with past acquaintances. I would rather they remained fresh in the mind, as good looking as in their youth. Even when I know that time and the aging process will have taken their toll, I still get a shock at how some of my friends have changed, how time has been unkind to them. Indeed one friend, a girl of immense beauty while a fellow student at university, remarked recently that when she now looks in the mirror she wonders what her great aunt is doing looking back at her. My own reflection does not bear close scrutiny.

The girl in this poem was the epitome of the stereotype of the comic book character ‘Beryl the Peril’ – snaggle toothed, with an outsized nose and the knobbliest knees I had ever seen or remember seeing and legs like pretzels. She was also a strong personality and had the habit of ordering her classmates around, an annoying trait. Her reaction to my calling her ‘Bossy Flossy’ is accurately described. Her mother phoned my mother and told her all about it. Fortunately for me both adults thought it a joke and all that transpired was that I was asked to apologize and to not repeat this sort of insult. I was instructed to mind my manners – something I wish had learned properly.

With hindsight, I consider that her tantalizingly partial seduction of me was a subtle but wonderful act of revenge, of pointing out what I was going to miss because of my earlier rudeness. I have never met her again, but I see her regularly in the moonlight of my mind, as the beautiful teenager with long hair and a perfect figure. And just briefly I basked in the envy of all the boys, before she cut me dead.

## ***The Innocents***

This poem is a cry of despair, even rage, at the slaughter of pre-natal people. It is also a description of the juxtaposition of the squalor that allows not only the uncontrolled advertising of back street abortions, but more the actual performance of this dangerous and cruel practice with the affluence of a minority who can afford families and decent medical care.

As a parent, the well-being of my child is paramount; no sacrifice is too much, particularly where her health is concerned. This makes it difficult to come to terms with the milieu that harbours the callous practice of easy access to abortion. The poem becomes a cry of rage against a system that has embraced and condones the destruction of the family unit, and the abrogation of the parental instinct. It is not so much the unfortunate and poverty-stricken mothers' inability to face the cost of more children against whom the anger is directed, but the situation in which wholesale abortion can thrive.

There is also an awareness that this is an inherited problem – the apartheid regime's suppression began this slide into moral turpitude for the majority of the nation's people, yet there is also despair at the present regime's inability to combat and reverse the situation. As a poet I see it as my duty to record my outrage, so that if the poem survives to be read, future readers will see that there was recognition and opposition to this horror. The major influence for this poem is Oswald Mtshali's poem *an abandoned bundle* (OUP, 1974), in which he laments the slum-dweller's stark choice of keeping a financially burdensome baby or dumping the new-born infant on a rubbish heap to be killed and eaten by starving dogs.

The irony contained in the flyer's legend "same day abortion – life guaranteed" makes me sick.

## ***A Teacher's Memo (To self)***

This is an anguished expression of protest against the electronic non-grammar that is infesting the language of the youth today. Here are some examples that exasperate me: 'inlove', 'alot', 'cause' (instead of 'because'), 'aswell' and leaving the personal pronoun 'i' as lower-case. They don't read anymore and wallow in ignorance. Or at least the majority of those with whom I come into contact. The abomination of the cell phone forces the children to communicate by proxy. One afternoon at the mall I saw two teenagers furiously texting away in deep concentration. Suddenly they realized that they were texting each other, from a shoulder-rubbing proximity. Then they giggled and started again.

## ***Dog Sequence***

Cathal Lagan encouraged me to record as many dreams as possible. These, he argued were the stuff of new poems. The problem with dreams is that they disappear so very quickly from the memory, even without the interruption of the messenger from Porlock. The method is to record as much as remains in the mind and then to indulge in 'free flow' writing. The result in this sequence is three poems exploring the relationship between man and canine.

## ***African Legend***

While reading up on the history of Mapungubwe I came across the legend about how potential conflict situations were sorted out so that violence could be avoided. In this case the killing of some livestock by dogs belonging to a chief was the reason for potential violence. The information was very brief, a mere footnote – livestock was important to the people, so problems were dealt with swiftly and in accordance to custom. Compensation would be paid, with interest. Peace then prevailed. It struck me that this was a very sensible and efficient mechanism for avoiding violence.

