

This document consists of two (2) parts:

Part A: Thesis (Creative Work)

Part B: Portfolio

IT'S MY HAND THAT WROTE!

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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by

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ABSTRACT

It's My Hand That Wrote!

This collection of short stories experiments with the idea of the text as it constitutes the world just as much as it is constituted by the world. These short stories use the text as a way to respond to struggles faced by people whose identities do not conform to society's standards. The stories in here navigate between fantastic and experiential writing which allows the text to speak in its own language. The writing is influenced by that of Mthuthuzeli Matshoba for the realist approach in telling the stories. Ayi Kwei Armah's writing in *Fragments* for experientialism that focuses on the dead and the living and which makes specific references to the idea of home – particularly for those who always find it hard to belong. And that of Bruce Sterling's creation of explosive imagery in science fiction that sticks in the reader's mind as portrayed in his short story *we see things differently*. Angela Carter's brilliance in writing short stories and her approach to magical realism has also been a powerful influence. In telling these stories using a hybrid/fluid approach, I hope to come to terms with being a different "being". It is to find ways of telling myself that it is okay to be queer, that to be a misfit is no sin. To say this in a language that gives meaning to my own struggles of being. This work is a combination of three disjointed moments of the narrator's life experiences which are exposed in three sections; It's My Hand That Wrote, (Un)Tying The Knot and Thoughts. The aim of creating these three moments is to let the reader dive a variety of "truths" of the narrator's life, instead of aiming to achieve a coherent single "Truth" about one's life. It's My Hand That Wrote explores both the unusual and inconsistency of life in a chaotic but explorative fashion.

DEDICATIONS

To my father Mnyamezeli Kortman Magade

We are all grateful to still have you amongst us

To my love Lindokuhle, thank you for the constant motivation

My friends Ayabulela Simelela, Lorna Mququ and Siphokazi Fekisi, you guys are my light

To my siblings; Sthembele and Luyanda Magade, I love you very much

To everyone else who has walked this journey with me, thank you for all the love

To my late mother, Queen Elizabeth Puleng Magade

You remain the Queen of my heart

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Part I – It's My Hand That Wrote!

Shaking hands

Elisa had been a good girl for all her life. Her parents wanted her to marry a good man. They were from the Basotho tribe. That meant she had to marry a Basotho man. One day she went to visit her sister in Johannesburg leaving the red-dust village behind. There in the big city, she met a well-spoken Bantu man, who was immensely good to her. The kind her parents always warned her about. At first she tried to ignore him. But he kept on parading for her attention. One Sunday morning while her sister had gone to town. The Bantu man came to visit Elisa's sister. Upon his arrival he was told that he'd missed the person he had come to see by a few minutes. The Bantu man opted to stay any way. He and Elisa's sister were good friends. So Elisa didn't mind having him around. For the first time since he laid his eyes on her, he'd been praying for the moment they'd be left alone together in one room. This Sunday was the very first time he'd gotten a chance to greet Elisa by shaking her hand. The other times he'd arrive while Elisa was busy helping her sister out with selling home brewed beer to the men who were always at her sister's shebeen. From there on, the Bantu man, became an even bigger regular at sis Doris' shebeen. Almost every day coming bearing gifts for the wonderful lady he'd fallen for. At times they'd seat outside the stoep of the shebeen and share cigarettes over few glasses of beer together. They'd begin to have conversations that went on and on to no end. Until the day Elisa was found lying on the kitchen floor with her throat slit into two halves. Her blood wet the kitchen floor where she used to dance while brewing home-made beer for her sister's customers. When her mother received the news that her beloved angel was late, she too passed away two days after being admitted to the hospital due to being attacked by a stroke – leaving behind the Bantu man's kids with broken hearts lying on the floor. Till this day, I haven't gathered enough strength to tell them what happened to their mother.

The police van

We sat in the backseat of the van. Me and my sister's kids, I held them by my hands. The warrant officer and the sergeant occupied the two front seats. I had not said not a single word since the call I'd made to the police station after the incident. I uttered no words to the police who'd come to the scene of the event. I was still gathering my thoughts as to what happened. I looked outside the window of the moving van, and noticed it had begun to rain outside. It felt like all the nights I'd been haunted by the evil spirits. I could feel them getting restless outside. I started to think that the rain was a sign that the heavens were welcoming my sister's soul. But there was nothing pure about the way I felt. I did know where I was going to find the strength to write a police statement detailing the events of that night. All I could think of was my sister's body lying on the cement floor helpless. I didn't even know how I would begin to explain to her children what had happened. I held them both with my hands and tightly squeezed their heads into the either sides of my ribs. I was ready to swallow them so they would not live to bare the pain of watching their mother losing her life. As we entered the police station, I was praying for them more than anything. They were taken into a safe room before I was taken to a separate one to give a statement. As they were being moved to the different room, Bongi, the little one looked at me and said, "Don't worry uncle Nnedi, it's going to be alright". For a second my throat locked, like I had swallowed a lump of fire. I blew her a kiss and proceeded to the next room.

Bite

One day I woke up at about three in the morning. I peeped outside the window as I heard what sounded like rain drops hitting zinc roof of our rented two roomed house. A stare of the scene outside confirmed what I was suspecting - it was indeed drizzling. The shadows of the trees were moving in all directions. They felt the touch of the wind as it passed through towards the East - where the mountains of the village stood unilaterally. They occupied only one side of the hole that formed our village - far from the waters, the plants and the stray animals. Slowly I closed the curtains and saw him turning and tossing in bed. Mike was lying there in my bed like a newborn baby fresh from the womb. He was awake for a few seconds when he heard the sounds I made as I was moving around the bedroom. But I knew that half of his body was still in a coma. He looked at me and whispered something with his eyes half opened. I read his lips from where I stood and figured out that he was telling me that his was hungry. I had bought fried chicken the night before and figured it would make for a perfect early morning snack. I walked into the kitchen which was the second room in the house. I opened the fridge and found the chicken creased, it looked crunchy just the way he liked it. I ran it in the "wave" for a couple of seconds and then proceeded to pour a glass of diluted Oros into one of the few tall glasses we owned. I went back to the bedroom and there was no one. I felt like I was losing my mind. I didn't know that missing someone could be this terrible. It felt like I was in a dream but his presence felt real. I went back to bed with an aching throat from the pain I was feeling. I took a bite of the chicken I had brought "him", but for some reason it didn't taste as good as I expected. I could not even swallow due to the lump of pain that has built a hut in the corridors of my throat. I never thought I'd experience the thirst of missing someone like this. Just before I knew it I had passed out. I woke up round about nine with a chunk of meat in my mouth. I went outside to spit out and took a pee before going back inside. I could not help but feel the presence of someone in the house yet I could not see anyone. I took a bath and put on a pair of headsets binged on Adele's music. I remember tears falling out from the corner of my left eye wetting the pillow. I cried myself back to sleep, knowing I was never going to lie my body next to his, like we used to before.

Being a man

I never knew I was different until I knew how to be my own man. One day at school one of the boys I went to class with called me a “moffie”. Not knowing the meaning of the word meant I couldn’t give much fuck if anyone called me by it. A term I had never heard before, maybe a few times but I had never bothered to know what it meant. Besides be just young, I just couldn’t care. I got home and told my mom about it, in passing – I never meant to cause any drama for anyone. Really, I had no intentions to get anyone into trouble, but I was just curious as to why on any normal day, another woman’s womb, would bare a child that would call me such weird names. Knowing my mom, I should have never told her about the incident. The next day, she was in the principal’s office shouting her lungs out with her breast jumping up and down demanding answers. Her dress was tucked under the edges of the tight she was wearing underneath it. How can her child be called names he doesn’t even know the meanings of? Later that day I was called to the same office to state my side of the story. The principal's office had something edgy about it. I never liked going there - even if it was on good terms. It was intensely cold no matter what the temperature was outside. The old-fashioned furniture inside resembled that of the old furniture shop in town, the one that my parents used to buy secondhand furniture from. For some odd reason the room even looked like an old mortuary turned into an office. The badge zinc drawers smelt of rotten metal. To begin with, I was frightened by being there before I was even embarrassed. I thought what my mom had done was to make things worse. I was worried sick that everyone in that tiny school was going to know that I was just another sissy who has his mom fight his battles for him. No one was going to show me not even the little respect they thought I deserved - no matter how small it was, I still wanted to feel like I matter. I wasn’t even going to make to the rugby team, not even to the cricket team - as it was regarded as a “soft” sport by many in our school. To be quite honest, I was not hurt by being called a “moffie”. What shook me was the violence that came with the utterance of the word. Just because I was a little smarter and much prettier, other boys felt like they had the right to play “dolls” with me. It wasn't my fault that I was softer in the tone of my voice and spoke more eloquently. It wasn't my fault that I took precision in the way I walked. All of it was given to me - I was born this perfect. I got into the mortuary office and stood there like a piece of broken wood. The look in the principal's face swapped me out the way like I was a piece of garbage. To avoid such things from happening again, I had to man up - just like my dad would say. I became another person I’d never wished to be. Just like them I became a bully. I spoke when I was not

spoken to. I would toughen my face whenever anyone spoke to me - just to prove i wasn't willing to take any bull shit. Just like any other day, the events of that day concluded to be a box of useless apologies. Until one day when another fight ensued at school. One of the boys who liked teasing me took my pencil without my permission. Not knowing I wasn't as soft as the last time he tried me. I stood up "gatvol" and approached him in the presence of "his boys". For some reason I knew that this would happen one day. So I had it all planned out in my mind. In my left hand, I carried a pen I was using for one of my school projects. I knew if he wasn't going to give me what's mine, I was going to take it back with blazing fire - I was going to re-write his face with that pen. As soon as he saw me making my way towards him his face began to change. He grinned and started to murmur something to one of his friends. I guess he was telling him to look at that "moffie". I got close to him and tried to reach for the pencil he held in his hand and he tried to play me. I grabbed a pair of scissors that sat in Mike's table and stamped it in his forehead and he screamed like A BITCH. He dropped the pencil and went outside the classroom calling out our teacher's name. I went back to my seat carrying my pencil. It in that moment - I knew I had become one of them - a man, and that no one was going to ever play me again!

Seeing crazy

After spending time at the rehab center for my craziness, I moved back to East London. I still felt flat and low about myself but I had to return to work. Then next Monday was the day I was resuming with my duties. When that day arrived, I prepared myself to the max so that not even a smell of sickness would be able to disturb my colleagues. I did not want anything to deter me from returning to work. I'd dusted myself out of sickness. One thing about sickness is that it becomes immortal in exactly the time you're trying to hide it. I tried my best to look normal. After spending an hour at the office, I could not help but to feel the same sense of pity that my colleagues felt for me way before I went to rehab. Though they'd acted fine earlier on, their silence gave rise to a million voices. Voices that were judgmental, I could feel them even when they did not say a thing. I decided to leave the office so they could talk about me in peace. I walked a distance of few steps to the direction of the building opposite the one where our offices were situated - to a Capitec bank branch. I needed a new card since I didn't own one after being hidden away from civilization. On my way there - I saw a student of mine dancing in the middle of the busy Oxford Street. He moved in different directions, up and down and even sideways with his fingers and arms held up high. When I came back to office I asked my colleagues about it. They fondly told me, "that one's gone crazy".

Pictures

Mother was beautiful in her days, even in her death she oozed crystal diamonds through her dead pores. When we were young she'd opened her vanity case where she'd placed photographs of herself during her golden days. Little we knew that one day it would come in handy for when we would be preparing a program for her funeral. It was a box full of memories of matching outfits with best friends. When she passed on - we had to dig inside the case to find a picture befitting her obituary. A mug shot with a "doek" wrapped around her head in a hut-like shape was deemed proper by my sister. It was one of her most recent photos. She'd put on a smile like she would never leave our site. She bleeds appreciation for life in most of her photographs, which was evident in her pale cheeks. Her teeth so white like bare bones of her offspring. We took the mug shot and all agreed that it spoke of who she was. The day of the funeral, a printed copy of the photograph stood next to the coffin that housed the carbon copy of mother's body. A site so impossible to forsake. Those who came to speak about her life confessed to the haunting nature of the photograph. That it made it seem like she was still hovering amongst the mourners. That the smile on the picture is exactly the same smile she shared with loved ones who knew her well. After the funeral, I took the photograph and placed in my parents' bedroom. For some time my dad could not look at it. He decided to place it somewhere in the house. It remained hidden for some time with no one bothered about its whereabouts. Three months had passed since we buried mother. I went home to visit my dad to see how he was holding up. Upon my arrival, I could not help but notice mother's photograph hung up in the dining room wall, next to it - was my dad's picture. I guess he was slowly coming to terms with mother's departure. But as the pictures stood next to each other on the wall, they made me wonder if he was next.

Smell

I miss how the pores of his body opened up every time we kissed. The smell of his breath birthed memories so hard to forget. I felt the texture of his body every time he laid next to me without any physical contact, glazed with salty waters from the inner biology of his glands. I resolved all questions burdening my mind each particular moment we spent together. The news of John's passing smelt of bottled dreams that never came to fruition. I went on my Facebook account and visited his wall. A three-second scroll confirmed all my worst fears. Stamps of #RIPs were visible from most of his friends. I rang his number which I have not used since our fallout. For three consecutive times it went unanswered. To think he messaged me a few days ago asking to meet so we could fix things, I wondered whether or not he knew that his time was running out. I've dealt with a loss of a loved one, but never with a loss of a first love.

the intern

the doctor came out of the maternity ward with her hands in the air – she screamed, “*help*” before storming back inside the ward. she came out again still screaming, “*help, help*” – in her hands was a baby boy, “*the baby is not breathing, nurse the baby needs urgent attention,*” the doctor screamed as her long legs hurtled her towards the intensive care unit. “*call doctor, Oosthuizen, please call doctor Oosthuizen.*” with her face turning pale, you could hear her teeth biting as she yelled. she continued screaming as she was making her way down the corridor – running towards the intensive care unit section. the nurse’s assistant quickly brought the stretcher that squeaked as it was pushed against the hospital’s plastic-line tile floor. “*run, run to the ICU,*” she yelled as the assistant slid the stretcher to the other unit almost hitting the walls forming the entrance of the ICU.

I watched in disbelief as I was sitting on the visitor’s bench of the hospital. I wondered how my mother was doing in the other room. I felt my armpits melting underneath my t-shirt. I got up as I began to feel my throat getting stickier each second tried to swallow. Being a doctor myself, I knew that if they don’t get out of that room sooner to let me know what’s going on, it would be a sign that something was terribly wrong. At the very same time, I wanted them to be there longer, so when her condition deteriorates, someone would be there ready to motivate her to fight for her life. I wasn’t ready to lose mother, but the heavens were slowly closing up, together with the hope that she’d ever make it out of that cold room alive. The world was caving in on us, and there was no one to shadow

While trying to come in terms with my own ordeals. I resorted to taking a walk up and down the hospital’s corridor. Seating down made me feel like I was catching fire with my bumps. As I was mindi9ng mine, some of the hospital’s staff didn’t understand the frown in my face, they didn’t understand what was going on. The hospital’s superior caught me parading the corridors and suggested I go help in the ICU. Still bearing my burdens in my head, I went in even though I knew I wasn’t in a good space to do so. But I could not refuse the orders of the superintended.

inside the ICU, a much older doctor – doctor Oosthuizen was busy pressing against the baby’s chest to check if the baby was breathing or not. “*please pass me that scissor*”, he said

to the assistant pointing at one of the medical instruments that was on top of the table. the younger doctor, with pale skin and dry lips who had been dealing with the baby a few seconds ago stood next to doctor Oosthuizen, who could barely walk because of his age, as he performed medical check-ups on the baby. she breathed heavily, you'd swear that if there was no ventilator in the room, her breath alone would steam up the entire room. the older doctor looked at her and asked; *"you are?"* *"i am doctor Millan, Sophie Millan, i am the new intern,"* she replied with a heavy voice almost swallowing her tongue. *"this was my case, i just don't know what happened, the baby just stopped breathing."* she continued speaking non-stop though doctor Oosthuizen wasn't paying much attention to what she was saying. her voice was becoming louder as she spoke without being dignified with a response. she spoke over the procedure being carried out by the older doctor.

"ssshhh, you came here to learn didn't you?" said doctor Oosthuizen to the young female doctor, whose confidence that she possessed when she came in earlier that morning had betrayed her to her knees as she was weeping throughout. *"that's correct doctor, i am here to learn,"* she replied, standing next to doctor Oosthuizen with her golden hair tied to the back of her head. *"take this,"* said doctor Oosthuizen offering the intern doctor a surgical cap to cover up her head. *"we are going to operate,"* he said softly, looking the doctor straight in her eyes. *"what is wrong with him?"* she asked while she stared at the doctor with her eyes bulged up. *"we need to open him up, so we can operate on his trachea and remove the tumour growing inside his nasal cavity, that's what's causing this baby to suffer from abnormal breathing."* Doctor Oosthuizen proceeded to tell the young doctor that this needed to be a precise and quick job since they are dealing with a baby.

as soon Doctor Oosthuizen walked out of the ICU, the young intern doctor followed him prompting him for a conversation. *"we live for this in this line of work, sometimes we win and others we lose, but you never take anything to heart,"* he said with a subtle smile on his face. he then proceeded to say, *"if you want to save a baby, or any patient for that matter, you never take anything to heart. you just do what you have to do."*

After work that day, I went home and hid myself beneath my blankets and since then, I never woke up to see another day shine up on my door.

miscarried

dear junior, your mother and i came back from the hospital with our hopes of having you lingering in between our legs. the news of your departure travelled so fast, breaking the fibres that had mended our now-broken-bond - the bond the three of us shared while you were still figuring your ways in her womb. our faces fell hard on the floor at the news of your passing. the sadness travelled through the thin wires connecting my brain to my heart. then the wires broke - and i lost it. the boiling heat of my anger didn't allow me to utter a word to your mother. i am now sitting here thinking, *i could have done better.*

dear junior, when i got a call to rush to the maternity ward - that this was a matter of urgency, i absolutely did not know what to think, but the thought of losing you did not even cross my mind. i ran into the car like a mouse being chased by its biggest enemy. when i got to the hospital, your mother was breathing through a machine. she was asleep and the doctor was worried that her heart was slowly losing its beat. i should have asked them to put me in her place but a lot of things were happening at once and my fragile mind could not handle any of the thoughts. i took time to reserve the shock that was plugged in my eyes and asked the doctor if the both you and your mother will make it and he said, *we can only save one.*

junior, the world was supposed to be yours. we carried you in our hopes and we awaited your arrival with our hearts. you lived in our mouths under our tongues. hoping your presence will make this world a better place. underneath my pride, i can still feel your longing heart ticking with the pace of time - as if you were alive. your longing to be here - our longing for you to be here, makes it impossible to live in a world you are no part of.

when the doctor announced your death at the expense of your mother's life, i stood outside the door way of the hospital and filled my lungs with cigarette smoke - just to get my mind off things for a little while. i reminisced about how fondly i would have held you in my hands - and showered you with my smile. the seconds i spent waiting for the doctor to come back with an update seemed like a lifetime. dear junior, why did you leave your mother's womb so early?

dream child

apparently i wasn't well when i was born. my mother - whom i recently met - told me i was always weak and sick – that i almost died. one day she took me to the village doctor to get me some help and left me there for a few hours. when she came back to fetch me she could not find me. the inyanga told her i had to spend time away from everyone so that i could heal. she went home carrying her broken heart in the palm of her hands. each of her hands holding a half of her forsaken love - love taken for granted. anyone who really knew her could see from the way she smiled that she fought a lot battles with her bare fists throughout her life - that she had been through a lot. she spoke to no one on her way home - only digging in her stomach for excuses to tell her husband about the whereabouts of their only son. other village women greeted her on the streets - they knew that her ways with people were holy and pure - that she had a good heart. they did not understand why she did not respond to them at all on this day. she told me she had her own worries to think of - all other things just rang in her head like sirens of a broken ambulance without her paying attention to them. when she got home, she found her husband red-faced from the beer he had been drinking. as she stepped inside the hut they lived in he stood up when he noticed that she did not come back with their son. her head was spinning as she thought about what to tell him. when her husband questioned her about the baby she explained to him what she been told by the village doctor. that the baby they brought to life was a different kind - he possessed powers never seen

before by the doctor. at night he could speak to the dead, and just the other day he brought back to life a slaughtered cow. the mother fought with the father about the inyanga not allowing her to be with her son. her husband claimed she had sold the baby to the rich in order to get some coins. this did not sit well with her - it filled her soul with lumps of pain. the next day, the only man she ever loved burnt her soul for let her accusing her of witchcraft. meanwhile, i stayed there with the doctor and he fed me different foods from the ones my mother used to feed me. my mother told me that the doctor had to feed me goat meat until i was much older. three days after my arrival i had to be taken to initiation since i possessed special powers. the initiation would prevent the misuse of the powers since i did not know how to use them. it included cutting the tip of my pinkie finger on both my hands amongst other things - this would also reveal the powers i had to the people of the village. as i was growing up, i had to stay under the eye of the village doctor who was my supervisor. so that he could give me proper training on how to use these powers. i have been with him from the day my mother brought me here. i had forgotten how she looks like until now. yesterday, i

met my mother for the first time since the last time she left me here with the doctor. i was told not to spend too much time with her - to not let her disturb my training. so we spent a bit of time catching up, in fact we were building up from the day we last saw each other - which i do not remember at all. i was told i am to graduate soon from my training and that we will have to move to another place - me and the inyanga. there are people who are trying kill us - to stop us from saving the world. so i had to cut my conversation with my mother short. i am not sure when i will ever smell her scent ever again. i even give her a hug this time around – my calling for now is to heal the wounded and mend the broken hearts of people like my mother - whose sense of purpose in life has been ripped off from them. i will forever be waiting - in silence.

seeking mother

once upon a time i walked into a church and there was a mother. she was kneeling down as if she was wiping the floor with a cloth. i immediately thought, *it's probably one of the church cleaning ladies*. as i came closer near her - next to the pulpit i could hear her muttering. the mother wanted to have many children - she was asking God for children. but then God spoke to the mother and said, *i will not give you children*. the mother turned her head to sense where the voice was coming from, then she saw me. just when i was about to explain to her it wasn't me, she angrily shouted "*how dare you?*" the entire time she was looking at me straight in the eyes as if i was the devil.

the visit

It was the third night of my visit in the ghost village. This is the village where my mother was born. We called it the ghost village because at night it would get very dark – there were no street lights. The smell of darkness would creep in beneath the one and only door in the house – the kitchen door. It would smell of a dying fire and wood. My bones would want to break from the fear vibrating in my bones. I would scream for my mother who would be sleeping on the floor in the next room because the bed wasn't big enough for the three of us to fit in. I would lie in bed in silence, but my body would want to move, to run to the next room where a drowsy body of my mother lay, but fear would suffocate me on my chest – it would cripple my wings and I would not be able to fly. Once I am in this state, no cry would be able come out my mouth, only ashes of the unsaid words would linger in silence. I would not feel much after that, it would be as if I was transported to another world, only the smell of the darkness that had crept in just as we lay would fill up the room.

One night while sleeping I saw a red face with dark eyes appearing in the still background of the room. It did not move at first – just stared. I felt my body neglecting me, as if letting me slip out of my flesh - like the air that I breathed blowing out of my own skin. I lay back in bed, holding the pace of my heartbeat so that whatever was staring could not locate where the smell of fear was coming from. I did not want to make things pretty obvious. The only colours I could see were black and red. I closed my eyes thinking that something – I don't know what – was playing tricks with me, but when I opened them again, the face came closer to mine, it was a face of a woman. Just as I began to open my mouth, ready to cough out my lungs through my mouth, I felt a big cold hand slapping my lips against each other – I could sense from the livid grab on my skin that I was not meant to say not even a dirty word. I remained reluctant, and the dead silence of the night ran in my veins. I instantly knew I was going to die, I just had to wait for the perfect moment to surrender my courage to the woman who had her hands cuffing my mouth.

The iris of her left eye rotated anti clockwise, when I looked at that direction I saw a baby linger in space, with multiple wounds. The woman said that the baby was my brother. I could not say a word though I wanted to. It's as if every time I wanted to say something my voice would just freeze in silence. So I held the mattress with both my hands, then I pushed the upper section of my body so that it could get closer to the nearby wall. Once I could feel the coldness of the wall rubbing against my spine, I let go of the mattress and put all of my

weight against the wall. In my mind, I spoke with myself trying to make sense of what the old woman had just said. *How could this be my brother? I have my brother here. What does she mean that the baby with sores on his skin is my brother?* I asked myself these and many other questions, but I guess by now you know I could not give myself any answers.

I turned my neck to look to the left, then looked to my right just so I could locate the site of my own fears. The darkness started to form a grey cloud that lingered above my head with its tail moving from the bedroom entrance with no door. I had never seen darkness on top of darkness until that day. It was as if I had died in that room and watched the Gods take me to their world. Everything happened so slowly that I have a vivid image of my courage looking for a place to hide under my pillow. As the cloud foamed up to closer to my face. My body started to heat up and I felt dizzy – and that’s how I fell asleep.

The next day I woke up with my head hanging on the side of the bed. I heard my mother’s voice telling me to wake before I could break my neck. I reached for my left arm with the right arm because the left one could not move properly. Then I leaned against the wall in the same position as that of last night. My mother sat next to me on the bed just in the same spot where my head was hanging from. Then I told her everything I could remember to the point where I fell asleep.

