

# **Beneath the bridge of metaphors**

**Poems from NMMU  
Arts and Culture workshops**

**Selected and edited by Brian Walter**

**Arts and Culture**  
**Nmmu**

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ISBN: 978-0-620-63272-0

Printed by NMMU Printing Department  
Cover design: Mike Barwood

# Contents

<b>Foreword</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Zizipho Mfazwe</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Remember me? .....	1
Miners' memories .....	2
Love .....	3
Friendship .....	4
Sacred place.....	5
Township .....	6
Generation of dreamers.....	7
Beneath the garbage heap .....	7
<b>Anand Brown</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Coming of an End .....	1
Be Strong.....	2
For the Khoisan – Son of Man .....	3
The Acts.....	4
Because you have been paid for .....	6
<b>Sandiso Mboyi</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Garden.....	8
The world is too much with us.....	9
Black sheep .....	9
<b>Mawalchazole Cinga Nyatela</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Cobweb.....	11
Prodigal.....	11
Ask time .....	12
Taxi .....	13
Museum .....	14
Vigilantes .....	15
<b>Sisonke Papu</b> .....	<b>17</b>
I cannot imagine .....	18
It is a white bird.....	18
Roots .....	19
Were words enough.....	19
Some of the pains.....	20
Ah! Mthatha, you giant eunuch! .....	20
Black bodies .....	20
Poetry .....	21
Beauty.....	21
To live .....	21
<b>Sisanda Mrwebi</b> .....	<b>22</b>
Frightened.....	23
Fear not .....	24
I am what I am .....	24
Journey.....	25
My life .....	25
Hurting .....	26
Thought.....	27

<b>Mohamed Rahmtalla</b> .....	<b>28</b>
I said .....	29
Ah, if she comes quickly .....	30
<b>Nolwazi Gumenke</b> .....	<b>31</b>
After the war .....	32
Booty call .....	34
Friendship .....	35
Grievance complaint .....	36
If I could, I would.....	37
If and when .....	38
When bodies drop dead.....	39
<b>Tawona M Ranganawa</b> .....	<b>40</b>
Demon .....	41
On a clouded moon .....	42
<b>Megan-Jayne Elworthy</b> .....	<b>43</b>
indecisive .....	44
Change .....	44
Waking.....	45
Diary .....	46
Near the end of June .....	47
Cloth .....	48
Oh, handsome stranger .....	49
respiration.....	49
Ornament.....	50
<b>Sinako Stuurman</b> .....	<b>51</b>
Plosives .....	52
Lesson .....	53
<b>Ammaarah Abrahams</b> .....	<b>54</b>
Beneath .....	55
Unknown.....	56
Calling.....	57
Particles.....	58
Oblivion.....	58
Hope .....	59
Ironic.....	59
Love .....	60
Confession .....	60
<b>Brian Walter</b> .....	<b>61</b>
In the <i>Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum</i> .....	62
<b>Lutho Matiwane</b> .....	<b>64</b>
I wanted to write you a poem .....	65
Things lost in the fire.....	66

<b>Olwethu Mxoli .....</b>	<b>67</b>
Untitled.....	68
Letters.....	69
Elizabeth.....	70
Protest.....	71
Quiet.....	71
Glass.....	72
becoming invisible .....	73
<b>Unathi Slasha .....</b>	<b>74</b>
Nobody weeps for Brutus.....	75
In Postmodern times.....	75
And .....	76
Bad luck.....	76
Absence.....	77
Value.....	78
In a dream.....	79
This is not my reward.....	79
Knowledge.....	79
Grandmother.....	80
No visitors.....	80
<b>Azola Dayile.....</b>	<b>81</b>
Claustrophobia.....	82
Pursuit of Happyness.....	83
we, her.....	84
What if.....	85
<b>Nombuyiselo Anthea Duma .....</b>	<b>86</b>
The fly woman within .....	87
<b>Sinesipo Jojo .....</b>	<b>88</b>
Unhealed .....	89
Silence: the silent killer .....	90
Reconnecting.....	90
Hard to find.....	91
<b>Precious Mahlangu.....</b>	<b>92</b>
Teacher.....	93
Cold Rape.....	94
Let Her Cry .....	95
<b>Afterword.....</b>	<b>97</b>
Resonance Poetry Movement.....	97

# Foreword

This collection of student writing has come about through the activities of creative writing workshops arranged by the Arts and Culture Directorate of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) in Port Elizabeth.

The workshops – six two-hour sessions in Port Elizabeth, and one six-hour session on the Saasveld Campus in George – were designed for NMMU students from any field of study to engage with writing.

The workshops focused on the writing process, and were practical: participants wrote in class and engaged in group editing and discussion. Some follow-up editing has taken place using e-mail.

The workshops have been great fun for me and have given me a chance to engage again with young poets from the Metro, as well as from George. I enjoy listening to the concerns expressed, the new voices emerging, the images used and the newer, spoken-word forms.

At the beginning of this process a visiting Australian poet, Luka Lesson, recited poems to an audience which included many of the participants, and his poems were subsequently discussed in the workshop sessions. I also heard some of the course participants recite at that event. There is vibrancy and power in the voices of our young poets, and it is important that more formal sessions, aimed at the written word, do not lose this energy.

The workshops, if they can be summarized in a few words, focused on using images in writing, being observant and being aware of the senses. There was also emphasis on editing for effectiveness of language.

The tensions between old forms and new, conventional and experimental, are always part of the poet's concerns. For poets in South Africa, there are issues of language, race, culture, the environment, drugs, violence and love. The poet's work, and the tension inherent in it, is never done. And this tension is evident this collection of young writers from South Africa.

For me it was a delight to be able to engage with students, to get to know them and their concerns. Writing is very revealing: dealing with writers teaches one about what they say, think and feel, or what they don't say. And the privilege of being trusted by writers to work with them in editing sessions and to keep contact over e-mail, has been touching.

I have seen writers grow in confidence, find their voice, find what it is that they want to say.

A highlight was travelling to the beautiful Saasveld campus of NMMU in George for a long session with an enthusiastic group of writers. I learned much from engaging with them, and it pleases me that some of their work is also reflected in this collection.

I would like to thank Mr Michael Barry, whose office initiated these workshops, and who insisted I include a few of my own works in this collection. I was ready to do so because writing teachers should be prepared to write with, and share their works with, participants. Thanks are also due to Mr Ryan Pillay, who assisted in setting up this programme, and Ms Nicki-Ann Rayepen, who provided efficient and much appreciated back-up, doing the administration and correspondence.

Finally, to the poets themselves, on both the Port Elizabeth and George campuses of NMMU: thank you for attending sessions on Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings, giving of your time and sharing your passion.

I have emphasized in the sessions that writing is a process: this publication should be a step in the process of your further development as writers.

# Zizipho Mfazwe

Zizipho Mfazwe is a Nature Conservation student on the George campus of NMMU.



“If we take care of Nature, she takes care of us. I want my grandchildren to witness the wonderful species of nature. If we do not conserve them, our grandchildren will not have the privilege of seeing live species, but see only images. Species will become extinct, like the quagga.

“I write to express the inner me. Writing unravels my hidden emotions. The only way I express myself clearly is through writing: without it I seem not to have the right words and my words just fail me. When writing, I cannot hide what I feel because it feels as if the pen and paper know the inner me. I can’t hide anything from them. They are like part of my being, or my soul.

“I do not have a specific theme. Most of my writings are triggered by emotions, conversations I engage in, my surroundings and what is happening around me in the world. I want to write about something that is relevant to this day and age we live in, that someone else can relate to.

“I have learnt that if you wait for inspiration to strike, then you are in for a long wait. Nothing you write about is irrelevant: it’s a matter of sharing, and how we pass on the little information we have.

“I associate myself with the *Protea cynaroides*, the King protea, which has a survival strategy for fire. Fire can kill the above ground layer of the plant, but it re-sprouts from its underground bulb. This symbolizes human resilience: obstacles may seem to destroy us physically and emotionally, but they don’t kill our desire, or what lies deep in our hearts. As long as we still have our “power house”, our source of strength, we get up, wipe off the dust, and continue with our journey.”



## **Remember me?**

Do you remember me

in the altitudes  
amongst multitudes  
with different attitudes

conflicting with your motives?

You sent your guards  
to fire guns on our grounds,  
even though we did not possess any arms:

our minds were about to bring harm.

We couldn't rest  
for our families were in need  
of care, but you couldn't care less,

because of the expense.

Lives were sent to rest  
forever,  
because of mere greed, and hunger.

If you had listened to our cry . . . .

## **Miners' memories**

The sun breaks the dark  
into dawn.

It brings hope, to some;  
to others, slavery.

They disappear,  
swallowed by the dark hole.

The temperature rises  
as they go deeper,  
oxygen levels drop  
to the verge of suffocation.

Drilling and grinding,  
and sweat  
cascades from head to toe.

Regurgitated by the hole  
with shoulders drooped,  
they sing to ease the pain  
for touch is unbearable.

They have forgotten

the beauty  
of the sun's reflection  
on the mountains.

## Love

You embraced me with your unexpected visit,  
I was not prepared:  
with mixed emotions  
tough decisions to be made;  
I was dependent on you to depend on me.

I love you,  
even though I never knew you.

I was scared;  
no one seemed to care.  
They never knew about your journey's end  
for you never reached your place,  
torn to bits,  
drained and flushed:  
my heart broke into a thousand pieces.

Your seat is still empty  
like a hole dug inside me,  
I still feel the warmth.

In a short time  
the bond we shared  
grew stronger than imagination.

I never got the chance to watch you,  
but I love you.

## Friendship

In this ship of friends,  
cruising.

Silence is too loud,  
as we gaze at the stars.

The sky seems so far,  
we say we are going.

In every action  
pushing each other in the right direction;

laughing with tears,  
we lift our eyes unto the skies.

For beyond the obstacles,  
we tell ourselves we're going,

wide awake in our dreams,  
determined like the ocean.

## **Sacred place**

I lay my head in her embrace  
I forget the rest.  
She hugs my head gently,

I drift to a place of dreams,  
of fantasy.