I am not sure how much poetic license is permitted, but the poem embroiders the story. The ‘paid with interest’ phrase giving me leeway to describe what is an eminently sensible way of avoiding conflict and appeasing the Higher Authority.

## ***African Song***

Often I drive our domestic worker of twenty year’s service the fifteen kilometers to her rural home if she misses the taxi. The commonage around the village is largely over-grazed. Scrawny cattle wander about under the carefree and seemingly careless supervision of small boys. At a bend in the Yellow Woods River the pasture is lush and a reed bed flourishes. I asked why I never saw cattle grazing here. ‘It is the home of the Tikoloshe’ was the reply spoken with utter conviction.

A little bit of oblique interrogation revealed that cattle, if they strayed into this area, disappeared never to be seen again. ‘The Tikoloshe eats them’. There is also a deep pool in the bend of the river. The sceptic in me immediately concluded that the young herd boys are fed this fearsome story to keep them and the cattle away from a potentially lethal place where cattle drown and are swept away.

Yet the legends of Africa hold a special place in my psyche, especially as I note the conviction of the domestic worker’s belief in the magic of the Tikoloshe. So I wrote the poem, not debunk or to scoff at the legend, but to honour it and the rhythms of ancient Africa.

## ***Sunset***

Another embroidered footnote from Mapungubwe. A lone skeleton was excavated in the remains of a cattle kraal. This was unusual (according to the pamphlet) and caused some speculation among the archeologists, anthropologists and sundry historians. There was no reference to interviews with the local oral historians. The skeleton of the elderly man was wearing a copper bracelet – copper usually being associated with the women of the area and era. Using the speculations I imagined the rituals surrounding the end of the dying man. Next, I questioned my Xhosa colleague. She described

a similar custom practiced by the people of her rural village – Peelton, outside King William's Town.

She informed me that the father is buried in the center of the kraal, while the mother is buried just inside the entrance. The father's grave will have a zinc base covered with his sleeping mat made of grass or reeds. The coffin is placed on top of this mat. The man's two blankets; the blanket he used to sleep under and his black and white ceremonial blanket are used to cover the coffin. The mother's remains are treated in a similar way. The grass mat is placed beneath the coffin and she would be dressed in her oldest ceremonial clothes which would include the big ornamental headdress. Their heads must face the entrance. If buried incorrectly these ancestors cannot protect their children. When his time comes, the eldest son will be buried alongside his father.

Either the northern folks' burial rituals differed from the local Xhosa rituals, or the excavations were incomplete when the pamphlet was published. Either way these ceremonial acts provide a rich source of inspiration and deserve to be recorded elsewhere than in the dry pages of archeological history.

## SECTION D: ODDS AND ENDS

These are scribblings that do not seem to fit in with the main body of the thesis, but which I am reluctant to consign to the dustbin.

### Head

When I am dead  
I shall keep my head  
on a shelf near the bed.  
Then I shall lose myself  
in the underworld  
(if there is one)  
or the overworld  
(if there is one).  
I shall take care not to cough  
for the sake of the kids  
who have had enough,  
not to mention the wife  
who, for all of our life  
kept her head  
(for the sake of the kids).

I tried to find a word to rhyme with ‘cough’ and could only come up with ‘enough’ which is not satisfactory although it looks the same. I wanted to write ‘enoff’. English can be a frustrating medium.

I thought to try and slip this into the section on finding an identity, but it seems to be more suited to losing an identity. There again it might have fitted into the post-colonial section and gone somewhere with a piece about mortality. It must stay here, a subject for discussion, perhaps.

This poem was written after reading Carol Ann Duffy's book *Feminine Gospels* (2002, Picador).

\*

Considering how to view the playlet below is problematic. It was written in fury. Strong emotion is not a good condition in which to write. Often hurtful or unnecessary things get blurted out. This playlet was never shown to 'Tracey'. I also have a reluctance to leave in the sexual anatomical references in the dialogue. The anger having made me 'go right over the top' or indulge in and be guilty of lucubration, I think the technical term is. In terms of my apprenticeship as a 'wordsmith', the playlet taught me that writing drama is probably not my *métier*. The dialogue is stilted and forced. Yet I still feel a real sense of catharsis when I read it. I needed to express my horror at a wonderful young person chucking her life onto the dungheap of an unwise marriage. Inexperience seriously interfering with her intelligence. Perhaps the wisest piece of advice my stern father once gave me was, 'Marry in haste, repent at leisure'.