She told me that the woman i had seen was her mother. That once upon a time when she was a teenager she fell pregnant and gave birth to a baby boy in the same bedroom where I was sleeping. The baby did not make it. Soon thereafter her mother also passed away. My grandfather walked in just as we were talking about this. “This is the way the ancestors use to introduce themselves to you, to show you the way,” he said with a violent voice and a serious look on his face. I sat there thinking, *but why me?* Just before I could say one more thing, my grandfather proclaimed, “kunyaizelekile senze umsebenzi, we really need to perform a ritual.”

travelled road

i had never seen a sight of another village than that of mine, never set foot in another town. my dream from the age of thirteen was to travel, to leave this place and explore the world. i also had an interest in people's lives - i could cleanse those who have been cursed. my grandfather told me that i had a gift - that i was a special child and i did not understand what he meant. every time i looked at the tall, bushy and greenish mountains surrounding my village, i wanted to throw up - i felt trapped. until one day i went by the riverside - there, i took off all of my clothes except for my panties and laid on the wet sand nearby the river. i hid my clothes under one big muddy stone so that the harsh winds could not blow them away. i was shaken to the core of my bones when i felt the slap of the breeze hitting me on my skin - my blood boiled and i tried to hold back the shock my body was going through by taking a deep breath, and for a moment my heart stopped - and so did my life. i sighed heavily before i could let my meats lay raw on the surface of the river sand. there by the river bank - it laid, my body, with not much motion except for the movement my big tummy and hairy chest were making as i was breathing my thoughts away. and before i could even take note of how i was feeling, i landed in a different place. i could no longer feel the air that bathed my skin with sand near the river. i could not even see the river itself. bits of my muscles began to loosen as i walked in to the land of the unknown. i could not see anyone but i heard voices of little children calling my name. they sounded happy and i began to worry when i could not locate where their noise was coming from. i got on my knees and with my face staring at the sky and i began to pray. i called on the names of my grandfathers - the ones i had never seen. i called upon them just the way my father would during libation. i spoke with them and they spoke back - they spoke in a different language. but for some reason i could understand each and every word they uttered. just like the little children, i also could not locate where my grandfathers hailed me from. i felt my wings getting stronger - the harder i prayed the more strength i gained and i felt like i could overcome all the hurdles that have been prepared before me - yet i did not know how far along was the journey i was yet to travel - but i was happy to be amongst their presence. i had to believe in the power of my wings - that if trouble landed in front of my eyes, i would be able to fly. when i felt that i had said all that i needed to say in my prayer, i lowered my head and gathered the strength to grow on my feet. i stood up slowly in my dream and held my pride against my chest - and fondly brushed both my hands on my face to remove the sweat that was running from the top of head down to the

valley between my breasts. just as i gathered the balance to stand firm on my feet - the world suddenly stopped again for me. it became pitch black - i could not see anything beyond the ashy cloud that filled my already blurry eyes. when i could open my eyes i saw a cloud hovering near me - i was now lying on the bed which was floating above the river. it was still dark - the night had descended up on my shoulders. i saw the shy brightness of the moon as it made its way - chasing the holy presence of the sun that lit the village. the cloud slowly made its way towards the bed i lay in. i bravely stepped on the cloud that lay near my bed - my intention was to give my whole self to the world - to let me be a new person. i wanted to be born again, to find my purpose in life. i felt the river waters getting cold - slowly turning into ice. i threw a piece of a broken mirror into the water - to test if it had really changed its form. the broken mirror glass hit the water - cracking its ice form. with the heat from my fears, i blew the warm smoke from my mouth into the air. it formed another cloud. i knew i was in a different phase of my being. that i had to serve – to offer myself to others, the way my grandfather has done.

silent baby

when i was a baby i almost got burnt to death. i was a toddler playing inside the one roomed house with some toys. i lived with my Mother – daddy must have run away. he couldn't handle a turning stomach crying for a slice of bread for dinner. drugs and alcohol became an escape. that day i played like any other. Mama was doing laundry outside. then all too soon the house was full of smoke. i suffocated and almost died from swallowing my own vomit. the smoke blocked my lungs and i could not breath in or out. a huge lump stuck up on my neck as i tried to search for some air - i fell on the ground and i never spoke ever again. since then i've never been able say, *i love you Mma*.

lost city girls

Jay and Mia had returned from the US to South Africa – home that had now become a foreign place. Mia was born in the dusty-red streets of Soweto, while Jay was from the affluent area of Johannesburg, Sandton. Their union blossomed while they both at the University of Johannesburg where the two of them met at one of the poetry reading sessions. She was a final year Arts major student while Jay was a postgrad commerce student. They hung out for some time before falling for each other after a mutual friend introduced them. After Jay's parents passed away in a terrible car accident – he decided that skipping the country after grad was better than staying in the haunted Sandton house he lived in with his late parents. Being the only child, he cashed in on his parents' inheritance, and persuaded his newly found love before he packed his bags to go to America to live with him. Off they went – wherever the wind blew, without Mia's parents' approval, a regrettable decision she had learnt to live with.

After spending the past seventeen years in a foreign land they had learnt a lot about new ways of doing things. things gradually changed in their lives and that included the way they related to people – some dead, others had given up on hopes that they would ever see the two ever again. to be gone for this long can result in lost friendships and fading family relations – especially when no contact has been kept over time. this made it difficult for the couple to decide on who they would invite on their big day. the results of the time they spent apart from keen men were showing. Jay had not heard from his favourite aunt Dora, while Mia was disowned by her parents for running after the man of her dreams. they perfectly struggled to reconnect with people due to lost time while moulding a life overseas. Jay and Mia relied on each other to make things happen. to perform a ritual of their love required they dig for approval from the past - to unite with the dead whose graves they've never set sight on. to search for long lost relatives who will see their union come to a successful pass - became their obsession. like the constant visits that irritated Mia's mom and Jay's aunt's irritation when taking Jay's calls – but they persisted in order to see the dream bearing fruits. In the mist of it all, Mia suddenly remembered a conversation she had with a friend while overseas about her big day: *I don't even know if my uncles are still alive in South Africa. My grandparents are long gone and I don't know who will bless our union, or who will even be walking me down the aisle*, though they had abandoned the motherland for that of the aggressive

Americans, they still had the hope of doing things the homely way. wedding invites were and circulated calling for the presence of their friends to grace the union. a few days before the big day, Mia received a call from the friend she was close with during her time in the US. Laura Valentino was her name. she had called to alert her that she got the invite and was preparing to make her way to South Africa for the union. just like Mia, she too gathered dust in her feet when she fled to the US, to Washington DC, to find a better life – leaving all that she grew up with behind. they met there, in the US one Thursday night in a house party that was organised by a mutual friend, they spoke for hours like radio jockeys with each one telling the other stories of their past. Mia told Laura how she was finding being in a new place after following her boyfriend who received a scholarship to study abroad. Laura enjoyed being there such that after Jay graduated, they decided to settle there. they most definitely enjoyed each other's company and one thing brought them even closer, and this was the fact that they were both immigrants in America. they even dubbed themselves as the “lost city girls” – a term which they derived from the challenges they faced as immigrants in the new place they called “home”. they would talk about an array of things from missing home, to encouraging each other when things became difficult in the aggressive land of the Americans. they often got tired of how the Americans would raise their loud and harsh tones towards Africans – finding the way they responded and treated elders as being out of control. but for them, being in this new land meant becoming accustomed to other ways of being. Laura was an eye catcher just as much as Mia was – another thing that made them click. her bubbly personality always meant she was guaranteed to have men and women confessing their love for her every time they met her for the first time. she loved to party and she could talk for days – everywhere she went she was always seen in the corner where people were laughing and smoking. she looked like a joker as she was always wearing her wet yet attractive smile – but she could not be mistaken for a fool. the way she attracted attention from people of all kinds, earned her the nickname “Valentine” taken from her surname. Jay always complemented her for she sure was a bright little piece of beauty who had no boundaries set for her. she could speak however way she wanted and sure could date whoever she deemed fit for her. a love so strong like a candle light that stood the strength of the wind – is what she and Mia shared. she and Mia shared the strongest of bonds that has had hearts breaking without reason – maybe at times just for the fun of it. they couldn't handle their anticipation to see each other again – to catch up on lost time due to distance. on the day of her wedding, Mia waited with hopes that Laura would arrive early that morning to hand her over to her man during the ceremony. she had become a sister to her. that never happened –

Laura never pitched but the wedding went on without her. a day after the wedding while having a snack over a bottle wine, Mia heard a knock on the door. she stood up eagerly with only one person in her mind and opened the door. Jay was seated in the dining room and could hear Mia speaking to people who sounded like they were police. when he tried to pay attention as to who it was, he heard Mia shouting, *no! no! no! not Laura.*

profiling average

profiling average is nothing that ceases to amaze me – it is done by putting your feet in your mouth. you speak of average without giving average a chance to respond nor one to change their minds when they ought to. the chances that average might respond in cases where they do get a chance to respond or when they think they have gathered enough strength to speak out of turn, average often remains silent – biting their tongue only to swallow their words. average is unattractive, always being teased by the “smarties” that speak without holding. average sits alone in the corner and sometimes she sits in the middle of a room being overpowered by those who hold the silence to speak but she doesn’t complain. She’d rather scribble on papers writing love letters to herself and usually she smiles at every passing creature. average greets without being greeted – even when ignored average hopes that someday someone will care to notice. average spends their average time in their room, burying their breath beneath the blankets. average walks slowly, when you see them you would swear they are missing something or looking for the house that Santa once lived in – yet average has never enjoyed Christmas. always feeling misplaced in family gatherings constantly looking for an excuse to be excused. average is the kid on the street whose mother dumped her in a rubbish bin next to a coal mine. she grew up in a city whose streets could not allow her to call anyone *mother*, except for the woman who really was not her real mother. average is the kid whose average meal comes from the very same rubbish bin that housed her tiny life when her mother abandoned her for a life in the big city. average’s went to the city in the arms another man withholding from him news of having delivered a nameless baby girl. she had no hopes of coming back to the coal mining city that buried her dreams under dark clouds of an average city light. the mother knew there was no way she was going to fend for herself and the tiny infant. she wrapped her with a hospital blanket and placed her inside the bin thinking she would suffocate to death. average learnt to live with another average woman – a cleaner in the mines whom she grew to love as her own mother. had it not been for her, she would have died of hunger inside the bin. she later ran away from “home” when she realised her “family” was not really hers. with no trace of her mother’s footsteps – she lived on the city’s streets where every other man she sold herself to never thought twice before calling her a bitch!

it's my hand that wrote

the other day i was lying on the sofa. waiting for my energy to pick me up. for my wings to strengthen - to be strong so i could fly. i must have been tired this day, because just as i laid with my back being capsuled by the sponge the sofa was made of, i felt singing butterflies in my stomach, what i felt next was something beyond weirdness. it suddenly felt like the butterflies were eating my womb. the feeling was so strange it was like a nail was being drilled up my anus right into the bare core of my stomach. even the smell of day was so strange. i have had my anus cocked up before - BIG time. i can't really say i felt sick - i just felt like i had entered into another person's flesh - and like a traveller who just arrived in a new town ready to commit new sins, i was trying to find my way throughout the new madness. every house owner enjoys their own space in their home no matter how much they love to travel. who then has the ability to settle in someone else's body flesh other than their own? it could not have been me - but this day, it was me and i tried. the sensation orchestrating its way inside my womb and made me drowsy and sent me to asleep. i could not even see the shadow of the light that beamed through the dining room window. i rested carefully allowing my body to fit in the sofa so as not to break my bones. off i went into a deep sleep. unknowingly if i lived or died i felt my entire body being elevated to a different form, a different level of being. a feeling close to the one that runs in your stomach when you are on a swing. i let it go - i let all of myself float into nowhere and it felt good. if to die feels like this, i wouldn't mind waking up only to do it again. as i was floating, i saw something that looked like a door - it must have been one. i reached for the metal door before me and stepped into the next room. there, pictures of myself hung on all of the walls. even the ones where i looked exactly like my mother. i still wanted to know where i was but there was no one to walk me through this valley of darkness. and after i entered into the next room - i saw an old man who looked like my grandfather, whom i had never met. my mother's voice replayed in my head. she was calling out my name so i could follow her lead. i could only depend on the accuracy of her own voice in identifying things and people that kept on appearing before my eyes in the valley. to find an old man is strange - but to find one who was not saying a single word made me want to pee in my pants. the woozy feeling kept on sending me into an even deeper phase of my sleep. as i was slowly losing myself into the

thinness of nothingness - i felt blazes of broken thoughts evading my mind - i was then left blank with no plan to think of. but i was ready. if this was going to be my death i was ready for it - it was pain free. i opened my eyes and knew that i had visited a place i'd never been to before. when i stood up - i held my body in a steady position and i realised i could not feel my right arm, i looked around searching for help with my own eyes, not knowing what had happened to it. and from that day- i could never tell anyone what had happened to my hand nor was i ever able to write anything else using it. my words, and everything else i have to say, are a product of my left hand - i speak with it.

not knowing

one day i entered inside my late grandfather's bedroom for the very first time since his passing. i saw a blaze of fire burning against the walls. next to the window situated at the back of the room where his bed stood, there was a metal stove that looked like a ball of raging fire. sitting on top of the burning metal stove was the tiny copper kettle that he used to boil water for his tea. i felt the heat from the stove killing the oxygen in my lungs. then in a matter of seconds i began to lose my soul - the essence of my courage fell on my toes. i begged my knees to allow me to kneel so i could catch my breath. before i knew it, i collapsed and felt one of my backbones scratching the surface of the floor. the room suddenly became darker than it was before. the pale look on my face failed to light up the room. for some time i felt nothing - like i was dead. when my mother opened the door, she found me lying on the floor floating on the surface of forgotten memory. she yelled my name asking go god for mercy, *Thixo nceda lo mntwana*. at her voice's command my body responded. i then woke up feeling like i had lost an entire week of my whole life. but that day, i woke up with a different name. my mother bowed her head down and proclaimed, *Camagu!*

a conversation with my dad about how to be a man

according to my dad being a man comes with a bunch of twists and turns. most of which are my least favourite. to be a man means you must stand up tall and ride the wave no matter how cold the waters are, at least this is not an “according to me” statement. these are my father’s words and every other man in the village who thinks with a broken head and a limping brain just like that of my father. i’ve often alluded to the fact that i like my water lukewarm. but no one seems to take me seriously because i do not look manly enough. i don’t have to ride on anybody’s wave when i really don’t want to. that breaks my wings. *don’t be too gentle*, my dad would say when he asks me to do some “manly” duties, like cutting grass and fixing small technical problems in his car. what is it about being gentle that does not sit well with you? i asked one day in the middle of the conversation as i turned my head to look at his big and bulging face – he looked at me as if he was ready to disown me. being a man means different things to different people, so i thought. these are the views i would share at times in my talks with my dad, and sometimes with other young boys in the village. *you’re too educated, education has made you soft*, they would say to me reiterating the idea that i am not man enough to fit in amongst them. *why does it look like you will allow a woman to climb on your head?* These are the things they would say to me to dehumanize not only the kind of man that I am, but also the very same women who raised them. When you are gentle you are regarded as “*soft*”. You must not stand like that but stand like this. The way you are standing right now with your hands on your waist makes you look like a girl. But ... what’s wrong with looking like a girl? I ask my dad. Because you’re not a girl, he says. I hear that there are things that a man is not supposed to be, I can take that, so I think to myself. But what I do not get is the lack of explanation behind the way that is regarded as correct and normal for an average man to behave like.

from above

standing in front of the moon's mirror. looking at myself like a plated marinated chicken. i find my heart dancing to the tunes of the galaxy – with hope that my eyes will soon be finding pleasure in meeting yours. with my feet big as the elephant's – i danced to the tunes of the galaxy and embraced the opportunity of moving my body next to yours. i laid wreathless near a place called my grave – waited for you to be awake from your own death and release me to perform my own earthly duties – to dance again to the melody of my own feet – each step to the memory of places i've set my feet in. to dance, again! again! and again! i glanced at the miracle kneeling before me – the hope of your survival, my survival. i see a horrible dream where our bodies turn into multiple sand particles – like crushed bones scattered into the waves of the winds. this dream only comes to me during the deadly hours of the night. when i see you, it seems a different body – that of another – has been dressed in your own flesh – a flood of rotten blankets.

paradise

to find a missing puzzle of my being i needed to travel to places i have never been before. to see things and people i have only dreamt of – most of whom i did not even know until the day my death was written on the foreheads of my already dead children. i dug up their bones and those of my forefathers to trace pieces of belonging in their DNA – in which i found nothing but missed opportunities of love and peace -- a mirror of life i never lived. i was lost and was never found. the world had swallowed all my dreams and hopes – of being with the ones i called my own. i don't know any of my children, yet they called me mother, even in my absence. if the stories i've heard about death are true, we may be standing on a cloud of unknown promises that will reunite us on resurrection day. heaven waited for me with song and dance. drums beating at the control of young children – amongst them were my own children. the ones who died before me, before i could share all my love with them. there i was... among the stars searching for my own peace. with my arms wide open, i welcomed all the memories of my past, i held them against my chest in ways i never did with my own children. i surrendered my grace to the unknown – for i had lost the essence of my belonging. i was lingering in the world with no feet to stand on. my heart heavily troubled by trying to make peace with the past – an abundance of sins from the time i really lived. i could not stand the site of my own fate – for i had lost my soul. i was willingly stretching myself far beyond where i stood. hoping to reach for love i never owned. i let my hands loose as i reached for the stars, the ashes splashed and melted in palm my hands. it is these silver ashes that lit the core of my heart – then i blew them across the sea and the winds carried them over and above the sea waters. i stared at the milky way they created as they sang songs of departure and brokenness – to let them know i was watching, like an angel with broken wings, i stood with one leg and waited for someone call my name – to which i heard nothing.

untold sin

on her hospital bed mother lay with her body on fire. the pain she felt she could not withstand as it took all the words she wanted to utter through her mouth. last thing mother remembers was when her loud voice yelled. when the fists of death strangled her on her neck – refusing to grant her an opportunity of her last words. perhaps to bid farewell to her three children. she suffocated in her hospital bed – with her eyes teary as if they were covered in glass. she smiled, but her pale face would not stretch wide enough without her skin cracking. sadness manifested itself beneath the tissues that made her skin. her children watching, and in silence they waited – for her to say her last words – and the last words never came. how she got there could be seen in the robes that dressed her husband. his clothes were bloody and torn, she sure put in a good fight. but she lost the fight to the violent rage of the man she called “her one and only”.

earlier that morning

lingering... a woman's cry so loud. she suffocates from the power of her husband. strangling her with masculine hands. almost sending her to death. he demands sexual intercourse. without her approval. her husband's hands -- feel like prison chains, grabbing her neck. causing her to gasp. once, twice she struggles to take the air in. in this moment, the only thing she is fighting for -- is to take one more breath, which could be her last. she tries to retaliate. using her breasts to push against his chest. but he is too strong. her power does not match his raging control. his sweat drips over her nipples. she is numb. her entire world turned against her. she yelled -- her tiny voice forcing itself out of the hand that covered her mouth. he ordered her not to make a noise. it is a move she will regret. even in her suffering. she wanted to take a glance at her husband's face. to look through his soul. to see how darkness had manipulated it. when the sin was done. she vowed to her husband -- to never tell anyone about it.

devoted (the full story)

i am a woman with three hearts. one which i left where i was born, e-Mdantsane. i am made of the rare fibre that runs in the womanhood of my mother. the raw origin of my womanhood resembles the pain of her past and disappointments of the present moment. for me, to live is to fight, to fight to live for her memory, to live in her memory. i tell my story from which i tend to omit all the truths that seem to make me weak. i speak in bold letters to scare all those who threaten my survival. i am a woman, whose love has become a sign of her weakness. to live in my name is to live in disgrace. my heart at home is for the people who birthed me. they live and dwell in it. this heart is for my family and friends. this heart beats for the people whom i call my own. then there is a second heart. the one which causes distractions. it takes me to places where only my thoughts have travelled to. it is the heart that carries the spine of my imagination. the one which in its absence i cannot seem to trace the blueprint of my path and belonging. the third one -- was never mine. it is the heart i gave to my husband. it belonged to him. this heart is the reason why the other two are functioning. it is the start and the end of it all. i would do anything to make sure it is protected. my children's hearts will be nourished by the blood from this heart. it is the rare kind. the kind that beats for generations to come. i cannot lose this heart. i cannot lose my husband.

devoted (re-written)

i am a three-hearted woman. the first heart is for the people who birthed me. the ones whom i call my own. the second heart pumps the waters which fuel my being. it causes distractions when it stops functioning. the third one, was never mine. it belonged to my husband.

the travellers

breaking the silence on the road with the soles of my feet. searching and seeking for a place called home. i stumbled up on hurdles called life lessons. from there on i carried my hope on my back and stalled closely next to greatness – a sign of relief yet so uncomfortable. like borrowed money, all good memories had to be returned. claiming victory in the silence of rejoice is to dance with swollen feet. i have been to places at the cost of my patience. i stayed in places i shouldn't have stayed in. next to dark graves of evil people. i have been to the jail full of praying soldiers, they killed each other every time they fought. if soldiers can't protect us, then we must run. a chance of survival only comes once in a while. a missed opportunity that bears a dead body on the run. an unpredictable scene of life taken for granted. i remained and smiled though my heart was frowning. at all times wanting to be the better person. i have said yes when i should have said no, i believed everybody deserved a second chance. just like the day i died and realised i could rise again. i have been calling on great supremacies to pave me the way. but to listen too, can be a sin at times. i find myself giving answers to my own prayers. still, we wait...to find our calling, our purpose for which we have been set up to fulfil. in agony i look at all the things i could have achieved on my journey – but the road was not paved perfectly for someone of a tone like mine. without a plan i moved on to the next page, the next town, the next dream without thinking twice about doing it again. i looked at the moon, the sun and felt the holy spirit embracing me wholesomely. i knew i had no means to move on – but only prayers to carry us through.

die stem

The sun descended unto my feet to locate where I was standing. To search if I was strong like the man my father always wanted me to be, or whether I was weak like shame no one wanted to be burdened with. The decency of my presence filled the room with smoke. Near my feet, lay pieces of a broken future, the kind of life that was never lived. Time spent reminiscing about what could have been, an approximation of what was meant to be. I drew my strength from within, right at the centre of my braveness and stood tall like a bamboo tree. I lifted my head up high to face the rays of the sun, each breath I took was a reassurance of my survival. A reminder of unforgettable scars, some still living beneath my flesh. A sip of warm air causes my soul to burn into ashes. My tears, a sole anchor of my pain. I stand next to my fears, with my hands I rub my heart until it feels numb, the only way not to feel any kind of pain. Like the stem of the bamboo tree, I remain strong in my beliefs. When I can't hold it any longer – I run before I can die. I don't like to prolong my pain. When I look at the sun, the heat burns all my powers and I remain stranded. A signal of weakness to the man I am supposed to be. Sometime it rains, and the waters of the rain fill my whole body. At times the waters in me reach a boiling point, and they let my life evaporate. When it rained again the other day, I then became sun, because I was tired of being the bamboo tree. I was now the source of the heat, even in the absence of the sun. I was fuelling my own purpose, the way I wanted to, like the man I have always wanted to be – broken but still alive.

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the omnipotent

the spirit from the dead visited us in the orange hours of the morning, the breath of the morning was overtaken by the rage of the wind that blew heavily as it made its way into the city. those who felt the blowing rage of the wind testified about its command – it swept away all things on its way like a devil claiming its victory. Mother, with a doek tied up on her head got up in song and in prayer. she'd dressed to impress the spirits of the elders. to welcome the powers that came from the depth of the soil. the seeds meant to protect her womb from perishing. the spirit demanded to speak with one of their own – talking to the eldest son, who never slaughtered a cow as a sign of welcoming the spirits. sending a message of importance -- disapproving of his action, of disobeying their rule by marrying a diamond city girl that never believed in the ways of the elders. Mother pleads with the spirits in cries and salutations, on behalf of her beloved. she offers a sacrifice by slaughtering a goat, and lets them take a sip of her own blood -- for all her beloved, she would rather be half – than to see them suffer. the spirits continue to speak with the flesh of her flesh, in voices of different tones and sounds – like there were multiple people speaking in the voices of the spirit. he, the eldest, was a rebel who liked disobeying laws of the father – and the spirit often punished him with bad luck and a cursed life. his life was shredded into pieces by the spirit – to prove to him the strengths of the powers they behold.

ancestral prayer

when the burning desire to live becomes overwhelming. when the road ahead remains unseen. when dreams become unpredictable, and when life is unclear --the life of the eldest must be turned into ashes. his old ways must be banned. his torn skin be laid to rest. he must leave dreams of his own to answer to the calling. For he is an elder, he must plant the seeds that will breed future generations. to abandon life as he knew it and transcend to the throne of thorns and nails. he must take suffering to save his own pride that is rested upon those who follow on his footsteps. to be at the forefront of the war. he must battle with his life to save lives of those who follow after him. he must lead the clan of his foremen. he must find ways of returning to the grave to ask for his father's approval. he must find a voice to speak to the dead for they will show him the way. he must call on his forefathers, the jolas, and ask them for answers. he must brew them beer as a way of offering his life to them in order for them to be able to speak their truths – his life will be intertwined with theirs as if he was dead even though he is still very much alive. when the jolas, his forefathers, those who have lived before him, speak to him ... he must listen, he must listen not do so with the physical embodiment but with the spiritual body. he must kill the physical and offer it as a sacrifice the ones calling his name – that way, he becomes one of them just as much as he is one of us.

visit to my grave

it had been six months since the day of my funeral. many people had come to see me in the wooden box i was placed in. like balls of tomatoes, i lay in the box waiting to be buried in a mud of broken hearts. the box was made of cheap wood that had water paint smeared all over it. those who came to my funeral were in disbelief at how unprepared i was to be buried – like it was my own fault. my mother tells me that besides anything else, it was a sad day indeed – that even my sister was taken to the hospital because she couldn't breathe after seeing my lifeless body lying in what looked like a box of tomatoes. i listened carefully as she told me about what had been the cause of my death. i could not believe that i was dead at the hands of my grandmother – that she had bewitched me. what was meant to be a nightmare had become reality – a scenery of my fears was facing me eye to eye daring me to say something. i held my lips with my hands in disbelief. though i was alive – i was as good as dead. i was buried alive. then i went to kneel before my own grave on rocky soil and demanded answers from the body that lay beneath the ground on my behalf – i asked for it to identify itself, the body from which i demanded answers did not give any response. i remained on my knees next to the grave seeking for answers – it became an everyday routine. being there every single day of my life not only caused harm to the flesh. but it broke my soul. i remained there for all the days of my life -- dead – but my spirit lived.

i could not come yesterday because i got sick and ended up at the hospital. when i got there, the nurse who assisted me was an alien from hell. i took my cell phone out of my pocket and dialled my dad's number. he told me he was dead and i should not disturb him while he was asleep. then the nurse said when he looks at me he can see my future. i asked him to help heal my wound but he said he left his knife back at my place where he slaughtered my father.

i remember the time when my sister's child was still in school. he could not write any words for himself and a tokoloshe used to write for him. he couldn't talk to anyone but the tokoloshe.

the day i went to heaven i saw a huge white space – like a cave leading to the land of peace. i heard voices and they later they became one voice. the voice then instructed me which way to

go. i saw all those who came to heaven before me. though others i did not know, they were happy to see me. some wanted to embrace me but they couldn't cross the fence that formed a barrier between me and them. since that day i was never able to fall back to sleep.