Through tough times  
she's there,  
and waits for me to reach for her.

In spells of doubt  
she cups my soul.

In my happiness  
I embrace her;  
she never complains.

## **Township**

Born and raised in these streets  
we find ways to survive.  
It's either you adapt, or die

in this natural selection  
exacted by humans  
where daily blood spills  
into the soil:  
dust to dust and ashes to ashes.

Young souls fight over territory  
not for any future:  
only the toughest survive.

Whistles and quarrels crowd the streets,  
loud screams and gunshots. Then silence.

Every day we live in fear,  
finding ways.

## **Generation of dreamers**

Head full of dreams  
to turn into reality,

we push  
obstacles aside like bulldozers

and aim for the heights.  
For there the sun is bright

for those with fertile hearts.

## **Beneath the garbage heap**

Surrounded by filth,  
the only place called home.

Tiny, fragile soul  
less than a month old

in need of love and warmth.

With no clothes on  
garbage hides the nakedness.

The silent winds blow up the cover.  
With the winds caressing her skin  
and the rains with unexpected showers,

the cry gets weaker,  
whoever has an ear.

# Anand Brown

Anand Brown is reading for a BA degree majoring in English Literature History.

“I like to write because I feel I have something of value to share with readers and fellow writers alike.”

Anand says that the themes in his poems vary, but generally touch on human experiences and pertinent moments in history.



and

“I have learnt that poetry still has a role to play in our contemporary space. Poetry is a relevant and necessary means of making sense of our world and ourselves.”



## Coming of an End

*"Oh sir the good die first. But those whose hearts  
are dry like summer dust, burn to the sockets!"*

*from 'The Ruined Cottage' by William Wordsworth*

The coming of an end is upon me  
and I stand speechless and unmoved.  
You left me!  
You left me!

I have been with you,  
and you with me,  
now you are gone,  
and take a part of me.

I will commit our memories to my stormy heart,  
bending and ebbing,  
breaking, beating, blowing  
our harbour and our shore,  
destroying our landmarks.

Our memories erode grain by grain,  
under the grey sky  
as I stand looking up from the pier.

You chose death!  
You chose death!

The coming of an end is upon me  
as I see you dangling from the ceiling:

lifeless,  
loveless.

## **Be Strong**

*For the girl who was told to be strong and not to talk about being gang raped.*

Don't hear the sudden stop of their van.  
Don't see them approach like bloodthirsty jackals.  
Don't feel the gun against your head.  
Don't think of where you are going.  
Don't look at your current location.  
Don't feel them push you onto the ground.  
Don't feel the thorns grab hold of your back.  
Don't feel them tear off your clothes.  
Don't feel your muscles go into spasm.  
Don't think of the air leaving your lungs.  
Don't feel their hungry thrusts into you.  
Don't feel your flesh tear.  
Don't think of your mumbled prayers.  
Don't feel their warm semen drip onto your abdomen.  
Don't hear their laughs and mockery.  
Don't feel their saliva on your face.  
Don't smell the scent of your vanishing innocence.

Just be strong.

## **For the Khoisan – Son of Man**

Were you there in 1652  
when the Drommedaris sailed in  
and the Dutch came war-armed and eager?

Did you hear women scream,  
or know the interchangeable dust  
in their offspring?  
Were you there?

Did you see men bleed  
to protect their own?  
Were you there?

Did you run after the Boesman child  
who ran from the barrel of guns?  
Children running from the pinch of white men.

Did you offer a hand to a battered Khoi  
while he was kicked around and broken?  
Did you feel his pain?  
Did you watch him lose himself?

Now, coloured man,  
like a fool you grope at cultures all a-miss,  
a lost soul betrayed by history,  
just standing around.

Were you there  
when the San used to smile,

when the dancing feet of shamans  
drummed a sacred beat  
moving through the body  
from the feet,  
hope, peace and grace,  
when the Kalahari still was a place?

Smile brown child;  
be there.

## The Acts

*Emmite spiritum tuum, Pater.  
Omul este atat de pierdut si atat de slab.*

*i.*

There is nothing.  
There is nothing to be seen.  
There is nothing to be seen here.  
There is nothing to be seen here in my life!

There are only scars of what came and what went,  
like a shell that speaks of an egg.  
Even the shadows need light to exist.

Why are the Gentiles so furious?  
Why do the people make foolish plans.  
The kings on earth prepare for war  
and the rulers join together against  
the Lord and His Messiah.

*ii.*

Sister Layla walks down the aisles  
humming a quiet hymn.  
Here the soft sounds rise,  
but the cross is moved!

Her habit sways from side to side  
and the broken church bells make a terrible noise  
and the house of God is invaded by dirty men.

Do you see the angel with the little scroll?

I am scared and scarred.  
Life is an angry river that beats its banks  
and breaks off soil and  
drowns the little children.

I sit with Daniel at the river Ulai to see the ram take charge.  
The voice of the Lord moves across the air.  
The world is dead in me!

*iii.*

My cup runs over.

Sister Layla prays for me and when I arise  
I am at peace in the south of Judea, but my heart  
grows heavy for Ezekiel who is long dead.

I am baptised in water and anointed with fire.  
I turn to tell Sister Layla my last wishes  
like Paul and Timothy.

There is nothing.  
There is nothing to be seen.  
There is nothing to be seen here.  
There is nothing to be seen in my old life!

I am set free!

**Because you have been paid for**

Arch your back for a familiar God.  
Mechanised reasoning  
conditioned thinking  
expected speeches  
predicted actions.

Forward workers!

The labour commences.  
And muscles are stretching,  
sweat dripping,  
teeth grinding,  
knees buckling.

Forward workers!

Till your infant becomes a stranger,  
and your wife wanders off.  
Till your neighbours hide,  
and your house turns cold.

Worker there is no reward for your  
devotion.  
Just a simple  
thank you,

for giving us your  
soul.

# Sandiso Mboyi

Sandiso Mboyi is an NDip (Public Management) student at NMMU.

“Writing is an integral part of my inspiration; it is the best platform for me to express my concerns. There is much in writing, things that you cannot see but feel; there is a reaching out logically through the intensification of writing.

“Writing explores numerous life dimensions that you recall when generating ideas.”

The themes Sandiso likes to think about are leadership, general social challenges, human journeys, geographic differences and psychological perceptions.

“These workshops were important and valuable to me because they helped me to explore numerous poetic and literature ideals. I embraced the culture of writing because it does not only bring about contextual literacy but it also brings about social and mental developments.

“This year I have learned to delegate and embrace working with people, and to build relationships. I have also learned to embrace diversity: with different people there is diversity in all aspects. I have developed love in working with people my age, because there is a lot to share.”

## **Garden**

Each time you take time  
to reflect in the mirror  
broken pieces appear.

The agony comes with the nightmare,  
unbearable voices from onlookers  
lantern the person within;  
the conscience thickens  
and the dream  
is against all odds,

the unfairness of this life lands us  
the fruits of its future:  
it takes time to make time  
each time we fall;

the secret is gravity:  
take time and land  
on your feet  
so that you can get back  
by storm.



## **The world is too much with us**

Life is so thin;  
we pave our way ahead  
layer by layer

– sometimes we cry  
the world around us seems  
further away in sight than in reality.

One gives in,  
and lets go of it

– neither backward nor forward –

the road is always rough:  
the bitterness, the saltiness  
always . . . .

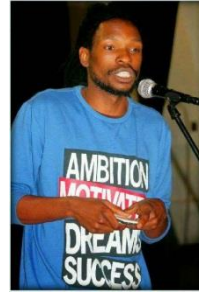
## **Black sheep**

I look up at the mountain,  
the circumference of my sight,  
while lanterns glow within,  
blinking my thoughts.

Downstream  
my imagination floods  
and onlookers, like waves,  
shout for my saviour.  
In silence imagery prevails.

# Mawalchazole Cinga Nyatela

Mawalchazole Cinga Nyatela, or *Skyscraper*, would love to pursue a career in community development, implementing programmes to uplift his community. He is at present a practitioner in this field, having come this course through his involvement with NMMU based Resonance Poetry Movement.



into  
the

“I write because I observed and experienced many challenges in my early childhood. I write to express my views and opinions, and to express the burden within.

“There are too many uncertainties within society which need to be holistically addressed. Thus my themes are social ills, my experiences, observations. . . my past, my current challenges. . . I write about what I face: poverty and inequality. History.

“I have gained a sense that editing is important, an essential aspect of writing. Poems express, they paint vivid images, and emotions. I have also gained a more “conventional” approach in terms of writing, learning how to convey a message through poetry. I feel I have a deeper understanding of what poetry is.

“Hip hop has been my path as a poet. It has grounded me, and proved to be a positive path in my growth as an individual.”

## **Cobweb**

In a cobweb of lies  
we despise  
the truth.

Thoughts mislead.  
Malicious words  
sink.

Materialistic trends  
tend to blur  
visionaries:

sink, lies  
that bite  
back and forth,

I swim  
in a pool of lies.

## **Prodigal**

Is he dead?  
No.  
Where is he?  
I don't know.  
Does he know you?  
I doubt that.  
Do you want to know him?  
Yes.

What's his name?  
Africa,  
is the name of my long lost brother.

Africa !!  
What a beautiful name.  
It's wealthy  
and strong.

## Ask time

Time is birth,  
memory.  
It has a root,  
a lineage, gets passed on,  
in pure traits.

Blood traces back to the dark  
continent of sudden famine  
and televised grime  
that programmes clans  
with intimate man-to-man visuals.

Time remains  
like the fossils of gigantic man-eaters.  
Time has seen it all,  
from the excessive whipping of Kunta Kunte  
to the enduring pains of holocausts.

Time is a primary witness,  
gazing on bloodshed, warfare,  
Ethiopia's fight for independence:  
time is history,  
and history

is nothing.

Mere memory.

## Taxi

Congested: in an overcrowded space,  
complaints evoke a dark cloud,  
the driver shouts a loud:

"I have had it with these coconuts!  
Ungrateful mutts disgust  
me like an open wound oozing puss!"

