

Carved onto the page

. . . 2016

Poems

. . . 2016

Poems from the 2016 NMMU
Arts and Culture workshops

Selected and edited by
Brian Walter,
poet and workshop facilitator



2016

Arts and Culture

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Foreword

This is the third year in which I have been asked to run poetry workshops with students at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

As in previous years it has been fun, creative and an education for me. I always find teaching and learning go hand in hand. One of the things I learned through practice this year was the art of letting go. Usually I have a fair number of workshops during which I assist writers to get ideas on paper, and to edit them. This year there were necessary austerity measures, and we had fewer sessions, and less time together. To a large extent this means that more of the work reflects the poets' own work, with less hands-on input from the facilitator.

This has allowed more of the poets' own voices to come through, I feel. This is true of the writers new to the course: but for me, this is interestingly true also of the writers who have been on the course in previous years. The experience from those years, and the learned discipline of editing, has made for poems that are interesting and well expressed.

Some poems are longer than might have been the case if we had worked, and re-worked them; but perhaps they're better for that!

In the workshops we used the sense of smell (spices, herbs and methylated spirits) to evoke memories, and writing; and also worked with clay to get a sense of "soil in the hands", of creating and shaping.

I thank the writers for sharing their words.

Brian Walter

Poet, workshop facilitator, editor

Olwethu Mxoli

Olwethu Mxoli is a 3rd year LLB student at NMMU. She has attended the course twice before.

“I have always said it is not a matter of liking to write, it is just an extension of who I am. It is what I need to do to make some sense of myself and my world. Sometimes I get it right.

“This year I have a mild obsession with the complexity of the mother-daughter relationship, how you want to sow yourself to them but are always tearing yourself away.

“Also I looked at love relationships. The yearning for them and the inability to stay in them and who is to blame. Lastly, I looked closer into how I see myself as a woman, and more especially as a black woman.

“We had a shorter time together this year and so I did not get to know the new poets as well as those I have worked with before, but as always I think being able to engage with a variety of people of different backgrounds and ages, in a free space, is exciting. I like that Brian always pushes us, challenges us with everything from basil to clay. Poems are in the ground I walk on and in my kitchen cupboard.

“Thank you to everyone. It is always a pleasure to be in your company (even on rainy Saturdays).”

Dying Namaqua

Here in this veld
flooded with flowers
– pick a few.

Crown yourself with daisy chains,
pin them to your cold walls
and watch them die.

Pressed between the pages,
the book reeks of how pretty
they used to be.

Now, tell them you love them,
that they are beautiful
when only their shadow
remains.

After the storm

I dreamed us last night
my dress was flowered and dizzy
and you wore that grin

the one you have been hiding

I think we kissed
but the sun was too hot
and blinding

I felt nothing
but an apology
and woke

alone

Connections

Sexton had her mother's rings,
a fur coat,
and a car puffing smoke in the garage;
that filled the room with ghosts,
kissed her lips, bit her ear
and softly, softly, pulled her
closer.

Plath had a clean kitchen
with an oven
which sang her name like a siren song
and held her lovingly,
as gas blossomed in her lungs
and she slipped in to a slow forever sleep.

Woolf had a river
and stones that tenderly pressed
her to its bed.
The world thought her lost
but the twisting current had rowed
her further downstream.

And I

– trapped in the mausoleum of my mind,
fingers raw to bloody bone –

am alive.

Day dreams

Two trees twist together in the yard,
trunks a drunken ampersand.
Bound like this I cannot tell
which leaves belong where.

Between them
the sun plays a crooked game
of light and shadow.
A hide and seek that terrifies the dog
into my lap,
a warm quiver-bundle of fur.

Afternoons
I lie here
and let the sun blind me,

and dream myself a twisted tree
wound tightly with another.

Here

This house is silent
with a thunder of unsaid words
which grate in our throats like gravel
and scar them mute.

In this graveyard
mother is the ghost
and father the tombstone.

We move around each other like mourners
in a never ending funeral.

A cacophony of laughter,
hollow and echoing:

this is a battlefield house;
burnt black and covered
in smothering soot.

Nothing grows here.
Nothing grows here.

Lying here

your touch makes fires
and I have always loved danger
especially the kind that leaves
scars

yours map all over
my body
stretched tightly –
a reminder of your leaving

Mother

Mother has a smile
that you want to hide
beneath the pillows,
far from hungry eyes
that easily devour pretty things.

Mother is full of secrets like this,
all sweet and sappy.
You have to have them all
for yourself.

The not mother

You are carved onto the page
in the untrue,
unbeautiful,
sort of you.

Twisted darkly away from what I know.
A sharply disfigured black thing
planted
deeply in my belly.

The tree growing from it
veins all over my body,
into my hands and eyes.

The way I spit you back
makes it hard to hold your hand
or fold myself into the cavity
of your chest.

The quiet exit

When I leave
the dark is still knitted together,
safely,
with orange bulbs on steel stalks.

I rattle my way towards
the always waiting
tomorrow.

An ocean held tightly in a jar
(at the back of the cupboard)
threatening to drown me.

This place

It is a different kind of danger
that sings these angry bullets to sleep.
It is gentle and kisses warmly
as it pushes them from happy guns
into waiting stomachs.

It is a different kind of mercy
that wakes these soldiers,
a tongue grenade that dusts entire towns,
carelessly.

It is a different kind of mother
that knows she will bury her child.

It is a different world
far from ours.

This side of the tracks

There is a tree growing beside the track.
Its branches bowed
toward the grey sky
that blankets everything.

Everyday
trains screech in and out,
emptying and filling themselves
like gossiping mouths.

In the carriage we all sit
where we sat yesterday
and the week before that,
some in excited chatter
squirming and swarming in a muted hum,
others quietly stare out the window.

Waking up

Before the town wakes
I see the shadows of the trees
stiffly bend and sway in the dark
of winter morning

like old women,
with tired leaves and embittered by the cold.

Then behind them
I see the tiny embers
of the town just opening its eyes.

When the ocean calls too loudly

My feet naked,
you me pull towards your gulf mouth.
Here, I pray to lose myself;
I will the body to let go.

But she is stubborn!

Hungry for life.
Hungry for the warm sun,
how it wakes flowers softly, slowly.

A blooming kiss:
good morning.

Natalie C. Wood

Natalie Wood is a member of staff at the Govan Mbeki Mathematics Development Unit of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. She is involved in the development of Mathematics and Science materials for high school learners as well as the coordination of the implementation project for these materials, at 10 schools in and around the Metro. She is a trained high school Mathematics and Physical Science teacher, with teaching experience at Woolhope Senior Secondary School, amongst others, with a passion for making a difference.

“To me, writing has a therapeutic quality, but more than that, I think it helps us to make sense of the world we live in and how we relate to it.

“It may sound cliché, but I write about life, one’s day to day experiences and emotions.

“In this course I have learnt two fundamental things: that it is okay to just write, it doesn’t need to be ready for publication or public consumption the first time around. Get your thoughts down on paper and then begin to mould them like a potter sculpting his piece of clay. The editing is where the real fun begins.

“Besides being passionate about making a difference, I also have a passion for photography and, of course, writing.

“We all have a story that we want to share and that is worth sharing, we just need to be brave enough to put it on paper.”

Let the sun shine in

Forget your troubles.
Forget your pain.
Open your shutters
and reveal who you are –
today.

Don't let your failures
be your frame.
Nor your past.
Don't be closed by the drapes
you draw for yourself.

When the sun through the window
drops its rays on your skin
it's a wonderful world
of sights, sounds and smells,
and you deserve the joy it brings.

Missing melody

Bold lyrics and a bewitching melody
become a beautiful piece.

You've been gone so long –
without you near me
I can't seem to find my beat –
my world's tune is incomplete.

But when we're together
the composition is just right
and I could dance our song all night.

Let us sing the chorus,
a harmonizing duet.
In a ballad dedicated to each other,
an overture my heart will never forget.

Encore.

Silent soliloquy

Watching warm colours rage
across the cloudy sunset sky,
you lie on the soft, green grass
and wonder . . .

why people are, who they are . . .
until the faint glimmer
of the first night star.
The heavens become blue-black,
sprinkled with glitter.