Moon Girls

The two of them were close like moon girls. They danced in synergy, each one of them complementing the existence of the other. They lived in a globe-like house that lit their souls – a gold like colour appears when they embrace each other – a true image of the existence of true love. One day they decided to take a walk and saw a building that looked like a library. They entered the hub of the library and started fucking. When their baby was born, none of them knew who the father was.

becoming

when i was young i used to travel to the moon and dance on its wooden floors like a wave of angry sea waters. one day my father followed me, tagging on my back with claws sharp as the hawk's -- and i flew with him with one of his hands holding me tightly on my left wing. we stayed there for a day and half and through the entire time he pretended to be asleep.

when it was time to come back, one of the moon girls i was dancing with gave him one of her wings and told him to fly. with only one wing and a mind that was half awake, he struggled to take off, staggering around on the edges of the moon's surface. scared to fall off the moon, he hung up onto my left wing as tightly as he could and slowly began to fall asleep. just as he began losing his soul to my control, i pushed him over the moon's edge and watched him free fall until his image slowly disappeared into space. i looked around and saw the moon girl smiling and giggling -- we danced and giggled together like nothing had happened -- and that is how i became my own man.

Being a BIG girl

We always knew that one day you would leave – climb the stairs to heaven to answer for your sins and perhaps be rewarded for your good deeds. We always knew that there would come a time for you to be hidden, behind the moon - singing to the universe – waiting for your name to be called. That day eventually crept up on us, unexpectedly so. When it did, it reassured and reminded us that we are living on borrowed times – yours was wrapped up. I wake up every morning, without fixing my hair or even brushing my teeth. I go to pee. In the bathroom, when I sit on the toilet seat, I place my thighs bare as they can be – on the ceramic toilet seat and I always forget how cold it is – the sting of the coldness makes my skin crease. Then I hear your voice whispering; “*always wipe the seat before you pee*”. You said this prevents the coldness from penetrating my body – that it makes the contact between my thighs and the ceramic seat much more endurable. But since you are gone, I always forget to do so. That is why I find pleasure in going to the bathroom in the morning, it makes me think of you – a connection that stays as a reminder that I will forever carry you in my soul.

After peeing, I land my feet in the kitchen. I search for something that will fill the void in my stomach – but I find nothing. I kneel on the kitchen floor craving for your return – to which I have long given up on but still I wait. How come when you left did everything become so empty? The heart the soul the fridge the cupboard – everything. Did you take all the groceries and the love with you? The last time I had a proper meal was at your funeral. Though I could not stomach the food well as the spasms from the heartache I felt were the only thing that could dwell there – in the cubes of my intestines.

One day you’d leave, that we knew. Though it bothered us – we dealt with it, the best way we knew how. We were happy with you amongst us, and I know you were happy with us too.

We baked cakes for you, even when it was not your birthday – we bathed you, without you asking – we dressed you, in your favourite colours – we fed you, all the foods we knew you liked. For your flesh would not allow – for you to do all of these things for yourself.

But not so soon, I said on the day of your passing. But then again, you were no more – hiding behind the moon. What could a little boy like me have done? A little boy like me did not have money to buy doctors. A little boy like me did not know how to talk to God – to ask him to keep you here with me. A little boy like me had nothing to offer the world, in return for your soul. So I let things be – and released your life to a peaceful place – if it were up to me, I would hold it dearly in the palm of my hand until the morning I lose my breath.

I felt confused and I felt numb, I could not come to terms with how things were to be after you left. From the time you left, I became so cold. I was confused as and numb, as to who will be there for me – when the kids at school call me a little girl, for my flamboyant looks. I know I'm not the perfect one – nor am I the innocent one. But why does it hurt so badly in your blatant absence? With you around, I knew I was safe. With you no more, I am left to die. Your passing hit like thunder – one minute you smiled at me, the next minute your body lay in your bed lifeless.

Why you left, that I cannot tell. Only God knows. Uncle Themba is here, and so is aunt (Polina) Paulina. But they always fight, they always swear. At times we go to bed, with nothing to stomach – only memories of your love. Sizwe and Ntombi are here too – their kids. They also stay with us. It's packed in the four roomed house. I now sleep on the floor – and this is the only time I get to find peace. To think of you, to be in your arms again – time to let you live in my mind, and listen to what you would have said if you still breathed life. At times I wonder, if you ever think of me, the way I think of you.

Without you waving, is how you left. I dream of you. At times you're close, and some you're not. I've lost the hope of being held by you in your arms again. To become anything, to dream of anything that I do not even have appetite for. Because the world rejects who I am. Uncle Themba told me the other day I must stop acting like a little girl, because I'm a boy. He treats me bad and doesn't care if I go to school or not. He tells me if I want to be a woman, I must go and live in my own house. Things are wicked in the house we used to call home.

Leaving behind, me alone. I have not had it easy at all. I go through troubles, to get what I want – just to survive. Bhut' Monde our neighbour – calls me to his house every now and then. Just the other day, he did it again. He asked me to take off my pants – and show him my butthole for four slices of bread, and cup of coca cola. I go to him, all the times when I am hungry, I'm now used to it – even the things he does to me – I no longer feel the pain.

Not even a note, you left on your departure. To tell us where you were heading to. Only traces of your face remain on the walls of this four-roomed house – through the glossy papers hanging inside rectangular frames. Not even a scent of your love remained, you took it all with you. The peace the love the warmth the respect our family once had in your presence went out the door when you departed. I don't have a choice, but to become a "BIG girl" as uncle Themba would put it, in order for me to survive. I am a nobody to aunt Polina – a doormat to Bhut' Monde. He ravishes me whenever he pleases. I turn to my worst enemies whenever I am in need. They delight in my presence for they know how to use me.

Of how you felt, is what I wish to know – maybe you were tired of dealing with me. Maybe my love was not enough. Maybe I brought too many problems for you. Maybe I was just not enough. Why did you not tell me?

You knew I wrote. I would have written you a poem asking you to stay. I would have written you a love letter with melodies from my heart. I would have written it all for you – laid it bare in pen and paper, with words you could never forget. Painted it in different colours – and hung it on the wall – next to hanged frames carrying a replica of your image. Just like I did every mother's day when you were still alive – I would have drawn all my love for you.

At times I sang. Songs of love for you my beloved. With you gone, I sit on the kitchen counter – with my hands capsuling the edge of my chin – and I stare outside the now broken kitchen window, hoping I would see you in fragments of fading memories. But now I have lost hope – for when my eyes will meet yours again.

To your annoyance, I always came to you for help. Even with things you thought were easy enough for me to master – like frying or boiling eggs. When other boys gave me kicks, braking my fragile rib bones, you taught me how to fight for myself. The virtue to be strong, that I stole from you. But now that you gone – you took that with you too.

There is nothing left – of my husky voice. I have cried and screamed, to empty ears. It hurts to know you can't hold my head against your chest and let me rest until pain is no more. You always had something to say - words of comfort to use. You had a way of making things seem easy, a power of healing wounds.

You always knew, the dreams we had. This one I'm in, is something new. Through all these years, we lay one next to the other – with you teaching me about life struggle and taking care of myself.

How to say, how I feel does not happen without me losing my mind. It does not happen without me shedding tears, every time it happens I look down hiding my sorrows – and have them tears dripping onto the soil which you once walked on. Goodbye my son, that you did not say the time you left for good. Until the time we meet again, I'll always carry you with me – like I carry the scars I've inherited after the wind took you away.

I miss you – I love you. But I can't take it anymore. All of this, is really needed to be said and is truly meant. I never knew that when you fall, I'll be the one to take your crown, and suffer like you did – a curse, from one generation to the other.

Everything I am going through is everything you went through. I am you, and you are me. As I write this letter, I plan to gather dust behind you.

into

I remember the day you came into my life. I had been waiting for it in my dreams. You knew the things not to say. Your silence called me nearer and closer. Your absence spoke volumes. Both I and u have been good together and to each other. Until the day the light of darkness took you away from me in split seconds. Our lives were once intertwined, I in your chest with you in-between my legs. We sang together beneath the blankets while eating each other's breaths. This gave birth to love which was one; we have now been broken; lies and fears have come our way and got us broken into pieces; these pieces resemble those of a broken glass; glass which mirrored our love, love that is no more. Who are we to be stuck in love, in memory of fading feelings? If only I had the power to forsake patterns of a lonely heart – I would have left a long time ago.

Intense

The Dick is big. It chops the girl. The girl screams. The girl cries. The Dick spits. The Dick eats. Without Consent. The Dick eats. It eats the girl. The girl cries. The girl screams.

Without help. The girl cries. The girl screams, and screams, and screams. She screams some more. She is clueless and powerless. She gives up. She feels numb. He fucks, and fucks, and fucks. Until she is breathless. But fearful. In and out. Is the Dick. Between her thighs. Taking her warmth. Leaving her cold. Cold as ice. Her waist is still. Her breasts are floppy. Her lips are dry. Her lady-ness is wet. Her father is on-top. It is her hands. That try to stop father. As he squeezes. The remains of his manhood. Inside the girl's lady-ness. It is her ears. That hear the moan of the father. Taking every bit of her sanity. It is her nails. That scratch the culprit with hopes he will stop. But only adding to the amusement of the act. Her innocence? Her pride? They are all gone. Taken by the only man. The girl has ever trusted. The culprit - her father. Her mother too. That sees the scene. And tells the girl to shush!

She felt her own sweat dripping all over her thighs straight into her pussy. Where they were met by his semen that no longer carried the seed to bare any children. She smelt his armpits. Like onion, they smelt. She called for mother. Knowing exactly that she was in the next room. Mother never said a word. Mother never responded. Mother never offered helped. Mother never provided protection. Mother never responded. But she could hear. She could hear the girl scream. Mother was in the next room. Drowning her soul in cheap alcohol. Her mind dazzled by the illegal cigarettes that produced thick smoke -- which consumed the room. She was in the zone. Her own zone. She had zoomed out of her daughter's innocent life. She had given it to the cruel bastard she called a husband. The room where mother was seated. Was full of smoke. Meanwhile, the room where her daughter was being laid. Reeked a soul of an innocent girl -- being murdered by her father's dick that could no longer bear him any children

The Apricot Kernel

Brawnier in its formation and thriving in the muddy soil. Dunked underneath the surface, while sensing bodies of the dead buried in the garden. Surrounding and fuelling its existence. Is it life, is it death? With no sight, it manoeuvres. Trying to manipulate its way into existence. Exhausted by the presence of death, from the bodies of the ancestors, that laid there for an interval of timelessness. It saw no way, but to thrive for survival. Its hard-core and wood-like physique protected it from serving as a meal to the underdogs - ants and worms. There, the struggles for survival begins, protecting itself from being prey to these underdogs. It remains focused, tracking the movement of the enemy. From which side it whispers. When it sees a bite towards itself. It hardens its wood, serving as a shell. There is a war over the land, between the underdogs and the woody kernel, about whose zone this is. About who chows who. The underdogs whining for ownership of the territory. But the wood kernel won't stop fighting. When it blossoms, the underdogs have given up on the old kernel, preying for unsuspecting intruders. Praying for survival. Without knowing if life has ended or just begun.

A woman's guide to survival

The water bottle thrown into the fire. Making its way to the bottom of the blaze. The intense heat quizzed the life out of the bottle, draining its water in order to fuel its rage. Slowly shrinking its form, to allow the pressures from the wind, and the fire to exhume its intestines. The bottle slowly began to lose its life. Life that was once beautiful and full of promises, full of hope. It was all coming to an end. Trying to reform itself by using its breath... to cool itself down from the intense heat of the blaze. The bottle melted like ice; into invincible pieces of plastic. It succumbed to the blaze, though it was willing to fight. The fire was too big to handle. The water bottle lost the battle only in the first round of the fight. It melted into a sticky form of plastic. Returning to its original form before it became a two litre plastic bottle.

The water bottle could not believe that its life was flushing before its own eyes. It started to remember all the days of its youth. When it was loved and cared for by its owner. It remembered how it had travelled between home, the gym and office, with its owner making sure that it was clean, and that it carried clean water too. All these memories killed its spirit. It could not afford replaying these records. Most importantly, it could not believe that it was the owner itself that was sending it to the ashes.

When the blaze was done, it celebrated the victory. It saw itself as the mighty warrior. It had every right to, I mean, how could a water bottle be compared to the blaze of the fire – There is no way. The blaze celebrated the death of the water bottle in rainbow colours. Upon taking a look, it seemed though as if the celebrations would not end. It looked as if the blaze was getting stronger. Ready to turn another prey into ashes.

The blaze kept fuming until it burnt itself out. Until its own life travelled with the winds of the dawn. It tried to remember how the battle was. It had nothing left to remind itself of the victory. All had been burnt into ashes. This bothered the blaze. Even as its life began to phase out of the world of the living, it had hoped that it would keep its flames alive. So that those who came after it, would be able to remember how it won the great battle. When this seemed to not be the case. The non-existent blaze asked itself some questions. Was the victory worth it? Could there have been another way to win the battle? Is the work it has done... of any significance?

Upon finding no answers. The blaze gave in to its own departure, its own death. When it was gone, there was no sight of victory. Only scattered pieces of ashes. Left behind, was the soft burned plastic which had formed the water bottle. It stayed soft in the existence of warmth the ashes from the blaze had produced. When they too stopped living – the ashes. The plastic began to harden. It slowly built itself to life again. Ready to live a second life.

I sat there watching – at the wonder of the plastic bottle. Reforming itself. Reshaping itself. Like it had won the battle. In my view it had won. The blaze was nowhere to be seen. The plastic stain will still be there – on the fire stand – amongst the scattered pieces of ashes – as a reminder, that life had to be fought for. I looked with admiration – at the resurrection of the plastic – though of no use anymore to the owner – or to any of us for that matter. But it was ready to live life to the fullest. This reminded me of the rebirth of Jesus Christ – whatever you call her. Like the water bottle, she came and fought the battle – for your sins I hear – like the water bottle in the blaze – your people crucified her and cut her breasts – just when they thought she had died – she woke up a couple of days later – two, three, four days later – I can't remember. But she raised up from the dead – to give life another chance – just like the water bottle.

When I look in the mirror...

I see a left handed body with neck tilted to the right. This body embodies the beginning generations beyond the image that appear in the reflection of the mirror. I see this hand – caressing the entire body with lust and the face stares with confusion – as to how a body can long to be this intimate with itself. In the mirror – I see bodies I have dreamt of in my sleepless nights. They glance – they ululate – and they call names – names of people I’ve only heard of from pa and ma – but names of people I have never met. The body in the mirror calls names of the grandfathers, grandmothers – names of sons and daughters whose images can only be reflected by the mirror which the body stands in front of. I see bodies of people I do not know – yet they look like me – they are familiar – names whose legacy is embedded on this left-handed body with a neck slightly tilted to the right.

When I look in the mirror, I see bodies claiming to be me yet they are not. Maybe they look like me – but they do not know how it feels to be me. I see trapped bodies of selves struggling to make way – as earthly forces do not allow. When I look in the mirror – I see brown eyed bodies glowing with confusion – entrenched with lacked confidence. When I look in the mirror, I see bodies whose chests dance to the rhythm of my breaths. I see big headed bodies mimicking the images of the stars – life scattered all over the place yet its images are reflected in the picture portrait of the mirror. I see scars from the past whose healing medicine remains undiscovered. In the mirror – I see a left-handed, big headed boy – whose image reflects those of his foremen.

All four of us

the silver kettle sings. the pots dance in unison on top of the stove. every step to the rhythm of the red burning coals. The chimney pipe glows in reddish and bluish colours – as it feels the heat from the stove. Mama, Sisi and I – are joyful in the kitchen – failing to hide the excitement brought by the arrival of Tata. Ta is to arrive home this winter night with the train. as he does usually. twice a year he journeys from Jozi to the village – to see us. Ma, Sis and I wait for him to get home with the train. when Ta arrives – he finds us three waiting for him. we wait for him in the kitchen – by the stove – it is where he finds us seated. it's a coal stove – with the big chimney piercing throughout the roof of our four-roomed house. sending the smokes to the zombies of the night.

it is warm in our house – especially in the kitchen of our house. in winter, Mama makes sure she prepares fire to warm the house. this winter is no different. Mama made the fire before noon – so that we can keep warm while we wait. she also cooks in the stove. so in our kitchen, not only is it warm – it smells good too. we wait for Tata by the stove. close by the wall. between the kitchen wall – where the window is situated – and the coal stove; is a very small place with a wooden chair – that is where Sis and I usually sit. it is the warmest place in the kitchen.

when we wait for Tata – Mama makes us sing. she makes us sing all the songs we sing at crèche. so when Ta arrives. we all greet him – we hug him –then we eat – then we talk in the kitchen. then when Tata asks about school – Mama makes us sing for him. We sing – we sing – we sing – all the songs we sing at school – till we fall asleep.

by early hours of the morning – we wake up in our beds – not knowing who took us to bed – i guess when we fell asleep in the wooden chair by the stove – when we fell asleep while singing for Tata. Mama must have asked him to carry us to bed. but when we wake – we find Mama and Tata seated by the stove. as if they have never slept. the coals are still burning. The kitchen is still warm – warmer than the night before. Mama keeps the stove refilled. so when we wake – it is still warm – and we join them. Mama and Tata are still talking and laughing – me and sis – join them – we show Tata our school report cards. sometimes he'd give us fifty cents each for doing well. but this time... he brought us new clothes. then we are asked to sing again throughout breakfast. but before we eat – he teaches us how to pray – we pray for our food. then we sing. then we eat. then we laugh. we laugh some more – all four of us – by the kitchen stove.

father, son, journey

excuse the confusion – for my journey resembles that of my father. as i walked to the promised land – i walked beside her. the lady they call Jesus, is the very same lady i walked beside – for almost all my life since i separated from the mother of my children – i was there with her. with bones broken and feet swollen – there was no single day i was absent – i was there with her. i was one of her disciples. but when she arrived in Jerusalem, the beautiful homestead – where men fed her when it was time to eat supper – she did not invite me. Jesus refused to let me eat with them. so, i decided to leave her.

one summer morning, we heard from the neighbours that they were coming to town. My father's Jesus and her other disciples were visiting our town – my father amongst them. from the look on my mother's face upon receiving this news – i could sense her frantic behaviour. though she remained calm, the squeakiness in her voice smelled of resentment. yet at the same time in her walk, i could feel her body shaking. she was not happy – she was nervous. i for one, could not tell how i felt. so i went to the other room – prepared for my journey ahead. i was also no longer willing to see my father's behaviour manifesting in me, time was against me – i kissed her – my mother – on the cheek and said my goodbyes.

on my way to the Basotho land, i thought of all the promises i had made to my wife. whom i have decided to leave with three children as i was following in the footsteps of a Jezebel, whom other men called Jesus. i realized that i was no different from my father. who too – followed in the footsteps of his own Jesus – leaving us behind.

up on my arrival in the Basotho land, i reached down the empty pockets of my trousers. hoping to find a coin so i could ring my mother and find out what happened after i left. and perhaps if at all she ever got a chance to speak to my father. i could not find anything from my pockets but holes big as my thumb – and only the promises my father left us with – empty. i'm certain even if i had something in these pockets, it would have slipped through the holes.

agitated to find a plan. i went to a nearby shop, and there was an older lady who spoke in my mother's language, Sesotho. i greeted her and asked if i could use her telephone. she showed me a sign of her thumb and the seventh finger rubbing against each other – signalling that she wants money for it. i offered to sell my watch – she then gave me ten bucks for it. i quickly went to the telephone box and called my mother.

to her disappointment, when Jesus visited town with his disciples, with my father as one of them. She, my father's jezebel, did not want my father to meet with my mother. my mother's voice crumbling, and her emotions rising. i knew this broke her heart into pieces – with her anger mirrored in each piece. she no longer had the access she longed for to her husband and soon thereafter she decided to go back home. carrying in her hands a handbag full of empty promises and memories of a broken marriage. i on the other hand felt like i had overstayed my welcome in the Basotho land and went back to the village on only to find still shadows of a scorned woman called Lethabo, my mother.

three days later after my mother arrived in her homeland, she rang me. hoping she would tell me that her travels went well, but there was more. my father – who the world had swallowed, was no more, his sickness took his life. some apparent heart disease caused the swollen feet and we all had to move back home for the burial – and Jesus, or should i say his Jezebel, the woman whom my father devoted the rest of his life to – was nowhere to be seen at the funeral. apparently the gospel needed to be spread and so she too – moved to the next town. After the funeral, my mother and i got on our knees by the doorway and watched the sun set, we remained silent – each contemplating their next move.

The monument

I am standing at the monument, not knowing if I'm going or coming. These walls bear names of Guy Butler and Olive Schreiner – names of people I do not know – a sign to tell me, “you don't belong”. In front of me, I see a sight Jakala, Fingo and Ntaba Maria glowing bluish with a scent of shredded dreams. In Fingo Village, homes are mud built and the noise of crying babies fills the streets of Fingo Village. Teenage pregnancy, over population I what you see in the streets of Fingo Village. I am standing at the monument and when I look north, I hear the sounds of “bottle kops” piercing through the tiny bodies of young men, arms broken, chest dented by three star knives. Young men; drunk, high in the streets of Fingo Village. Gqom music from a near tavern gives ambience to the Streets of Fingo Village. Burnt bodies, old grannies, dragged to ambulances making their way to the hospital only a few will come back alive. While others never make it, some are buried the following weekend. The smell of marijuana has become a model of aspiration in the hood. In Fingo Village, if you don't know how to pull a joint you aren't smart. These boys will sell their souls to get a joint in Fingo Village. Even the sight of Tanti location from where I stand instils the taste of a not-so-sober-mind. It is rough in this part of Fingo Village. Souls come and go and we never know when they will return – if they will return. Others perish and we don't have a choice but to forget them like they were not our own. I am standing at the monument, behind me, stands a gigantic glittering monumental building – like a titanic it stands and never sinks – carrying the images of the cities' elites. Its light breathes yellow beams and white rays – is this the hope we have waiting for? Who knows? But I am here, we are here ... I can see ... can't they? In this city, potholes bury our dreams for we have lost our pride, and empty taps fuel our anger our spirits are tired of this dry land. I am sick to my womb. We must vote? How? Because we died long ago of hunger and thirst or lies and self-pity. What remains... are shadows of a broken people whose future is a repetition of the past – clothed in robes of today's occurrences.

Unfaithful Monday

This unfaithful Monday morning was very cold. It had rained heavily the previous night. This Monday – a normal school day. The grey trousers I wore at school that day were no match to the cold breeze that filled this small town. Every time when one uttered a word. The cold breeze took a chance to give one a cold kiss. Teeth biting against each other – a melody of broken bones. To keep warm, one had to make sure they wore an extra pair of sleeper pants underneath the grey pants. It usually gets like this in this town during winter. This unfaithful winter morning was no different, it was cold as it was in my father's deep freezer – to such an extent that I could not even locate my own fingertips. My nails looked frail, as if they were ready to break. That is what this town's winter does to you – to your body. It puts it under a lot of strain. Every night before we sleep, we dipped our feet in warm water and applied Vaseline to keep them warm – otherwise we could never fall asleep. I had to constantly rub my hands against each other to create a small amount of false heat in order to keep them warm – this too, was not enough. On days like these, one even struggles to hold a pen properly. In days like these, I always wished to go home early.

Surprisingly when we arrived in the school yard, many children were in attendance. The principal was strict, so no one wanted to miss school. I guess everyone decided to swim in this cold weather and make their way to school. I begged my frozen feet to bear with me until I could get to class. As if it will be warmer there. The cement floor did no justice to my already cold feet – it just made them worse. As if this was not enough, I even struggled to put my buttocks on the orange chair, it was as cold as the floor my feet were standing on. Our classroom was not a conducive space for days like these – broken windows and a dripping ceiling, at least it wasn't raining on this particular day. As usual, the school kids were making noise talking about whatever had occurred during the weekend, while others like myself were making noise about how cold it was.