It's a sunny Sunday morning for you too,  
who shamelessly splash the taxi with vulgar language:  
your taxi already smells like garbage.

We are tired and babalas,

from different places, different backgrounds.  
"Be humbled that such a well-spoken youth  
chooses to board this noisy junk,"

says the old lady who is cramped in the front row seat.  
"You sound dumb, I must say,"  
and "My leg is numb,"  
adds the coconut.

## Museum

Our small museum gazes  
on white history

if there was ever a black remains  
a mystery:  
schools teach pure puppetry.

I stand tall like the statue of liberty  
scraping the sky with flames of fury  
gazing with eyes filled with animosity

I ask why?  
Are we not a part of this  
historical vicinity?

The stone throwers of Despatch  
cooked and dispatched red bricks,  
built historical monuments  
and fearlessly fought in the struggle;

in 1985 natives  
fought with stones  
against guns,

sons of the soil  
coiled in anger,  
savagely attacked

and burned Nomathamsanqa down:  
a frown  
painted on the faces of the wise.

## **Vigilantes**

We were confined,  
buttocks numb,  
ropes tight,  
in a trunk.

Fellows' heads bumped  
as the vehicle swayed

and suddenly stopped!!  
Doors shut.

Commotion and screams!  
Run! Run, Beloved.

Now jeopardy  
has caught up.  
I'm about to be punished  
for all my wrongs,  
though innocent here:

a fifteen year old,  
awaiting torture  
for her false  
rape accusations.

We will lambast  
the truth out of her.

Society is  
split in half.

They are just calves  
who drank  
poisonous milk.

I eavesdrop:  
how to break,  
my kneecap .

Damn ! my flesh aches  
from the drag

down that coarse  
gravel patch.

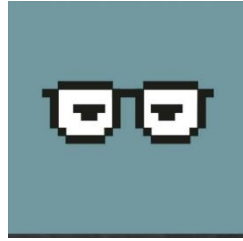
Face swollen.  
bathed in pain,  
my mind is frozen

Light brings more darkness  
as they open the trunk.

A barrage of fists  
and head butts  
reveals newfound audacity,  
my guts for the truth.



# Sisonke Papu



**I cannot imagine** myself  
travelling to distant cities  
and lonely continents  
hoping to find myself  
or construct the self anew

when I have not dealt with the depths  
of the conflicts within,  
and this is the baggage  
I carry always with me,

creating despondence  
in fresh spaces

### **It is a white bird**

A shriek  
in your soul –

and a discontent  
you cannot wave away  
or scratch;

life is never full.

You were put here  
to experience the lonely setting  
of suns:

nothingness  
is a white bird.

## Roots

Before my forefathers' tongues could fold  
and form unequalled sounds on palates  
coarse hands would mould smooth clay  
to contain the souls of old;

before birds learnt to fly or the ocean to wail  
underground the mole sniffed its way  
and bees gave life with their sacred hums;

and before all of these were spoken into existence  
when the fabric of time was woven by shaky hands  
my roots  
were forcefully removed:  
a culling of trees not well-read, nor well-born.

The remnants of branches of trees as old as I  
sip a yellow substance,  
a perpetual decay that dried my father's breast  
and my mother's voice  
to teach me the meaning of my name. Sisonke!  
What of the golden leaves?  
We, their future grandfathers, will tell them  
how once they rode the rays of the sun  
but this will remind them of how they died.

**Were words enough** and I more creative  
I would write myself next to you  
in this poem  
and be with you forever

## **Some of the pains**

I have waited for time  
to teach me how to grieve  
and find oxygen to breathe  
- my gullible heart forgets how to feel

But these third world pains  
beg to be felt  
O! to be old and young  
like a faint light

## **Ah! Mthatha, you giant eunuch!**

Your barren crotch ensnares  
the decapitated bodies  
of your unyielding seeds.

## **Black bodies**

My agony manifests  
in an invisible thyroiditis  
when I contemplate poems  
about the desecration of the black body  
for dissertations are no longer plausible  
and mass protests are death  
I have seen these bodies  
scattered like dandelions in the wind  
and reduced to ancient dust

the burden of our lives makes us all artist  
and historians, squabbling about our things

## Poetry

What weight does a poem hold  
when ghosts lament their lives  
and infants bleed,

and the bickering gods  
settle their scores?

## Beauty

I have learnt that beauty is queer  
and is often brutalised  
by the unreceptive eye;

that it has nothing to do  
with holding,

but a lot with credence  
and with letting go

## To live

I forget how to live or to exist  
I forget to philosophise  
the quandary I have been born into:

I do not care about the division of cells  
and the trigonometry of the earth,  
the lapsing of time  
or mechanics of the heart.

When I stop to live  
I hear the silence of stones  
and flowers wailing in a gust,  
the echo of the human noise  
our resting bodies make.  
And our ambivalent souls  
imbue one another in the burning fires  
of our fragile youth.

# Sisanda Mrwebi

Sisanda Mrwebi is an Industrial Engineering student at NMMU.

“My ambition is to become a professional poet, and also to be an industrial engineering practitioner.



“I like to write poems which reflect how I feel about a particular situation. I also like poems which advise, bring awareness and warn people, especially the younger generation. Thus I write both love poems and cautionary poems.

“My involvement with this group has enabled me to write with greater freedom: when writing poetry you don't have to have barriers preventing you from expressing yourself. You can write down whatever is on your mind.”

## **Frightened**

I'm freezing here, alone  
tryin'a figure out  
why I'm on my own.

Rejection  
as a result of possession  
that's tryin'a take over,

calling up on God  
to rescue me

from becoming  
what was not meant for me  
to be

## **Child in the street**

A drained face with no smile,

a flattened tummy,  
his body half-covered with cardboard boxes:

sheltered by a bridge,  
eating dustbin meals,  
barefoot with bruises.

He loiters about the streets all day  
looking for food,  
he coldly begs:  
his skin cracked and thin.

Shame comes over my heart.

What if he makes a clean start?  
His need is care;  
a person to love him,  
and  
to be there.

## **Fear not**

I'm here  
to be your shoulder to cry on

give you a hand when you fall;

don't be frightened  
I'm here

to be your pillar  
to lean on

## **I am what I am**

a black beautiful woman, I am  
a bold pretty woman, I am  
from an African family, raised  
by both loving hands, told  
what's good and bad;  
I am what I am

they say black is beautiful;  
like a chameleon I become colourful  
with my mates, because black is beautiful,  
so colourful, powerful and wonderful;

I am  
what I am



## **Journey**

I always did what I was thinking  
silently, without anyone hearing:

singleness was what I thought,

being with the rest was never  
dreamt about.

I didn't know how to love

till a great feeling of oneness  
with a few people started,

a bonding feeling

I'd thought never existed:  
and now I know how to love.

## **My life**

Full of brightness and delight  
filled with fruitful moments

wonderful experiences  
my life,

tender sweetness: regardless of bitterness  
others insinuate

without taking a step  
or tasting how it feels

to be  
such a worker.

## **My soul**

My soul can't rest,  
my mind can't resist desire.  
I'm addicted to demoralisation.

As they insinuate,  
murmuring men  
make it more of a pity

and make my heart fall:

acting tough,  
I pull myself back.

Threats won't  
get them satisfaction.

## **Hurting**

The soil is thirsty.

Red as the evening sun,  
oven hot,  
the sunlight is heating hard.

I am sitting here  
seeking help.

No soul to give me a hand,  
no water  
to wetten my hurting throat

## Thought

Imagination  
fades away.  
Mind if I follow?

Without you  
I am a leafless tree,  
with upright twigs  
colourless

without the sunlight  
of confidence.

I struggle for life  
in this barren soil,  
so dry.

Mind  
if I follow?

## This little world of mine

Under the influence of compression  
pushing, pulling, tackling  
these obstacles closing the way

I wanna be out  
I want observations to be made on my art  
I write  
I express what's inside  
bringing awareness to the lost

no soul is willing to help  
I shout  
ought to be fighting back  
this barrier inside my heart

anger, quietness, being shy

# **Mohamed Rahmtalla**

Mohamed Rahmtalla is reading for an Honours in Applied Language Studies at NMMU.

He sees himself essentially as a translator, rather than as a poet, but has enjoyed joining the group as it has taught him about poetry.

## I said

*Before I resigned from my job and came to study in South Africa, my best friend and nephew, Abodi, tried to dissuade me not to do so. This is our conversation.*

He said:

Oh, my uncle, do not be a child again.  
Do not return to high school madness.  
Do not ruin our life,  
resign your job, abandon your flat,  
and leave your friends.

Banks by instalments sell cars;  
flats they offer too.  
Brides for grooms are waiting.  
Buy a car, take a wife, make children  
and die a warm peaceful gentleman.

School days are over, time will not come back.  
Hide your baldness in a wife.  
Be wise and grownup.

I said:

Nay, my nephew,  
I am not for these.  
I will travel and see the world.  
I will not wear my life away here  
until death decides my pilgrimage.

I will not die in a cold hospital room  
where nurses issue formal death papers  
and bored translators disagree about my name.  
Worms will not feed upon my corpse,  
nor their little ones play in my ears.

I will die amongst eagles on mountains  
or in ocean's daughter's abdomen;  
and let them translate whales' songs.

**Ah, if she comes quickly**

*This poem is transferred from the hieroglyphs into Arabic and I translated it into English.*

Ah, if she comes quickly  
as a royal post,  
impatiently waits  
for the master's letter.  
The stables were prepared,  
the horses were in the field,  
the chariot set for exodus.  
On the road it wants no lingering.

Ah, if she comes quickly  
like a royal horse  
chosen from a thousand wild horses,  
jumping around its pasture.  
The jockey know its legs  
and when the lashes crack  
it has no wait.  
The lover's heart is dancing.  
She is no longer far.

Ah, if she comes quickly  
like a deer running in the desert,  
its legs circle it  
and its body is feeble.  
Fear is in its heart.  
A hunter and his dogs follow.  
They cannot see its dust.