And you wonder . . .
would you do life differently.
Does it change?
Do we evolve?
We may, we may not.

As the moon trades places with the sun,
we grow old.
And questions shall remain
though our stories will be told.

Devoid

When time is right
and we talk from the heart
honesty and trust mean all.
This world would be perfect
and hurt no more.

Love would follow –
else there'd be nothing left
and without it, we will fail.
Without doubt, every time.
And for some, incapable of love,
life ceases

And the glory
will spiral them into a daze.
Our understanding,
nothing,
and our language null.
Our words lost
till no means no no more.

Linguistics of life

Free to come
Free to go
Free to write what I feel
Free to earn
Free to learn
Free to speak what I know
Free to form
Free to be
Free to read so my mind can grow
Free to fight
Free to flee
Free to listen and not just hear

Free – to be me

Forgotten Children

Do you know what it's like –
welcomed to a classroom with no door?
To walls that are bricked but bare?
Windows that are broken,
all resources stolen?
The smell of desperation in the air?

Cheerful, smiling faces look back at you.
“Good morning Ma’am,” rings in chorus,
though broken school shoes abound;
pants that are far too short:
barely a sock to be found.

How can we grow a nation?
How can we expect things to change
if we leave our learners in this squalor?
Almost forgotten . . .

expecting them to learn,
expecting them to flourish,
expecting them to hope
– yet they do.

Hope

Our land is burning
and not with desire.
Our world is on fire.

Our country is crying
and not tears of joy.
Our world is in pain.

With unkindness,
and such disdain,
our world is in torment.

We're apathetic,
after so much hurt and grief.
Our world lives in disbelief.

What's left
but to kneel and pray?

Joy to the world

For Joy Alexander

One day you're here
and the next you're gone
like the lost lyrics
of an unwritten song.

Your time has been so brief,
you've gone too soon.
There's no time now for joy.
No time to help:
only time to mourn.

And a hole gapes
where you once were.
Nothing will fill your space.
Nothing will be the same.

But as your requiem plays
we know you are singing in heaven:
"My people, my people,
I'm in a happier place".

Mundane

A stolen kiss – a wave good bye.
Unlock, get in and buckle up,
on my way to work,
and wheels turn
before traffic grinds to a halt.
Clutch in, gear down, brake!
Red, orange, green . . . crawling,
perhaps a detour past the airport?
My favourite song, sing along!
Forge ahead.

In the sunrise over the highway
pinks and purples paint the sky.
Almost an hour has gone by
and my parking space is waiting
to snuggle me between its lines.
I revere the last moment
before the day truly begins.

With much to be grateful for
– waking up, my job, my senses –
I already look forward to home
and greeting the one I love.

Pollination of promise

There's some promise
pollinated within each of us:
perhaps easily in some,
it is thrust onto others; no matter,
the growth is the same.

We must accept our prompt
or how could we bloom –
the seasons don't wait:

or if you seek the stage
to fill a leading role,
don't miss your call.
Though it may take some time,
your role will be filled.

And why shouldn't it be you or I
in the lime-light, on stage
before a crowd, in our place
where we can stand up, proud
to play a strong character
in our own urban legends,
fairy tales, realities or myths.

Hold your head high
and dream, nourish belief
and let self-prophecy flourish
so you shall bloom
in the lime-light of your garden,
your stage.

Taryn Isaacs De Vega

Taryn Isaacs De Vega holds a dual role in academia, as a staff member at NMMU and a student, reading for a Doctor of Philosophy (DLitt et Phil) in Communication at the University of South Africa, focusing on the area of media and accountability studies.

“My academic interest is moving toward South African history, feminism and consciousness movements. The latter informs my poetry as I hope to tell the stories which remain untold.”

She wishes to find a career as a researcher and academic. However, she says poetry feeds her soul, adding: “Writing allows me to share my contributions of how I see the world with others. It also connects me to my 10 year old self, who wrote poetry daily, but never showed it to anyone because to 10 year olds, poetry just was not cool.”

Her academic interests also manifest themselves in her writing, and she explores themes of media accountability, society, feminism and gender violence.

“Preparing this publication taught me that writing is an art form. The artists who sculpt words can create imagery which changes the world, or at least people’s perception of the world as they know it . . .”

Through the continents

My pen is a traveller
to many continents

the Mediterranean sea
cool and still turquoise blue,
glistening in the sparkling sun

the deserts of Dubai
with dresses of black and white on men and women
to keep the heat at bay

the coral on the barrier reef
a source of aquatic tales,
it listens closely to the anemones telling their stories

the Great Wall of China
and its millions of passers-by
camera's clicking and flashing and snapping away

boys playing soccer in the street
as the Brazilian Christ the Saviour of Brazil towers above
watching over kids dreaming of food and filling hunger
with soccer balls instead

The magic of Africa
giraffes and lions tip their heads to greet onlookers
of big bushy haired beautifully brown skinned bodies

My pen travels

Within you

Draw from a depth of joy within you:
smile brighter,
let worry and fear fade –
allow light and positivity

write them in your heart,
always.

Knowledge

Knowledge
to acquire it, is to learn
to accept it, is to unlearn
learning and unlearning and learning again
leaps and strides in the garden of the mind
thinking and rethinking
misunderstanding and understanding

knowing life

Life

Life

a drop in the ocean of time,
a granule on the dunes of eternity,
a whisper in the wind that is universe.

Playground innocence

*Speaking out for the girls abducted
by Boko Haram in Nigeria*

Hundreds of little girls,
skipping and running,
playing and learning,
on the school grounds;

hopscotch and assembly,
reading and the classroom.
Education for all.

Secret classroom molestations,
breast grazes,
rapist gazes,
unsafe spaces.

Night time, and the onslaught comes
through windows and front doors,
then deep into the forest.
Where? No one knows.

They bring back our girls,
now women,
with children and deep scars

Laughing like the colonisers do

I wish I could laugh about decolonization,
laugh the way the colonisers do –
their laughter is cold
and malicious,
uncaring and unfeeling, undisturbed
by the destruction of a people.

I wish,
I wish I could laugh at decolonization the way the apartheid
Afrikaners do
with smug and entitled laughter
while the land and economy remain unmoved.

I cannot laugh at this movement.
The revolution by peoples of Afrika
to reclaim the dignity stolen forcibly,
to reclaim their land, their culture, their language;
to reclaim their families, their wealth, their thought;
removed, stripped from this people
along with that, dignity.

Descendants of international bandit kings,
off-spring of National Party prime ministers,
claim that there are no voices to be heard,
no peoples in slavery,
no communities oppressed,
no mothers raped for their supple breasts,
no fathers exploited on the mines.

Descendants claim that nothing real existed before the settlers came.
The coloniser laughs again,
creating another wave of colonization
– colonisation of the minds of a new nation.

I cannot laugh at decolonization,
or at the movement reclaiming the rights of a nation
to be more than the rainbow nation 'free'
– to explore an existence that was never allowed to be.

The voice of winter

Droplets fall,
droplets in hundreds of thousands,
as a shower breaks,
and showers tear from the sky
as the pressure becomes too much
for the clouds to bear.

The sky shouts in thunder,
screams in lightning.
Showers falls,
millions of tiny droplets,
drip,

and fall.

Virtual Life

A life story post by post
The voyeurs dream comes true.
Their stories, successes, and failures in full view
of 'friends'.
Photographs of travel to not so distant lands
promotions and material possessions
uploaded for all to consume.

Broken hearts and un-kept promises
lie online to be exhumed.

The era of social media ,
#hashtags, statuses and check-ins ,
is all they know.

Friends used to talk about how they feel.
Today friends are followers
of posts of emoji's and videos.

Conversation

I spoke to my creator
and my creator spoke back to me
in a conversation of love and trust and thanks
some would call “prayer”,
others “insanity”.

I spoke to my creator
and my creator spoke back to me.
I thanked Yahweh for the blessing of life and history,
Allah replied with grace in the soul.
God sent a divine spirit to multiply wisdom,
Buddha sent a vibration for the chakra cleanse,
Jah spoke of Zion in clouds of holy smoke –
ancients sounds of “om” and “uhm”
rang within lives long forgotten.