The noise was disrupted by the entrance of the English teacher. He had covered up in a long brown jacket and look almost like a soldier. His greyish beard was like a frozen roll of wool. His image on its own made me feel like I was underdressed. He took out the novel prescribed for grade four learners and began to read where we left off last week. The section he was reading was very sexual – it tickled my ears. The aim of *Ngadu's Fate*, the novel, I guess was to teach us about the downfalls of having unprotected sex, HIV and teenage pregnancy. This day, he read the section where the two main characters in the book were having sex, Ngadu

and her girlfriend whose name I cannot recall. For some reason the teacher seemed very passionate about this part of the novel. I think the majority of the learners in the class – if not all of us felt something happening in our bodies during the reading – a tickling sense of excitement. This was evident in the fact that, during the reading, one boy stood up and went to the teacher to ask if they could be excused from class. As he stood up, he could not hide the boner that filled the front of his grey trousers as he stood up. He tried to hide it, but we all laughed at the banana-shaped erected penis as he walked out the door with nothing but a fallen face due to the embarrassment we had suppressed him to. As we sat in there while the teacher was reading, things got intense – we felt Ngadu penetrating his girlfriend – a weird feeling, as if we were there in action with them – that is how well my English teacher read the book – he took us all into the scene – like everything was happening in front of our own eyes.

The next scene, depicted the masculine character of the protagonist, Ngadu, having a sexual relationship with one of the male characters. Apparently Ngadu was a confused boy who did not know where to plant his seed – he was bisexual. I was too young to understand what all of this meant, and so my body began to feel some sort of discomfort – I felt my blood rushing up my neck as is it travelled via my spinal cord, sending waves to my hair's roots making my hair stand still, and like everyone (I would assume), my penis remained erect from the excitement of the previous scene. The teacher was so good with the reading such that he created an image in our minds as he read the book with passion. So, with this male to male encounter, I did not know how to tell my penis to stop twitching as this was something unusual. Tyson on the other hand, who was one of the learners whom I shared a table with, sat in front of me, and it's almost as if he could tell I was still erected every time he glanced at me during the reading. I was used to talking about sex with my friends when we were being naughty, but to hear it at school was kind-a bit embarrassing. It made my body cringe – like I had someone sucking my hard penis, yet being shy about it. It created both excitement and a sense of fear at the same time – the kind that makes you feel like you've just been caught by your older brother while masturbating.

It is funny how the body reacts when it hears people talking about it. But it becomes a nightmare when it hears others speak ill of it – when the body hears this, when it is addressed in ways unfamiliar to it – it almost crushes into pieces. Or at least that is how Tyson felt. It was on that cold Monday morning when I heard my classmates discuss, in fact when they teased Tyson about his sexuality. It was during the very same day our English teacher read

the intense piece in our prescribed novel, where Ngadu, the protagonist was having a sexual intercourse with another male character. After that, the teacher concluded that Ngadu was bisexual – a word that I heard for the first time. As the reading proceeded, Tyson and I kept on staring at each other, I was uncomfortable but I think he was more out of place than I was. There were instances where we heard other boys at school teasing Tyson about being a “moffie”, but this was something I did not plant into my mind. Rumours were that Tyson had both male and female genitals. There was something weird about this, so I did not take it seriously. So as the reading continued, all these things I’ve heard about him started to make their way back to mind. My spine went cold – as if I had blocks of ice tubes cascading through the back of my neck. I could see the embarrassment on his face. Every time our eyes came into contact, he would quickly look away – I guess he felt like I knew something.

Tyson was kind-a different, not the usual typical boy that wears the same grey trousers throughout the week until they turn brown because of dirt – he was not the kind-a boy – who stayed with uncombed hair, smelly armpits and an itching body because it has not been in water in two days – no, not Tyson. Tyson was clean. He had a sharp chin, with cheekbones a shape of a television remote control. A dark skinned boy with a skin tone so flawless like he lived in water. His lips, you’d swear he’d smeared berries all over them. In his voice he was calm, even with the way he talked. A big headed dark skinned, slim boy – shy but very clever. A sweet tall boy – whose fate disowned him on that particular Monday morning.

What took place in class that morning, turned my face pale. It made my body freeze – like my knees were locked, I felt small and stood still in silence – and as broad as my shoulders were, the fear circulating in my bold body did not allow me to defend myself against the heaviness that spilt out from the violent tension in the room. Nor did it even allow me to stand up for Tyson. For the first time in my entire life, I felt weak, I felt my muscles losing their strength. I think I was scared. I tried folding my arms hoping that this gesture would bring me to steadiness, but the trembling of my bones caused the meats of my skin to vibrate. Together with my heart, pounding, they resembled the tunes and rhythms of a marimba band.

My whole body was on the run, it was in a rush, it was in a hurry, yet I was still glued to my chair. My body was on the run but it held itself hostage as it remained still behind the two meter long desk. I remained hostage in that orange chair, not because I wanted to, but I couldn’t move. I wanted to act on my thoughts and let my body run, but for some reason I sat there like I had wet my pants. Tyson – who was the joke of the class, was seated in the chair

opposite mine. For the first time, we stared at each other eye to eye without a blink. His dark face was getting darker, his nose was also starting to expand. I felt his anger from where he was seated. As if his soul was mine and as if his blood ran in my veins. I asked my body to “hold it”. But it refused. It frowned at me – my blood vessels thickened. I rubbed my left foot on the cement floor, trying to find ways of distracting my attention to what was taking place. But our teacher continued reading this extract from *Ngadu’s Fate*. As he walked out, the rest of the class, mostly the boys, stood up behind Tyson and started singing “ngoba wena u-bisexual” (*Because you are bisexual*). At that point my body flattened as I heard others chanting degrading words to Tyson. Perhaps both Tyson and I couldn’t hold our breaths because our eyes remained in contact for the first time since he had been avoiding eye contact. I felt him ask for me to stand up for him, but I could not move my butt from that orange chair. I feared for him. If I knew I would never see him again, I would have stood up, dragged my body towards his, and right there and then, given him a hug and let my lips lay against his. And tell him how much I loved him. Today I am sitting here, craving to know what really happened on that unfaithful Monday morning. Tyson did not deserve to leave like that.

Maître

I am the incarnation of my mother, the present tense of her soul. Though hers doesn't breathe anymore. I am present in her name. My flesh smells of her flesh. My blood of her blood. I am her rib, her – my maître. My soul is tangled in her bones. Though they've perished in to ashes, the presence of my soul in her bones will nourish her memory – so it lives not to be forgotten. She is absent, but she breathes in my presence. She lives in memories. Her story will be told to generations to come. She has faded – and her soul has transcended to the moon. Yet she will be known, her story will be told. She is my maître. I live in her memory, I dwell in her rules. In my dreams I see her – she speaks life to my plans. I listen, and listen and in her voice I find my power. I live in her memory. Words of love have been uttered. Hurt and hate have both been banned. Spirits of loved ones have faded. Innocent souls have been shredded – both by her passing and pain. They now all dwell in wonder – of how things could have been. Her physical presence will be longed for – but she lives – in memories her kin. Even her enemies long to be with her, one last time, one last time they say. Fake love from friends and family members is what she disowned – in her passing, in her death. I give her my heart as an offering of the love she deserved but was never granted with. Her heat in my hand. I breathe life to her crashed bones – the ants have made a feast of her rotten flesh. Her fall, was my rise – it was never in vain. I live in the name of my maître – in her absence I breed light to her image.

Last Friday night

The Friday was a beautiful one – sun rising from the north, east or whatever direction the sun comes from – I don't care, but what I know is, this Friday it was a sunny day. The sea breeze caressed my hair – as little as it was. I felt the ocean's breath running through my forehead right to the back of my neck. It tickled my tummy as its waves tapped every single fibre of my skin. I wanted to wear a skirt – just to let my ankles have a taste of this freedom but my ugly and jealous friends wouldn't allow, *Uzithanda gqitha izinto*, they said. I hadn't been in town for some time, so this was some kind-a catch up situation. We were about to paint the town pink. *Boys and girls, let's roll! Your boy is in town*, I yelled as we were about to drive away into the night. Immediately after we got into the car, it felt like the world was dancing in the palm of my hand. It smelt like burnt roses in the car – or like a bottle of Gordon's had been spilt in the car. Non-the-less, it still smelled good – it was something we could handle – I guess because singamanxila sonke. So the smell of Gordon's wasn't anything to write home about, yayingento ewisa umntwana ebhedini leyo.

We got to town and started club hopping – like ducks running for water, we jumped from one place to another sifuna iindawo zokuthoba unxano. We partied out a storm – drinking everything and anything our throats could put their hands on. The thirst was real, it's like when you're horny. It won't go away until you let your lips suck on a beer bottle. Almost like wanking which gives you a feeling of relief. That's what being thirsty for a banging night out feels like. Eventually towards the early hours of the morning, our feet led us to one of the spots in town where everyone goes when every other joint has closed. We knew the vibe would be on a hundred, the place never disappoints. We got there – it was packed, you'd swear it was a re-make of Mandela's funeral. We parked outside and proceeded to go inside.

As I was busy wiggling my arse to the entrance, my friends were wacking and voguing behind me – we serenaded as we walked in with our vosho move on point. Kuleyo indawo yom-jaivo I give my friends ten – they know how to close down the dance floor. The way we danced – it was as if Beyoncé was in town. They were making a noise and behaving in rude manners – but that's what makes me love them anyways – they're crazy like that. Just when I was about to get into the club, something strange happened. I saw a familiar face as I walked up the stairs – up on a second glance I realised that it was Ex – my ex-lover. They lit their eyes in an awe – surprised at my appearance. The confidence my body embodied helped me

portray a good image – an image of a boy they once used to jell with – as I began to greet, with a smile wide as the length of the toothbrush I use to brush my teeth. Ex greeted back and I proceeded inside.

A few beers later I felt a tap on my left shoulder – on looking back, it was this bastard I used to know, my ex. I did not mind greeting and yeah “catching up”. But for them to think they know me beyond the last time we last fucked was a bit annoying for me. Even though I was disgruntled about giving them any second of my time, I hid my pride under armpits – and attended to their request. Ex asked for a moment to talk to me and we moved to the nearby corner not so far from the table where I and my friends were seated. There – we occupied that little space in the already full club – we made it our own. Ex’s head on my shoulder and I had the centre of my forehead at the top of Ex’s head.

They looked good – with their hair shaved and with skin as soft as that of a baby. They wore a striped t-shirt with blue jeans – arse popping out and thighs so tight I could see them through the tight jeans. I complemented them on looking good – and they proclaimed that it’s the gym that did the wonders. They smelled different from the last time we’d been together. Ex still knew how to take care of thyself – I must give the bitch credit where it is due. A well-mannered young lover, this you could tell by the innocent stare in their eyes. They talked as if they were mending the heart they had broken six months ago – as if we knew each other again – as if me and them were one, an item.

Until this point, I thought I had shredded all the memories we shared together into tiny pieces of forgotten love. Until now, I hadn’t really given much thought as to how I felt about them or even how much love I still had for them – or to even think about the lack of it therefore. I thought I was done – until tipsiness gave us enough courage to face our fears – it drove Ex back to my arms, and I found myself searching for the scent of Ex’s hair whilst they leaned against my shoulder. Though I had told myself that I would never initiate the first “real” conversation between I and them – I was really glad when they approached me.

We swirled in the corner and tangled each other’s arms like ropes tied to form a knot. We laughed and giggled like little girls getting ready to dance in the rain. I felt at ease, yet in my mind I had a lot of question to ask them. They looked relieved, with no worries written on their face. I wanted to interrupt the happiness boiling in Ex – yet at the same time, I did not want to spoil the mood. This here, was something I missed with all the waters running in my body – yet pride would not let me admit to it.

Sweat, fart, pee and smell of vomit filled the little corner we stood at – thanks to the fan above our heads the effect wasn't as bad as it could have been. Me and the nigga continued with the talk, all eyes on us but we indulged on each other's breaths without giving a fuck.

By now, my friends were fed up. I had told them that me and Ex – we are never getting back together. So they were probably surprised that I was laughing with the enemy. That is the thing, maybe I wanted to make them my enemy when I bombarded my mind with the idea of not wanting them back – but they were no stranger to my heart – I could not close off my heart for them, something had to give.

In the middle of our talk, they asked for a moment to go and speak to a friend. Minutes later as I was about to leave, I looked for Ex with no trace of where Ex had disappeared to – maybe into the night, once again!

They be gone

windows are wide open

the breeze entering the room is fresh and calm

the room is full of blatant silence

the carbon copy of the speaker's shadow waves on the shiny floor of the room

the speaker stares outside the window

eyes focused right at the centre of the breeze waving outside

a stare right into space

as if the speaker sees something

Few seconds later, the speaker begins to murmur

you and me, aren't we one? i and they are the same. why are you haunting me like this? what would you do if i hung my feet on my shoulders and walked out that hole? would you still follow me? would you? we are just stuck in boxes. in a box. we want to be recognised. but we also don't want to be known. to be recognised is to let go of who we are. to be boxed in shapeless boxes of ice. to make our souls still. to cut our wounds deep. to silence our movement. we are here, we are bricks and we are stuck on these walls. both you and i. there's no turning back, no running, no attempting to jump out the window from the fifth floor. Here there is no cutting of wounds for pleasure. we are stuck, if you want to die, it will have to be from holding your breath till your lungs don't speak no more. you must hold your breath and let death spill out of your bulging eyes. you must see it. we must see death finishing you off, painfully so, and we must see it walk out of your own eyes with its mission a success. you must suffocate. that is what you want isn't it? to die? to live no more? yes? no? what do you mean no? finding pleasure in death is what brought you here, it is what brought us here. you think Sam is the reason we are here? i thought we got over them a long time ago, i mean Sam. weren't they a bitch? a douche? i thought we had forgiven them a long time ago. do you miss them? Is the thought of them in your mind the reason for your confinement? the reason for our imprisonment? was it their dick that got you hooked? I remember the time they held you against the wall. when they shoved their pipe up your arse even before you could catch the smell of the morning breeze. i thought you liked it rough. you told me the pain they made you feel brought you pleasure. I didn't know you felt this way about them. resentment. you

need to make peace with it, with other things too. until that happens, we are here for the longest time. is it 90 days? i think that's what the doctor said. did you hear what the doctor said? and also the nurse? who is crazy? i am sure it is you, definitely not me. i have always been fine. i have always been on fire. what about you? have you always been smart, like me? should i go now? should i release my soul to the universe so i can feel myself evaporate. or should i? should i dance to life's synergy. and let its energy send me to the grave. should i do this life thing after this 90 days? Live to wake up. go to work. get paid. get laid. only to be waiting to get laid to rest yet again. do i go? yes. go. or let my breath surrender to the power of the rope. rope that hangs from the fifth floor's roof and let my body lose its beat. or do i wake up? get bathed. go to church. sing hallelujah only to pretend i am happy to be in the presence of a man i gave not even the slightest shit about. a man i have never met. or maybe i will live. so i can wake up in the morning to go outside - to have a smoke and watch the sky smile at my miserable face. perhaps i should stay. i should stay definitely. to watch my sinking grow as if i were watching my own death. Maybe it is my sinking that will give rise to my death. do i stay to get better as if they themselves are better? will i ever get better? will they get better if i am better? if they do get better, what then happens to me? In 90 days the doctors say i might be better. what's the wait worthwhile for? maybe it is best i don't stay. i once thought .maybe it is better if i leave. is life already making a feast of me? of us? maybe if i stay i can be of use to them. the ones who want me to get better. maybe not. maybe they disregard my lunatic presence for most time i speak nonsense. i see things. i see you. but yet you are me, in me. i see little girls, our daughters, then we swallow then. and they are no more. maybe if i live i'll be dead sad - i'll regret it. but I'll be dead. i will die. maybe i should just hand myself in and die. But it has to be after this 90 days. I don't know how it will happen. but i do know - where you die, i too will die with you.

Part II – (Un)Tying The Knot

The meeting

After a lousy day at work, Mr V and I went and conquered the gym. There is something about heavy metals and sweaty gents that somehow turns us on. I hope it's not just me feeling this way. Mr V assures me that, most definitely I am not the only one. "Look around you, there is so much testosterone underneath every boy's muscle, do you want to tell me none of them ever want fuck each other, huuh?" I am still shy talking about this, I giggle a bit and shake my head while heading to the treadmill for a final warm up before I head home. At least no one can hear our conversations and this makes me happy. I am not yet exposed, but I still find joy in talking boys.

It was a good day at the gym, I don't want to lie. It wasn't like work at all. I get to the changing room and start thinking about what it is that we are going to have for dinner. A few ideas pop up here and there, and at the same time I am still in awe with the boys' muscles and dick prints popping pointing towards my direction. Finally I am ready to go home, I am not weighing myself today, I've seen enough dick, I don't need the weighing machine to spoil my mood. If I am fat who cares? At least I am working on it.

Just past the Biko Building somewhere in Prince Alfred Street. I am busy minding my business when I bump into him. It was such an intense moment. He had his eyes glued to me for a good number of seconds. I took a glimpse of him once, it's a face I know, probably from the gym. A second look was just to confirm if he was still staring, and guess what, he was. The third time I was just pushing it, I mean yes I was curious, kill me for it. It was that third that started it all, he nodded his head and I read it as a sign that he wanted me to stop. Of course I did.

Brother man came over. He greeted and I greeted back and I even offered him a handshake. I told him who I was, or at least who I thought I was. And in no time we were both laughing about the incident that just happened. He said I was the one staring, while I was arguing he was the one who stared at me first. It became one of those conversations that would never end. I think it was our first fight, funny yeah? There was just something cute about it. Imagine it, two boys who bump into each other while gazing and having an intense conversation about who was checking out who. It was scary, for me at least. But the fact that he liked talking put me at ease.

We conversed for some time before he asked me where I stay. I told him – it is a bit far from where we met. He suggested that we go to my place since he also has no plans. It is round about 8 in the evening. We walked to my crib and in-between things we talk about what we are both doing. Interesting stuff I tell you. We get to my place and I offered him something to drink. I didn't have a couch, so the only place he could make himself comfortable was on my bed.

There he was, on my bed. His back leaning against the head-board design with his one foot on the ground and the second floating at about 2 cm from the floor. I, lying on the bed with my stomach. Close to his waist. In that yellow t-shirt, his lean muscles looked as if they were ready to pop out. The t-shirt was tight, I mean real tight. His ribs so firm underneath that t-shirt. Looking at him with my neck tilted a bit so I could pay attention to his eye contact. We chatted a bit more before we kissed.

Soft lips, tight, lean masculine body against mine. I slowly move my right hand across his waist giving him enough space to get closer. And he does just that. Now I can rub my hand all over his body, touching places and things I know I shouldn't be seen touching. But this right here, was a sin I was willing to commit. While the situation got intense, this got harder, real hard. The breathing picked up. The pace of the heart bit ran across miles, beating twice as nice. It was during that moment, I knew Phill and I were going to fuck.

On a high

Saturdays are my favourite days. Especially this one. I am about to hang out with my new buddies. Ever since I moved to Wakanda, I have met some interesting people. I think I am going to stay here forever. Ha ha ha I am kidding. A friend from back home hooked me up with two of his friends that live here, when I told him that I was moving this side for work. So yeah... I am waiting for them now.

We had spoken on the phone via texts. I don't even know what they look like. Three seconds later, my phone rings. Eita, I answered. "*We are outside*" says Zwai, he is the one I have been messaging a lot prior to this day. Since they have been staying here for some time, they know the street I directed them to, Jozi Street. Just as you enter Jozi, there is a gigantic distinct street light, it's the only street light in the area where I stay. So the house I was renting was just opposite it. They couldn't miss it. Like a witch, I slowly opened the bottom edge of the curtains, just to observe if indeed they had arrived. Where I'm from, it is seen as a witchcraft activity to spy through the window, especially in the evenings. It's one of those beliefs that do not make sense to me. I won't go deeper into that.

Oh jah! As I spie.... I see a green unusual car, I can't remember the model. I was too excited that I was finally going to master the streets of Wakanda. I stepped outside after locking the door. It was starting to drizzle outside. I quickly ran to the car though I was not sure if I was running towards the right people. I was a little bit shy too. When I got to the car, I found the backseat door on the right side of the car open. I got in, Zwai introduced me to Piwa. Nice to meet you guys, I alluded.

Both of them are big... well fat if you would like me to say. There I was, tiny and shy amongst these two matured dudes. But they did all they could to make me comfortable. "*Where are we off to?*" I asked. Before that question could be answered they offered me something. "*Here, have this, it will make you feel at ease,*" said Piwa. "*What's this?*" I said, with my eyes wide open demanding an answer. "*It's coke,*" both of them responded. I was stunned, in my twenty-two years on earth, I have always battled with addiction. I had thought it through and decided to quit it at varsity, but I couldn't. So now, the devil I thought I had run away from, was looking at me eye-to-eye. I was failing. I was repeating... repeating the very same mistakes that made me run away from home. Suddenly we stopped, in the middle of road. Apparently the road was leading to a nearby hangout spot down the hill.

Snot and pull, snot and pull. Deep sighs.... Snot, snot, snot and then pull. The car was starting to warm up from what the three of us were breathing. Slowly, I was getting there... high. For a good five minutes we had managed to fill the car windows with steam from the pulls and puffs of devouring the coke.

Down the hill we drove, reaching our destination. Kwa Mah-ma, they called it. On arrival, we encountered a pool of other young people seated in groups and some were loners. It was packed. "*Is it always like this?*" I asked. "*Yes, but Sundays are the best,*" said Zwai. We found a spot at the back. As if we knew each other for much longer, we spoke and drank. Repeating what we did in the car, we shared the coke amongst the three of us. As if it was my last day. I took and took until I could not take anymore.

The last thing I remember was when I took out a cigarette. I remember taking the first three pulls. From there on I switched off. The next thing I know I was in a hospital bed. I woke up and saw a young black lady in a white coat. Where am I? I asked. "*You're in hospital, you overdosed last night,*" she said. In disbelief I looked at her... with words stuck at the tops of my tongue. Before I could think of what to say next, she held my left shoulder as if she is transferring her energies to me. She told me to rest before walking out to check up on another patient. The place that I thought would help me forget about my previous life seemed to be the rebirth of my misery. I zoned off slowly into deep sleep, and when I woke up – I did not even know what day it was.

Second chance

When I realised I was still alive, I did not know what day it was. I had become a cocoon in my own body. Heavy needles sprung out of my muscles right into the tissue layer of my blood cells. My own body had become its own prison. My thoughts remained in my locked mind trying to figure out what really happened. I was asking myself questions I did not have any answers to. I looked towards the room's entrance from my hospital bed, I could not see much beyond the obscured view that my knees were slightly hiding. I tried to lift up my head to see beyond my knees that had created a barrier blocking from seeing beyond what my eyes could see. The feeling of trying to lift my neck stretched my muscles far beyond what they could take – I felt them slightly tearing in half. Out of frustration from not being able to achieve my goal – I rested my head on the pillow, thinking to myself that I might as well die. What was happening to me was something far beyond what I could have imagined for myself in this city. Wakanda had become hell on fire. Just as I had these thoughts running like streams of water in my mind, I felt a shade-like image walking towards my direction. As I lifted up my eyes, I saw a face that seemed familiar but I could not see clearly who it was. For a moment, I thought I was losing my mind. I tried to say something but I had a blockage that had locked my throat. As the shadow came closer, I saw Phill's face. His eyes lit raw white as they came into contact with mine, as soon as I became certain that it was him – I began to shed a flood of tears. Phill remained silent while holding my hand. I felt the warmth from the palm of his hand, his hand held mine tightly as if he did not want to let go of me. His body was sending signals to mine – that everything will be alright. I felt at peace knowing that he was next to me – the entire time I was falling in and out of events. The room kept on changing colours, it turned from white to blue then it was yellow – an illusion of some sort. All this time Phill said no word and only spoke to me through touch. His touch reassured me that he wasn't going anywhere – a feeling I had not felt in a long time. By this time, it hadn't been long since Phill and I started vibing, but the feels he gave me that moment alone were more than a lifetime of feels I have ever shared with both my parents. For once in my life, I felt safe. It was the kind of feeling I had been missing my whole life, and it came from the last person I expected it from. To me, Phil was just another fuck buddy, to see him and feel him the way I did that day nearly killed me – it is one of the things that made me wet under the hospital blankets as I could not withhold my tears. As I held his hand in mine, I kept gasping and sighing while I was fighting so hard to prevent more tears from rolling out the corner of my

left eye. A long time after Phill had arrived, he softly uttered his first two words, “*how are you?*” His voice was calm and I could tell that he was really concerned about my well-being. Warm shivers blew inside my body as he spoke with me – it had been a while someone showed such concern about what was happening in my life. Phill’s voice pressed all the numbed feelings that I had decided to bury the time I left home. He evoked all the emotions I thought I had long detached myself from. His presence alone rebuilt my spirit and he did not even know it. I felt like if I told him what his presence meant to me, he would see me as a weak person. That for him it would be a victory because I had been neglecting him all this time. By this time I had done all I could to collect myself from breaking again emotionally. I looked at him with a fake smile, as a way of telling him I was okay. I was feeling the most terrible of pains I have ever felt in my chest – thinking of all the things I had done and said to Phill from the time we started sleeping together. Since the time Phill and I met for the first time, we kept seeing each more often – mostly just to have sex or to go to the gym together. He then kept asking me if I would like us to be an item. I played him because most times I did not know what I wanted. I must be honest, I liked having Phill around but at the same time I also wanted my freedom. So I dragged him along and gave him the false hope that one day we might be together – I told him we’ll take things slow until I figured what I really wanted. By doing this I knew he would stick around. As I was laying on that hospital bed with him beside my side I thought to myself, what have I done to deserve such a person? More than anything else and more than any physical pain I was feeling – I was mostly pained by his commitment to me even at a time I really did not deserve it. I kept on smiling just to signal my appreciation to him for being next to me. I gathered enough strength to keep the conversation going. How did you know I was here? I asked him, staring at him with my weak and sickly eyes. He let go of my hands and reached down beneath the chair next to my bed. He leaned towards his bag and took out my phone. *I was trying to call you all weekend and Zwai answered your phone. We met in town yesterday and he told me everything that happened. So I decided coming here would be the first thing I should do this morning,* he said while he was handing me my cell phone. Phill’s voice was calm throughout and not even once did I sense anger in his voice. I slowly mumbled with my lips saying, *thank you*, to which he replied by saying, *anything for you, anything*. I smiled sparingly not wanting to show the joy that filled my heart by hearing him say those words. He looked at me with his loving gaze and told me that he needed to go. Hearing him say that made my body cold, all things I was afraid of about being there started to come back. I knew if he left I would remain there alone wishing to die. As he stood up, I hung up tightly onto his hand, he grabbed my

hand with his second hand and asked me, *what's wrong?* I looked at him once and could not look at him for the second time. I looked down with my chin leaning against my chest. For the first time since I met Phill, I did not want him to leave. Yet it was still difficult for me to ask him to stay next me. I felt rejected even before he could say it. With both his hands, he shook the hand that I used to hung on to his, and asked for the second time, "*Muzi, I said what's wrong*". He let go of my hand and held me by my chin, he slowly lifted my chin up so I could face him directly eye-to-eye. When he noticed I was crying, he softly wiped my tears with his thumbs on both my cheeks and the third time he said, tell me what's wrong? I swallowed drops of my own tears as they slid right through my cheeks straight to the edges of my lips. In a bold and trembling voice I said, *please don't leave me here*, without taking any looking at him directly.