A miracle! She looks  
at her resting place.  
If you visit her cave  
four times she kisses your hand.

# Nolwazi Gumenke

Nolwazi Gumenke is a BCom: Economics (general) first year student on the NMMU Saasveld Campus in George, who wishes gain from her field of study, travel the world and equip herself with as much experience as possible.



to

“Writing is therapy for me. I have a lot to say but sometimes I feel like the people around me are caught up in their own world and don’t have time to listen to my silly thoughts: so whenever I feel like I’m going to explode or I’m too overwhelmed to say anything I transcribe my thoughts, ideas and emotions in ink.

“Writing keeps me sane, and that’s how I have conversations with myself.

“I write about everything, really. But I have noticed that a lot of my work is centred around lust and heartbreak. I think it’s mainly because of the stage I am in in life, moving from teenage years to adulthood is a very interesting journey.

‘I have learnt the importance of imagery. I now write to paint a picture, but I’m still new at it: with practice I will get better.

“I appreciate the opportunity offered by these workshops.”

## **After the war**

What do we do  
with the guns and the tools?  
What do we do with the dead bodies?  
What do we tell the families?

How do we fall in love again  
with the person we see in the mirror?

Do we hide the guns  
and tools under the river?

Just for in case the war starts again,  
we will have them near  
and they will be sharper  
and more dangerous than before?

Do we take them to the mountain top  
and forget they ever existed?

Or do we frame them  
and reminisce once in a while?

Do we put them in a safety deposit box  
where our kids will see them one day?

After the war,

after we conquer the twenty-one year  
abstinence limit set by our society,  
then what?

Do we lose it the night after?  
Or wait until we get married?

What happens when it's all said,  
and done?

When butterflies no longer take the stomach  
by storm when we smell familiar cologne!

You know, after the virginity  
is gone and our bodies crave for sex no more,



what happens then?

When the urge to be cuddled dies?

How do we close this one door  
when we don't know what stands on the other side?  
When it's all said and done.  
Then what?

## **Booty call**

How dare you call me that!  
How dare you be so ungrateful!  
Are you calling me a sperm dish?  
Huh?  
Would you rather have me charge you  
a few pennies for sex?

Ain't it a gift from heaven?  
Ain't it supposed to be free?  
Where do I begin to put a price-tag on such?  
On what grounds should we indulge?  
Do I need to justify my satisfaction?  
Why should sex be a disgrace?  
Do you want me to lie and say I love?  
Can't I just lock you up,  
tie you on a bed,  
and explore my fantasies,

lay you down, ride on you like a horse?  
Show off my booty-shaking skills,  
suck your lips and all,  
scratch your back and your chest,  
spank your ass and lick your toes?

Can't I crucify you on a steel bed  
and make you testify?  
Can't I give you all of me,  
make you roar and confess?  
Bite your neck, heat you up  
so you sweat to sweat no more?

Knock you off your feet,  
get you down on your knees  
begging for more?  
Wake up Monday morning,  
kiss you on the cheek and leave.

When we meet then on the corridor  
we pretend we've never met.

For I just want  
to explore my fantasies.

## Friendship

Friendship, like wine,  
gets better with time;  
like water,  
you need it to survive.

It's gas to a car,  
air to the human body,  
food to the stomach and soul.

It's home.  
True evidence of love.

When two, not connected by blood  
share a few laughs together  
their hearts connect automatically:  
the bond they share is stronger  
than the walls of Jericho.

Somebody you know you can show your true self  
with no judgment.

When you have somebody  
who knows you,  
has seen you at your worst but still loves you.

This one goes to my friends  
for having my back,  
wiping my tears,  
listening to my problems,  
answering my calls at ungodly times,  
tolerating my moods,  
forgiving mistakes,  
loving me.  
And being my pillar of strength.  
Just want you all to know that you are appreciated.  
Couldn't have asked  
for better friends.

## Grievance complaint

Swear I'm taking him to the CCMA for unfair dismissal.  
For he led me on.  
Held my hand and said "This feels right,"  
and kissed me on the forehead.  
Introduced me to his grandmother.  
Took me to parks and cinemas.  
Met with his friends,  
with my not knowing he did all of this for the sex.  
I still remember the bittersweetness I felt  
when he said "You mean the world and a half to me  
but my Facebook wall, it's off limits."  
The audacity of this man!  
He looked into my eyes and talked  
about how he'd been imagining our getting married  
and having little babies that had my eyes and lips.  
I sat there like the fool that I am  
and joined this imaginary future.  
I wished for kids with the texture of his hair and his smile.  
Wanted them to have his eyes not mine,  
so I could look into them and get caught up in his love.  
He said "Happy second month anniversary  
and I look forward to many more."  
I leaned closer and something was not right.  
His heartbeat was normal.  
When did my presence become so flat?  
I looked into his eyes and I saw chick number two  
reflecting in there.  
I tickled him and heard her voice in his laughter.  
He smiled and chick number two's heart reflected.  
Dear Lord I swear if we dusted his heart,  
we'd find her fingerprints in there.  
My heart sank for a retrenchment I saw coming,  
with candidates auditioning for my role.  
He had no intentions of renewing my contract.  
This I call unfair dismissal.

## **If I could, I would**

If I could take your pain away,  
I would carry all your burdens on my shoulders  
just to see you smile.  
Don't care how heavy they are.

If I could replace all the tears you've cried  
with a bucket full of smiles, I would.  
See, if I could let our bodies keep each other warm,  
I would allow you to hang your body around mine  
like a question mark,  
stretch your back muscles until our hearts beat as one.

I would do just about anything to see you smile  
but I was taught to put me first  
and what you require from me is against what I believe in.  
If I could, I would.

If I could read your mind, I would stop asking  
silly questions and making my dull jokes.  
See, if I had an idea of what you were going through,  
I'd let myself in and wipe all that sadness.  
But I can't read your mind, and only you can let me in.

Yesterday I tried listening to your heartbeat  
and it didn't tell me much.  
I leaned closer, your lips were trembling as always,  
but didn't tell me much.

I put my tongue inside your mouth hoping to suck out  
whatever was bothering you, but in vain.  
See, if I could I would.

I could go hungry, go to the ends of the world  
just to set you free, but I need you to let me in.

I need you to open more than your arms,  
need you to open your heart and mind. Let me in.

If I could, I would.

## If and when

If you still see mistakes,  
spot flaws,  
point faults,  
see weaknesses  
and imperfections,  
you are not yet in love.  
Wait until you walk on thorns and do not feel anything.

Wait until you hear he is a rapist  
but do not believe that you're his next prey.  
Wait until you hear he is responsible for the house break-in  
at your place and still not give a fuck.  
Wait till you walk on thorns and do not feel anything.

If you can still remember how many girls he cheated with,  
if you can still remember how many times he lied,  
how many times he stood you up  
and how many times you fought  
you are not yet in love.  
If you can still remember how many times you broke up  
only to make up, then you are not yet unloved.  
Wait till you walk on thorns and do not feel anything.

Wait for him to break your heart to a million pieces  
and still love him with all those bits.  
Wait till his love suffocates you  
and you feel like there's a steel knife on your wind pipe  
but still love him with every breath you take.

Wait until one touch,  
one look,  
one kiss,  
one word from him makes everything ok.  
Wait until his scent,  
his presence,  
his smile, wipe the slate clean,  
bring a Colgate smile to your face  
and make you whole again.  
Then you are in love.

Wait till you walk on thorns and do not feel anything.

## **When bodies drop dead**

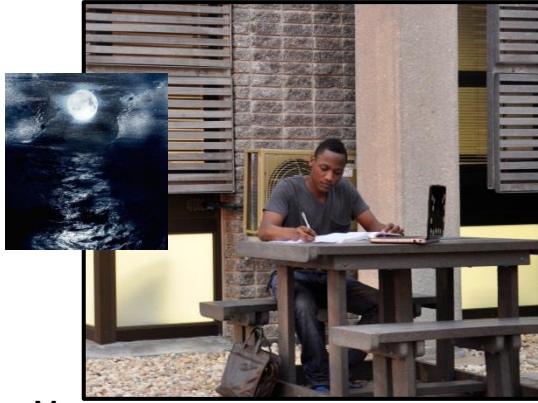
When bodies drop dead for beliefs that never existed.  
Makes no sense!  
I wish to travel back to my grandfather's time.  
Turn the clock back  
to an atmosphere of fifty years ago  
of real men, where age didn't define maturity.  
Where a man's ego didn't depend  
on how many panties he'd dropped down.  
Nor on the amount of blood he had shed.

I long for that place  
Where people were one, so united  
the entire neighbourhood felt like home.

When bodies drop dead for beliefs that never existed.  
Hurts my soul!  
Makes me feel for the next generation.  
Cripples my smile,  
knowing my kids will grow up with no solid man.  
Drains my strength.

Our society is shallow, with unconfident men  
seeking contentment by hurting others.  
Hurts me  
to see arrogance replacing peace and harmony.  
Tears me up  
knowing that people drop bodies dead  
for beliefs that never existed.

# Tawona M Ranganawa



Tawona M

Ranganawa is a fourth year Law student at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. He is passionate about Law, but enjoys many other fields as well. He feels open to any career, “as for now”.

“I cannot really define what I want to be but what I know for sure is that I want to be great.” Tawona is inspired and motivated by the greatness of Nelson Mandela.

“I write because it gives me a sense of freedom,” he says. “I write about religion, politics, Africa, love . . . .”

In the workshops Tawona says he has learned the importance of editing his work. “I used to just write randomly and I did not edit.”

“I have also enjoyed interacting with other poets and knowing that you are not alone makes a huge difference.”



## **Demon**

Last night as sleep captured me  
a snake, huge and ugly,  
swerved and shook the wind,  
battling a man  
with armour of gold.

I felt the trial of a demon  
fought off and erased from my life.

I felt the light of a new day,  
a new beginning,  
a new me.

Someone was battling for my life,  
fighting the claws of death.  
I stood by, scared, my legs weak.

The glare of the armour captured my sight.  
I didn't run until the snake was slayed.