I spoke to my creator
and my creator spoke back to me
to remind me that we are created for eternity,
that divisions break the harmony
and destroy the ether of thought
– divisions forged through divisive laws.

“Unite,”
the creator whispers, “before all is lost!”
No one can hear.
the sounds of religion are too loud.

Sinaed Stuart

Sinaed Stuart is a 3rd Year BA student majoring in Psychology and Anthropology. She wishes to pursue careers in both cultural anthropology and clinical psychology.

Sinaed says she finds writing both expressive and therapeutic. “It reveals a lot about the writer. We write what we are feeling and sometimes what we are afraid to say aloud.”

“I write about feelings and my perception of certain things. I write about things that people can relate to. There is no central theme I focus on all the time. I do not want to limit myself like that.”

“I have learned that I have grown as a poet and that my poetry is a lot more structured now than it was a few years ago. Attending the course for a second time made me realize just how “involved” poetry becomes. It is ever changing and ever growing. And when we surround ourselves with like-minded individuals, and hear their perceptions and understandings of their worlds, it makes the experience worthwhile.

“I am honoured to have had the opportunity to work with Brian Walter again, and to have learned so much more from him this year. The calibre of poets during this year’s workshops was truly inspiring.”

Bloody Poetry

Cuts on skin, skin torn
like shredded pages of forgotten books
once filled with the mystery
of memories, and the misery
of things past.

Blood flows, warm
and dripping
on canvasses of unspoken
words.
Pages are blood soaked
with the death of a life untold.

Drop by drop,
words fill the emptiness
to pulsate unknown truths
through thick bloodied veins
under the skin of unlived dreams.

Flow, I bid you,
exist in realities
outside the poet's mind.
My bloody poetry leaves my veins,
letting go
of the pains of being
misunderstood.

Pain, beauty and poetry

See the red ink stain
my writing pad
with the broken metaphors
of a memory lost
in time, like shattered glass;
bleeding punctuation,
lost commas
and full stops unfulfilled.

Hear the pauses and
exclamations
as I recite my life
on the stages of crushed dreams,
while audiences of blind followers
cling
to the pains of my history.

Feel the curves of my
voluptuous
poetry, like a woman never
touched,
the softness as words
penetrate my empty canvas.

Live with me, here,
within my words.

Alive

A teardrop stains
my weary face, searching
within the empty vastness of time
and space – I am surrounded
by light.

I am engulfed by loving
embraces of flesh,
my eyes search memories
known only
to my emotions.

I dwell mentally
from landscape to portrait,
from warmth to coldness,
from fear to existence.

I hear background noises
echoing unknown sounds.
Life here begins for me.
Birth, life, live and be.

In life I am
profound to you.
Exquisite, my being
exists through you.
I am now, and will be still.

Broken

Lost thoughts run wild
in shattered mazes,
the exits blocked by rage,
engulfed by the flamed hatred
of fire-spitting dragons,

amongst new and old souls;
the scattered fragments of bones
once the limbs of the living;
the stolen breaths of once
breathing.

Tiny bodies resemble
a life of feelings
felt when thoughts were free.

Cries echo across
the plains, cries
once cheerful laughter.

My thoughts run wild
in shattered mazes.

When the sadness comes

When thoughts of things past
start to unravel in my mind,
unwanted,
an internal darkness steals
into light.

Shrewd memories
journey to the surface,
and hurt consumes
this body.

Why force light
into darkness,
a light
not belonging here?

Thoughts of death
and meaningless life
merge.
Memories of a life unlived
are all I have
when the sadness
comes.

My love

In your eyes I see
a beauty unknown;
a vision
of true honesty.

In your hands I feel warm,
overwhelming passion
like a furnace – I am
enrapt in your flames.

In your voice I hear
sweet melodies
of laughing infants on a
summer's day.

Here with you there is peace,
sanctuary.
No words can describe my love
for you.
No boundary can restrict our
eternal fate.

I am yours in spirit.
I am yours in mind.

And you
are mine.

In the artist's palms

Lifeless,
yet so full of promise,
I can mould you into anything
my heart desires.

The potter,
I will give you purpose
unknown yet
to my disturbed mind.

The cold, softness in my palms
reminds me of a childhood
unlived,
games I never played.

My heart of clay

When I was a child
my mother scolded:
“Stop putting your heart
into everything you do,
and stop trusting
everyone around you.”

I could not understand her.
How could I do, and be,
but not feel?

But that was before heartache
and heartbreaks, before
life within was lost.

Now I feel with hands.
I see with eyes.
My heart no longer beats rhythms
of longing, and love, and loss.

My heart of clay is still
lifeless within my ribcage.

Restless slumber

I turn in restless slumber,
my mind so full of emptiness
there's no sense in my thoughts,
no comprehension.

I wrap my mind's hands
around the unknown parts of my dream.
Thought by thought
I grab with my artists' hands,
one by one
making them something.

Somehow I get them
to a moment
where I am no longer lost
in the midst of them.

My dreams take shape,
like clay
in a potter's hands.

Who are you?

Who are you when you listen
to the voices in your head?
Who are you when you see
the tearstains
of a life unlived
on your face?

You exist in a world unknown.
Can you breathe breaths
of air when your lungs
are pained and bitter?

Who are you, when hands
touch the naked fragments
of your innocence?
Who are you, when words
pierce from the tips of tongues
like sharpened blades?

Are you alive, for brief moments,
outside your pain-filled thoughts?
Do you speak with words
– not only in your mind?
Do you feel with flesh
– with not trenches in your heart?

Tell me, who are you
when you are not.

Destruction's aftermath

Thoughts, like seeds
in the fertile soil of minds
unknowing,
drown in waters of one-sided thinking.

Roots start to manifest,
grounded in hateful reasoning,
the stubs surface, of a war
yet to come.

The bark of enemies prepared for battle
grows strong and steadfast.
Branches of destruction occupy
a once barren battlefield.

And after the last bombs drop
and those worn tree branches unite,
beautiful, colourful life
will arise
in destruction's aftermath.

Logamurthie Athiemoolam

Logamurthie Athiemoolam is a professor in the NMMU Faculty of Education.

“I find writing therapeutic and stimulating. The writing process enables me to articulate my innermost feelings, thoughts and convictions in the written form.

“My themes tend to focus on my personal experiences, travels, the beauty of nature, life’s journey and the lessons to be learnt from life.

“The course has stimulated me to use visual imagery and metaphors to capture the essence of my experiences and to refine my writing so that the images are more crisp and succinct.

“The course has been invaluable in connecting me to other writers thereby creating opportunities for us to share our journey of writing and the writing process.”

Sunrise across the bay

Sunrise in Summerstrand, P.E.

The calm sea
mirrors a still sky.
The waning crescent moon
and the dim, far flung stars herald
a new morning.

Then a gleam of light
peers from behind the horizon
to pierce the darkness.

Growing rays flicker and shimmer
as the eye of the universe
ascends from the depths of the ocean
flashing streaks of gold
across the shimmering sea.

Changing landscapes

*Sunset on a game farm
on the outskirts of Windhoek*

Dwindling rays of sunlight
etch the mountains
in flames of fire.

As the rays retreat
orange hues
cover their vastness

and the blanket of darkness
is wrapped
in a diamond sky.

Sounds of the universe

*At the lookout point near the Himalaya
Mountains (Lord Shiva's abode)*

My eyes transfixed in the distance
from the Lookout point,
to prepare for magic.

From behind the majestic mountains
a single streak of shimmering light,
flickers through the crevice
and is gone.

Rays of mystical splendour
caress the magical mountains.

The snow- capped mountains,
draped in reddish hues,
shout out their splendour
to the sky.

For a moment,
time stands still,
as the rays light up the mountain
and dance to the mystical sounds
of the universe.

The wings of hope

To a colleague incarcerated in a foreign land

Fly on the wings of Hope,
across time and space
to cherished shores.

Like a swallow,
fly across countries and continents,
stormy seas and turbulent skies,
fixing your mind's eye
on your dream of hope;
smell the scents of the sea
and savour the sweetness
of welcoming shores.

Let hope, your navigator,
guide you through dark mornings
and endless days
so you see distant figures
of smiling African faces,

as you draw in the breath
of Life,
and are carried on the wings
of hope.