## **A Murrain on Marriage**

or

### **Midwinter of the Soul**

*(A playlet for two separate speaking parts of any  
gender – prompted by a dear friend's unwise  
wedding.)*

Tracey : Your hatred pulled the trigger.

Self : No. I was in another country.

Tracey : Your hatred, so strong, so pure, pulled the trigger.

Self : No. I was on another continent when the shot was fired.

Tracey : Your hatred.

Self : No. I was passing another galaxy, impotent.

Tracey : Hatred had a grappling iron in your skull. Down its rope the  
synapses said, 'pull the trigger'.

Self : Iron is too soft for my skull; my love too rigid for the rope.

Tracey : You have circumcised your soul, exchanged clitoris for trigger.

Self : I have tossed the foreskins to dogs beyond the temple walls.

Tracey : Self-immolation proves nothing beyond stupidity.

Self : It gives clearer insight to the world beyond.

Tracey : The cost is far too high.

Self : There are no human terms where we have been.

Tracey : No. We have not returned. The journey to hell has no end.

Self : Self-immolation of Self.

Tracey : Do not retell the story of my life.

Self : Your life was over when the zygotes formed.

Tracey : My sons are healthy.

Self : Their bodies are strong. Their souls are sealed by the foreskins of  
fate.

Tracey : Do not employ words as bullets.

Self : Look beyond the temple walls. Your freedom defies infibulation.  
Run now, up the rope and into my skull.

Tracey : I cannot leave these lives.

Self : They will live on without you. Climb the rope.

Tracey : There are stars in your skull.

Self : You are beyond the void. Look down.

Tracey : It is dawn.

\*

### ***Pavement Graffiti***

I was very undecided about including this poem in the thesis. Finally I chose to exclude it, as it would be construed as being too derivative. I had been reading a lot of Stephen Crane in, among other sources, James Burl Hogins's anthology *Literature: Poetry* (Science Research Associates, 1974) and the influence of the poem *The Black Riders* iii (135) is all too obvious. It also defied a logical place in the thesis; it fitted nowhere among the themes of identity, ecology and post-colonial angst. I include it here in an effort to show I need to try different influences in order to see whether or not they are suitable as content. In any case experimental poems add to a sense of development as a writer or poet (I modeled a lot of my television criticism for *The Mercury* on the columns of Clive James of the London *Observer* during the 1970's and 1980's).

\*

## **Pavement Graffiti**

*After the London Bombings 2005*

I saw the man  
he was here,  
but only his brains;  
no bones, no balls, no veins  
only his brains,  
I saw him  
on the pavement  
and in the street,  
only his brains.  
I saw the man.

I saw a boy  
playing with a man's heart,  
bouncing it to the beat  
and pulse of another's life.  
'Is he your friend?' I ask.  
'Not any more,  
he has no brains.'

I saw the boy  
playing with a man's feet.  
'Is he your father?' I ask.  
'Oh yes. Only his feet were not so big  
or bloody.'

I heard the boy:

‘We tried to put him together,

but he has no ears,

no eyes, no fears

and it may take years.

This is no time for tears.’

I heard the boy as I wept.

His is a private grief

from underground, taming wild animals,

being the blood in their veins.

Gathering his father’s scattered parts

is not right for a boy

‘This is not right for a boy,

you must come away with me.’

‘You are the devil within,’ he says.

‘I am not.’

‘Then give me the brains.’

I cannot.

‘Give me the heart.’

I cannot.

‘Give me the feet.’

I dare not.

The poem is not complete. It did not go through the rigorous editing process that I usually follow. It is an attempt to express the horror I felt at the bomb attacks in London in 2005. The horror sprang from, among other things, the realization that, albeit unwittingly, I had exposed my family to extreme danger. I chose the underground route we took across London to pick up a car and then drive north to Scotland. In Berwick-upon-Tweed that very night we watched on the television the aftermath of the bombings. We had passed through the wrecked station only an hour before the world went insane and people died. I still go cold at the memory. We went out, found a church and spent an hour on our knees.