Now I am awake in bed  
shaken and sweating,  
wondering what has just happened.

Am I delivered?

## **On a clouded moon**

The sky painted in dark misty blue.  
Heavy hearts echo in the dark.  
Chattering and wails embrace the atmosphere.  
Now we wait, with questions: what happened?  
What did we do wrong,  
or not do?

A harvest of tears, folded hands,  
forced laughter from the back.  
Head on head, an inevitable collision.  
It was time, nobody could stop it.  
A bullet to the heart, a missed call.  
It's now a clouded moon with little light shining.

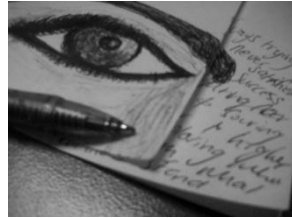
We are lost. Wondering how the world works,  
our judgment blurred.  
Is it our time or His time?  
We are puppets. We brew in our anger,  
we don't know what happens next.  
Curiosity drives us to travel the sad road.

The knowledge kills us.  
We want to know, but ignorance ambushes us.  
Forever we will remain in the dark.

The good Lord shared only some secrets of life.  
It's forever a clouded moon, hanging.

# Megan-Jayne Elworthy

Megan-Jayne Elworthy is based on the NMMU South Campus, studying towards a Bachelor of Education, focusing on the Foundation Phase.



She wishes to be a teacher at a school where the learners need to be inspired and motivated. “It is my hope to one day to be involved in the political development of education in South Africa.”

She says: “I consider myself a creative thinker, always thinking outside the box and always trying to swim against the current. It is because of this that I always have a lot going on in my mind and life, so if I did not write I would lose myself, my identity. I believe my voice is vital to my happiness and success in life.

“I often write about my confusion and questioning of the world, and the things that I have to deal with as an independent woman. Another theme that I frequently write about is unity and connection to the moments in life that resonate with me and my views.”

She says that during the workshops she learned that she had something to say about almost anything, if she put her mind to it. “I can write about most situations. Also, I learnt a lot about the importance of editing your work, although it is possible that a piece of writing will never be complete . . . .”

She works as an online English teacher, so meets people from all over the world. “I love meeting new people, and learning about different cultures and perceptions. I love the environment, relaxing at the beach and hiking in forests. These things are my inspiration.”

## **indecisive**

The journey is driven by the day:  
strong winds are fighting  
strange clouds are coming  
rain is periodically falling  
the sun still shining

and it's transparent

the weather is screaming whispers

of sleepless nights,

and the turmoil of

indecision.

## **Change**

I don't know how to end them –

situations,  
discussions,  
relationships,  
poems,

anything.

I only know how to lose them –

sad,  
but it's just change  
in the end.

## Waking

The crescent  
moon nurtures my happiness  
and freedom  
of movement, of motion  
dancing to songs  
with insane rhythmic tendencies.

It's good to be free,  
free to say  
"I hate the way you judge me."

On my way  
I stop at the sea:  
duties on hold for  
a man  
almost waiting for me  
says  
he's born in the 50s  
much to tell  
too many opinions  
so we pray  
about struggle  
and gratitude.

The sea gets rougher  
as the wind carries our words

and I am reminded  
that to be free  
is the responsibility  
to sometimes carry  
the burden of a smile.

## Diary

I try each day  
to extend myself . . .  
do more . . .  
but feel lazy.

Laziness must have the lowest vibration.

What have I learnt?  
Reflection. Who am I?  
Here comes a poem.

The crux of my mentality  
– maybe you can relate –  
is that everything is a contemplation:  
imagine the word,  
the vibration (the sound)  
of destiny . . . .

The journey through fiery deserts  
and full moonrises  
(yes, that is what I saw on the frequency of contemplation)  
raw energy flows  
like the sun's summery growth  
and the mountain's wintery ice.

I must think about it...

## Near the end of June

notice the implications

it's all mathematics  
each observation  
don't doubt it,  
your ability to do  
philosophy  
through poetry...  
guided by the rules set in front of me  
blocking me, actually  
from the expression I truly seek

that's why I write  
for me

reflecting on poets like:

Maya Angelou

her experience

her advice

her wisdom

Kalil Gibran

his obsession with nature

how that described his love

his life

and John Keats

his fear of the unknown

of not being good enough

his philosophy

his legacy

## Cloth

*i.*

the cloth hit the surface  
with a light thump,  
soft and versatile:  
the colour unknown to me, pink  
or some variant of it, holey  
so it can absorb the liquid  
it uses to clean

no hands to fulfil its purpose  
it lies there, lifeless now  
bundled up and waiting . . .

like my generation

*ii.*

my pen  
travels beside my post-its  
so I can make notes about this  
and that,  
depends on what I notice  
and practise.  
Now I am just exhausted.

Too much in life  
drains my creativity,  
drains my objectivity

and so my post-its look like  
a cloth with nothing to clean

and my pen looks like  
a cloth after a party

with so much to do  
but somehow just waiting . . . .



## **Oh, handsome stranger**

Oh, handsome stranger  
let's take things slow.  
The flicker of your tongue on mine feels sweet  
but also rushed, and like only a taste  
of what it could be . . . .

Oh, handsome stranger,  
tall and strong  
like my lust,  
I urge you to wait;  
I might want more . . . .

Oh, handsome stranger  
We don't have to be  
alone tomorrow . . . .  
Let's see where this could go.  
I wish for a chance  
to maybe know  
love, at the end of this night . . . .

## **respiration**

wish I never . . .  
not such a thing,  
from a happy mind,  
but rather a  
misled one.

always trying to recognize  
the pattern set within  
made the suggestion  
slipped into nothing  
drifting away,

writing words about being  
– absurd

## Ornament

I am a dream catcher  
hanging there  
pressed against a wall  
becoming less than 3 dimensional  
yet always wanting to be more

at least I'm there  
on display . . . not willingly  
but purposefully  
I represent a dreamer, yes a dream

decorated in many ways  
but my depth is within  
where no eye can witness  
no ear can hear  
no tongue can taste  
but here I am  
hanging,

trying  
to be real  
and exist on a wall

# Sinako Stuurman

Sinako Stuurman is a BSW student, studying social work on the NMMU South Campus.



Sinako finds the writing poetry to be an outlet: “Writing allows me to pour out my emotions and to deal with what is of concern to me.

“I write about the daily struggles that I face, and also about what my take is on the pressures that we might be going through as the human race.”

His recent involvement in the creative writing workshops has helped him to consider the style of writing that a poet might use, and the emphasis on the subject matter without being obvious: “Most of all, I have seen how to write for readers, but not to put ideas into their heads – rather to leave readers to use their imaginations, to make their own conclusions.”

“We might think that we are, what might be might not be.”

## **Plosives**

In this dark cloud  
I'm trying to breathe,  
the air seems heavy:  
what's a person to do?

Questions block my thoughts.  
I'd supposed that things of this earth  
were meant for us  
who live here.

I find myself asking  
whether I'll ever see a picture perfect  
pendulum?

But pandemonium  
paralyses pondering,

preventing progress;

then the pressure of peers  
peels away principles

to expose pessimistic ideas.

## Lesson

You don't know what the Lord  
has bestowed upon you;  
those piercing eyes,  
that infectious smile,  
couple to form the face  
that brightens the room.  
Your spirit beams with the joy  
of the break of dawn.

You bring lessons,  
carrying life-changes  
to the lives you touch.  
This learning comes  
from within,  
where a stone  
has been replaced by a fiery heart.

So thank you:  
you and your family  
will find room  
in the Lord's house,  
the resting place of souls.

# Ammaarah Abrahams

Ammaarah Abrahams is studying for a BA degree majoring in Psychology and English Literature. “After this degree, I would like to further my literature studies; travel the world and maybe one day complete a novel. But until then, I’ll live in the moment and enjoy every wonderful moment that life has to offer.



“Writing allows me the freedom to express my thoughts and feelings, although no amount of words can fully describe the intensity of one’s inner emotions: but that’s the beauty of writing; the ability to write, and still to have a sense of mystery behind every word.

“My main theme is love. I find the notion of love to be massively intriguing, as I feel it can either make or break you. I try to see the dangers of love, and still sift through to find the grace of love.

“In this course I’ve learned not to give up. Writing is such a great learning process; you observe things that you don’t usually take note of. I’ve learned to take all sorts of critique from readers and turn each into constructive criticism; and to be open minded towards people’s opinions. I have a broader viewpoint on the world, and take the little things into account – I’m learning to appreciate the finer details of life – no perspective is trivial, especially when it comes to writing.

“Showing deep emotions through writing does not make one weak or vulnerable; exposing one’s inner thoughts shows the absence of fear towards anyone’s misconceptions and judgments about how you feel.

“Unhealed scars bring the most beautiful words that astonish both the eyes when you read and the hands when you write.”

## **Beneath**

*i.*

He guards his innocence  
while summoning his demons,  
playing suspect to his own mind:  
victim of his actions.

His own prison is his heart;  
all that he feels is nothing  
and everything, all at once.

*ii. Seen yet hidden*

I fell in love with his dark soul  
yet he is mesmerized,  
thinking love is kept for the deserving.

The waves of his darkness  
echo in the canals of his heart,  
singing a song that only I can hear.

The venom pulsates  
his daggered heart  
that jerks like a pendulum  
accumulating all the delusions  
and resurrecting ancient wounds  
that poison the lively soul and mind  
that he tries to conceal through silence.

He's deaf to his own calling.  
I can hear.  
He's blind to his own doings.  
I can see.

I couldn't have loved a darker soul  
who lightens my life  
in ways unfathomable

And if I spoke of this,  
he's that vulnerable

he'd crumble.

## Unknown

*i.*

Does he not know  
that every darkness  
can be cleared through light  
which he keeps from seeping  
into his undying hurt?

Even in the dark still of the night  
the moon and stars unite  
against the black ink the sky writes with.

And in the blazing daylight  
the sun can be kicked back by clouds  
bringing early dark.

Does he not know  
that every good has bad,  
and every bad has good?

He is all too oblivious  
to the unknown

that I will make known to him.