Taj Mahal

(Tribute to the Taj Mahal)

This monument of ageless beauty
draped in marble attire
glistens in the morning sun.

Minarets and domes, symmetrical
in gardens of magical splendor,
rise up to meet the sky.

The story of your life
is shrouded in mystery;
of love for Mumtaz.

Your creator, kept captive in prison,
peered through filigreed walls
to draw in the beauty of lost love.

Lives lost, hearts broken, years gone
– but love is immortalized
through your hallowed walls.

Allegory

Your journey starts at birth,
through rivers and valleys
highlands and lowlands
to your destination.

Sometimes you disembark,
have a *déjà vu* moment
with a stranger who
disappears:
your tracks were not
meant to cross,
yet one fleeting moment
joined your hearts
and lives together.

Then the train stops
and you are engulfed
in smog and darkness,
as passengers try to rip away
the core of your Being.
When the passengers leave,
you are relieved.

Through the windows
of your compartment you feel
the pain and suffering of life,
and see the venom
in the eyes of those
envious of your journey,
but lessons are to be
learnt.

Finally, when you reach
the end of the line,
you leave the train
and carry with you
life's lessons
to an unknown
destination.

Desert

Sand dunes close to Walvis Bay, Namibia

Mounds of endless desert wonder –
barchans wind-swept,
sketching vistas.

Laboured footprints,
plodding uphill,
and wind-blown

mirror life's journey

forever morphing,
always changing

Valley days

Reflections on the Group Areas Act

In the valley the tranquil river
meanders lazily to the sea.
The aloes standing
amidst the rugged crags
are rooted in this land.

In the distance, the temple
is a reminder of pleasant valley days.

I throw a pebble into the pool
and stare as circles
ripple outwards from the centre
to draw me in.

I watch the children
eat home-baked bread
as they sit around the fire
listening to valley stories.

They climb the hill
in search of adventure
in rugged cliffs.

I hear them in the distance
rustling through the leaves.

I relive their happy moments
as they watch silent movies
projecting their future lives.

They map out their histories
to chart a course,
only to be uprooted.

Forced removals

Interconnected lives and histories,
living mosaics of joyfulness,
were interwoven into common destinies.

Happy smiles on carefree faces
were woven
into tapestries of blissful playfulness.

Then lives are ripped apart,
houses crushed and homes broken;
rubble-strewn lives
of pain and sorrow,

lives shattered
and hearts broken;
shattered dreams
of scattered people

in manacles of fear
with controlled minds and tortured souls,
suspicious minds and hateful hearts:
separate lives in separate places,
lost living and stolen innocence.

Rekindling hope

When you are a cork on the vast ocean
floating aimlessly

think about pleasant memories
filled with joy and love.

Think about the beauty of nature,
of calm days and gentle nights.

And know
that although all seems lost,

the tide will turn,
and life will be renewed.

The song in your heart

Live each day as if it were your last;
let the songs in your heart
fill the universe with joy.

Let the joy in your heart,
wash away the pain of the past
to fill your soul with contentment.

Mystical land

Visiting ashrams and temples in India

Land of mystery and mysticism
with a cacophony of sounds and tastes
that touch the senses,
with colours that dazzle the mind
in joyful playfulness.

Here people search for meaning
beyond the material
to the depths of being,
to find an essence.

Carrying the burden
of past lives like slaves of fate
they dawdle on relentlessly
in search of Nirvana.

Your legacy

The world will not remember you
for what you have accumulated
and what you have left behind.

You will be remembered for
touching the lives of others
to make a difference to the world.

Ganges

*Visit to Varanasi,
overlooking the Ganges*

River has flowed for eons,
flanked by palaces
and temples of
divine splendour.

Pilgrims are drenched
in the nectar of life
to nourish unfulfilled dreams,
as they listen to the soothing
sounds of the universe.

Smoking kilns
capture the hopes and dreams
of unfinished lives –
and remind us of mortality.

Athol Muller

Athol Muller is a staff member, working in Procurement and Assets of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

“I enjoy writing as a means of expression, healing and contemplation. The themes I attempt to explore are wisdom, understanding and being human.

“I discovered during the workshops that one needs to constantly set time aside to explore one’s own writing. It was a breakthrough moment for me, as previous explorations would be inspired by mood, feeling and the desire to write.

“Yet this simple, but very effective technique, taught me an invaluable lesson.

“In order to discover that which links you to the world, you need to train yourself to delve *inwards*. This extraction of thought brings expression to the fore, as discovery takes root not only in the darkest of times and hours, not only in the happiest of times and hours, but also in the seemingly mundane and innocuous times and hours, fusing thoughts into inspiration.

“I have enjoyed working with my fellow writers, and our facilitator, who have inspired me to continue delving into and exploring my writing.”

Camp fire

He sat down to eat.
From where he came we cannot say.
He'd just appeared.
The fire blazed.

A pain-etched, furrowed brow.
Snowed-over hair at odds with a youthful face.
His, a tale of beauty, knowledge, wisdom, insight.
His, a tale of suffering, condemnation, reprisal, pain.

How could he be so old, and yet so young?
How could he be so young, and feel so timeless?

An invocation for more.
More wisdom, more words, more insight, more celestial disclosures.
Unravelling the cosmos before disbelieving eyes.
A symphony of words to our ears,
laced with witnessed suffering.

Called back into our presence –
amidst a translocated moment,
the revelation of a sojourn,
the narrative of his soul's voyage –
with irradiated hope in gaze,
the pain resolved to grace.

Relief and warmth embraced us within.

"I've kept you long enough my friends," he said.
"I'll see you when you rise. The night has turned to morning.
We need to rest, so that our spirits retain our souls."

When we awoke, the air was clean.
The sun smiled thoughtfully.
The mood was light.
The breeze spoke gently to us all.

We only thought of him again that night, when we lit the fire.

Winter cold

Cold is the winter of the night.
I cover me with discomfort, with pain.
I lay my head down on anger.
I wrestle with my fear.

The river has run dry within.
The valley's vegetation is dry and sparse.
Am I to stay, or go?

But leaving will only carry with it the night.
I must stay.
I must protect that which is dear to me.

Some say: "Light a fire to keep warm."
But flames consume ripe vegetation,
burning indiscriminately that which is innocent and pure;
that which does not harm;
that which seeks light –
and not the darkness of the night.

I save the probability of continuation in my pocket.
I recall the sincerity of belief.
I yearn for a foregoing protection:
we are secure, in the abandonment of doubt.

Rain and snow do not drive me from hope.
To survive, I warm myself with memories of youth,
a comfort to aging,
inspiring insight and understanding
which revel in discovery,

opening pathways yet to be walked.

Ah, I see the light
atop the mountain!
The only way is up.
I walk a new path.

There is a light

There is a light that passes through the door
in streams of understanding,
from creaky wooden floors
that tell of a place
where the trees felled to lay them
were taken down by hand
and nurtured into panels with tools that had no time:

unlike the modern lines
where brick and mortar have re-imagined
and re-invented classical forms
fused to the clay and stone
of an age where *classical*
was new, outstanding.

But still the flow of understanding
streams like watercolour
longing for the togetherness of all.
The light ignites the yellowwood
reflecting visual memories
onto walls enhanced by now:

but now
the memories are of we.

Why it stays

The best of who we are,
of us in sprawling splendour
against the tide that knows
– where water stays, but nothing grows –

should wake us to remember those
who gave their lives that we may know . . .
the times that make us give
without the pain of surrender.

It brings us closer to our wholeness.
It clarifies the winter rain.
Ours is merely that which wonders to the lake,
the parted distances of the lives we've made,
whilst all the world can contemplate
a breathing lung that yields the morning
of a new awake.

It stays because we've strayed.
Amongst our lonelinesses we are bound.
The sand is radiant to the touch
and brightens days to a sun-kissed glow
from whence we are released,
yet a yearning grows

that never leaves.

They are me

That first smile,
that playful banter of learning about life
the awe and the wonder from stories at night:
they are me!

Not just a part.
Not just a thought.

They are me.

The first spoon of food
that's been spat out with gusto.
The twinkle in eye
when they've turned you around finger.
Their bravest of nights when the monsters have lingered.

They are me.
They are us.