Part III – Thoughts

After spending three months at the hospital where I had gotten tired of smelling sick, dying bodies and a pool of pills – I was moved to the rehabilitation centre to receive help for my “condition”. No one wanted to say out loud what my condition was, not even myself. I had become a zombie that relied on tasteless hospital food and heavy medication to help me survive. Phill was there when I was moved from St Mark’s hospital to the rehab centre just across the street – he was part of the process. As soon as I was in the rehabilitation centre, it became home – there was not a better place I’d rather be than being there. I had not been home for a long time, with my parents and all my beloved. The world had become a hole and swallowed me to the deep ends – I had become a weak man. I had no hope that my situation would get better once I was released – or if it would worsen. I did not trust myself to take good care of the man I had become. I was spending my last few days at the centre so I had all the reasons to be happy but I wasn’t. Phill’s constant visits and support kept me sane. He had become a pillar of my gratitude to be alive. Alongside Phill’s pure love and support, was Gerald who kept checking up on me at least once a month. He was my boss at work, and one of the very few I trusted with drawing a positive image of life. The last time he came to visit was a month before I moved to the rehab centre, and he had told me he’ll come visit me two weeks before I am discharged to make sure that I’m ready to go back to work.

Time’s strength is to travel distances and cross borders while carrying multiple burdens on its shoulders. If there is one thing I admired about time, this would be it. This is one thing I envied the most about time – it went on fast while I kept scratching my mind for a sign to the next step, the next move. Time moved, while at the same time my life became stagnant. I wasn’t looking forward to see the fruits that the future held. I became barred in my own fear and succumbed to the desires of invisibility. I lost myself in the distance between here and there. I was caught in between the past and the future. I did not whether to give or take. In cases were I took, I never gave back. My own life was not serving me well I had become stuck. Even when the time for my departure from the centre was approaching at a snail’s pace, I was feeling more doubtful about the decency of life awaiting ahead. I got so tired of not belonging that even while I had a chance to belong I kicked and stepped on it with both

my feet. I'd stooped so low in my life such that I could not remember how it felt to be human. I waited days on end for the day where life would excite me – but I puked every time I tried to swallow a pinch of my own pride.

The day of his visit I woke up early just so I could clean myself. I wasn't really up to it – but I knew if he could see my hobo look he'd lose hope of me ever going back to work. I smelt of cigarette flavoured clothes with a watermelon flavoured breath from the bubble gum I was chewing that morning. Two weeks before my release I was thinking about a lot of things including where I would go to from that point in my life. I had not been to my place in almost six months – could the landlord have given my place to someone else? I could not stop asking myself these questions. For me, that moment was bitter – I did not know what the world had in store for me – though Phill had told me a couple of times that he would not mind helping me out however and whenever he could. *Where to from here? Where shall home be hereafter?* I asked myself these questions looking outside the window, like I would all the other days. Home – wherever that may be, I was missing that. I sat in that room alone and I could feel darkness infiltrating my stomach. I felt numb and sick, I immediately lost all the butterflies I used to get in my stomach when I thought of all things that used to excite me. My stomach has become home to my pain – a womb of suicidal thoughts.

The feeling of being given a second chance does not feel like you have been given a second chance. It feels like you have been given a slice of your life line on a silver platter to eat it at the dinner table. Second chances leave you with the feeling of reversal. You always wish that things were different – that the life you once had control of is no longer yours, but belongs to those who have given you a second a chance. The day I woke up on my hospital bed after the overdose, I had never stopped feeling bad about all the choices I have made in my life. It left me with a sense that I was no longer living my life for me, but for Phill, Gerald and all my beloved – and there was no way I could disappoint them.

My time at the rehab centre taught me a lot about home. I've always regarded home as the coconut house we lived in -- a four roomed shell filled with the devil's saliva. We were never at peace, even Sundays felt like hell. I would sing to the shell to let it swallow me to hide me

from those who were offended by the way I walked. Mother preferred to me to stay inside the coconut shell and not let myself be swallowed by the words of the evil ones. So, lying on that hospital bed, fighting for my life, felt like home. But this time I was willing to let go – I was willing to die. If it had not been for Phill next to me, holding my hand every step of the way. I would have walked slowly to the smoking area and let the cigarette smoke shadow me to death.

One of the task I was given in the rehabilitation programme was to write a letter to myself. I looked at the piece of paper in front of my eyes and started painting it with my tears. I called the facilitator to show him the nothingness that came out from the exercise. She looked at me and said, *we are getting somewhere*.

At times I wished I had died from the overdose incident. It felt good to feel nothing – my biggest failure in life was when I woke up from that hospital bed. I knew I had another long ride, another heavy wave to float on. I see nothing precious about the life that awaits me. It's only full of my writings where I scribbled in red asking for help, but no one listened.

Every morning before eight in the morning my phone would ring – I'd be angry and irritated. At times I'd ask, *what do people want from me?* The phone would continue ringing non-stop. One day the caregiver came into the room and my phone was ringing again. She asked me why I don't answer it. I looked at her with an angry with a falling face and told her to mind her business. She left gave me a glass of water and told me I shouldn't be closing people out of my life and she walked out. Her words stuck on my mind the entire time I was sitting in my room. I thought how could it be possible that I ought to open myself to a world that has never had space for me. Just as I finished drinking the glass of water, the phone rang again. I picked it up and on the other hand was Phill, he listened to my silence and irritation while saying only a few words here and there. From there on, we continued listening to each other's silent moments on the phone almost every day – Phill's silence on the phone was soothing. Just knowing that he was on the other side going through the journey with me gave me hope. If I didn't do it for me, I knew I had to do it for him.

The other day while in hospital fighting for my life, I got a call from my sister whom I had not spoken to in a long time. She did not know anything about my condition. Everyone else back home was as clueless. She started to stutter as she asked me how I was. I tried my all to sound normal so she would not notice that I was suffering. She was the only person I had contact with back home. I lifted my shoulder and cleared my throat properly so she would not notice that I wasn't well from the roughness of my voice. She told me that my dad had been fighting for his life at the local hospital back at home. She proceeded to tell me that 2 hours ago he lost his life due to a heart condition. I responded by telling her what a pity it was that he had lost his life and dropped the phone.

I could not feel for anything else during my time at rehab beyond what I was going through while inside there already. Being there made me realise how lonely life can be especially for someone whose family has rejected them due to being gay. When I left home I vowed to never go back there ever again – just like I do not plan on going back to rehab. But some day I knew I would have to return to see my little sister back home. Life wasn't as good after my dad passed on. I sat there alone wondering how I could possibly make things better for her. Feeling guilty of neglecting her, I decided to call her – I could hear from her voice that she was excited to speak to me. I told her though I would not make it for dad's funeral, I would make a chance to come see her once things became better on my side. She knew the pain I went through when my parents disowned me, and I appreciated her decency to not force me to come to the funeral – she remains my light, a glimpse of a better life – one I never had.

at times i replied to the train of music playing in mind - an imagination of thoughts telling me to do it, sometimes telling me to do it not. at times we flew without our wings - never knowing if we'd fall, but still we'd hope to land, safely. but last night it was all a different strain of feelings. a string of flashing thoughts that came and went. i never knew how i would tell you of my own passing - nor did i ever imagine how others would get to hear about my own death. i even imagined that by the time we realised we had to die, none of us would still be alive. that even if we are all dead, no one we feel the pain of hearing about the other's passing. but here, and there – you stood. you stood above a body that you once knew –telling everyone how you thought you would grow old next to it. how your thoughts and feelings

were closely aligned to it – like a string of dreams that never materialised. there – all i could hear was music, as my body lay in the cloud of darkness. different layers of my skin calling your name – with the songs of our forefathers as ambience to the scene. the music that could send me away to make sure none of the memories i moulded would ever be remembered. some which are dearly hidden in the core root of my now bleeding heart. it was the kind of music that had the command to make people forget the scars of a rotten past. there – where my body was found, there was stillness, memories flew to the west with the flow of the wind. there was silence, a melody of a dead body, which can no longer find its own beats – then there was me – a body that lay in a pool of death but at the same time the body that wanted to live and be alive.

they came and stood above my body with their mouths mum for they did not know my new name. they came to greet me and to take my spirit with them where they said it shall rest in peace. i never knew peace, i was surely not going to find it in my grave. they called me using names of my forefathers – people whose names i can longer recall – not even as i was making my way to a place they were known to have been occupying. i was making my way to them through death. they came to beg me to leave with them – to follow in their footsteps, even though they knew i did not know where the road would lead us. these people, who called themselves my people, they came and said they had come to take me home. they spoke with my spirit for it to remember its way back home. on their shoulders they hung blankets of different colours – some brown and others black, to signal to the world the news of my horrible departure. they spoke to me, and i could not speak back – for i did not want to travel back home with them – wherever that was. they had come not because of love – shame had brought them here. this was their plan to mend together pieces of a shredded past. the people that abandoned me had come to collect my spirit – to take me home. wherever that was, but i was not willing to go with them. i had found home in my own death, and it was beautiful.

every time when i looked into your eyes i saw my own pain through your cries. but today i see you stand above my body that lay near your feet -- a body that cannot smell your dirty feet, a body that lay in stillness, a body without a name. this body could not move but could still feel eclipses of your heavy shadow standing over it -- questioning everything that went wrong because it could never go right. this body lay near your toenail breathing ashes from

the sun. not craving for when it will be awake, but it lay motionless without fear trembling inside. it is my body that lay near your feet, it is my body that you could not recognise before your eyes. with all the truth bared before the balls beneath your lashes -- it is you who still does not want to believe that my body had died -- that it will no longer say "hello" to you ever again. at times i thought i would not do what my thoughts wanted me to do. but today, my body has swallowed me. i lay in silence never knowing when my name will be called.

upon arrival to the graveyard – they sang in celebration of a life once lived. they watched with their eyes full of white lies as my body became one with the soil from which it was made. they hid the body beneath the soil – so it could never raise to power ever again. many of the mourners cried for a life that was beautifully lived. a story once told was now folded into fading memories. my life had reached the final stage – where the value of death was the same as the value of life itself. the air, the water and the red sand were all becoming one with my body. my grave became my name, a reminder that I was no longer fulfilled with life. this was a place where those who sought to find me were sent as proof of my exit. my life and my story were written on glossy stones, a site of grief not even a lazy eye could miss. the world never deserved my existence – a flood of stories never told. i did not know such days would exist – that a crown of death was being measured on my head. On that day, they all came -- each one with a story of how they knew me – a parade of sad memories. they sang but my body would never wake.

One day I decided to take a flight. To take a break from this kind of life – a life of lies sprinkled with fake love. I wanted to dive right into the hot waters running below the Earth's surface, and experience a new way to breathe. I wanted to scribble my name in the green waters deep beneath the land of my forefathers, then I will rewrite it in ways which no longer carry tons of past sins of unrighteousness. I want to paint my name with new colours of a raging dawn. To hear tomorrow screaming new promises that behold my love.

One day I wanted to get out of my own body. I wanted to jump into the life that was unknown to me. to feel the pleasures of being new, to be a visitor that came to seek true love. I want to have people sing when they hear my name. to get rid of the sighs and sins which my name bears without fear and doubt. I want to be stripped naked and raw, so my flesh can

remember the smell of being human again. I want to dance in the true colours of nature, and feel myself as I am cleansed pure of my old ways.

Once up on a time I wanted to run for my own spirit – to let it be pure -- to fuel my joyfulness about life again. To let the cup of life overflow. I could no longer bear my soul being inside me – I wanted all the demons stripped out of my flesh. I wanted my fats to stand bare and tell of the stories of my sufferings.

One day I then jumped off from the top of a cliff – and felt the heavy air elevate me to what felt like my new life. I released my spirit and flew into the cloudy breeze that filled the sky. I flew away from the life I knew – the one that could suffocate me till my own death. I felt myself entering a new body – the kind that made me feel cleansed, it's the one I've been longing for.

One day I sat on my own and looked myself in the mirror. How could a life wrongfully lived be reversed to its inception? To amend all the wrongs that have occurred thus far. I felt new yet my thoughts still gathered dirt from my past. Can I be fully cleansed? If so, at what cost? One day I was floating above the sea and felt my dreams piercing out of my body and I knew there was no way I could make it to my destination. I opened my eyes to see if I was still above sea waters. Then I felt my bones burning in a blazing fire. The whole of me turned into ashes which slowly disappeared across the sea. I felt myself being forgotten -- that is why I wanted to remember where I was, but I couldn't. As I began collecting my thoughts to paint a perfect picture of where I belonged, I had already hit the ground. If you want to remember me, look at the sea water, my spirit is floating away with the waves.

i had already made peace with the fact that my parents didn't want me.

i had to make peace with the fact that the world had rejected me.

there was no other choice but to move on to the next chapter of my life.

which also did not have many pages into it.

all i could see were blank pages of where my story should have been written.

i needed to move to a different place.

to let mercy rewrite my life.

i packed my bags one day and got onto a bus and moved to East London.

a city i had never been to before.

i was ready to let go of my fears and see what this grey life had to offer.

there were no dreams that the palm of my hand had gathered.

my neck got stiff with memories i wanted to forget.
up on my arrival – i had no one to call my own.
the world had become a dumping site.
i asked a friend of mine to fetch me from the bus stop.
she told me she was on her way. i felt bad bothering her, but this had to be done.
from her voice i could tell she was really surprised to hear that i was around.
i got off the bus and left all the embarrassment i could feel under the seat i had occupied on
the bus.
i waited in anguish like i had killed a priest
this didn't make me feel bad at all because i knew i had killed my own father who was a
pastor and never got caught.

I watched the tail of time hiding behind the moon. The many years I have spent in silence
were not close to the amount of pain I have ever felt in my life. I shook my head disagreeing
with how my memory had disobeyed me. I took a glimpse into the future, and realised that
the universe was speaking a different language to that of mine. My road was not pure,
therefore my sins could never have been cleansed – not even by a bottle brandy offered to the
ancestors as an apology.

I started telling people that I was sick every time they asked what was wrong with me.
Physically I was well. It was the spirit that had issues – it had died. The issues were taking a
toll on my body. I would wake up with a sharp pain in my chest. Like secretes had piled up in
there. I plunged off my thoughts like a car jumping off a bridge. I took time to listen to what
my body had to say. For some reason I felt like it was too late. I could feel my spirit leaving
the shell that my body was made of. I tried to listen again and all I could hear was Marley's
music playing at the back of my eardrum. I knew if I didn't collect myself there and there, I
could be at the verge of losing my life. I could hear my heart telling me to stop – I heard it
asking so many questions – most of which I did not have answers to. The coming of death
was close enough and I could feel it. I heard some people singing sad songs. Some I could
remember from the time I was young. Others my mother used to sing to me after church. The
church songs gave me a fright, they are usually sung when there is death, and I didn't want to
die.

The other day Joe and I were lying on the single bed I owned since moving from home. He had come to visit me. As friends, we would normally lie next to each other while pilling the room with a smell of beer and awkward conversations. This day was different. I felt him longing for my presence. Each time I kept moving away to give him enough space to sit next to me, but on this day, Joe wasn't looking for "enough space", he just wanted to be closer to me. He kept on closing the space between the two of us by coming too close to me – as if he wanted to cuddle. It was like being there in the room with him was not already sufficient. He leaned back to look at me directly with both his feet on the ground. He sat with his back facing towards the entrance, blocking all the light that was coming in from the tiny holes of the main door. He pulled a chair that stood in the middle of the room closer to him next to the bed where he was seated. Our conversation started fading as he was busy making himself feel comfortable. The way he was staring at me you could swear he wanted to sex me with his eyes. I battled with my thoughts to not be oversensitive and tried to remain calm. He slightly tilted his waist side way to the left – his back was no longer just facing the direction of the entrance, he had created a whole roof with his entire body as it hung over my head. All I could think of, was how fresh his breath smelled even though he was drinking beer. His entire body had now occupied the air that I breathed. He lowered his voice as he spoke right into my face. Just as I was slightly drowning heavily into sleep as our conversation was starting to stagger. He lifted his right arm and brushed me slowly all over my face, breaking the knots in my beards. He told me how beautiful my skin was – something I already known so it didn't come as a complement. He shook my brain when he started telling me how good it was that he was touching me this way. He said it made him feel different. My penis became an electrical wire that was running on high voltage. I tried to hide my excitement because I took this as a friendship gesture. Another part of me did not want him to stop. I kept quiet, finding it hard to swallow the lustful saliva that began to fill my mouth as he gently rubbed me across my neck. I don't know what it is about his touch that drowned me even further into sleep. But I was still aware of what was happening. A feeling I had not felt in a long time until that moment. Round and round his fingertips went all over my face. At some point even grabbing the fatty tissue behind my neck. A feeling that made me feel like I was walking in heaven on stilettos. I let my head lie low and gave the rest of my body to him – I wanted him to do with it as he pleased. Then for a moment the movement of his fingers on my body came to a sudden stop. I opened my eyes and saw him pulling out a cigarette from the cigarette box

that was on top of the counter. On his way back to the bed where he was seated, he lit his cigarette and told me there's something he wanted to tell me. I flipped my body as I was lying in bed with my stomach – to lie with my back with my face facing him and my eyes staring straight in his eyes. I wanted to hear all that he was going to tell me. He took a pull from the ciggy he had on his hand and blew the smoke towards my direction covering up my entire face. He gave me a gentle smile and slid his right hand beneath the t-shirt I was wearing. He rubbed me softly, even getting closer to touching my penis with his elbow as he leaned on my stomach with his elbow. He kept giggling the entire time while I was drowsy from the pleasure he hand was giving me. After sometime I felt a sharp pinch from his elbow and screamed “ouch”. He looked at me at to confirm that he was hurting me on purpose. To look at him in this situation, gave me pleasure. He stared, with the most loving eyes I have ever seen and said, “Just wait until you see what I can do to you.”

Mo had always wanted to dress up like a girl. It's been his fantasy since he was a child. On some occasions when he was young he would lock himself up in his parents' bedroom and dress himself up with his sister's clothes. The ecstatic feeling he got from borrowed robes made him feel special. He would turn his brown cheeks pink using his mother's lipstick. His alter ego gave him all the confidence he needed to conquer the world. Mo had always wanted to live his best life. He made no excuses. No one could tell him anything, not even his mother. The both of them got along really well, it was his father that was a problem. For some reason, he did not approve of the way Mo chose to live his life. The day he was sent to further his studies after passing matric, was the day he felt liberated – that he could now be himself.

Weekends and nights out were his favourite game. He really excelled in his work and used the night life as a way to escape the “real” boring world – or perhaps to find himself. His room was colourful and full of life – decorated with various books, some he had been collecting since he was young. He knew a lot more about his sexuality than people from his village. He also knew that it would not be that easy for them to accept him – just like his father. He was into flowers and preferred cheap clothes. He worked hard for every penny he had. So he had a good way of spending his hard earned cash. Even when he was out and about on the streets with his friends, he wouldn't consume a lot of alcohol – he just went out to be in touch with a better version of himself. Everywhere he went, he carried his mother's love and advice with him. Always telling his friends to always take care of themselves. His

mother once told him about how hypocritical people can be – that he needed to choose wisely who he preferred to open up to. This was something Mo carried with him throughout his ways – until the day he was found lying in a pool of blood – with his red broken stilettos next to him by the side of the road.

Before I was taken back to rehab, I had vowed I'd never set my foot there again. But then again, what is home without a mother? Since her passing I haven't been well. I do not know where home is. The scent at the rehab centre is the only closest thing to her memory. See, mother was nurse, for some reason, I felt like being there, at the centre would be the easiest way for her to find me – meanwhile I was losing myself. I've sat here a countless times waiting for her, but mother never came. As I am writing this, I am still here, inside these walls, waiting!

PORTFOLIO

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Introduction

This portfolio of evidence consists of a body of reflective work that indicates my learning curve during the MA Creative Writing (MACW) course. I have divided the portfolio into different sections in which I indicate the impact of the readings I have uncouncted – and give a flashback of how my writing has improved over the period of the course. It also includes commentary on moments which have impacted my writing style and how all this has contributed to the way I view the writing fraternity as a whole, and what position(s) I would like to occupy within the field. Furthermore, in this portfolio, there is a section of reflective journals where I talk about my writing journey by creating a link between my writing and that of other authors – in order see how my style has been influenced by those who have more experience. Secondly, there is also a section where I report on the writing and reading workshops that I held as part of fulfilling the requirements of the MACW course. Following this, is the third section, whereby I review three books that were some of my favourites during my reading research project. These books appealed to me because of their writing styles, use of language and their focus on queer literature and identities. A detailed discussion is found in the reviews' section of this portfolio. Lastly, is the poetic essay where I discuss my stance about how I view writing and which direction I see appropriate to use, particularly for the kind of work I want to produce. The aim of this portfolio therefore, is to document by offering substantial evidence, the journey of my writing since being part of the MACW course.

Reflections: Editing your own work/ the importance of editing

The seminar presented by Ronelda and Nathan was based on editing. I really enjoyed the conversation on how seriously one – especially the author – should take the editing process. One of the things that stood out for me was the fact that – any writer should consider editing as an important task of the writing process. This is because as a writer, the work that you produce should be able to reflect a positive and professional image of yourself – and thus, the work itself. By this I mean that, since the work will be speaking for itself in the absence of the writer, the readers must be able to engage with it in a way that fully represents the effort that the author has put in.

In this journal, I want to reflect specifically on three components of the editing process which I found to be useful for me. First thing being the introduction to the world of editing. In this regard, I was simply drawn in by the discussion on why one should make sure that their work is edited and what is the importance of this process. During the discussion in the seminar, I realized that, editing is a very crucial task that can also drag for some time. To edit your work as a writer means that you care about the quality of the work you produce and how it is received. It also means that you as a writer respect the audience which you are targeting. It makes the writer think about the kind of message that is communicated to the reader and how this message is packaged. In this instance, I see editing as a way in which the writer aims to package the text for the reader. This is because a well edited text can create a lasting impression on the mind of the reader.

Secondly, the people that are involved or should be involved in the editing process are people that the writer should be able to trust. This section is something I valued the most during the discussions. This is due to the fact that, a lot of people think that the task of editing solely depends on the editor. I have therefore learned in this seminar that, the editing process begins with the writer. Is it important that as a writer you first edit your own work before even sending it to the editor. This saves time as the editing process can be very lengthy, thus by editing your work before sending it out, allows the editor to work on minimal errors as the majority of the work has been looked at by the writer. Also, when you edit your own work you make it a point that the message that you are trying to send is clearly stipulated. The editing process at times can be very excruciating to such an extent that the writer feels like their voice has been taken out. Editing over and over again, gives the writer enough time to think carefully about the way they want their views to be taken.

There are also a variety of ways through which this can be done. As discussed in the seminar, you can start by asking someone you really trust to look at your work. This can be someone you are related to, like your sister, or even a friend. This person must be someone who can give you an honest opinion of your work. In this way, you as a writer, are opening yourself up to scrutiny and critics who will be giving you an honest opinion. Though it was also argued that having someone else to look at your work can be a daunting experience, it was also argued that, it is highly advisable that one tries to get themselves used to having their work reviewed by others so that they can be able to understand how their work is understood by others. The usefulness of this process is that, as a writer, you can be able see what works and what doesn't work in your text, even way before the editor sees your work.

Thirdly and lastly, is the discussion on the kind of relationship that one needs to have with their editor(s). A positive and healthy relationship makes it easy for both the writer and the publishers to meet publishing deadlines. If the relationship is not that great, it can pose threats on the progress on the writer and sometimes might even discourage the writer. I have also noted that it is useful for the writer to choose an editor that understands their work and area of specialization. Being edited by some who knows you better and is also knowledgeable in the area you are interested in as a writer, makes it possible to produce a work of good standard.

Editing can be a tedious process and thus writers need to be hands on in this process. At times it leads to tension and misunderstandings between those involved. But the writer must always think about the quality of work that they seek to produce. Writing is a very subjective and personal process, and editing can sometimes be harsh on the feelings of the author, but I have learned that, it always helps to look on the positive side, and think about the effect that editing will have on your work.

Writing desire

The seminar presented by Mishka was based on writing desire or writing about desire. This I found to be a very interesting topic as it is a subject that is multi-layered. It is multi-layered in the way that writing about desire is viewed differently by people and therefore writers approach it differently. Through the class discussion, it was argued that, while writing about desire might look like an easy task, it needs a lot of consideration and proper planning before the writer takes on the task. I have learnt that writing about desire is not easy because writers can easily fall into the trap of writing about love and longing a cliché.