*ii.*

I am like  
the layers of the earth's crust,  
untouched  
yet known in its deep existence.

And I swear  
I would wait,  
desiring actual patience  
for that soul to unleash the beauty  
that my darkness cages.



## Calling

*i.*

“Love me less,” she says  
as if loving her more  
would propel her to fear  
and doubt every action  
and promise he ever made.

“Love me less,” she reiterates  
as if loving her more  
would resurface her pessimism  
and abandon all her hope.

“Don’t love me more,” she warns:  
yet, deep below her commands  
lies her craving for him  
to cushion her cynicism  
and put her troubles to bed.

*ii.*

Does he not bother at all to care?  
She does not request much.  
“Can you nestle my agony to rest?” she asks.  
“It is what I’ll need,”  
like basic want to a hungry beggar.

Her heart craves  
only his solid touch  
to secure  
her wrecked pain.

But every touch stings  
and every word bites;  
nothing heals,  
the scars remain.

.

## Particles

It astounds me to find  
that it only takes a particle of my heart  
to understand all of yours

but it's horrific to know  
that all of your heart  
cannot unravel  
even a fragment of mine.

## Oblivion

And even though I could not love  
my sceptical instincts  
falter  
as he explores  
the soft edges embedded  
around the rough curves  
of my forbidden heart  
that only he could seize.

Do I not acknowledge  
that he will help anchor  
my weighing ship of worries,  
and all things of nothingness  
can and will be eased  
like an antidote to a deadly illness  
which poisons my heart  
with the venom of my mind?

## Hope

It's remarkable how her heart  
can store all the destruction  
that lurks everywhere and nowhere  
through the hollowness of her soul

and yet  
still accommodate love  
every minute  
every second.

Hope  
was her solution.

## Ironic

It is in fact quite sad  
how her goals became dreams  
and how her nightmares  
became her reality

## Love

One word can  
aggravate hundreds of agonies  
torture thousands of wounds  
destroy a million bits of happiness.

She drowns her hurt  
with tears from her blurred eyes:  
her heart aches with brokenness.

She learns to speak  
through silence.  
She recognizes love  
through pain:

it's the way  
she knows it is real.

## Confession

The forceful push  
against the hard brick wall;  
his colossal fists  
knock my fearful  
living corpse,  
with blood down my face:  
the edge of weakness curls up in me;  
he surrenders me, crippled.  
Daily.

My fragile feelings  
are torn  
by words which lie beneath  
the sharp lips  
that he seals with lies.

He leaves me hanging  
on almost death.

## Brian Walter

Brian Walter studied literature at NMMU before the merger formed the new university. He taught at Chapman Senior Secondary School in Gelvandale, and then for 18 years at the University of Fort Hare.



He is a poet, with four collections published. He has taught in creative writing courses at NMMU, at the University of Fort Hare and at Rhodes University.

“When I was asked whether I would assist with workshops for students at NMMU, I readily agreed. Working with younger poets keeps me in touch with the voices and concerns of our young generation, and also with the spoken-word poets who are so popular, so energetic.

“My own writing is perhaps a little page-based, although I do also like to write for the ear. So my contribution has been to speak about what I do with poetry, and to encourage the writers to find some blend between that, and what they do more naturally.

“I like to encourage writers to find their own voices, to be alert to language and its possibilities. It has been a pleasure to work with this group.”

## In the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum

*in memoriam: Jenny Fabbri*

*i. Henry Moore*

Ha! This gallery's got six reclining figures  
by Henry Moore — my old heavy-weight  
of inspiration, with his huge earth spirits,  
his essences of weight, gravitational down  
upon their plinths, form-mastered to shape,  
rounded human-idea brought forth:

and here a sketch, a coloured lithograph,  
six figures: you are to me as a canvas  
to the soft excited breast of first love.

*ii.*

Here's Graham's *The Artist Turns his Back  
on the Bay*. Though I've seen this before,  
I've never seen it quite this way. I've just done  
a tour of the South End Museum, that *memento*  
of the pain one human can give another,  
of cluster-people smashed in their families,  
houses down, driven off, and here's that hurt again,  
or anger, sadness, defiance, as the artist walks away  
from the very ruins of place, community,  
and like Auden's horse, his *Icarus*, life goes on  
in the very flutter of the apartheid flag,  
the tugboat busy, busy on the dark blue sea,

and through these ruins of spirit and place  
the artist leaves; defiant, back-turned,  
carrying his own soul and visions  
and completed canvasses: and over his shoulder  
his brushes of new sights, new creations.  
He steps out like a matador, while the crowds  
jeer and roar their farewells, derisive —  
one bares an awesome bum. He strides past  
the women, and out of the sin of the ruined  
land, wasteland, the wilderness of this city I'm in.

*iii. On Finding a Chagall Angel in the Bay*

In the dark, dark, dark swirl of brushstrokes  
a beast, with comic-effort, somehow grounded,  
strains away: and somewhere wings,  
and a halo-round golden sun-face,

till I find, in the ink, amongst the somewhere  
butterfly locust wings a windswept angel  
afloat in front of the horse,  
looking backwards, serenity just on her face;

as though a splat of art, a feather fallen from Chagall,  
has drifted somehow down to settle the Bay.

*iv. La colombe á l'arc-en-ciel*

The dove like a phoenix flaps still-lifed  
across the rainbow, frozen. No feather  
moves, tufts inert around its claws,  
artificer-made, all dead on the sky-page  
of imagination, and monument stiff  
on its flat rainbow: only I feel  
the dove-head – fragile in its storybook  
self, and storybook feathers – is delicate,  
alive, alert, sensitive, real.

# Lutho Matiwane

Lutho Matiwane's first poem has given the title to this collection. Aptly, it looks at the disturbing power of words, and the conflict that creative artists encounter.



Lutho is studying BCom (General Accounting) at the NMMU Saasveld Campus in George.

She enjoys creative writing, and using her imagination. She comments: "Writing gives me peace of mind and relaxes my thoughts. It takes me to my own world.

"Furthermore, writing also forces me to meditate on things I haven't even experienced.

"However, I mostly write about my emotions."

Meditating on the writing sessions, she says "I have learnt to draw inspiration from a picture – a literal picture, or one in my mind – and to come up with a great poem!"



**I wanted to write you a poem**

Beneath the bridge of metaphors  
I wanted to write you a poem,

but I got scared  
that it would mould and bend,  
give sight to the blind,  
heal hearts that are broken.

It would reveal secrets,  
tell stories untold  
of unconditional love.

My hands would be uncontrollable.

It would tell of sciences  
unprovable.

I wanted to write you a poem.

## Things lost in the fire

I still remember the fire.  
I was six,  
too small  
to have lost it all.

His cunning made it easy for him  
to lock me into that room,  
It is inexplicable. I felt  
affliction akin to labour pains.

My hands had gone limp  
and I couldn't fight.  
I watched it burning all I had.  
Meekness and kindness,  
love and care,  
gentleness and all.

Pride and future destroyed by his blithe actions.  
He managed to bring me to his do,  
his voice soft and cajoling.  
I still remember the fire, burning all my tomorrows.

I thirst to sleep, to sleep forever.  
A coma would do me just fine,  
to get rid of these whispers, nightmares.  
Did he rape my thought too?

I thought the memories would fade, but I remember all.  
The movements, whispers.  
I can feel their weight on my chest.  
That fire  
lives in me,  
something burning every time I close my eyes.

How do I forget?  
This man has made part of me fertile.

# Olwethu Mxoli



Olwethu Mxoli, an LLB student on the NMMU

South Campus, says: “I don’t like to write. I need to write. It is the only place I have ever felt I can crack open my chest and not be scared of or embarrassed by of the ghosts that lurk there. Ink and paper allow me to be honest with myself even when I would rather not.

“I have tried to look back, to the time I first realised the cluster of squiggles meant something, and in every image that comes to mind I have a crayon or pen in my hand scribbling on someone’s wall or book.

“I write about things that fascinate me. Love, history and loneliness, and how they are linked in some weird way. I write about things I wish did not fascinate me. Death, and the violence in our country that is somehow becoming the norm.

“I have learned to appreciate. I always thought that I was an open-minded person but through these workshops I discovered that that might not be as true as I had hoped. I have met people who have very strange ideas and who see the world through a lens I did not even consider existed.

“I have learned to open myself up to the world and look at something else besides my shoes. I watch people and trees and birds and ants and wonder....

“I have discovered that great trait I somehow lost in my rush to become an adult: to wonder, to enjoy and to think!”

## Untitled

heavy sacks swing  
one for each day

ragged, old and gaping  
and still weighty  
pulling down on woven peg

swinging carcass

poles bow  
the line dips  
forming a vicious half-mocking  
crescent smile

surging carcass

a gavel banged  
by a cold hand  
snatched the breath out of you  
you-sagging-heavy-bag

swinging carcass

here, you are equal  
weakened by man  
loaded sacks swinging  
side by side

dead

## Letters

I want long letters

the kind you have to wait for  
with postage stamps  
and thousands of finger-prints

imperfect letters  
with scratched out words

I want to see your handwriting  
how your e's look like r's  
I want to trace every loop  
always careful not to smudge the ink

I will read them  
crumb by crumb  
all the while wanting to devour

I will treasure them  
tuck them away  
to dig out  
when I want to smell you

I want letters with at least  
ten postscripts  
I want to know you squashed in  
every thought you could  
so I could hold them

I want to run to the post box  
each morning  
because it might be the morning

that brings  
the long letter I've waited for

my whole life

## Elizabeth

He named a port after you  
that grew into a city;  
and when sailors are wrecked  
they call out to you:  
they ask for your mercy.

He built a pyramid  
not with factory brick  
but imperfect stone;  
he sought for you  
he wanted your love;  
your memory  
never to be forgotten.

Bathed in the light  
of the tower  
that is said to groan  
lamenting for you  
as he did.

You never got to see the world  
he built in your honour.

He tried to make a model of you  
but couldn't,  
he ended himself to be with you.

Maybe now  
you ride elephants  
and dance in clouds of colour  
and drip with salty water.