That's when your children become your greatest teacher
– when you must survive
for them to be greater
than you would have been
had your dreams been so bright.

Nehemiah Latolla

Nehemiah Latolla is a full-time MTech (Chemistry) research student, studying Natural Products specializing in Organic Chemistry.

Gently

The wind blows gently into my room
to welcome you
– like early morning mist
to my swollen sleepy eyes –
and kisses my plump puffy lips.

You take off your tired cloths
and take my warm body.
Your scent invades
my early sun-kissed thoughts
and leaves my restless body at peace.

Place your hand delicately
on my soft curved hip,
and draw me into today's miracle,
a smile on my half-asleep face,
bare to the thin fingers of love.

Don't text me

At the brink of love lies deceit.
This is the wisdom you imparted to me –
that love is a desolate space
and we a forest fire
leaving nothing in its wake.

I tried decoding your logic.
If you say that love triumphs over all
why did you become the embodiments?
Not of love but of the obstacle.

Soon sunshine will touch this space.
Grandmother spoke of death within life.

That too
becomes nourishment to dry land,
that too
becomes a vehicle for healing.

Your texts are no longer desire.

Twenty days away

“Out at sea,” you say.
Memories of that time haunt me still.
The feeling of being without purpose,
as mine was lost with you,
nervously navigating,
never getting to me.

In those days
I wished to touch your soft woolly hair,
their disorientated course texture
recalling my insecurities,

our commitment questioned,
feelings freely
fleeing towards your safety.

Yet a storm in me persists
with noisy seagulls
deflecting me from you.

My love, how we have strayed,
clashing into hidden icebergs,
rapturing relations rapidly.

Sail your ship into my harbour.

And as the morning mists dissipate
appear ashore to me,
with sea-legs losing our footing
in the dense sands of love,
ever earnestly
entering our end.

After the rain

How I longed for summer
in the wake of abandonment;
longed for the sun to gaze upon my back,
transforming my flesh, a darker tan,
and have the night jealously look upon my face,
lost in the unknown.

Then welcome winter with warm embrace –
cumulonimbus clouds a mirror.
The heaviness inside
like a dam ready to break
erupting into a cyclone;
I find myself in its eye, reflecting on the I:
trapped, searching for freedom.

But spring's surprised kiss
wakes my sleeping heart,
blossoms bloom upon my spirit
a holly movement,
wholly dancing in the rain.

And as the droplets touch the sand
I am found.

Love in colour

A lullaby to Milky

Your white freckled skin
and copper blond hair –
I could compare us to
sunshine on a rainy day,
to a last resort
that withered away.

I invited you to dine
on my willing body
against the stacked odds
you still bore offering –

as the pain of being set free
capitalised our senses
we crawled up
those imaginary fences
trying to keep us apart.

Yet here we move unknowingly,
decisive
in our indecisiveness.
Yesterday you pulled away.
But a warrior in me rose
and with weak hands
commanded strength.

We shed tears and promised
never to let go.

My melanin marked skin
and coarse black hair –
I could compare us to

wishing on a falling star,
to parent abandonment
after the realisation of truth.

Absence of innocence

I made a vow to myself,
ties that criss-crossed around
my heart.

But remember that night
when we broke them?

Cool air kissed my warm skin,
and after bliss trying to decode
those beautiful freckles on your back.

As tight clenched fists
embraced fabric,
we became one.

At climax someone said
“I love you”.

Those uttered vibrations mimicked
the beating of our hearts.
Then still tenderly I bid you to come,
sharing with you
my most precious jewels.
How beautifully you wore them,
like ball and chain
fit perfectly together:

I wear your flesh as blankets.

A new treaty to be made
with our hearts.
Your skin tints a scarlet red
when you cloak me with your promise.

Hands intertwined
a criss-cross between us,
erratic breathes taken
in the aftermath
of what had transpired.

A thin layer of sweat now covers me
in the absence of my innocence.

Beau

Fragmented notes about you

I wish I knew why
it just so happened that I met you.
You were casually strolling
through the gardens of cyber space,
when you happened upon me.

I wish I could understand
the mysteries behind your green eyes.
How you hide your thoughts
behind your smile:
God, how I love your smile.

On the balcony you said,
“We moving so fast...”
I was aware of our momentum,
the course we took to this displacement.
Here all my preconceived theories lie waste.

My being enters a state of emergency.
I ask myself
why you enter my thoughts so frequently,
why we connect so easily
and why I offered my once guarded self to you
so carelessly.

I still remember your face.
In those final throes.
Your blond curls a frazzled mess.
I said, “You’re beautiful”.

But if I am being honest with myself
nothing is more beautiful than your heart.

Grandmother said, "Be with someone
who makes you smile."
God, how you make me smile;
this too is a form of worship,
this too elevates me to greater heights.
Breaking bread with you
I am daily fed.

Hooded Men

I read somewhere that they were
killing us.

Our
existence had become a chant
too loud,
laments created discomfort
and we overstayed our welcome
in our own home.

Then salty rivers traced familiar paths
like noose-tied slaves marching on.
Here another piece of my spirit dies,
as another mother consoles
the dark depths within her
whence I, too, came.

My reality is a cruel joke
while the unaffected white
picket fences, two-and-a-half kids
in suburban bliss.

They form a circle around this burdening mess
I have become.
Eyes detesting this image they created,
as if my sun kissed divine, lesser
my being not God forged in a manger.

I grow weary of them,
of this world's hate.
A new form of lynching,
killings in plain sight
while children watch on.

I imagine a long row of dark
hooded men,
marching:
baring brace-less necks
carrying once promised freedom
towards those pearly gate,
I hope there awaits a better fate.

Phila Dyasi

Phila Dyasi is a second year student on the Missionvale Campus, pursuing a Bachelor of Commerce degree in General Economics, with aspirations of being an economist.

He writes under the name NuBlaccSoUI.

“I compose poetry for myself, first and foremost, as a tool to navigate through the past, to locate who and what I am in the now, and how best to position myself in the future.

“This is ancestral, past-life reading; this is meditation and prayer; this is future telling, a spiritual fair.

“Motions that 'move' the soul such as death, love, faith and hope are thematic stances on all the poems.

“As a writer, I am learning still about the editing process of my pieces and the improvement over the year is evident.”

white flag is burning

Fierce. Frustrated. Fuming. Traitors ringed round the neck.
Fight. Fires. Forcefully. To our hells we are all bound anyway.
Police pulling triggers at raised-hands-people, in church people, my people.
Mob justice pacts to counterattack the courts' injustices. Your cat for my dog.
Politicians always half-hearing, keen to speak,
but are never really listening to us.
And with all dark humour and bad jokes considered, nobody is laughing,
Mr Government!

Tarnish the tarmac to break new grounds; now roads appear for the low-lives.
We will thrust our poor bodies for the richer good of our children.
We will penetrate barricades, because we are all the powers – supposedly.
Our spiritual wills will not allow us to cease until we are all free, financially.

Highways to better living was promised, a shelter, a job
and food for gaping mouths
Detours of corruption were unnecessarily taken,
unaccountability and nepotism.
Potholes that only get filled during election time, the puncture slows all down.
We were almost great. No spare only four.
Now these Stop-and-Go's that never go.

The lost lead.
More or less, the masses are manhandled by the most moral-less.
Our vices are violet, days blue.
Our vices are violent, these eyes blue.
The dusk came before dawn.
The sun never shone, for many moons.
You cannot reason with a dictator. We must revolt.
Rather cremate than correct.
He's not really dead till you remove his head,
and rest it next to his shoulders.

My moral compass misguided, shattered into smithereens.
I lost my head in the hype, at the altar of sacrifice. By any means necessary.

Faceless. Our flaws: No solo is at fault.

She did it.

It wasn't me.

The devilish deeds were done by him.

Her stone offered the fatal blow.

Fabrics of the minds that were once woven and sown as one, now tread apart
as threads now seem to leave the womb seams.

The last sound was a screeching scream.

Only sightings of shadows spotted at the scene, where we were once a
society.

A beam of hope with every new sun. Another risen day.

Always gaining ground towards but never reaching the stolen lands of ours.
Shuffling shoe soles, too lazy to walk the feet. The work is a drag, since *since*.