In constructing the poem I tried to emulate Crane's 'striking and concise phrasing and unflinching confrontation of smugness and hypocrisy' of his free verse, with its 'stripped down lines and stark phrasing concentrated on the rendering of a single effect' (Wikipedia, 2012). Much of his work also dealt with the theme of a rigorous test or trial by ordeal. I saw the London bombings as an ordeal of apocalyptic proportions, particularly for the children involved. In terms of a 'confrontation' with smugness I had to deal with my own sense of relief and guilt at having escaped by so narrow a margin. The feeling of guilt, I know, is irrational and inexplicable, but very real. The use of the free verse format so preferred by Crane, I find to be a challenge, a challenge that was very stimulating. How successful my attempt at stripping down the lines is open to judgement, but as mentioned the poem needs work.

\*

On a lighter note is a 'found' poem inspired by reading a translation of the Persian poet Rumi in Coleman Barks's book *The Soul of Rumi* (2002, 158). At an ECCA Group reading this poem caused a lot of laughter from the audience. It also caused a little moment of dissention among the members of the group. We were equally divided by those who wished our readings to be serious and times of

intellectual pursuit, not a display of cheap wise-cracks masquerading as poetry. My own opinion is that if we choose to read in public, then we become entertainers and that a mixture of humour and deep literary overtones is very necessary. The matter was settled when we decided that each poet was free to choose her or his selection of poems to read without let or hindrance. An eminently sensible solution.

### **Side-issue Sewerage**

Rumi tells a tale of great woe  
when 'garbage' began to sink the Ark –  
ballast 'on that scow' shifted  
and she sailed in circles, shipping water.  
Noah scratched the back of a pig,  
so Rumi says, and the pig  
sneezed a rat from each nostril –  
waste disposal, the rats  
ate the garbage.

Very environmental, very green.

But what, you ask,  
of the by-products of the rats?  
Rumi tells that Noah scratched  
the back of a lion  
which sneezed two cats  
which ate the rats.

The Sufi circle, neat Zen completeness.

I know, I know.

But my western mind  
craves an answer,  
it cannot see an elephant potty-trained,  
it cannot conceive of a hippo on a flush loo,  
or a rhino reversing her bottom  
over the gunwales to poo.

So what did Noah do?

I see Noah press-gang  
his sons and reluctant wives  
to shovel the dangerous ballast overboard.

Four thousand years later  
Columbus –  
and so began a tale  
of greater woe.

The next poem, which has no place in the thesis, goes some way to explaining Don MacLennan's comment quoted earlier at the end of the Reflective Journal, about my quoting 'from the centre of experienced incidents'.

### **Letting go**

A hopeful whisper  
over the wires requests a photograph,  
as memento, last relic  
of a son mangled in a motor wreck.

There is no negative  
he will not appear –  
and the voice sobs dead,  
but will not put down the phone.

I listen to the silence  
link extant, hope extinguished,  
a reluctance to sever this last thread.

Letting go  
is a lonely pilgrimage  
past the shattered statues  
and ruined pyramids of the heart.

It is lonely to remain  
in the prison of this flesh  
enduring the soul in solitary  
for the sake of those living  
in the slipstreams of death.

This rather sad poem was prompted by the aftermath of a tragic and fatal accident involving a hockey team of Under 14 Selborne College schoolboys. The week prior to the accident I had been briefed to photograph the Dale College golf team in action against Selborne. I followed my brief to the letter and shot off reels of film (in the era before digital cameras). I filmed only the Dale boys. One of the Selborne boys killed in the accident had been playing golf on the day of the match at King William's Town Golf Club.

The mother of a deceased golfer took to phoning me on a regular basis begging me to trawl through the negatives of that day just in case her son appeared. I checked and rechecked. There was sign of him, yet she would phone. She would phone and not hang up. I could hear her sobbing. I did not know what to do. To replace the receiver seemed more hard-hearted than to just listen. It took up to twenty minutes to half an hour before the connection would be broken. I once heard a soft voice in the background and suspected that a friend or her husband gently took the handset and replaced it. This saga came to an end when one day, in compassion, I offered to send her all the prints and the negatives. A howl of anguish followed. It was the last thing she wanted. For me to sever the connection of what in her mind was the last possible image of her son, alive, was unspeakable. She never phoned again. Still sometimes, at night, I awake having heard that scream over the lines from East London. It will live with me forever.