None were loved like you,  
Elizabeth:  
none

## **Protest**

Matchstick and petrol  
erupt in the hot deadly kiss

a ring sears the street,  
in the wet sticky embrace of death:

men chant  
to the feared scrape  
of the panga on tarred ground:

they sharpen the edge  
to slit the throat

## **Quiet**

the room is empty  
stuffed with old  
time's slow hand  
grunting along

the tickets have been sold  
the crowds rushed in  
but the benches are bare

everything moves slowly

no excitement  
just a quiet  
anxiety

## Glass

the stupidity of you  
is delicate glass  
crafted by clumsy hands  
"it will not break" – they chorus:  
the cracks  
map the surface,  
fine lines  
sketch the convolutions of a life  
once young  
not yet alive

but old age  
is queen:  
the glass crumbles  
to dust, and she binds the dust  
with tears;  
and oh, the form that rises...  
sculpted by the pains of letting go,  
letting go of the stupidity, the fragility  
once suckled from innocence

to leave behind those days  
to scatter as sand  
on the shore  
to be pulled and let go  
by treacherous waves of hope

is the beauty of life,  
the greatness of glass



**becoming invisible**

the days are longer  
hours stuffed  
into crowded hampers

faces have blurred  
into one sticky mess  
voices wade  
through the muddy  
air

conversations seem rehearsed  
– she'll toss her hair now,  
and she does –  
I am sickened by the bubblegum smell

the corridors  
are empty  
clogged with heavy  
silence  
and the mute  
thud  
of his boots  
on the tile floor  
fading into the walls

# Unathi Slasha

## **Nobody weeps for Brutus**

I'd like to write a story  
and call it:  
"The Death of Mandela"  
where all my characters  
continue with partying,  
fucking,  
                  thieving  
robbing  
etc.  
after  
                  hearing  
about their leader's death.

## **In Postmodern times**

the poets are going to hell  
for not telling the whole truth  
(but truth does not exist!)  
for sorely exposing the ugly  
aspect of life (hey, we are in dystopian times)  
and its limping legs  
and its old skin  
that's flaking away  
like sprinkling confetti (that's my reality)

the poets are going to heaven  
for telling the beautified lie  
for solely eulogizing roses  
whilst eschewing the cruel  
and the raw facts of life.  
they are going to hell  
they are going to heaven  
"yes, that is right, there is no toilet  
and there is no kitchen," a friend said.

## And

*i.*

And the night goes silent as the violence of dreams,  
and the night creeps like church mice, footsteps unheard,  
and the night goes unnoticed, unbothered and unchanged,  
and the night goes on and on like life and like death,  
and still the blind man with his stick  
cannot point the difference between night and daylight

*ii.*

And the night is not complete without her shriek,  
it is not complete without contusions on her cheeks,  
it is not complete without the broken arm,  
the broken leg,  
the cracked ribs  
or a throbbing vagina;  
it is not complete without a tongue gyrating in blood,  
or the swallowing of blood clots to hide the shame.

## Bad luck

Never allow her to weep.  
If she cries  
then trouble comes.

And when that happens  
you better be holding the baby.  
Her tears

are of an old soul.

## **Absence**

I looked deep into his red eyes;  
I swore to myself, that God did not exist.

There was no guilt, no fear; his eyes were red  
with resentment and malice.

I struggled with him in a scuffle; he was stronger  
and more experienced in the art of brawls.

It was my first physical contact with a thug.  
He stabbed. I fell. Makhi screamed behind the counter.

I remembered what Makhi had said when I told him  
I'd had a premonition, that the dream

of three months ago was bound  
to come to fruition any day that week.

He did not believe me. "We can't close the shop  
because of a feeling," he had said.

## Value

The newspaper  
the radio  
the television  
the internet  
all of them  
tell me  
about bombings  
killing thousands  
of innocent  
women,  
men  
and children  
in Gaza.  
However none  
of them ever tell  
about the crisis  
in Congo  
or the conflict  
in Somalia.

I leave home  
for the mall  
for the shopping centre  
for church  
or the shebeen  
everywhere  
people are carefree  
like they have never  
watched or read  
the news.

### **In a dream**

Here trees & flowers  
are sentient  
(man, you chop them down with an axe  
and they bleed a sticky substance that  
resembles sap)

Here  
the wind walks like a hologram  
and the clouds weep  
giant drops  
hit the ground.

(Neters, the humans quiver  
when the earth  
trembles.)

### **This is not my reward**

I planted a plantation of potatoes  
  
but when harvest time arrived  
  
I reaped bags of thorns

### **Knowledge**

I have known  
and measured the depth  
of my unknowingness  
with every morsel of truth  
I stumbled on.

## **Grandmother**

I ate pap and spinach  
savoured confectionery  
and other delicacies  
guzzled African beer in a calabash.

I woke up the next morning  
with a decaying taste in my mouth  
and an upset stomach  
urinating uncontrollably  
and defecating,  
thinking regretfully, shit!  
I should have listened  
to my granny  
when she said  
I should not eat in my dreams.

## **No visitors**

Many days poems don't come  
or saunter within  
the boundaries of your comfort;  
don't blame them.  
You have to step out  
and go get them,  
grab them by the neck

frog-march them  
onto the pages  
of your existence.



# Azola Dayile

Azola Dayile is studying for a National Diploma in Journalism, wishing to become a full-time writer and critic.

The spoken-word poetry artist from KwaZakhele in Port Elizabeth began writing poetry at high school, though he never shared it beyond his peers.



In 2012, his first year at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, he joined the Culture Consciousness Society, hoping to grow his craft and become better at what he had been doing for some time. He joined fellow artists Sisonke Papu and Unathi Slasha to launch the Resonance Poetry Movement at NMMU in March 2013.

Through his work with this group, he gained the confidence to take to the stage and share his pieces with a larger audience. Some of his poems have been featured in the youth show on Radio L2K, a community radio station based in Uitenhage, Eastern Cape. Azola was also part of a collective that went to NMMU George campus's Cultural Day, where he and other poets performed. He has also performed at the Culture Consciousness poetry sessions, as well as at the Professor Neville Alexander International Conference hosted by CANDRAD at NMMU in 2013.

"I write about anything and everything that matters to me and to people like myself; my subjects range from identity, belonging, poverty, struggle and the overly clichéd love."

## **Claustrophobia**

When borders become too much  
and walls start caving in  
I battle for breath  
gasp, clench on to dear life  
and try not to give in.

We are packaged into boxes.  
One like the other,  
and all suffer  
from a like quandary.  
Loneliness, melancholy,  
depression, pestilence  
and madness:  
and love or sex  
offer no peace.

I tried Bukowski,  
then Marechera:  
tried Albert Camus  
on the floor of a wine cellar.  
Had conversations with a leper,  
shared hugs with a stranger:  
a baby boy in a manger.  
Still no redemption!

And with my last  
thirteen cents  
I put through a telephone call to heaven  
and it rang,  
but never an answer.  
This has since been the case  
whenever I am kneeled in prayer.

## Pursuit of Happiness

I have spent countless hours  
at church,  
pubs and strip clubs.  
With pastors,  
prostitutes  
and drunkards.  
In pursuit of happiness,  
the truth  
and fleshly desires.  
Sang happy songs with Hedonists  
travelled with nomads,  
got high with Rastas  
and broke bread with pariahs;  
camped on bended knees around hell-like fires  
to listen attentively to grown men liars.

Slaughtered sheep,  
goats  
and cows  
for this little bit of sanity  
and crowded peace of mind,  
but my hands are smeared with blood  
and the dark clouds still loom closely behind:  
where the hell is this love?  
Hearts are no asylum  
for feelings that people cannot describe.

And do you remember  
when god said "let there be light!"?  
I was unfortunate,  
and cast out  
to write this poem  
with my tongue in the grim dark.  
I am convinced collecting empty beer bottles  
and picking bread crumbs is my birthright.  
I am still in pursuit  
but the journey leads to a mad house.

**we, her**

i am  
because  
you are  
because i am,  
we are  
because  
you and i are  
because we are

even though  
we might be jarred  
and bombarded  
by the scars  
caused by  
our thousand black brothers  
dying behind bars.

you are in me  
and i breathe through you  
with you  
for you  
for you are part  
of this being,  
being who  
what we are  
and aspire to be.

even though  
we are faced  
by this phase of aids  
teenage pregnancy  
illiteracy  
yet we are not frightened  
nor fazed.

that is you and me,  
us, we;  
today, tomorrow.  
in the presence of her holy heavens.

**What if**

What if  
the stars were god's eyes  
all seeing  
only when it is night time  
blind during the day,  
in the dark  
coming alive  
to see who kneels  
to pray  
or pays  
tithes for blessings  
to loan sharks  
debt collectors  
and priests in dismay

I say

What if  
the sun and the moon  
were illegitimate twins  
of a love affair  
between Galalai  
and an angel with broken wings  
and a twig  
in her eyes

What if?

# Nombuyiselo Anthea Duma



Nombuyiselo Anthea Duma is a BTech Nature Conservation student on the Saasveld Campus in George, who is working towards being an environmental advocate.

For her, writing “gives me the opportunity to express my observations and emotions.” She is interested in observing social systems from an individual’s view, as well as the emotions that they evoke, without, however, being judgmental.

Duma has found that the workshop helped her to consider her audience, as well as whoever would be reading the poem in her absence. “Therefore I have learned how to use words to help the reader create images and feel what the writer was experiencing .

“Communication and learning is fun, so when we add poetry to it, that art is such a graceful joy. To see the poetry that life gives is inspirational.”

## **The fly woman within**

She cries, announces to the world her arrival,  
she cries for the loved ones she's had to let go,  
she cries tears of joy at the first sound of her new born  
    she is the woman within  
    let her cry: for her tears bring healing

Her fears rooted deep in self-doubt  
born with no surname, nor mother to learn from,  
her epiphany . . . love and truth begin with self,  
constantly told she cannot be  
when it's her light they fear most.  
    she is the woman within and  
    she does not fear loving unconditionally.