The only beacon still lit, is the bedside lamp flickering on Mount Blizzard.

They call it college education, we coined it knowledge for the nation.

Dearly departed: gone but not forgotten

2004, Infamous for:
flashbacks of a free-fall
into a black hole,
a dark, bottomless pit.

Followed by fake philosophy
– preacher, never reached her –
at the pulpit.
My pre-adolescent soul caught fire
the evils of the world had me lit.

Should I call on the divine that's higher?
Third-degree burns from the urns,
I'm in the mines of hell
and the devil's a liar.

Mind-molested from all the tearless mourning
– and it was a moon-cast morning
I was excited for the excursion;
travelling my passion.
Barely breathing
I was gasping
same time my aunt passed living for past tense.
Rest in Peace.
Declared deceased,
she ceased to exist
in the childlike mind of mine.
Nowadays, solitude is my recluse.
Who would have thought that the grave could house a muse?

A dangling double-edged sword
slicing my lifeline cord
is a danger I cannot afford
swan-song this, singing to my own accord.

I'm on the sewer side of this life,
cannot even commit to suicide
because who knows what and who
is waiting on the manure side
in the afterlife?
if anything at all . . .
we don't really know.

Unanswered

Who counsels the counsellors?
As they selflessly dive deep
into acidic pools of trauma,
real-life horrors.
The *broke* breaking their backs
as they try to build
the ruins of the broken.
But we are all siblings,
and so we shall
share
the family pain.

Lov...

Is it love this,
that wants me to change,
to model me into: a structure unknown; to a strange figure;
an unoriginal, counterfeit looking somebody?

Is it love this,
that makes me doubtful if I'm enough?
That takes, takes, three times it takes
but knows nothing of ever giving?

"Open your heart and let them in," some instructed.
"Allow love to enter as indifference leaves."

Never a warm nature to anyone,
always with a cold-front for a face.
I am not anybody's summer.
I am bitter, biting as winter.

They said my walls were built up too high,
 why?
Was I readily awaiting warfare?
Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm . . . maybe.

My life organ a fortress.
Never permeable.
Never penetrable.
Be a human-being,
these robots said.

Nothing left here to stab, I am fully bled out
– oh, so I thought.
As I open my wounds
letting them bleed
till they stop.

Child-home

In the midst of suburban life
I catch the scent of the soil
after a hailstorm,
the warmth of the motherly afternoon sun
after a long day on the playground
my tongue still burnt
from the hot, rich rooibos tea
as sharp as conversation.
My skin still feels the grass
as though it were the carpet
I used to lazily lay on in the lounge at leisure
staring blankly at the television
as my childhood passed me
with every flashing frame.

Men unfit for mankind

I met my mother's biological father, my 'grandfather', at his funeral.
Foul feelings, petty and futile.
Killer-stare, I look corpses dead in the eye.
So I shut his sight-lid, the iris; blinded the guy.
(I've got issues, you need to subscribe. Can't just kind-of-buy.)
But no disrespect to the departed, I came to bid goodbye.
Or maybe that's a lie.

I buried my soiled hand deep in his casket for a handshake.
But the unawake, unaware of my extended greetings
cannot reach out.
This is awkward for me, at a celebration of a life I never knew.
A human I never loved.

New family,
folk I need to find familiar fields with.
A couple of assets left –
liquor store and a taxi business –
varying facets.
Your widowing wife's children introduce themselves
to your other, other, other offspring that you left
to collect dust on the shelves.
How often babies are left paternal-orphan is why June 19 is coffin.
You were Mr Misappropriation-of-Trust.

Our Sovereign Lord speaks, in whispers, of offering forgiveness
even when and where it was never requested.
The gospel youth sermon says that that the dirt
will return to the earth.
Men show each other the men's restroom,
I never saw you at the urinal.

But back to the burial.

The Doves' services hearse driving your body to the cemetery,
your resting place.

I hope the Lion's Gates open unto you with a loved-filled roar.
You find an angel that's your greater half
like bettered bilateral symmetry,
even I would hate to see you afterlife live alone.

Consider this my flowers on your tombstone,
as you push daisies in the gardens.
I planted a tree today on top of you,
may the good fruit fall far from the tree,
and the boy-child never age and be his Father's son,
but a son's Father.

UKhulu

My beloved grandma, still she
works. She rises with the sun
to clean our home; sweeps the yard;
make heaps from grass cuttings
and piles up trimmings
from the windbreaker tree.

The wheelbarrow, wobbly
from years of slaving, is filled to the top.
And off to the pit-hole I will push,
to the fire-spitting-flames that
she has already tended.

Tirelessly she labours,
her backbone bent and
straightened,
for as long as I've lived and much
longer before.

Midday strikes
her sunlit face always to the ground
never showing strain or wear.

We seek shade on the veranda.
Well, I am her hands hands-on,
so curtains come off the wall,
and there're sheets to be ironed,
the garden to be done,
the toilet to be cleaned,
and outside windows to be mirror screens.

The spirit of a slave. The soUI of a light in a cave.
The grand Grandma.
Those early hours, she barely slept
heating the waters as warm as your love.

Breakfast by the bed-side,
a sprinkle of care and kindness in every bowl
I tasted with my being.
My Childhood Home was and remains you.
The source of strength.
I thank you for my life.
I thank the Lord for yours.
May you live forever!
There is always something someone must do,
and the work is never done.

Kafkaesque (mort)

This waiting room is painted of pain,
 featuring faces with mouths down-turned,
 impatience taking up these empty seats,
 of family members already lost,
 we feel like the least loved
 in the mighty grasps of almighty fate's
 crushing hands,
 we feel like the last patients
 to be visited during the night shifts,
 by nurses and doctors,
 the times of day when the most dust
 is swept back to the humble soil
 by an unseen, yet not-so-invisible bashing broom.
 the old fan – barely hanging –
 is closing in full circle,
 a whole life lived.
 dull curtains, some unhooked and five minutes to falling,
 alongside the walls stripes
 designed with print of doctors' usual words,
 "i'm so sorry for your loss."

If life truly begins at forty,
 then her's ended at the starting line.
 this would be a misplaced and mixed metaphor
 if it weren't for olympics silently running
 in the background on the t.v.
 reminds me of my mute cries, surprised eyes bulging,
 gaping mouths with no sound.

It was to be a preventative measure; a routine operation
 a possibly cancerous lump.
 I am flipping aimlessly through these magazine pages,
 each catching a tear-drop for the dog-ears
 (whoever reads them next will turn over the pages better).

Some puzzled maze pieces fall out of a box,
 my baby cousin tries to gather the cardboard paper
 of a family tree picture,
 but the least important twigs are lost,
 and the last friendly branch found missing.

The many portraits that make up the landscape
 go away from time to time.
 It was just a little, smallish lump:
 this news is hard to swallow.
 My eyes are peeling onions.
 My throat is winter-hands dry.
 Mum says she saw her most alive
 a few odd minutes before time clocked aunt out.
 Grandma's sister blames herself for suggesting, advising,
 and in retrospect putting "pressure".
 Neutral colours dirty the scrubs floors,
 hypothermia lurks in the corridors,
 but the coke from the vending machine is medicine lukewarm.

It was a game of musical chairs,
 But when the seven trumpets sounded,
 the stools remained still, they stood
 facing eastward in hexagonal formation ,
 an angel ascended, the remnants were six shadows now.
 With a plot twist, it's fewer players each round.
 Who dies first wins, I've tossed too much soil on dust,
 my hands are dirty.
 We wash our hands clean with this paraffin.

Open-casket, the last sight took my breath away
 – the whitened clay still one,
 but with the breath of life taken away, by the One,
 who giveth and taketh.

It's also winter our hearts.
dips of grief, dabs of black clothing, grim-reaper the thief,
we still loath him.
Another weekend
another sad-a-day
another funeral.
And his life was a summary,
too brief a breath, as the contraction is.
No sympathy to bother saying
"i am".
Public or private hospitals, dark clouds gather above all.

Twenty twelve was a scar,
for four years now we are still scooping our scabs
from the bottomless pits that fell from ever-fresh wounds
picked at a tad too prematurely,
so very early.