The next section of the portfolio is the ADDENDUM. It consists of a series of scanned notes and drafts which hopefully will illustrate the process which I follow when producing a poem.

WORD COUNT FOR PORTFOLIO: 32,672

WORDCOUNT FOR THESIS: 9268

## ADDENDUM

Blaauwkrantz 29/6/12

EN ROUT TO GTN #3

The day calm, perfect sun, warm - not hot nor cold. Windless no rustling breeze -

Stood above the elephant paths gazed down saw the road, hewn from the cliff face never walked on by elephants. Walked beneath by Bushmen.

Walked along the railway to the bridge from which people fell to their deaths unused now, the metal melting into rust

I focus on the destructions: <sup>spare to</sup>  
Elephants - bushes useful ornament -  
Road - the caves blasted and filled with  
Bridge - rubble priceless rock art destroyed  
↳ marvel of engineering containing  
potential of mass human destruction. -  
not the fault of the bridge. Overloaded train -  
the final coach jumped the rails and  
dragged all but tenders and one coach into  
the ravine.

AB - no native names; the non-people  
invisible to history, another sin ~~to~~ to beg  
forgiveness for.

N Road to Hsting Town #3  
For Lennie & Redman - Landlord  
Customs. 2/7/12

It's not only that the engineers got the road  
so long - it's the longest built up to the  
It's what they did, it's what they did on the way to  
the summit's records reveal  
that Bushman had been here  
left their glorious record on walls of carved  
blasted away like the elephants to make way  
(Concept of Art as a change) vandalism of  
for the ways of man. Backed rubble

Salings of outrage never to disappear  
announced by L. and R.  
custodians of the ways  
keepers who know and if you are  
fortunate will share these ways  
revels of ancient knowledge.

Lennie reveals his  
Redman says with a huge of satisfaction.  
the ecological day the ~~to~~ path is built  
on unstable rock

The road is expected to collapse  
I can hear elephants trumpet their grief  
ghostly Bushman with approval, over the

In delight ~~in~~

Man's battle not adapted, doomed.

Walk with us down these ways, and far down  
along in the beach, also, beside  
water to the lily's ripples  
of elephant's tails? Calling Culp to comfort  
See the Shaman paint his pictures  
delicate and beautiful (vandalized shrine)  
Ride down the Kwantz on creaking crochons  
hear the ~~trick~~ of Whelp of history, a herald  
of the return through those woods  
to the bitter monuments.

22/7

(it) ~~the~~ ~~anger~~ ~~is~~ ~~worn~~  
about the road up the Blackwater  
(the shortest route.)

The survivors' records reveal  
that the Bushmen had been  
had adorned the caves in the cliffs  
(with their delicate drawings)  
blasted away like the elephants  
to make way for the ways of men

A tumor of rage  
reduced by Leslie and Rodney  
astrichens now of the ways  
(who know)

and if you are both aware  
that will show these ways  
of ancient wisdom.

Leone reveals with some satisfaction  
the geologists say the road where the caves  
were vandalized  
is built on unstable stone -  
the cliff, road and all, is expected  
to collapse

In the terror of rage  
~~down~~ you can hear  
(if you have the gift):  
elephants trumpet their glee,  
ghostly Bushmen tongues click  
and oxen low in delight.

Cleanse the tumor  
and walk these ancient ways.  
You can glory  
in the bust, bones, bones  
and listen to the belly rumbles  
of elephant sons  
calling calves to comfort  
see the Shangan saint  
his pictures, delicate and lovely  
on the vandalized shrine  
Ride down the Kwanzes  
on creaking wagons  
near the ship-track of history  
a herald  
of the return through these wolds  
a better ways.

22/7/12

En Route to Gramstown junction <sup>III</sup> - final. ②  
For Leonie and Rodney Yendam

built  
for  
on  
Rage like a tumor  
at the engineers so wrong  
about the road  
up the Blaauwkrantz  
The surveyors' records reveal  
that Sustment had been,  
had adorned caves in the cliffs  
with delicate hands  
blasted away  
like the elephants,  
to make way  
for the ways of man

to make way for man

The tumor of rage  
reduced by Leonie and Rodney —  
custodians now of memories!  
If you are fortunate  
they will share  
these ancient ways of wisdom.

custodians of memories  
storers of wisdom - ...?