She labours, first to rise and last to rest,  
teacher in good faith with no credentials:  
domestic; nurse; a career woman . . . superwoman,  
unappreciated, undervalued, but highly sought after  
    she is the woman within and  
    labours tirelessly for her loved ones.

She knows betrayal . . . a father denied her,  
a mother left her for another man,  
her husband brought her children from friends,  
the church shamed her for separating from abuse:  
    she is the woman within  
    she forgives: but dare not ask her to forget.

Every parent's nightmare, she's the lady  
of the night selling pleasure she never enjoys:  
Lucifer's art of temptation and seduction,  
lies have her laying down, her seduction to succeed:  
    she is the woman within  
    and her sexuality does not define her.

Womanhood has taught her to cry and heal;  
not to fear her own power;  
to love unconditionally;  
forgiveness as a nurturing feminism.  
    Dear fly woman,  
    first love yourself.

# Sinesipo Jojo

Sinesipo Jojo is doing the final year of her BA Psychology Degree.

“I am studying towards becoming a Clinical Psychologist,” she says.

“However, writing is a way of expressing myself, a way of letting my feelings and thoughts out, and a way of speaking to myself. It is also a way of letting my thoughts be known by others.



“Most of my writings are based on personal experiences, and on the relationships I have with others.

“This year, in the workshops, my writing skills have improved in the sense that I have learned how to ‘summarize’ my writings by taking out all the unnecessary explanations and how to be more ‘poetic’.”



## Unhealed

I can feel the atmosphere  
heavy on my shoulders,  
I can't take the stuffy air of silence

I wish I could find the words  
to start a simple conversation  
'cause I can't stand this tension between our eyes,

but words are paused before even uttered,  
my troubled heart doesn't have the courage  
to process them  
'cause a million nights ago,  
many secret tears were dropped

a million tears ago  
many things were left unsaid,  
a million heartbeats ago  
many wounds were left

unhealed

## **Silence: the silent killer**

If someone had been there for you  
at some point in your life . . . .

Was it from the heart,  
if you were always reminded  
that something was expected in return,  
if something once of love and care  
felt like a favour, and a burden?

I knocked on your front door  
and was welcomed by a smile and warmth:

inside,  
I discovered a new dark room  
of anger and resentment.

It is stupid to ask what happened:  
we both know

it was silence.

## **Reconnecting**

When I trace tears back  
I find that they come from somewhere in my heart.

I find they are water drops  
from a roof leakage,  
in a room shut and neglected ages ago.

It's been long since  
I have opened the door,  
and been in the dust of this room.

So hold my hand.  
Let's get this place clean.

## Hard to find

Words are everywhere  
daily  
we read them, and they fly out  
like nobody's business when we are provoked . . .

but there's always something hard to understand . . .

they are hard to find  
when they are needed by the heart;

when the heart feels,  
words hide like they are not part of life.

While words are busy playing some twisted game  
my heart looks sadly through the glass windows  
as the raindrops slowly slide down, gently  
on a cloudy lifetime,  
hoping that one day,

words will realize what my heart wants to say.

# Precious Mahlangu

## **Teacher**

You didn't need to breastfeed  
to be a Mother,  
nor bring a candlestick  
to be a bright light.  
You didn't have to be a constructor  
to help build Knowledge.  
Or a map,  
to help discover our lost selves.

You didn't have to be Christmas  
to leave joyful memories;  
nor the sky  
to show us that there are no limits.  
You didn't have to stay forever  
for us to realize our infinite duties.  
Nor be scaffolding  
for us to gain strength.

## **Cold Rape**

The eyes have not yet seen,  
the ears have not heard  
and the mouth never spoke:  
the heart stopped beating,  
her fingers were in a motionless grip.

Her body died, still  
between the earth and his hands.  
The warmth of tears  
confirmed the last piece of life in her.

A man she once called friend,  
the coldness of his hands,  
like a snake, travelled from keeping her mouth shut  
to divide her legs, apart,  
groaning in satisfaction; it smelled like hatred.

Lucifer inside me  
stoned my innocence,  
the price of my father's cows,  
the pride of my mother's joy,  
society's measurement of decency in a woman,  
my future husband's faithfulness,  
as cold as death.

## **Let Her Cry**

Drop the last tear...  
for the freedom she fought for,  
dreams she prayed for;  
a mirage she fantasised  
but never saw.

Don't wipe them away...  
for the love she had to let go,  
a husband chosen for her  
and another woman's children she mothered.  
Punches substituted for soft kisses.

Let them flow...  
for the beauty taken by the wife-title,  
the imprisonment of society's level of dignity,  
reliance on a man not man enough to woman her,  
the labour pains of culture and tradition.

Let her cry.  
It might be the last voice she has,  
the last prayer she says,  
the last care she gives ,  
the only freedom she has,  
the only respect she gains.  
Let her cry when all else is of mankind

and she is a woman.

**Died inside her body**

*for Saartjie Baartman*

A beautiful African woman,  
well formed, found her nakedness imprisoned,  
was watched like an animal  
and then labelled abnormal.

She became money-making material,  
a test of human-animal sciences  
reduced to a tool  
of workmanship, enticed  
from one country to the other.

She shut her eyes to be in darkness.  
Their voices gave sight to her heart.  
Told her body to die, as their hands  
explored her caves and the edges  
of her womanhood, privacy, her majesty.

They carried her body shape in shame,  
neglected her strength in every penny they paid:  
well-formed and created by God,  
yet owed and sold to and by men.  
The look in their eyes as painful  
as the labour pains she never had.

And then she died  
of a disease called blackness  
and an overdose of womanhood,  
with bits placed in the soil of her fathers:  
her pain and shame told  
from one generation to the next,  
living in tongues and literatures

that pray that the soul  
of an African Queen be laid to rest.



# Afterword

## Resonance Poetry Movement

As a trio of young writers seeking our space and time in a literary world, filled with purists and all kinds of other nasty people, we have come a long way, even though we are not “there” yet.

This anthology is a step towards finding our own space and time, as young writers, in the often unwelcoming /unbecoming world of literature. We therefore congratulate and say a big “ups” to every writer who contributed towards this anthology, to Brian Walter, whose guiding hand and words of wisdom proved vital to our growth, and the NMMU Department of Arts and Culture who initiated and funded the project.

We have found what seems to sound like our voice: now it is for us to keep it, and learn to shout out louder to get our messages across.

Our efforts to find the peculiarities of “what poetry is” are often beset by the power of the authoritative cannon and the foreign traditions interwoven in our contemporary society’s very fabric. Thus, intricacies come along with the process of composing poetry. On the other hand, contemporary culture has inherited a rich cultural heritage of literature and to disregard it would be to deprive ourselves, and future generations.

But to persistently glamourize and romanticize the “poetic voices” of past ages would be to codify and vilify the poets, and any word artist, writing today. What is meant by “poetic voice” here is the adherence to a more conventional style, technique, rhyme and meter, punctuation, form, images, tone, diction and all the other writing decorum or elements that conventionally comprise a poem. Thus, “adherence” suggests the use of these elements in a rigid, conventional manner. This is because if the artist today is convinced that their work must, exclusively, operate according to this framework, their work would, over time, grow increasingly redundant and lose any agency and urgency it had the possibility of carrying in its own time.

This project therefore came about as the need to break shackles, old and new. It sought to exercise the freedom poets to express themselves in a unique and personal manner so that their ideas form and inform the cultural patterns of the time that they live in. To us, this was essential: this project facilitated the establishment of an institutional platform and recognition of these emerging voices.

These voices in *Beneath the Bridge of Metaphors* articulate their national condition, but within a universal application. They carry an alleviating personality that redefines, criticises and appreciates the contrived mechanics of the world that we have inherited. These voices, however, are not representatives of an exceptional proclivity of a 'new age' of writing or composing poetry but they are works with a very personal approach developed by individuals from different backgrounds, all with different sensitivities and sensibility, to give meaning to their works.

We, as the RPM, are proud to have been instrumental in giving marginalised voices a platform which promotes creative self-expression. This is a first step in proclaiming that the creative will always, through intuition, find or develop a style or technique to make their subject an independent and living work with an unquestionable relevance to a timeless and universal condition, which is the human condition.

Our hearts felt deeply satisfied and enthusiastic when we were reading through the draft of this anthology, as we woke to the reality that this project, after long planning, was coming to fruition.

We remembered when a RPM meeting raised the need to hold poetry writing workshops that would lead to a publication containing each participant's work. Now it is here. The very purpose of the anthology is closely related to the objective of RPM.

As an on-campus poetry society, specifically a spoken-word collective, our aim has been to gather the dubbing poets on campus and give them a stage, a platform, not only to nurture and master their art, but to make their voices heard. These spoken-word aims do not exclude us from the more literary,

written-word community, and a number of literary figures have in fact defended the spoken-word.

When a lecturer from the Department of English, Ms Nancy Morkel informed us that a Dr. Walter was available to co-operate with the RPM collective we were concerned. For many academics, spoken word is a skid-row whilst everything canonized is a shrine. This is painful, because spoken word is often excluded from the literary community, or not given the attention it deserves.

We do not believe there should be a distinction between what critics called stage-poetry and page-poetry. To us, poetry is simply poetry. When academic critics seek to categorize it into boxes for their own ideological fancies, it is destructive: poetry itself is already a marginalized genre of literature, and this distinction makes spoken-word artists the marginalized of the marginalized.

However, Brian Walter, a poet himself, proved to be a humble and open minded soul. The transition from stage to page was not, after all, a painful exercise but rather a challenging and enthralling activity. We believe that every contributor has learned a lot about their own approach to poetry writing.

We would like to add that the poetry writing workshops that gave birth to this publication also polished our writing style and gave us a fresh way of looking at our work – and ways of improving the expression of whatever topical concepts we choose to write on.

We are proud of this publication, which bares evidence of the resilience and dedication of RPM and the writers. However, the fact that it is the first step of a journey, for each writer, and for a larger project, is cause for deeper satisfaction.

Sisonke Papu, Azola Dayile and Unathi Slasha