Some of the things we will take to our graves,
will take us to our graves, as we exhume our pre-mourning selves.
And hurt still drops in drips,
red-bottomed-sticky feet from the blood washed tiles,
the pain and the paint in permanent.
Some matters you can only ever think about
when you are half-awake and half-asleep,
because these nightmares are too real to be **dreams**.

uThixo Ovayo unoNobantu, nabantu bakhe bonke ngamaxesha onke.

Kuda Majonga

Untitled

I hold my breathe captive
in the clenched jaws of my infantile mouth.
Every pounding in my chest
triggers ideas of my sprinting imagination
– funeral of my own fabrication,
I lie in its wake.

Neither silence nor sound
can calm cascading images.
My shut eyes deny fear's stability.

I hold curiosity clenched in adolescent fists,
ears pounded deaf by the noise of society.
The thin membrane of impressionability
envelops thoughts that are beaten
like a drum of creativity.
Reality is nothing
but the cacophonous voices I chose.

Prodded and chiselled like a sculpted form,
the sacred statue of my identity is defiled
till like a daemon
I manifest familiarity.

Crumbs

Thoughts,
though seeming wild and untamed,
possess all the essence of intents and purpose.

Lax your imaginary reigns
and let loose

the precipitations
of unrestricted ideas.

Form,
given to ideas in the prison of writing,
allows captive views to be free of the pen.

Make clear the trail of crumbs
in forests of misunderstanding.

Find your way home.

Sight

Perception is to move through space.

Motionless we lock our vision.

Irrefutable is the evidence,

inevitable is change.

Perspective

Coming with honest perspective,
I'm told my rhetoric is abrasive.

Misguided precepts
expose the community
to walls of half-baked concepts.

I am self-educated
and use my scholarly ways
to unlearn those institutions
that prey on my need for survival

to kill my intuitions.

Untitled

Racing against fragments of time,
feeling the weight of doubt at my heel,
dizzy heads cause misleading concerns.

Cradling my thoughts in my hands
I start fights with gripped fists.
I jab at insecurity –
dealing damage, I draw strength.

With every breath I become savage,
barbarian for the cause.

Misunderstood, no; standing
for my movement is secret to society.
Pitchforks and torches walk adjacent lanes
till death is treated like those burnt at the stake.

Divergent ideas cause difference,
ignorance shrouds deliver the mental:
no messiah more masonic.

Protracted struggles are endured
to structure society,
etched skills and memories on the palimpsest.

Slowly we pace to the finish line.

two not one

I fought to adjust
and make you see how I trust.
Lust was how it began
– now depleted –
I stared into your eyes to reach your soul.

I sought a deeper connection than I usually penetrate.
Hate reflected back because I failed,
so you say as we lay that I swayed.
Winds of change blew cold,
nude emotions shattered, as they did not thaw.

Compromise
is synonymous with dirty lies,
icy truths are more resolute with clarity.

There's no benefit in lost principles,
or accommodating vulnerability.
Poor foundations cause weak integrity,
platitudes don't adhere to mis-mated desires.

I'd hear your voice crack
as we lost our fire,
becoming ruins
in the ring of our choices.

Questions

Consumed by its flames,
my mind is gently caressed by warm curiosity.

Violent sparks of prematurity
wage blue-edged tongues in the face of ignorance
and sizzle the complacency out of the kindling.

Doubt burns like amber at the core.
All I seek is the answer.
At times the response is mystified –
repetition and ritual pacify avidity.
Paramountcy of systems is not discarded:
I need to recode the framework.

Disaster comes by inquisitions of society.

Headed to various temple altars,
sacrificing twisted piece of mind,
I ask questions as praises

Untitled

I face grizzly possibility.
My stern gaze is dazed.
Doubt and hesitation bring crust to the eye.
Shaky fists and confusion muddle deliberations.

These are the side effects of battling addiction
to societies hardest drug.
Rehab is etched into every introspection.

I walk from false intuition.
Broken mirrors at my feet
more than seven years gone,
bring no misfortune, but cut soles.

Patiently I shed light on the path –
Saviour?
I am just charting a journey.

Embrace chance as you would an old friend,
with rules learnt to adapt.
Thoughts are like a river, like rapids on jagged rocks,
violently clashing with the self.

Actions are seen as rebellious,
misconstrued by those of shallow sight.

Light outside the cave gives clarity
to those who sought vision,

I find those akin:
than venture to those I need redeem.

Yin Yan

Powers of analysis and criticism.
Results are based on calculated sequence,
logic determines every course taken,
abstraction of situations to the true element,
isolation of elements to understand the one,
focus placed on the manner of doing,
reality seen through the frame of reason.

Opposed to intuitive inference.
Knowledge attained from metaphysical experience,
conceptualisation allowed to will,
conclusions made based on the bigger picture,
routes plotted from the ways of nature,
free spirited form of art,
communicating emotions as required,
eclectic refute to life.

As I take a knee

I am rooted in my exaltations.
Intuition directs my life.
Seeds of these ideas and behaviour
labour,
and thoughts on existence bore fruit during adolescence.
Contractions & contradictions
borne of my Desire to know.
Raging flames of curiosity raze me to the ground,
duality of upbringing being my beginning and end.

Spread the branches of this tree of enlightenment,
edifice well-watered by the sweat of Ritual.
Entwine change
for the universe is capricious,
deal with pasts and futures
through Jani Gates till worlds end.

Different

Intrinsic to individuals as hair strands to a head
follicles are exposed to feral scrutiny.
Between brutal digits you suppose I attain value.
Attempts to untangle are treated as mutiny,
strangled infantile actions seek untrammelled existence.

Beauty, to which in numerous forms, we all aspire
is damaged, shrivelled and broken by society,
trapped in the box of our minds
the truths of our appearance.

We fail to derive our substance from nature's variations,
danger is found in group acceptance.
Mob mentality stifles societies' divergence,
falling under the thumb of ever narrow lenses.

There's as evanescence
of multiplicity in presence.

Margie Childs

Margie Childs is a lecturer in the Faculty of Education. This is the second year she has attended the workshops.

“Reading, writing and reciting poetry are wonderful ways to still the soul and quiet the mind. Sometimes poetry is a way of retreating from the world. At other times poetry brings the world inside with great thundering and marauding.

“My poems this year crept up on me while I wasn’t looking. Ideas and inspirations surfaced during the poetry workshop, in a dark corridor and just round about.

“At the poetry workshop this year we worked with clay – squeezing, moulding and shaping it in response to ideas and memories. Crafting poetry alongside friends and later in quiet, solitary places was much like working with clay. Sometimes disciplined shaping resulted in a beautiful form and at other times it was best to crush it into a ball and start again.”

Monkey in the room

There's a monkey in the room:
grey like an elephant,
but with a more menacing approach.
Wilder and quicker than a long trunk,
smaller and more condensed,
easier to avoid and ignore,
but with a much greater peril.

There's a monkey in the room.
Infested fur,
black faced,
sharp toothed,
glint eyed,
endowed with elegant gloved paws
of a malevolent thief.

There's a monkey in the room.
This velvet vervet marauds at will,
all on campus is fair game.
Confront him and wear
the scars of his attack.
In corporate branding of blue and red.
Beware of the monkeys. They bite.

Remembered anger

Eyes flashing with furnace-anger,
their bodies are taut with restrained rage,
years of humiliation and soul deep pain.

A deep resounding chorus
a rhythmic protest dance
a building energy
a firming purpose
a rising rage refusing to be stifled.

The puss filled wound now breaks open
and pressure and pain released.
The stench of degradation is bitter in the corridors.
A deep resounding chorus
a rhythmic protest dance
a boiling energy
a steadfast purpose
a throbbing indignation refuses to be stilled.

A late winter day

The gentle sun offers a loving caress,
and a lazy cat languishes in the afternoon warmth.
Garden birds twitter with delight,
swizzling and gossiping about the imminent spring.

A soft breeze whispers tender promises,
while drowsy foliage nods in anticipation.
The fertile earth almost stirs,
taking a last somnolent pause before change of season.

In a cold and unwelcoming room
a small child enters the world.
His frightened mother has no delight,
afraid of harsh judgement and poverty.

No tender words escape her dry lips,
her terrified heart drums a bleak future.
Merciful fate plays a powerful hand,
snatching breath from the tiny babe.