Leonie reveals with some satisfaction  
the geologists have judged the road  
(where the caves were vandalized)  
is built on unstable stone -  
the cliff, the road, and all  
is expected to collapse.  
going / expected?

stages the road  
built on unstable stone?  
Has cliff will collapse

reaches  
As the tumor of rage  
diminishes you can hear  
(if you have the gift),  
elephants trumpet their glee,  
ghostly Bushmen tongues click co right —  
and oxen low in slow happiness.

justice

ghostly clicks of B. tongues  
and slow oxen low bluish  
ghosts of Bushmen  
peigues

to  
Cleanse the tumor  
by walking the ancient ways.  
You will glory  
in the bush, the aloes, ice-les,  
and listen!  
to the belly rumbles  
of elephant cows  
calling calves to comfort,  
see the shaman paint

pictures, delicate and lovely.  
Ride down <sup>the</sup> ~~the~~ krantzes  
on creaking wagons  
hear the whip-crack of history  
herald  
the return ~~(through these wares)~~  
to better ways.

23/8/12

En Route to Grahamstown number 3 - <sup>Title 2</sup> ~~number 3~~ <sup>number 2</sup>  
For Leoric and Rodney Yandot

Dull rage like a tumor  
at the engineers so wrong  
about the road  
up the Blaauwkrantz. <sup>Recs</sup>  
The surveyors' records reveal  
that Bushmen had been  
adorned caves in the cliffs  
with delicate hand,  
placed away  
like the elephants  
to make way  
for man.

→ <sup>and</sup> <sup>Page at the engineers</sup>  
<sup>So wrong</sup> (?)

<sup>Keeps</sup> The tumor of rage  
reduced by Leoric and Rodney  
restrictions now <sup>what the animals</sup> (?)  
If you are fortunate  
they will share  
the ancient ways of wisdom.

Leoric reveals with some satisfaction  
geologists have judged the road  
will collapse,  
is built on unstable stone.

<sup>Cathartes</sup>  
<sup>de murt</sup>

<sup>Recs</sup> As the tumor of rage  
diminishes you can hear  
(if you have the gift),  
elephants trumpet their glee,  
ghnally clicks of Bushmen tongues <sup>try</sup>  
and oxen owing in slow happiness.

<sup>spans</sup>

<sup>Seamette</sup>

<sup>J. Eve</sup>

<sup>Anthology</sup>

Cease the tumor <sup>try</sup>  
by watching the ways.  
You will go y  
in the bush, the stones, the trees  
and listen  
to belly rumbles  
of elephant cows  
calling calves to comfort,  
see the shaman paint  
pictures (delicate and lovely)  
Ride down the kienies  
on creaking wagons  
near the whip-crack of history  
herald  
the return to better ways.

28/7/12

*En Route to Grahamstown - Catharsis*

*For Leonie and Rodney Kendall*

Dull rage like a tumor  
at engineers so wrong  
about the road  
up the Blaauwkrantz Pass.  
The surveyors' records reveal  
that Bushmen had been,  
adorned caves in the cliffs  
with delicate hand,  
brasted away  
like the elephants  
to make way for man.

The rage  
is reduced by Leonie and Rodney  
custodians now of what has lasted.  
If you are fortunate  
they will share  
the ancient ways of wisdom.  
Leonie ~~recalls~~ with some satisfaction  
geologists have judged the road  
will collapse,  
built on unstable ground.

*recalls*

As the tumor of rage  
recedes you hear  
(if you have the gift),  
elephants trumpet their glee,  
ghostly echoes of Bushman joy  
and oxen plowing in slow happiness.

Cleanse the soul  
by walking the ways,  
glory in bush, aloes, foenias  
and listen  
to belly rumbles  
of elephant cows  
calling calves to comfort,  
see the shaman point  
pictures, delicate and lovely.  
Ride down the kranzes  
on creaking wagons,  
hear the whip-crack of history  
herald  
the return to better ways.

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