I have learnt therefore that, as a writer, when writing about desire you need to have a different mindset that will enable you to write things that have not been written before and stuff that has not been said before. This is something that is not easy to do, it needs one to be very aware of the fact that desire is a topic that has been written about, and writers tend to fall into the trap of saying things that have been said before.

A perfect example is when people write about love and relationships. When writers attempt to write about love and relationships, the focus is mostly on the descriptive nature of love which tends to be a cliché. I have therefore found two ways of attempting to write about desire without falling into the trap hole of being boring and re-writing what has been said or written about before.

Firstly, I looked at love or desire as a journey. This therefore enabled me to not only look at the writing of desire in a descriptive way, but to write about the journey that one goes through that when they desire someone or something. In this way, I am not just describing desire, but I am adding colour in my writing by talking about it as a journey. For me, desire is a journey – a journey with different stages – different challenges. Because all these components of desire I have mentioned are different from person to person, they enable me to reflect on my own journey which is different from that of the next person.

Secondly, I looked at desire as a drive or motive. When we desire something or someone, it makes us behave in a certain way and causes us to do certain things. Also in this regard, the motives or drive which emanate from our desires are different. So by focusing on these different lived experiences offers a unique point of departure from which my writing can be based on.

When attempting the task, we were given in the seminar, of writing about desire. I began by trying to focus on things and experiences which will make my writing unique. I therefore became interested in adding texture and detail in my experiences in a way that will make my writing meaningful and easy to understand.

My reading research for the week was also something which I found interesting and new. I read an anthology titled *Black, Brown, & Beige: Surrealist Writings from Africa and the Diaspora* edited by Franklin Rosemont and Robin D. G. Kelley. This anthology of surrealist revolution has opened a new world to me. As a writer who is interested in portraying the realist perceptions of the world, this anthology has taught me a way of balancing the two worlds of realists with that of surrealists.

Though I have a strong tie and interest with the realist movement, the surrealist has offered me new ways of looking at life and the things I am interested in writing about. Therefore, as a result, I am looking at ways in which I can navigate between the two and applying their influence in my writing. The works that I came across in this anthology helped me understand the application of the surrealist approach in writing. *Tenebrous* and *Black Rose* are two pieces of writing that about love. They approach love in a different way and form. They talk about the blackness and the shadow of love which is something different than the way other writers usually approach when writing about love. This different and new way of talking about famous and general topics is something I find intriguing and very useful in making my own writing very different.

Poetics

The seminar on poetics for me was a useful one in many ways. Firstly, it introduced me to a work of different authors and how they view writing. This opened my eyes to the fact that there is no one single dominant or conventional way of writing. It only depends on what the author is trying to achieve with their work. In this regard, I am of the view that in my writing I need to be able to find language that enables me to talk about the kinds of the subjects that I often find myself about. Initially, I thought that there is only one way of presenting my writing by simply allowing it to mirror the real. And this idea of the real is what I initially wanted to write about – by looking at things as they happened in my life and as they happen to and around the people I am close with/to.

In this regard, what the poetics seminar introduced me to, was the idea that there is no single way of telling the truth. And that there is also no single truth. This means that, though I want to write about the things I have experienced. I must not only think that the way I was used to – when it comes to writing – is actually the only way of writing about my experiences. With this being said, once I understood where I want to be in terms of my writing and what I wanted to write about and from which position, this helped to have a better approach to how I was going to structure my long essay on poetics and thus in the process foregrounding the ideas of writing from experience as my main argument in the essay.

Additionally, while I am also thinking about writing the real in the way I know it – and the way I know how. During the poetics seminar I came across readings which discussed the way to go about it in doing so. For example, Bell Hooks talks about the difficulty she encounters in trying to find the language to write about the subjects she wants to write about. So this gave me thinking about how as a second speaker of the English language – which is the language I tend to write about – how do I make this language work for me and perhaps use it to its fullest potential. I am well aware that this is the area that I am currently struggling with. But through constantly reading and writing more often, I am finding myself to be in a space where I can be able to use this language in a way that enhance my writing. How I do this is by making sure that I stay away from writing from a more ordinary way and strive towards showing my emotion in my writing. Though this is a difficult thing at times, as in most case I would run out of words that can mirror the true essence of my emotions – the reading process has enabled to grasp and play with a wide range of vocabulary in order to see

how I can use it for my own benefits. This area or challenge in my writing is something I am still very much willing to explore in my writing.

Secondly, what the seminar taught me is to investigate the idea of categorizing authors into certain boxes – to say – one is an African author or perhaps what constitute African literature. Many discussions around this topic came across during this week long seminar. The like of Taiye Selasi and Chinua Achebe have also had their say on the topic. But what I have learnt through interacting with their views is that – the most important thing that we should rather view as important in writing is the position or the point of departure of the need and the desire of the writing itself – and focus on where it (the urge to write) comes from rather than where the author is from. This is because I believe that the true essence of what embodies our wiring is our experience. It does not matter which part of the world we are from – or which part of the world we occupy in this particular moment, but what matters are the lived experiences which move us enough to find the courage to have something to write about.

To understand the above mentioned issue has enabled me to not worry with the issue of categorizing myself and say I will write from the position of being a black writer or an African writer – though at first I was tempted to do so. But letting go of that burden enables me as a writer to tap into spaces that I would have not gone to had I categorized myself according to a certain box or a certain label. In this case, I follow the views of Phillip Zhuawo, who stresses out the point that he does not write for the man in the street, but rather prefers to write for himself. In this regard, I attempted to write and focus on the areas that some writers prefer to stay away from in my long essay. Areas and subjects that I myself was not that comfortable in writing about. This includes exploring issues of identity, sexuality such a queerness in my writing. These are the things I want to write about which at times frighten people or make them feel uncomfortable. But through the seminar on poetics. I have attempted thought the suggestion from my lecturers said that I should let this issue come out more as I do not make it more explicit.

Lastly, what I found useful in this seminar is the discussion on who the writer should be writing for. In this regard, I am almost tempted to say that I want to write for a specific audience, people who will love what I have to say. But then again, I have also learnt that, what I write about might be rejected by others because it does not move them. What I have therefore decide to do is to view my writing as some kind of an experiment. Where I

navigate between different styles and forms, but not with the aim to please anyone but myself. In the process, if however anyone falls in love with what I do – that will be a bonus.

Writing About Place/Space

The seminar for this week was based on writing about place/space and writing about the self. This involved going through the work of different writers who have written about places, bodies, the self and spaces in a variety of ways. What I enjoyed the most during the seminar was seeing how some of these authors we were introduced to tackled the issue of writing about the self. The reason I find this part interesting is because I have discovered that as an author, I want to write about the self. But in doing so, I want to find ways which will enable me to do this in a very interesting way.

By interesting I mean, to write about the self in ways that are different. This realisation came to me when we were given a task by the facilitator to write about what we see when we look at ourselves in the mirror. Through this task, I realised that there is so much that my body wants to say to me, and for the longest of time I have not been listening. This task therefore gave me the skill to listen to what the self – the body – my body – wants to say to me. In addition, I want to use that as my power and strength as an author. My body is always reacting to things, and those reactions and feelings are what I want to write about.

This task, I decided to approach it differently. Often at times when I think of myself or my body, I cannot help it but to see those who came before me. A lot of times I have been told that I look like my mother, while some people say I look like my paternal grandmother. So in this task of writing about what one sees in the mirror, I decided to portray that/those kind of identity/(ies). Which reflect the generations that look like me, and generations which the image of my body carries.

The people that I see when I look at my body or at myself in the mirror, are those who have passed on like my mother and my grandmother. So this task/seminar has also opened ways which enabled me to write about the dead in ways which are new to me. I have since figured a way of writing about the experiences I have had with such people as if they are still alive. This comes from the feeling that, because they are mirrored in my image, therefore I do not see them as dead, but as people/souls who live through me. As a result, this that I have learned in this seminar, is something I would like to explore in my thesis.

Even in my reading research, I have had to explore with writers who write about death, sacrifice and other aspects of life in very interesting ways. One such author who does this is Ayi Kwei Armah. In his novel *Fragments*, Armah writes about things and particularly people

whom we have lost. He says that each and everything thing that goes away eventually makes its way back to where it is from. Even the bodies of the dead can be seen in that way, they are never gone forever, but rather come back in one way or another. What I appreciate about Armah, is the fact that he leaves it open to an individual to decide whether to believe this to be the true or not. And in my own experience, I believe that the souls of the ones we have lost, have a way of manifesting themselves in the bodies of those who are left behind. Hence it is my belief that the souls of my late mother and grandmother, are not totally lost, but they live through me. And I see it as my responsibility as an author to reflect their images and tell their stories when I write about myself or my body.

In addition, the task also required us to write a place where we are right now, and indicate how this place evoke our senses and emotions. In this task, I decided to write about the Grahamstown monument building and how that side of the city is different from the location. In the feedback group, the facilitator indicated that often than not, when authors write about social life and social ills – it is very easy to fall into the trap of creating narrative spectacles, and my piece has a potential of falling into that trap too. This is something that I have also been interested in discussing to such an extent that I made an effort to talk about in my long essay. While I understand the fear of falling into this trap, this does not change how I as the writer, see and interpret the things and the world around which are part of my social life. But at the same time, I want my work to not over dramatize these social ills, hence I have decided to pay great attention to it.

The way I have addressed it was to read Joel Matlou's *Life at Home and Other Stories*. In this collection of short stories, the author dwells greatly in to his life, poverty and some of the social ills that he experienced in his childhood as a boy. In the short story *Life at Home*, Matlou documents these aspects of his social life in very simple terms and I must say it does not feel like he is creating a narrative spectacle around these issues. So in my rework of the task, I have decided to attempt to do the same thing. So all in all, this seminar has greatly influenced how I think about my writing and what I would like to explore with in my thesis.

Writing the body

The seminar in this week by Stacy Hardy focused on writing about body. This seminar for me was an extension of last week's seminar of writing about space/place with Kerry. The reason for this is because I find the body to be an interesting place or space in which the writer can write about. The body also occupies certain spaces in which influence how the body feels. These spaces that the body occupies such as the home, hospitals, work place and others, can cause the body to react in a certain way and experience certain feelings. It is therefore through writing (though writing is not the only way) that the true meaning of these feelings can be fully expressed.

The other thing that I found to be interesting in the seminar of writing about is the ways of expressing myself thoroughly. In the exercise that we were given of writing about body, the teacher Stacy Hardy mentioned that the task has also equipped me with using a poetic technique in my prose writing. This she says, has been able to help me create very strong images in what I am writing about and this is something I can exploit to my advantage. I could also actually feel that my writing was getting better, especially when I use my poetic voice in writing prose pieces.

The other thing that I feel like is working for me is the fact that I still continue to reading poetry works in my reading research. This ideas of reading prose has a way of making my work stronger than it usually is. Just because I am in the prose writing group does not mean that I should abandon my poetry interests, especially when I can see what is it doing for my as writer.

For my reading research this week, I read Mzi Mahola's *Strange Things*. This collection of poems has enabled me to think broadly about how I must approach my writing process. Mahola in this collections uses great images to describe things he talks about in his poems. Mostly, I like him when he creates images of places or nature. When he describes for example places Hogsback or mountains. He describes such places in a way that gives a reader a full picture of the places as if they had seen them.

This style and technique is something I want to learn to use more in my own writing. As it has been evident in my writing of this week, the teacher has been able pick it up and notice it. For this week's seminar is truly something I would like to implement in my final thesis. As I

have said in my last reflective journal, that the body has a lot to say, and I am willing to learn and find ways of listening to it.

Experiences in narratives

Seminar ten dealt with writing about experiences which form part of the author's lives. The seminar began with the teacher, Fundile Majola, prompting the writers to think about what are their sources for their writing. Then the authors responded with different answers stating where their writing stems from. What was interesting to me was that, in each response it was evident that the writers wrote from a subjective position, from their own way of seeing the world and things around them.

The teacher then also alluded to the fact that, as writers; our writing includes a part of our lives. But then for every author, it depends on their own style in terms of how they want to put that on paper. As writers, we sometimes tend to tap into our own experiences when we write, and at times, we may alter the way we tell the story as if the writer is not part of it.

This for me was something worth experimenting with, and I have been doing so. What I have come to understand about my own style is that, though it may be greatly influenced by things that I have experienced, I make it a point that I write in a way that will not make it obvious that the idea come from my own experiences.

In addition, Fundile also suggested that in writing from our experiences, it is not really a must to narrate the story as it happened as at times this can be boring. And at times this is often linked to the conventional way of writing. What he suggests writers to do, is to employ different and new forms and styles of writing when writing from their own experiences. For example; even though one is writing from one's experience, they can write about in a surrealist way or in a fairy-tale-like way so as to distance themselves from the writing.

What really made me excited about this seminar, is the idea of recognising experience as a point of departure in one's writing. This is the idea I strongly argued for in my long essay, and I must say that it was really refreshing to be in a seminar that dealt specifically with this topic. And what other writers are doing when they are writing about their own experiences.

In my reading research for this week, I read *Semiotext(E): SF*. I encountered Bruce Sterling's short story *we see thing differently*. In this story, what stood out for me are the descriptions of places, people and things that Sterling writes about in this story. In the first opening

paragraph, he describes America by using very powerful images that shows the reader of what kind of nation it is. By doing so, he already paints a picture by using historical moments which depicts the position America holds in the world and how American view themselves.

The characters Sterling uses in this story are described in a way that makes it easy for the reader to picture them in their minds. Sterling uses almost a poetic voice in his writing which flow nicely and uses powerful images in creating scenery. Sterling's rich vocabulary enables him to do an extraordinary job in telling a beautiful story. The vocabulary attracted me so much, and I believe that the more I read I adapt to using such tools which will help me improve my own writing.

In the assignment that we were give this week, I made it my mission to use descriptions and vocabulary that assists me in creating the images that I want to create. Though I still kept my language simple, I also employed and experimented with using images that I have never used before, and I think this helped me strengthen my own writing.

Writing and re-writing death

The seminar on writing and re-writing death was an interesting one, yet at the same time it was a difficult one. It is interesting firstly because it has offered me with an opportunity to look at different ways through which other authors approach death in their own writings. It also offered something new, that is, how to add humour when one is writing about death. Because the notion of death is something that is heavy in its own right, adding humour or writing about it a light manner may offer the writers with a variety of devices/tools that they can use in approaching this heavy subject. Secondly, the seminar was a difficult one because it required us to dig deep into our own emotions and think about how we felt when we lost someone or something which we valued in our own lives. So the re-visiting of those emotions was something that was challenging about this seminar.

The way I have attempted in order to try and get over this challenge was to approach the writing/re-writing about the death of a loved one in light manner. Though I create a sense of feeling throughout my assignment. I tried to make sure it does not sting to the reader. This I have done by using a child's voice throughout the piece.

Writing about sex is not so much of a big deal

In seminar twelve we have learnt about writing about sex. Writing about sex is something some authors like to experiment with, but there are also still other writers who find it difficult to venture into the topic about sex. Through this seminar, I found out that some people/writers, find sex as a taboo thing to engage in. throughout the seminar, some of the writers were very tense when it came to talking about sex. Majority of people still have the mentality that sex is a topic that only older people are allowed to engage in.

In the prose group for example, some writers are older and others regard themselves as introverts and cultural oriented. The social values they hold in terms of talking and approaching sex, do not allow them to be that open. So what I found interesting about this aspect, was to find out how they will tackle the task of writing about sex. This therefore also gave me a chance to think how I would prefer to write about sex in my works.

In trying to think of a way of writing about sex. I decided to focus on writing about in a simple and straight forward way – that is to be blatant about it and use simple language and call things what they are. In doing so, this makes my writing hit the reader on the face, while at the same time the simple language I use enables the reader to find the text as an easy going kind of text.

This style of writing is what I have encountered in my reading research. For this week I read *Strange Things Sometimes Still Happen* edited by Angela Carter. What I like about this collection of fairy tales is the simplicity of the way in which the stories are written. Different stories at times are written in a similar fashion, this creates a sense of expectation when one reads these fairy tales, because they are told in familiar ways.

What I also enjoyed in this seminar is the introduction to the different categories of writing about sex. The first one is writing about sex metaphorically – where the writers is not blatant enough in mentioning things, they would rather use metaphors to refer to things which have to do with sex. Secondly, it is the blatant way of writing about sex – which as I have indicated in the beginning is the category I decided to experiment with in my assignment. The third one is a reflective manner of approaching sex writing – where the characters are the ones reflecting on something that happened during the time they were having sex. This is usually more prominent when the writing involves young characters. The fourth one is the violent approach to writing about sex – where the sex itself is a scene depicting violence.

Finally, there is an unexpected approach to writing about sex – in this case, the sex is usually unexpected. This could be risky, as the reader at times may find the unexpected sex seen as a shocking experience because it was not expected. In this case, if a writer would like to experiment with this kind of approach in writing about sex, they need to find a perfect reason to do so.

In writing about sex now and in the future. I want to write the unfamiliar things not usually seen. I want to venture into homo-romantic experiences that mirror lives of gay people. I want to write about how such experiences are often seen as not fitting into today's conversations – I want my writing to open up a space where such experiences can be shared and talked about.

In conclusion, writing about sex can require a lot from the writer. This is because the experience the reader must find needs to be reasonable enough or close to reality enough for the reader to relate. But with this being said, it does not mean that the writers must not venture into new ways of writing about sex – which mirror the experiences of the modern society we live in.

Writing in community workshop and how to write reviews

This seminar was to give us a guideline on how one should prepare for a writing workshop. The second part of the seminar was to outline to the writers what steps they need to follow in preparing for the reading of their own work.

To begin, I would like to start reflecting on the free writing workshop that we have been asked to organise. While this might seem like an easy and a light task to undertake, there are a lot of things that need to be considered. For example, I have learnt that the target audience for your workshop must be people who understand the aim of that the task. They must also be made to understand the effectiveness of free writing. The person giving the workshop (in this case me), needs to be wary of certain things that can be done in such a workshop and things that cannot be done at all. For example, since the audience might comprise of people who are doing this free writing task for the first time, it is important that when you work with such people, you start small. For example, you can start by limiting the amount of time the audience members are expected to produce some writing in to a minute or so. Then as they proceed, you can slightly increase time limit.

It is also important to make it known to the participants that they do not have to read what they have written if they feel they are not ready to do so. Also, you can give the participants some prompts that they may use in triggering their writing. While this might be useful, it is also always important to not ask the participants to write about things that are too personal as some of them can have a break down during the sharing. It is therefore advised that one must try by all means to keep the exercise as fun as possible.

Secondly, with the reading group, I have learnt that it is always important that one starts with a small group. A small group for someone who does not have experience when it comes to reading their work to a large group is a great way to start. Then once one is used to reading to small groups, they can target larger groups. If possible, ask the people for feedback if they feel like they want to say something, but it is advisable that you do not force people to talk even when they are not willing to talk.

During this seminar, we were also asked to look for three reviews that have been written by others. These reviews were brought to class where we had to discuss what they liked about the reviews. The first review was of a book called *Two Weeks in November* by Douglas Rogers. The disappointing thing about this review is that it was done by the author

itself. This makes it seem as if the author was pushing some kind of a marketing strategy for the book. On another side, I liked the idea of getting to see how the author came about in writing the book. The project was meant to be about the journey that Douglas took with his friends when the coup of Robert Mugabe took place, as a result the focus of the book quickly changed. Two reviews that were my outmost favorite include a book review of the book titled *Afropean* by author Johny Pitts and the review is written by Colin Grant, and second one is of a book titled *The House of Tshatshu* by authors Anne Mafer and Phiko Jeffrey Velelo with the review written by Hazrel Friedman. Both these review outline the context of the story so as to set the reader scene and tone of the book to the reader. The reader then goes to the book with a sense of excitement without really exposing the details of the story.

Lastly, we were asked to do searches of online publication which we find interesting. The one that stood out for me was the Brittle Paper, for its appealing look and feel especially in attracting young writers. I find the content to be fresh and constantly updated which appeals to me. The fact that they do not focus only on well-known writers also drew me to it. The platform given to young and upcoming writers is something I view as progress and refreshing as it opens door to young people who spend majority of their time online.

Beckett and monologues

The seminar was on Beckett's use of monologues. The seminar focused on how one can write monologues that are both interesting and unique like Beckett. To do this, one has to pay attention to a number of things.

The first thing users of language that enables one to use vocabulary that captures the emotion and state of being of the narrator. In writing monologues, I have learned that one needs to capture the inwardness of his or her feelings. This requires the careful use of language that will enable the author to capture those feelings.

In addition, writing a monologue requires the author to reflect on what is happening on the stream of consciousness of the character. I have learned that to write a monologue, is to write the mind, the feeling, and the thoughts of the character.

The task that we were given for this seminar was to write monologues where the character is confessing or thinking about something that is happening in their lives. In doing this and in approaching the assignment, I decided to capture the emotions of a character in a mental institution. The character I used is reflecting on trying to find peace and coming to terms with being admitted to a mental institution. The character is, therefore, reflecting on these issues on their own as if they were talking to someone else. In this assignment, I make use of "I" and "you" to refer to the character. I do this to create a split of the characters image as if there was another person whereas in reality i am just using these pronouns to refer to the same character.

In my reading for this week, I have encountered something different and interesting which I found useful for the assignment. I read Mishka Hooson's *Call it a difficult night* where the character uses a reflective way of telling her story of suffering from mental illness. In this book, the author also uses the same effect of monologue style in describing the events that took place in the character's life in trying to deal with mental disorders. What I appreciate about this book, is the author's ability to use simple language in giving the vivid images of the character's experiences and challenges.

This I regard as the most important yet difficult task to do as an author - to not only say what the character was going through. But also to use a language and images that will place the

reader at the centre of the character's feelings. In reading this book, I felt like I was walking next to the character as she was facing these challenges.

In conclusion, this task and way of writing as used by Beckett and Mishka Hoosen, is something that I would really like to experiment with in my writing. My focus on my thesis is on writing about being a misfit and often being rejected due to not conforming to society's standards. My writing therefore seeks to reflect the internal conversations that I sometimes have as a result of being rejected and through observing others who face the same challenges that I am facing.

Writing relationships and social life

In this reflective journal I reflect on my reading project and how that continues to shape the kind of work I want to produce. This week I read the novel *Taipei* by author Tao Lin. In this novel, the author depicts the relationships of the main character and in doing so he is able to create a clear picture of each character. Writing relationships especially in a novel like this one requires the author to have a clear picture of how the lives, experiences of character are put together so that the reader can be able to differentiate one character from the other. In this book, the characters keep on re-occurring in the next chapters on the entire novel, and every time they reappear, there is no sense of confusion as to where they are popping out from.

As a writer who mainly focuses in writing short stories, I only make use of one or two characters and this enables me to keep up with the pace and to keep track of how my characters develop throughout the stories that I write. I guess this technique I often see it as an almost easy one because I get to focus on fewer characters and therefore I don't lose track in terms of how I develop their story lines.

But also as I am continue with writing a number of stories for my thesis. I find myself writing stories with feature multiple characters – and as it can be imagined, I need to be able to depict the useful of each character and how each of them help me in enhancing my stories. This is something new and different that I am experimenting with in my writing. The stories I write are mostly not interrelated. So each story I write deals with new and different characters unlike in a novel that has reoccurring characters. So in my work I am always faced with the challenge of thinking real hard about the way I write my characters and the ways in which they relate with each other in each story.

Tao Lin writes relationships and social life so well that he is able to create a lasting emotion in the readers mind in terms of how the reader can relate to the characters. I appreciate his use of long sentences with commas breaking the sentences in order to create a rapid pace of his character's social life. For example, this works well in his descriptions of the scenes where the characters are going to from one party to the next. The high beat and fast paced sentences create an excellent and vivid picture of the party life of the characters. This is definitely something I would like to work with in my own writing.

Writing adventure, journey and seeking

This week's reflection focuses more on the work that I have been doing for my thesis. My writing in general seeks address issues of being and one's journey in finding herself. Seeking and being on a journey (be it physically, emotionally or otherwise) is something that can be explored in various ways. For one, the way I chose to express it is on an emotional level. This is mainly based on the fact that the feedback from teachers detailed how well my writing becomes alive when I describe the emotion that is felt by my body. But in doing so, I have not yet completely ignored the fact that at times, an emotional journey may stem for a physical journey.

For example, the journey that I took moving to Grahamstown in 2019 (physical journey) has influenced a lot of things which has affected the way I see and feel about certain things (emotional journey). It is then for this reason I am of the view that whatever physical journey we take in our lives has an impact on the emotional journey that one goes through. In my writing specifically, my emotional journey focuses mainly on things that used to happen to me growing up which did not make a sense back then, and it is only now that some of them are starting to make sense.

In doing so (writing my journey), I am seeking to find answers to the things that have not been making sense in my life. The journey to be discovered ahead requires an unveiling of things from the past, things that have happened to me or to people around me. The unveiling then is somehow a way for me to deal with my own demons in ways I have not explored before, and my writing has become one of those ways.

Karen Lord in *Redemption in Indigo* writes magical realism and adventure in a beautiful and funny way. The writing is excellently executed and what works well for me is the descriptions of places, events and emotions as the journey or the adventure is taking place. This is style I would like to adopt and as a result it is also something my supervisor is trying to gear me towards – which is to find one-word descriptions for my emotions and images I am trying to build in my writing. This will thus enhance my writing and tighten it in order to give hard hitting descriptions of the events I am trying to describe in my writing.

Writing confusion and weirdness - reflecting on Sam Pink

In this section I would like to reflect about writing confusion and weirdness, particularly as reflected in Sam Pink's writing. What I have learnt is the fact that there is a lot of disobedience to language and structure in the way of writing that Sam Pink employs in his writing in an excerpt from *Person*, published in the short story anthology *40 likely to die before 40*.

Secondly what I appreciate about this work is the fact that it built in a state of mind the story's character. We are travelling to places and are being forced to see things through the eye of the character in a rather very weird way. The character is walking in the streets of Chicago where he/she sees different things – we are therefore taken into that confusion as readers and through the language and the structure of the text, we are also meant to internalise the confusion ourselves. The sentences range from long to short sentences which are all over the place, describing things and events as they occur in the mind of the character.

In this story something that works for me is when the author describes a lot of things that are happening in the mind/life of the character which we also sort of get confronted with in life. These are things which do not really make sense to other people but they only make sense to the person experiencing them. Here in Sam Pink's excerpt, they are being described as mundane things – that are being told through the character's eyes. The character is walking around the streets of Chicago and really feeling like a piece of s*** -- and for me this gives me the impression of someone who is really trying to find themselves throughout all whatever the world is throwing at them. In a lot of cases when that happens and such confusions and chaotic events happen -- the only way that we can handle it especially as a writer is to write it as it happened which includes writing in a way that will convince the reader to be part of the confusion.

In my own writing I am also interested in the journey of the mind, the journey of the physical body and journey of things that I am also confronted with in the course of my life. I am interested in exploring the journey of the things I dream about, the journey of the thoughts that cross my mind as I navigate my way through this life. I look at people just as I look at things with a judgmental eye, and that yields from the fact that also as a living body, I have also been judged for one thing or the other. In my writing, I am trying to take off the judgmental spectacles so as to see and say things for what they are. Sometimes the way I see

things as they happen in my own world is not really how other people view those things, this is why the excerpt from *Person* by Sam Pink is really working for me – it speaks from a valid point of the character. It is a working pissed because of how the author is trying to place us in the mind of the character.

The character experiences a lot of things which sometimes make him or her happy and at times they frustrate the character. So in this piece, we are drawn into it because of its chaotic nature and in my own writing that is also something that I am trying to implement – to paint the chaotic nature of my thoughts on paper. The other thing I like about this piece of writing is the dipping and digging inside the thought process that one would really never talk about or write about. For example, Sam Pink talks about how the character thinks eye contact is a bad thing and he says the character doesn't make eye contact with the girl because he/she doesn't want to ruin their night by making the girl feel bad. So I mean, those kind of things are things that one would only think about on their own and really be afraid or not know how to say them because they seem so useless. But due to the character paying attention to everything around him he/her, this is not seen as such useless things to write about, but rather he is writing about them in a unique manner and that for me gives me the sense of how frustrated the character is about everything that is occurring around him/her.

In this reading or in this piece of writing, I also like the mystery that is brought by the character as he is going through this journey that he is going on. Sometimes he/she walks into a shop and describes what he/she sees and other times sometimes he/she is thinking about something and he/she then is describing what he/she is thinking about. All of this is done in a soothing and polished language. That for me is working because in a way it is describing the mundane of the everyday life and the effects of what that has or what effects that can have on another person reading the piece. I like the description of the mundane because even though in my own writing I tried to describe the mundane, I do it from a different level by introducing a surrealist element in my writing. I do that because I want to employ a new way of saying things and also a new way of describing things, feelings and people that I have had an encounter with whether in real life or in my dreams. What I like also about this writing is that sometimes Pink uses short sentences which range from short and descriptive, to long ones where he is just playing with language. one would feel like these sentences don't really play a role or don't really have an effect but the reason why I am saying these words or sentences work for me is because they give me a sense of frustration and relief that the

character experiences or that the writer is trying to infuse into the writing so as to let us feel what the character is feeling.

Writing love and rejection

What I appreciate about Chelsea Martin's excerpt from *Even Though I Don't Miss You* is the ability to write love and rejection all in one piece creating tension that keeps the reader interested in the story. what works for me in this tool and approach that is used is its ability to expose the kind of love that the character has, while in the same light it exposes the kind of disappointments of being rejected by the one you love. Within this kind of writing itself -- you can still sense the kind of love that exists when the character confesses the love for his/her partner. Yet at the same time there title of the piece says something different.

This piece for me, does something Similar to that of Sam Pink, whereby there is some kind of tension between what the character says, and what they end up doing. In this piece, Chelsea is trying so hard to paint a picture of how much he/she is irritated and frustrated by her partner or ex-partner, yet in the same spirit, we get to have a sense of how much love Chelsea has for his/her partner. This kind of writing is the kind of writing that kills two stones with one two birds with one stone. In a way it portrays disappointments while at the same time it speaks about the nature of love and the kind of things that one does when they are in love.

Writing about love for me is something that can easily be a cliché -- But what Chelsea Martin's writing shows to me is that you can choose to write about love in a very different way than the usual over used way. To write about disappointment or rejection can also be boring. But in this case, it is done in a way that portrays to the reader how the character felt and still feels about the person they are referring to.

I for one believe that there's no love without disappointments, and I appreciate seeing this in Chelsea's writing. At the very same time, there are no disappointments without love -- and the exposure of those two elements in Chelsea's writing creates a conflict within the writing itself that seeks to paint a lasting picture of these two colliding worlds. The portrayal of rejection on its own in this kind of writing and the complementary or beauty element of love seem to be at opposing ends at first. Yet at the same time for me, I feel like the one is used to as an effect activator of the other -- to indicate to the reader, that without love, there is no rejection. This stems from my belief that we, as people, don't often take disappointments seriously from people who do not mean much to use. It is only when we get rejected by those close to us that it hits the most.

In this piece, we see that love is not just love, we see that love is made up of different things; that love is made up of different build ups, love is a build up from something that was never there. At some point, I also feel like rejections and disappointments are all part of love – that they are all part of that build up.

Another complementary element that I appreciate about Chelsea Martin's writing is the portrayal of all these elements of love and disappointments -- the writing brings to life the absence of someone you love. This enables the reader to get to feel what the character is feeling – which is the yearning of being with the one you love, yet you can't due to circumstances. A lot of the times when I have read about love and relationships, it's always about how the presence of someone makes the next person feel -- but in this kind of writing we are exposed to the absence of the other person and how that really affects the way the next person is really feeling. That for me, paints a beautiful picture because it gives me a clear description of what happens when the other person is absent. In this, we get an image of the kind of love that the character is experiencing, so there is so much irony in this kind of writing or in the way of putting things together that really works for me. The kind of writing that appreciates both love and rejection equally so, as elements that make one whole.

A lot of the times I want to write about the absence of the people who have meant a lot of things to me. I always imagined those people being present and have always experienced them being present, but now that they're not around, now that they're not in my life -- I find it difficult to write their absence in a way that will still symbolise or show how much I still appreciate them. This is because I think at times I am also too scared, or too lazy to write about the absence of those people because maybe it will require me to put in a lot of emotion, and maybe that is what I'm trying to deal with in order to make my writing colorful. The area of my writing that I am always scared to tap into, is the very same area I find to contain a strong sense of my writing.

In my own view, writing about love has only been done in a positive way, the kind of way that only celebrates the good and jolly things about love. Now, in Chelsea's writing, we get to see and experience the side which is not so privileged, the kind that does not feel comfortable to the reader. It is the side that a lot of people are not comfortable with, which is, sort of, the negative, the side that is always under looked and never given attention -- which is how someone's absence can bring about the emotion of love through the way one character yearns for the presence of the other.

Writing the unusual

Writing the unusual has been the most challenging for me at this stage in my writing.

The unusual is the kind of life I get to experience when I zone out into my own world.

The kind of world that only I can imagine without others being spectators.

The unusual is the land of dreams, the conversations I have with my late mother.

It is the world where I am able to talk to my forefathers. The land of confusion.

I am struggling with find ways of painting that world on paper.

I struggle with giving these characters a unique voice that truly liberates their true being.

The voices of the spirit – sometimes I feel that my own ability to be entrusted with their messages is standing on the way of what they really want to say.

I can hear what messages they want me to pass – but I lack the correct and efficient language to transpose their messages.

At this point in my writing I feel like I am exploring with a lot of things most of which are very unusual to me, and surely they will be unusual to the reader one way or the other.

I am experiencing writing about body in ways which I feel makes sense to me only.

I feel that for some people things are very difficult to understand but for me they make sense.

What I mean by this is that, I am trying to write my truth as it relates to my experiences.

Just the other day I fell asleep on the couch and when I woke up I couldn't feel my left hand.

This for me was something that was very unusual and it comes as a funny experience.

Having titled my thesis *it's my hand that wrote* and also being left-handed -- to find this body part that I use very much during this process of my writing failing me is something I find very unusual.

Maybe it is a sign. But how do I put those messages my body is sending me in a piece of writing?

Not being able to function during this period is something that I can only attest. No one can feel that on my behalf. It is then my everyday struggle to try and let others feel through my

writings. But to ensure the explicitly of such unusualness, as my own is something I find easy to do when I am alone in my own time and space. But in my writing I can try as much as possible to make people understand what I am trying to say -- even though I may sometimes fall short, it is an ongoing struggle.

I find that the world is experimenting with my body.

At the same time my body wants to experiment with the world.

I then struggle to create my writing in a way that will merge the two.

At the very same time I find that struggle, I find that contestation between these two walls being something that interests me and sometimes something that motivates me to write strong pieces. But it is not an easy thing to do.

Also in my reading I'm finding myself being interested in reading short stories - some of which I think try to do what I am trying to do in a very effective way -- even though I feel like at times they are targeting different topics than what I am target - what I feel like I need to do at this point in my writing is to see how I can employ my difference and confusion in a way that seeks to achieve the objective I have of combining the outside world as it is with the inner world as it is inside me -- so as to keep the fire burning from which most of my writing will originate from.

Writing monologues and longing

In this regard I have been reading Jeanette Winterson's *Writing on the body*. What I appreciate the most about Winterson's use of monologue is that she does this beautifully by giving us review of the absolute character through the current tab that is present in story. Winterson's use of monologue reminds me Beckett's monologues. Winterson is able to create scenes which stuck into the reader's mind. The monologues give a reader a sense of exploration of the character. What interests me the most in this kind of work, is Winterson's exploration of the body through the monologues. That character confesses an extreme kind of love which she has not felt for the lover in ages. S/he has found this kind of love in a different person, which is not his/her lover. While the character agrees to emotionally being attached to his/her lover. The physical body is drawn to someone else besides his/her partner. In these monologues, when the character questions himself/herself, we can begin to see his/her two worlds collide.

I love this way of writing because it focuses on one character while at the same time it is giving the reader the emotions and senses. In addition, it also draws us in into the ins-and-outs of what is happening inside the mind of the character. Janet's monologues take a frame of giving the reader a picture of the environment where the character finds herself in. This I appreciate so much because it creates a lasting picture in the reader's mind and after reading the monologue, you still have a picture of what was happening and a picture of the environment with a sense of how the settings looks like.

Every time when the character is with the person they are cheating with, we are not only drawn to her emotions of how this other person makes them feel. We are also drawn to how he/she feels physically, emotionally and otherwise. I also appreciate the fact that through all that is happening. We get to sense that character that the narrator's marital partner without really being directly introduced to the character itself. It is through the physical interaction with the person they are cheating with that we get to sense how the narrator feels about the spouse.

In this section I would also like to reflect about writing about loneliness. It is also Jeanette who employs a very useful technique in the language that she uses that highlights the depth of the characters. Jeannette writes, "I have tried to get you out of my mind but I can't seem to

get you out of my flesh”. This gives an impression of a character that is trying so hard to get rid of someone that they are so attached to, yet they can't seem to get rid of this person. In doing so, Jeannette creates a very beautiful contrast between what the character wants and what the character is trying to get rid of.

This for me creates a sense of honesty in her writing because the expressions she uses are ones that anyone can relate to especially where one is trying so hard to confirm to themselves that they don't want something -- but yet what they claim they do not want is the very same thing that they continue going back to. It's the kind of lust that one cannot get rid of – and the body is used as a tool to portray that kind of lust. This is something I am trying to explore – how a body navigates throughout the patterns of life, as it finds itself in a world where it is pushed to perform duties, to feel things which at times it does not have a choice to cull – thus becoming an embodiment of lust, but not only limited to sexual desires, as well as lust, as it relates to other forms of social life.

“It’s My Hand That Wrote!” – The Final Reflection

Reflecting on the Reader’s Report

The reader as depicted in the report was able to pick up some of the themes I explore in my writing, however, while this is the case, I also sensed that the reader could not link the work together as a whole. The work in its structure and nature is very difficult or does not allow the person reading it to expect a conventional narrative form. The whole text is a bond that breaks and reconnects in specific moments. This depicts things and experiences that are faced by the character which occur in a very chaotic manner. In my mind, I have always found it difficult to depict this confusion in words, hence I believe that the chaotic, disjointed form from has given a platform that I can use in exploring the themes I am writing about. This enables the reader to think, breath and take a break in certain intervals. While this might be intentional on my behalf, I am with the reader when she says that the work needs to be coherence in structure and in form. Ideally, that is what one would expect – coherence. In this case, I have tried to create a sense of coherence in my thesis as suggested by the reader. I have also tried to create consistency in the form throughout the text by adding the quotations and by fixing other grammatical issues as pointed out by the reader in order tighten the language and to create a coherent structure. Additionally, I have added a couple of new fragments which could easily interlink with the existing ones in order to create a sense of flow and synergy throughout the text. In cases where a breakage is evident, it is intentional.

As evident in my writing, the themes I explore include themes such as; belonging, estrangement, embodiment, family, queer identity, sexuality, sexual discovery, death and life, as well as addiction. These themes for me are very heavy to deal with especially in short creative piece of 30 000. There is always a feeling that there is more I can say about these themes. But to do so in a very creative way has been a challenge. In the report, the reader make the observation that in some instance intend to overwrite. And so in the reworking of my thesis, I have had to think hard about ways that I could use in order to make my writing straight to the point. Initially, I had planned to deal with only one the, that being queerness as it is something I have always been interested in. However, I later decided to explore all the other themes in three segments so as to explore more of my own creativity. This thesis for me is an exploratory project and therefore holding back would have not given me the change to

explore my gift and talent fully. I also have been shy and nervous for a long time to write about some of the subjects that I wrote about in this thesis, so it was important for that I maintain an honest voice doing writing about the experience of being an “othered” person. But again, the challenge is remaining resolute and honest without overstating things. In cases where the reader suggested I think of other ways of saying things, I have paid significant amount of time doing that. The result was that this suggestion has brought some spark in the way I write about most of the things I write about. It has enabled to me in other instance to fully expose the importance of writing about the subjects I have chosen.

In my writing, I employ a disjointed approach in trying to explore themes I would otherwise not really engage on with anyone. These are the issues of sexuality, dealing with loss and spirituality amongst a few. I have employed this technique purposefully as way of trying to remain honest in my voice and in my writing. Also, the approach works well for me as it allows me to experiment with the various themes which at times I have had issues of dealing with because they are either too personal or too heavy to share with anyone. In revising the entire thesis, I have made it a point that I stick to this approach as it allows me to pen down the confusion and frustration of the world I am trying to explore.

I have also tried to be specific as possible in my writing. Which means that the text does not contain any hidden meanings other than just what the reader is able to resonate with. The difficulty I have had in my revision was to think about the next person and how they will receive my work. My writing is my own, but obviously it has a huge potential of landing onto someone else’s hands. By the time someone picks up any of the stories I have written, it is up to them to do whatever they wish to do with it. So I have tried to clean it up and to edit it so that it is still readable and is still making sense to whoever else might read it besides me. In trying to ground my work to make sense. I have taken the advice offered in my report by the reader that I should reconsider some the terms I used in my writing that seemed to be confusing.

I also experimented with the form and the style of writing, particularly the inclusion of dashes. The reader in the report has noted that, while this might be something fresh and

experimental, I must remember that sometimes it can be confusing to the reader. While my work is really about exploring my confusion through a confused structure, I did take note of the reader's assessment. As I am trying to write this confusion using a confusing structure itself, my work still needs to be grounded so that the structure does not throw the reader off.

To manage this, I have had to tone it down on the language and grammatical aspect of my work. This I did in order to create a clean product that will even confuse the reader further. I have had to reconsider my use of dashes. I did this by making sure that on the grammatical aspect, I must remain within the borders, but not limit the experiential, but rather to clean it up. I did however felt like it was important to keep the form as experiential as possible. While some of the pieces seem to employ the conventional use of grammar, in others, I make use of small letters though out in order to maintain a certain voice or/and a certain atmosphere.

The disoriented structure that has been employed in my writing has been chosen in order to find a way of speaking about issues that have long bothered me. I get the feeling that the reader got when going through my work as she states that some fragments of my writing are sometimes too oblique in their intention. This is due to the fact that I wanted my writing to lead itself without me seeking to take it somewhere. From the onset I did not want to promise the reader that the writing is promising something greater towards the end – that there is some kind of suspense to arrive to. At times I did leave things hanging carelessly and intentionally. This according to the report has a tendency of drifting the reader way. In trying to speak to this challenges, I then decide to take this seriously and explore other ways of writing my confusion. Confusion for me is one thing that is difficult to put down on paper. In my work I am exploiting and exposing that state of chaotic-(ness) of a characters life and that is evident in the nervousness in the voice(s) of the character(s). As a person who has struggled with issues of belonging. I have tried to expose that through my writing. The text is lingering, it is trying to find a home. But in doing so, I am with the reader that as it circulates in this journey of finding a home, it must have some things that is concrete and coherent about it.

Throughout the text, the report kept on wondering if some of the things (i.e. the over/use of dashes) were done intentionally or not. I must admit that while majority of them were done intentionally – there were places where I felt like their use really needed to be reconsidered. I have realized that while I might be in a state whereby I am exploiting my chaos and

confusion, it is always nice when you meet the reader halfway. In this case, meeting the reader halfway means that cutting down of most of the things which I defined my work. But not to do so because it's not acceptable, but to do so knowing that the writing still needs a home – a place where it will be accepted, but also with the hope that it will constantly be reinvented. The intention of doing so is to enable the person reading the text to still think long and hard about what they have read. My writing does not offer any solutions to any problems. Additionally it does not seek to offer any healing, it is a body of exploratory work that exhibit fragments of a life that has been longing to belong. With that said, it does not employ a conventional method which has a beginning and an end. It is the kind of writing that always leaves the reader with more questions. These constant questions that arise from the reading of this text are what I believe we live for as people, which is to constantly find answers about the things that make us who we are – things that form our social and spiritual being.

In trying to build the work together for the final stage, I have had to think twice about whether or not to break the initial (three-part) structure which I have employed or to just go with it. The thesis is divided into three sections which depict the character's life and experiences of fighting demons; spirituality, gayness and belonging. While I want the work to raise more questions and to remain highly experiential, I also want it to be grounded. By that I mean that I want the reader to be able to associate themselves with it or not to associate with the text in some moments. All which is fine, I want the text to start a conversation within the reader herself – about things that they feel matter as evident in my work. It is for that reason I have decided to leave the initial structure as it is. The moments for me are intentional as they make the reader disconnect and reconnect with the work in various parts. The parts where one reader might be turned off, are the very same parts where others are engaging with the work more.

To cut all the structure out for me, remained one of the difficult things. So I had to mend the gaps by adding something new into the work that has already been done. This I did in order to make sure that throughout the text there is somehow a similar voice that tells different stories. Life for me is something that I view to be very haphazard, it's not a linear project as we would all like it to be, it has moments where we disconnect and reconnect, it has moments

where we turn on and turn off our minds to specific things and situations, and it also has twists and turns. These are the grey areas that I am trying to explore in my writing. Often at times it has required me to find useful and adequate expressions which I could use. The reader in the report makes comments every now and then about the kinds of expressions that I have employed throughout my work. In some cases even suggesting that I change them. So I have greatly thought about this and have indeed changed them in order to create that spark I have always wanted my work to embody.

By employing the connect-disconnect approach, I understand that by doing so, I am creating a bitter-sweet memory whereby in some cases the reader is left in awe about something and they feel like they would like to hear more about. I however shift and move on to a different topic. This for me, is something I do intentionally in order to try and break the intensity of some of the things I am writing about. This is evident in the reader's report when she mentions that the story "Intense" is a good but very disturbing for her. While I might agree with her, these are the things I have not been able to speak about for the longest of time. I explore themes of violence in an honest and at times heartbreaking manner. The reader in the report also does not suggest that this is a bad story – but makes the point that it is very intense to read. That is why I have created a breakage between the intensity of the text and the smoothness of it in some areas by creating disjointed moments of the character's that are sometimes hard-hitting and other times they across as very soft and smooth in tone and in language.

1. Introduction

• *What is the purpose of the report?*

The purpose of this report is to outline what took place during a writing workshop that I held for some of the Walter Sisulu University first year journalism students. The workshop took place at a small and intimate venue in Heritage Building, the university's site where the offices and lecture halls for the journalism programme are situated. The workshop was held on the 8th of August 2019 from 08:30 to 09: 30 AM.

Mornings are my favourite part of the day. They are calm and often silent. They come with a smile and a possibility of new events unfolding – a perfect combination for a writing workshop.

2. The Writing Workshop

The beginning

I began the session by introducing myself to the students and told them that I am currently completing a Master's Degree in Creative Writing at Rhodes University. I then told them that the writing workshop is a session where they will be required to just write and explore what could come out from their writing, so they should not be worried at all about it. I also explained some of the expectations I had as the facilitator, that I expect them to be comfortable, to share their stuff and if they feel uncomfortable, then they should not do so. I also told them that they should stick to the rules of the session and if the time that was set for them to produce a piece of writing was up, then they should stop and not continue writing.

• *What methods did you use for your workshop?*

I went to the writing workshop prepared as I went through the notes given to us by Paul Wessels on how to facilitate a workshop. I read them for a number of times prior meeting the students. The students were alerted a week before the workshop took place so that those who

were interested in attending the writing workshop, were most welcomed to do so. I also read further information online on how to facilitate a writing workshop and what stood out for me was the fact that, the facilitator has to be patient and easy going with the participants. With so much information, I was determined to be present amongst the students, of whom majority of them, this would be their first time attending a writing workshop.

To get the students writing I employed a variety of strategies. Firstly I explained to the students that the workshop is not to determine who the best writer is and who is not. I made it clear to them that the main aim of the workshop was to get them writing and I told them that they are more than welcome to write about anything that comes to their mind. I then gave the participants 60 seconds and suggested that they write about anything that they could think of at that moment. I further told them that they should not worry too much about the grammar or whether or not what they were writing about made sense or no sense whatsoever – all that they needed to focus on was the writing.

Secondly, I extended the time to 3 minutes and told them to write about anything that has happened to them recently. In doing so, I was sceptical that the participants would want to write about things that are too personal and too deep. In trying to prevent a situation where people would be writing about subject matters that would cause them to break down, I suggested that they keep things general and to avoid tapping on things that will make them emotional.

Last but not least, I extended the time to 5 minutes and decided to make things a little bit exciting. I prompted the students to write sentences in which they formulate lies, then they must continue doing so until the time is up. The students participated in all the activities and a few of them who were interested in sharing their work with the group did so and it was fun and exciting for others and for me to see what they had come up with.

3. Conclusions and Recommendations

• *What were the main findings and conclusions reached as a result of your workshop?*

The results for me were ideal. This is because at the beginning of the session, I started with a group of students who were hesitant to put their thoughts into writing. With the first two activities, the students were not comfortable with sharing their work with the rest of the group. And as the facilitator I made it a point that those who did not want to share their work were not forced to do so. As the workshop proceeded and as we did more activities –

some of which were very short, the students started to become more comfortable with sharing their work. Particularly with the fun activity which was the last one, people became more excited and they started warming up to the idea of writing. This gave me the idea that in order for one to be a good facilitator, she needs to be able to make the participants be at ease and let them know that at the end, the workshop is there to enhance their skills and not necessarily to judge them. The fact that people might not seem interested at the beginning of the session, should not bring the spirit of the facilitator down, rather, she should be patient enough to trust that the participants will pick up interest in the writing process as they proceed. To get them into the groove, they need to be encouraged to starting writing small pieces within a short limited time frame, so that they do not find themselves bored with nothing to write about. In addition, it I conclude that the best thing to do is to come up with fun and interesting prompts as these are a good way to keep the participants excited and energetic.

Reading Event Report

The reading session was held on the 16th of August 2019 at WSU's Heritage Site. A small group of WSU students and staff in the journalism department were invited to the session. The audience was a small group of which majority comprised of students. The session was planned to take an hour from 09:00 – 10: 00 AM. The plan was to read for 15 or 20 minutes and then use the rest of the remaining time to engage with the audience based on the work that was read to them. I selected a number of written works from my new collection and made copies for the people that attended the session.

When the session began, I started by introducing myself and asking the audience members to feel comfortable and free to engage with the work being read to them. I then proceeded to reading my work. Majority of the pieces that I chose to read were short prose pieces and others were one and half pages long. I made it sure that I chose works of different lengths so that I can be able to showcase all the styles of writing I have been experimenting with. The reading was interesting for me because it taught me how to handle a reading session. For example, I went to the session thinking that I will be solely in charge of the session. To my surprise, some of the audience members requested to read certain pieces themselves. So what I did was to first read the piece myself – then after that, I would give one person a chance to reader the piece after I had read it. This provided the audience with the chance of going through the piece thoroughly. And in most cases I have realised that in order for audience members to have anything to say about any piece of work, it needs to be read a few time so that they can be able to comment on it.

After reading each piece, then I had to give the audience members a chance to respond based on what they make on the reading. In this regard, they then share what the take or reject from the piece itself. The responses we were interesting for me because they also varied as per respondent. The pieces which I shared with them range in size as I have mentioned above, but they also range in style and focus. For example, while other pieces ranged from the realness of real life as we know, others were more spiritual and more magical in nature. It was really interesting therefore for me to hear what they think about each of my pieces. The one big observation I made was the fact that, the audience members were more critical the pieces that fall under the magical realism spectrum. This could also be due to the fact that my audience consisted of people who mostly have no idea of the different kinds and styles of writing that

exist. This I took as an advantage because it gave me the guarantee that when they respond to my work, they will be giving me their unbiased and honest opinions.

The other interesting thing for me was to notice the amount of discussion that people were having about the pieces that I was feeling mostly insecure about, particularly the ones that were more falling on the magical fantasy spectrum. While a number of the audience members were appreciative of the nature and style of writing, others were more confused as to what the narrator and in some cases the writer was trying to achieve. This gave me a sense that really when people read one's work, they just take for what it is and make sense of it according to the way they received the material.

In my own opinion, I also had to put myself in their shoes and understood how they felt about this magical realism style of writing I am trying to experiment with. As this was something that they could have been encountering for the first time. This is the side that usually gets me more emotional when I write using this style. But the way in which I chose to write the feelings and experiences is not the ordinary way that one would expect. I have a way saying things because maybe I also do not want to go deeper into the wound, and that is what I tried to work on after the reading session. To understand that I should not employ the magical realism style for the sake of hiding my emotions. But to paint my feelings and experiences as a writer in a different way that has not been explore as yet. To be able entertain the voice that wants to remain discrete, to speak the pain that still remains under the surface of my heart, but also to do so in a way that remains true the stories I am trying to send across.

Lastly, I then asked the audience members to write down their feedback of the session if they wanted. Some people were willing to share and stated that this session opened their minds in terms of the existence of the various styles that can be used in writing stories. Others explained that because they are so accustomed to the linear, conventional and traditional way of writing stories, which is what they expect when they are reading any kind of stories they encounter. But through this experience, they have gained a new way of looking at any piece of writing.

I felt good that through this session I was able to expose my styles of writing to people outside the creative writing course. The feedback that they gave me is what I appreciated the most because it was somehow different from the kind of feedback that my classmates would give me. In addition, they were not scared at all to critique some of my work because they were scared to think of what I would think of them or how I would feel. They just gave it to

me in the exact way it is and this was done without fear of favour. This gave me the idea that in cases where they found my work to be good, they said and felt so because it was truly how my work had made them feel in that particular moment. I have often said that whatever I write, I write it for myself. But I also think that it is a beautiful experience when readers can take the work and make it their own – and I am opening up to experiencing more of what I would call “detachment” and letting go of my own work, so that it belongs to whoever reads it, and I am willing let the reader do as they please with it – even if the intention and meaning changes as different readers come into contact with it.

Book Reviews

Review 1

Call it a difficult night – mental illness written in explosive language

This book explores the nature of mental illness in a very descriptive manner. It uses different fragments and reflections of the narrator's life in drawing the reader in and walks the reader beside the narrator so that the reader is able to feel all the emotions that narrator is going through. The thing that makes this book work the most is the style of writing that is employed by the author. Mishka Hoosen employs a short form style that is vivid and descriptive in nature. This enables the reader to enter both in the mind and life of the character with ease and precision which sparks the reader's interest of wanting to know what comes next.

The readers are also drawn in into the different situations, contexts and situations of past and present life of the character, where we are able to see how these situations and events have affected the way the character views life in general. There is also a reflective techniques that the author uses which works very well, whereby there author is able to shift the tone, voice and focus of the narrator into events of the past. The narrator in some instances remembers past events which in some cases do not have anything to do with the current state the character is in. in doing so, we get to get a glimpse of the life of the character as they appear through this technique of reflecting on past events.

There is also a lot of internal memory which the narrator is trying to communicate with the reader. What I appreciate the most about this is the effect it has of being able to force the reader to visualise the internal turmoil of the character. This would have not been possible if it was not for the author's ability to employ precise and vivid images through the use of simple but effective language.

Hoosen's explosive imagery which she employs through her short form narrative styles enables her to capture the conflict that the character is going through. This she does by capturing the events as if the reader was witnessing them together with the character.

Noticeably so, the fragments of the character's life do not follow any chronological order. Which at the beginning can bring up some confusion to the reader. At the centre of book, the battle with mental illness and the battle with depression are exposed not only through the events that take place in the character's life in a mental institution – but also through the use of explosive language that marks an everlasting stain in the readers mind.

Review 2

Queer Africa – an exploration of queer identity in Africa in a polite yet unapologetic style

The collection is an excellent combination of African queer stories which talks about how “othered” bodies constitute the world, space, and time they find themselves in, particularly focusing on the African context. The stories are written by different author from the African continent, and together as a combination they well in projecting the lives of minorities in an unapologetic, bold and funny yet. Yet, at the same time, in telling their stories, the authors still maintain a sense a subtleness that makes it easy for people who are not familiar with queer writings to go through these stories.

The reader is driven through the narratives by being introduced to different styles of writings. One that is found to be dominating in this book is the one that uses the internal thoughts of characters as if they telling these stories to themselves. This style executed in also all these, stories, works really well as it makes it seem like all these stories are being told by one person. This also helps in creating the subtle tone throughout the book, and a level of consistency that draws the reader to move from one story to the next.

There is also an element of yearning and longing that prevails in almost all the stories in this book. Longing to belong, and to be part of the greater world without being judged is what forms premise of majority of the stories. As the reader navigates though the book, they can't help but to feel a sense of connection with the characters because they are experiences are relatable. In each and every occasion that the characters are going through, there is something that the reader can connect to.

The authors tackle sub topics within the larger topic of homosexuality – something that is often not up for debate especially within the African context, and they weave through and around in ways that does not throw the subject in the reader face. Yet in doing so, they are unapologetic about the things they write about, which make this book a brave and courageous piece of work that explores identity, culture, love, sex and belonging without fear or favour.

Though entirely based on queer experiences, the biggest advantage of the book is that it does not exclude people of different sexual orientations and preferences. Instead it invites them into the exploration of a different world that is often seen as something disgraceful by the general public. Editors, Karen Martin and Makhosazana Xaba have done an amazing work in

choosing the stories for this collection. In their nature and tone, the stories work as fragments of an entire novel – where we get to meet different characters with different experiences. The synergy and energy that runs across the stories, make it difficult to put the book down. After reading one story, the reader is left with a pile of curiosity as to what the next story entails.

Review 3

Taipei – a novel with a narrative style fresh from imagination

Taipei explore the relationships, family and belonging in a world full of confusion. It follows the life of Paul who by navigating his way through life is encountered with the pain of losing relationships while at the very same time he finds himself at the verge of forming new ones. In telling Paul's story, Tao Lin uses a language and a style that is rear and fresh – as if when he writes he is always digging the words down from his imagination. This plays itself beautifully when it is on paper as it enables the reader to create their own images using the descriptive language used by the author. This is evident in the way Lin describes the behaviour of Paul's father over dinner in the first few pages of the novel. The descriptions he uses are in some way unexpected and contribute largely to the originality of Lin's work. When Lin writes the actions of the characters and descriptions of events and places, he does so in a way that the reader is not expecting. There are terms or descriptions that he uses, where at the beginning the reader would think they know where these descriptions will lead to, and yet, they take a different turn. This creates more suspense as the reader is drawn by keeping their attention focused on these little surprises

The nature of the novel itself forces the author to write the lifestyle of his characters. His portrayal of the party scenes, and nights out – make his novel a worthwhile to read. The writing itself is a kind of party itself that is there for there for the reader to enjoy. There is a sense of freshness and youthfulness in the way Tao Lin writes about the social life of the characters. In some instances he adds wit and charm so as to keep his writing relevant particularly to the topic of having fun.

Alongside his wit and charm, Lin explore the relationships of his characters in an extremely contagious way. In the way he writes about the relationships between his characters, he does in a way that gives the reader a sense of how the characters know and relate to each other without necessarily being boring or obviously explicit about it. This engages the reader to want to read more in order to find the answers that lie in between the grey areas. Tao Lin takes the events of the relationships of the characters which are often take for granted and gives them a whole new meaning. He does not just explore the kisses and hugs the characters share, but also expose what greater meaning such things have in the context of the novel. He also uses dialogues in order to make the reader a part of the conversations that the characters are having. When one is done reading the book, they cannot help but feel like they were a

part of what was taking place in the novel. Through employing a different kind of writing style, Lin is able to invite the reader stay with him as he exposes the memory, love and lives of his characters.

Poetic Essay

Writing as a Journey of Experience and Experiment: Mocking Intellectual Narrative Expectations and the Notion of Narrative “Spectacles”

*“Deliver me from writers who say the way they live doesn't matter. I'm not sure a bad person can write a good book.” **Alice Walker***

“I write for young girls of color, for girls who don't even exist yet, so that there is something there for them when they arrive. I can only change how they live, not how they think.”

Ntozake Shange

*“If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive.” **Audre Loudre***

It is my view that our experiences as writers are embedded in what we write. Ntozake Shange, Alice Walker and Audre Loudre are three authors whose works differ on many levels than one – they differ beyond language and syntax– beyond space and time, because they tell stories of different people in uniquely various ways. They all stem from a variety of experiences – as experienced by the authors themselves or the characters they write about. They also stem from different fragments of forms, styles, and experiences that each author has chosen to experiment with in their works – and they are all valid. For me, these works don't get their validation because the authors have decided to employ some what good English or follow a dominant pattern and form of writing – or because they use fancy vocabulary and imageries that are out of this world – no. These works for me are valid because each one of them paints a picture of an experience in its own unique way.

Dambudzo Marechera writes that, he views literature as a unique universe with no internal divisions (1988). Marechera further expresses the idea that he does not pin or pigeon-hole literature by race or language nor by nation (Marechera, 1988). Furthermore, he suggests that within the field of literature, there is a healthy interchange of techniques and themes – and the fact that Europe is said to have a head start in written literature can be seen as an advantage for the African writer (Marechera, 1988). This is due to the fact that, the African writer does not have to worry herself with the problem of structure – as they have already been solved for her (Marechera, 1988). Again, it is Marechera who argues that, beneath reality, there is always fantasy and that it is the writer's task to reveal and to experience it (Marechera, 1988). Marechera uses Sinyavsky's words to describe the role of a writer by stating that, a writer's

life is a journey and that it has to be a journey and it has fate. In addition to this, Marechera also discusses ‘fantastic realism’ using Sinyavsky’s definition. Both these writers view realism as a convention and an artificial form. Marechera suggests that realism pretends to be able to say the truth about life. Sinyavsky further alludes that, while he is not against the idea of the truth, he believes that it can be sought and achieved in different ways (Marechera, 1988).

Kathy Acker says this about narration: stories are about something [...] and that a story has got something to do with realism (Acker, 2004). What Acker is sharing here is the idea that people have about writing stories – that stories need to represent and mirror what happens in our lives (Acker, 2004). But what she later ventures into is something I find very interesting particularly in the context of this essay. She talks about a genre of writing that Julio Cortázar calls the “fantastic genre”. This style of writing as both writers argue, is opposed to that of false realism which consists of the belief that everything can be described and explained. Acker then suggests that realism is reductive and that it is a controlled method. She further suggests that, realism does not want to negotiate, open into, or even know chaos or the body of death due to its reductive nature (Acker, 2004). She raises a concern by asking; why must writers bother themselves by making themselves miserable and so reductive when one can play? – which is to be fantastic. In her conclusion of discussing the fantastic genre, Acker argues that, to play in structure and in content, is to desire to live in wonder (Acker, 2004).

It is Tasiye Selasi who writes about what it means for different writers to be an “African writer” or from which position of interests various writers initiate their writings from. Selasi warns against the grouping of “African writers” together, stating that the warning does not stem from a lack of pride in the continent’s literary tradition – but rather from the Western tradition of essentialising African subjects (Selasi, 2019), an issue Selasi is very conscious of. Selasi reiterates Evan Mwangi’s words when stating that, artists or writers who resist being put into categories do so because they do not want to be vacuum-packed as ethnic writers in the metropolitan academy, which has perfected these tendencies whenever it encounters writing that is not white (Selasi, 2019).

Selasi also supports Chinua Achebe’s sentiments in stating that, what has been seen as a task of trying to define what “African literature” is, has been met with difficulty and failure (Selasi, 2029). According to Achebe, it is not about what characteristics “African literature” ought to have, whether it is literature that is produced in Africa or about Africa, or literature

that features African subjects or perhaps literature that has an African theme. What Selasi thereafter argues for, is the freedom that the writer needs to be granted with when writing their stories. The freedom to feel and say things without being put into certain categories is one that writers need to often strive for – as being boxed into categories can at times be limiting to the writer.

My interest when it comes to writing has always come from things I could relate with – or things I could relate to. I write about the way I see myself as I occupy the world. It is Adrienne Rich who tells us that in her writing, she expects the reader to ask: “but what does this [the text] have to do with me? Do I exist in this poem?” (Rich, 1993), – because by putting myself and embedding my experiences in my writing, I want a reader who shares the same experiences as mine, to see themselves in my work. Rich’s point tells us that in most cases, readers are looking for texts that can speak to them – work that they can find useful – the kind that represents their thoughts and experiences. This is the very same attitude that I try to employ in my own work – to let it mirror my life in ways that make sense to me. Rich further argues; we often go to poetry because we believe that poetry has something to do with us (Rich, 1993). This is to say – we as the writers, need to write about our own lives and experiences in ways that will make our readers relate to us. But I need to state that, even if readers don’t relate to what we write about, this does not mean that our work is not valid.

Talking of experience and experiment is Ann Lauterbach who uses Charles Bernstein in describing the word ‘experimental’. They both agree that to be experimental in poetry means to take an aversion to form, rather than an aversion to conformity (Lauterbach, 2005). That is to say – the author has to decide to create something new instead of following the order that already exists in the realm of poetry. This formation – of a something new is what I am interested in, rather than being limited to follow a style of a certain generation. Though this too in its nature is not incorrect, the warning I would give is for writers to guard against staying rigid and not opening up to exploring new forms. While we may borrow from other generations the way we approach form and style, it is imperative however that the way of imagining – the way of experiencing as evident in my writing – that – I want it to be mine. Of course old forms may give us a point of reference and departure in terms of our writings, but the creation of a something new rests up on us as the new generation of young writers.

Lauterbach further states that; between promise and fact, between known and unknown, lies the experimental, because the experiment is always in-between the things (between the

unknown and the known) and it stays there like a hinge (Lauterbach, 2005). She further puts a nail on this view by stating that; the risk involved in taking a new form, is that you may not make it to the other side – across the suspension, but the willingness to risk failure – to make mistakes, seems essential to turning promises into facts (Lauterbach, 2005). This means in order to make it to the other side – where our writing will and can become successful – however we may define success – we must be willing to take the risks and not just operate within the borders – by following orders – and by following a certain narrative convention that has been set for us – we ought to break boundaries.

Once more, Lauterbach links the task of experimenting with experience. This she does beautifully as she states that; those who view form as static and reified are doomed to repetition, historical and personal (Lauterbach, 2005). Lauterbach sees the pressure and the attention that we give to experience as what leads us to the real – the real that is authentic (Lauterbach, 2005). In turn, the real that is authentic according to her is the process of experimentation which she views as the willingness to adapt to contexts, in order to derive not so much new meanings as new ways of interpreting the unpredictable (Lauterbach, 2005). This is to say – the process of experimentation is not so much concerned with the action of being able to offer new meanings that are embedded in the texts we produce, but rather, this process allows us to find new ways of interpreting things that are unpredictable – as they are a part of our lives and lived experiences.

I must also state it that, while I am interested in writing about things that speaks to me, I am also interested in what lies in-between the real and the unreal – that for me is something I am willing to explore beyond my own limits and beyond what I am familiar with. Thus for me; writing is a journey of finding myself in places where I thought I would not find myself – this has also offered me with an opportunity to be able to write about myself in ways that are different from what I am used to – to find myself in-between the usual and the unusual – the known and the unknown – to be there, and have a voice of my own – however it resonates with the other [the reader] – that lies with them.

Though I have a strong tie and interest with the realist movement, the surrealist one has offered me with new ways of looking at life and the things I am interested in writing about. This way – as not only to look at what is in the surface – but to scratch beyond it, to navigate the spaces where confusion and conflict often occur, to navigate amongst the grey areas of experience – is one way which I find resonates with me as a writer.

Therefore, as a result, I am looking at ways in which I can navigate between these two worlds and applying their influence in my writing. I am interested in the space that lies in-between things – things that are in paradox – things that lie in juxtaposing ends. This perhaps stems from my own experiences as a person and as a writer and perhaps in my role as a teacher. I have always found myself in situations and positions where the absolute is not so clear. Where the line between the known and the unknown is always blurry – where the question of whether one is a man or a woman seems to have an easy answer – yet it remains a complex issue. This grey area is what interests me and I am keen to see what lies in those spaces that people and even writers rarely dig deep into – spaces of gayness and darkness. Sometimes I am interested in writing about light and hope – and at times I am not moved – but that too – which I write about – hope – is also a valid experience.

My interest and curiosity of finding new ways of telling and new ways of making – new ways of experiencing and experimenting are an effort of generating new ideas – about myself and whichever that I may find myself writing about. Lauterbach reminds us yet again, that the fragments among which we live should cause for a celebration rather than lament, so that inclusion and exclusion are in a flux (Lauterbach, 2005).

Yang Wan-Li alluded in his writing that a poet must work like an artist that is painting a picture using a brush and paper when she is creating a poem. Furthermore, Wan-Li suggests that, though this can or might be a process in which the poet engages in when creating a piece of work, it is not what makes a poet. Wan-Li suggests that a man doesn't go in search of a poem, but the poem comes in search of him. Though Wan-Li said these words a long time ago, and speaking from a different background and cultural context, the words remain true even today.

Many people whose literary works came in a form of spoken literary words like praise poetry, believe that a poet does not create her poems, but rather, the poem makes its way to the poet. The poet in this instance is seen as some kind of vessel through which the message that lies in the poem is being transferred to the people. In human culture, the praise poet is seen as someone who has been sent to speak of social ills that a specific group or community of people is faced with. Then the poet, is someone who, through her own work, aims to warn that particular community about something that might be of danger to them. Because in many parts of the world – dead bodies are believed to possess the ability to speak through bodies of

the living. Therefore, could this be seen as being real or fictional? I don't know – because that too – is an experience of all poets – and it too – is valid and worth investigating.

Mxolisi Nyezwa agrees slightly with the point made above in his discussion of the poetry embedded in Maskandi music. Just like the poet has social and communal responsibility to warn the people of dangers that might affect them, Maskandi music, as created by the artist, carries in it the souls of social minorities (Nyezwa, 2015). Nyezwa further argues that, Maskandi artists have developed a deceptively simple style of singing that is both original and very innovative in execution (Nyezwa, 2015). It is this originality, a sort of creation of a new language, way of writing, way of telling and re-telling stories that I am interested in implementing in my own approach when it comes to writing – the idea of navigating between the real and the unreal using language that best describes my own experiences. Maybe a question might arise as to, why should this way be seen as a useful way of writing? It is Nyezwa again, who states that; this innovative way of writing – this technique – is able to blend specific and often contrasting attitudes and views of black culture, religion and language together (Nyezwa, 2015). The very same juxtaposing issues I mentioned in the beginning. Maskandi music does this in a way that often crafts and bends the vernacular languages – it is this crafting and bending that often lends the poetry to music (Nyezwa, 2015). Nyezwa, views this, as an extraordinary skill and technique he finds useful for his own writing of IsiXhosa poetry. It is this form, and technique which I am interested in, though I aim to make it unique to me, by adding my own experiences and those of others.

The above mentioned views is somehow different but related to the way of writing which is proposed and discussed by Marina Tsvaeva. Tsvaeva argues that, the basis of every theory is experience. This kind of theory is the way through which one, as a writer, is able to use and becomes conscious of things that speak to them or move them. To be precise and use Tsvaeva's exact words, the theory in this case is "the verification [and], the intelligence of the ear, [a process] of merely becoming – conscious of one's hearing". The similarities in these theories or techniques if I may call them that, are in their acknowledgement of experience as the bases from which the poet is writing from – while on the other hand, Tsvaeva's approach is more Western, and by that I mean individualistic, the approach as evident in Maskandi and oral traditional literature – is more communal in nature – and all different forms are valid. As Nyezwa points out that; the choruses of Maskandi music are far from monolithic – and that very often, they praise both the young and the old, the powerful and powerless – they are for

the community – for a people that will be able to find themselves in the works of these poets (Nyezwa, 2015).

While writing from personal and communal experiences is something which is viewed as useful by the authors I have discussed above. It does not come without its own struggles. Bell Hooks talks about the struggle she faces as a writer who writes about or from personal experiences or the collective experiences of black people. She states that; whenever she begins to write a new piece, she is confronted with the extreme dread that, her subjectivity which she fought so hard to claim will not assert itself (Hooks, 1991). She alludes that, she is often faced with the fear of not being able to find words that fully articulate her experiences or even the collective reality of struggling black people and this makes her want to remain silent (Hooks, 1991). The exclaim Hooks is making stems from the fact that, writing from one's experiences is not an easy task at all. Many times, it is very difficult to distinguish between what should be told and what should not be told, at the very same time, finding effective words and ways through which to tell and write that reality remains a struggle. And also the fact that when she writes about such experiences, they are often discouraged as they are seen as those that are playing the narrative spectacle game.

This kind of fear, argues Hooks, has aroused in her a sense of awareness that; wounds that are inflicted by oppressive structures mark us all (Hooks, 1991). In addition, she says it has also made her aware of the fact that, while political self-discovery and the development of revolutionary consciousness may be able to heal us, they do not erase the experiences we gained from oppressive structures of racism, class exploitation and sexist dominations which mark who we are or who we have become (Hooks, 1991).

It is Njabulo Ndebele who reminds us that; literature cannot give us lessons, but it can only provide a compelling context through which we can be able to examine a number of ethical issues which have a bearing on the sensitisation of people towards the entire range of a culture (Ndebele, 2006).

In his own words, Ndebele talks about the use of the 'ordinary' and spectacle which are often found in certain kinds of literature, particularly, protest literature. The theories of 'ordinary' and spectacle are useful to discuss in my essay as they point out to how some authors depict or experiment with both black social contexts and experiences in their writings. For Ndebele, to create a narrative spectacle is to invoke in the reader, an inward experience of delightful thrill at the spectacle of suffering, defeat or even injustice (Ndebele, 2006). That is to say, to

create a spectacle is to dramatize a particular social issue which forms part of the social lives, social experiences and even social context(s) of the character(s) in question. Ndebele warns that the over dramatization of social experience, may affect the way in which writers depict the experiences they often write about.

To further prove the ideology that writing is a subjective process mirroring the experiences of the writer or those of his/her community, Phillip Zhuwao's recorded interview with Alan Finlay which was published in the *Bleksem* publication in 2006 stands as proof to this claim. In this interview, Zhuwao talks about his influences which fuel how he approaches the writing process. Besides being highly influenced by the work of Dambudzo Marechera in the way he writes, Zhuwao asserts that the position and point of departure from which he writes from is his own experience (Zhuwao, 2006). He further states that he writes about what he has seen, what he has felt and about the relationships he has with the people that he loves (Zhuwao, 2006). This further proves that, many writers have paid significant attention to the things around them – which shape who they are as individuals, and that it is these social experiences which they then use as a point of departure and reference in their writings.

Like Ndebele, Adrienne Rich also warns against narrative spectacles when she states that; in a political culture that is characterised by managed spectacles, poetry appears as a rift – what she calls a peculiar lapse which appears in the prevailing mode (Rich, 1993).

Robert Creeley discusses how he views writing from his own terms of experience. He asserts that, poetry obtains itself from an unequivocal order (Creeley, 1989). By this, Creeley means that poetry ascribes itself to some rather plain order – where there are certain things that one is limited to do or not to do. He then goes further to say, while this might be the state in which poetry finds itself in or the space in which it operates, what he refuses to accept is the assumption that this order in which poetry is subjected to, can be acknowledged or gained by intellectual assertion and will (Creeley, 1989). Again, here we see how the author views writing as an openness of experiences – where a writer's credibility or that of his/her work, is not only be limited to the intellectual capacity of the writer.

Creeley goes further to point out that, this beliefs that poetry's order can be achieved through intellectual assertion is like an intension that seeks to shape language to a specific purpose which the literal act of writing does not itself cover (Creeley, 1989). I therefore suggest that, as we deal with the issue of writing, we must not only look at writing as a process that is fixed in a specific space – specific time – with a specific order – for a specific purpose. But to

view writing as an experience and an experiment – where the possibilities of reforming and reshaping language always exists – to view it as a process where the telling of experiences is not fixed to a certain style or form – but where the writer feels comfortable to utilise whatever mode of writing which suits his own way of telling – and where such experiences will not be reduced to spectacles and intellectual expectations of the audiences.

Writing for me, is an experience the writer experiments with – using rather a different language through which they are able to express their own feelings – language which they are able to use in telling their own experiences in their own ways – to tell their own truths. It is employing a new tool – not a conventional one but rather a fluid one which allow the writer to be able to play.

I do agree that what writing has to give – it has to give it through language and voice (Rich, 1993). But there are various ways through which language can be used in order to achieve whatever goals the author had in mind from the first instance. And also the readers of poetry or any kind of genre for that matter, needs to project him/herself into the background of the text, and to read the works with an awareness of the limits of available idiom (Couzen, and Patel, 1991). This is to say that, readers cannot pretend that texts exist outside experiences of the writer, therefore to simply ignore that, is to deprive themselves of finding an effective way of engaging with the text beyond the meaning of words.

To conclude, I see it befitting to use Lauterbach's words when she says; for as long as we long for syntheses, master narratives, complete views, we will be unable to imagine how to shape institutions which have a potential to override greed, self-interest, and cruelty, all of which are ready to assert their prerogatives, at the expense of the experimental (Lauterbach, 2005).

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