The corner of Admiralty and Erasmus is his resting place.
The child mother, desperate and alone,
leaves him swaddled quietly
in a bin on a late winter day.

Jack Reacher considered

Jack Reacher champion of children
and protector of men and women.
Warrior Prince and Noble Knight
of the pages of well-read paperbacks.

He lives in my imagination,
and visits my dreams,
more than character.
or a toothbrush toting loner.

With his laconic sense of humour,
and intolerance of fools and suckers,
he resonates, and sits well with me,
affirming my outlook.

Reassuring, not brutal,
he dispenses measured justice:
disarming, astute and calculating.
He is a refuge from the real world.

Everyday madness

Colours and scents explode
while high flying ideas jostle and jumble
and words spill like machine gun fire
from the brain and tumble mouth-wards.

Sleep retreats to a darkened corner
while wakeful energy powers
the vortex head and buzzing body.
Manic superiority knows no bounds.

Masquerading as commonplace,
sanity flows and ebbs.
Rationality and logic retreat.
Reason is wrestled to submission.

Early morning walk

Crisp dark air greets us
as we escape confinement.
Eager eyed and high spirited,
furry bodies strain with delight.
A host of smells and curiosities await.

The slumbering neighbourhood does not stir
as we slip quietly along.
The dogs free of leashes
run to this stone and that tree,
marking their progress.

Dawn is still a long way off.
This magical time is soul filling.
Wisps of dreams still linger,
slowly swirling and fading
into shadowy remembrance.

The return has a different rhythm.
The quiet grassy culvert is left behind,
guarding soft secrets and mind wanderings.
We migrate home in unison,
striding towards the new day.

Sive Jacobs

Strawberry Jam

White, baked bread
out of the stove, hot and steaming –
I stood in front of her, with hiccups
because of my heart-ache.

uMiss had taken my hand
and walked me into the kitchen.
uSis Thandwe pulled my hair and constructed rows,
one, two three and four.

uMiss placed her hands over my face
drying up my tears like a rain droplet,
I was late and that made matters worse
All the other kids were settled.
They were already in tune with the daily songs, singing:

Capha, capha, capha
Imanzi ilokwe yam
Capha, capha, capha
Imanzi ilokwe yam.

My long, floral dress
– tight around my waist
with puffy and pointy shoulders –
I hated with all my being.
Aunt insisted the dress fitted.

Uzobamhle nje,
she went on with her nagging;
I went on with my crying.

uMiss, opened my hand wide
and placed the white
baked bread on my palm,
steaming hot with Rama
and strawberry Jam.

She dragged me back
to the other children
and sat me down on the floor.

Strawberry jam
was an ointment over a wound,
a mending flavor, a sweet medicine.
The smell never escaped me.

Sisi's hands were no longer pulling
each string on my head,
the constructed rows
allowed the air to move into space
only the comb knew.

Every time I swallowed
I digested relief
with the chanting and joyous songs;
every time I escaped
and heard my head thumping
as they thundered their feet, singing:

Qhum, Qhum kuyaduduma
Qhum, Qhum kuyaduduma
Imanzi ilokwe yam.

I hated my hair,
I despised my dress,
I loved the bread
that mended emptiness:

It was sweet, sticky and I licked it
I ate it – till I reached my house's gate
I smeared it around my mouth.
I based it on my scalp.
I did all that because it made sense.

uSisi shouted

I did it all because I was searching for healing,
fulfillment.

I could never be the same.

Child in me

I have realised there is a child in me
I can never escape
locked inside my chest
enclosed by the cages of my ribs.

When she does find a way
to untangle from the constraints of maturity
and laughter travels from here to infinity

an epiphany arrives:

the one who continues to cherish the child in me
and allows the giggles to be a song
that lingers
– that one
will be blessed to know how to be

human;

we

we who are always changing

Twala iqhiya

Twala iqhiya

Twala iqhiya

Twala iqhiya

Slowly, slowly wrap the material around your mind
carefully, contemplating,
draping all your dreams, hopes of the future,
covering, securing . . . protecting,
protecting what is yours.

Twala iqhiya

Twala iqhiya

Twala iqhiya

Choose, choose the colour, the pattern and the texture,
bold, printed and soft –
you want to be recognised, don't you?
Beautiful, strong . . . shining,
shining, taking your place.

Twala iqhiya

Twala iqhiya

Twala iqhiya

Twala iqhiya –
look, look at your resilient reflection in the mirror,
turn . . . turn
your beauty is inside
inside
inside
inside your mind.

Twala iqhiya.

School shoes

Shoes
Shoes
My pair of shoes
cover my feet
and protect me from the dirty dust.
I step into you
and you keep me warm.

Shoes
Shoes
My pair of shoes –
you make me run,
you make me taller than the rest.
I step into you
and you keep me steady.

Shoes
Shoes
My pair of shoes –
you get so sweaty
on a hot, summers day.
I step out of you
and my toes dance – freely.

Shoes
Shoes
My pair of shoes
complete my outfit:
the sound of each step lingers after I leave the room;
each step is known by you and my feet.

Shoes
Shoes
My pair of shoes
hides my unpainted toenails.
You are strong, so strong,

I step into you,
I step into you,

you allowed me to step into life.

Broken

. . . sobbing, heartache
joined with pitiful hiccups

your heart tells how much it hurts
every time it stops

Smile

I can be fully certain that tomorrow will arrive
and I think of many a-thing I could be

however, if tomorrow arrives and I am no more
forget all the other

forget it all
but don't you ever forget my smile.

Reflection

I did everything you told me I shouldn't
some ideas seemed valid
I tried them out
even those that you warned me about

I did everything I could to break the walls
or climb over
every step led me to today
where I am amazed at how much I have realised

we can be bad and good
simultaneously
in subconscious confusion
some of what you said was good

I wish I knew better
could shut my ears and electrify
my mind with a different word

reflection has helped me understand:

you, me
us
humans –

the world

Psalm 136

When I think about thankfulness
I see a wide sea crushing into me
with fish swimming in circular motion
My eyes feel dizzy and I can't help
but hide them with my two hands.

When I think of thankfulness
music inside my body, electrifies me,
wires me together with the giver
consumes me until I feel like belittling myself
into a bundle of joy.

When I think of thankfulness
I see children jumping up –screaming *hip hip*
And I say: *Hooray*
Hip Hip, Hooray
Like it's my fifth birthday all over again

When I think of thankfulness
I see hands that have never been touched by soap
Hanging –begging
I think of how little I believe I have
And how huge it would feel to those pleading hands

When I think of thankfulness
I feel the sun's warmth in my insides
When I open the window:
Only to find that the rain has taken over
I scream: *Sunshine*

When I think of thankfulness
I know of an infinite hope
That even pain after pain follows
Blessing after blessing

Even turmoil after turmoil follows
Joy after joy

I take a moment to think
Lord, thank you.

iRainbow ka Tatomkhulu

Did you know that when you face your back towards the sun
after the rain has fallen, you will be able to see the rainbow?

When you face your back towards the sun
after the rain has fallen, you will be able to see the rainbow?

Red, of course is the colour of agony and pain
that drenches over and around your head
as your soul sinks down, drooping down to the very dust
that you rest upon now.

Our land.

Green is the life that grows after all the silent suffering.
Tranquillity grows inside you because
tomorrow the sun will shine
and the crops you planted will be more alive than you are.

You search for more.
You know that somewhere further away
liberty waits for all who have suffered
days of enslavement,
months in a locked up, dark room,
years in chains
wrapped around your mouth,
your ears and pulling your tongue
to the point where you can't even pronounce your name
in your own mother's tongue.

*You were brutally beaten,
pushed and placed in one position,
making no move.*

*It was never your decision.
Your voice could only be heard
when the sun's rays warmed your head.
The smell of the water refreshes your mind,
liberates it for a moment.*

*Your head spins as you search for a place to rest
not certain whether it is the sound of your heartbeat
or your head thumping, really hard.
Now I know it was the beat,*

a rhythm to your work song.

*Blue. You lay your body on the ground
listening and searching for the coolness,
reaching for something further, far going.
The sun is shining and you are not certain
whether it is a sign
of a new hope,
new horizon,
new direction.*

*You wait for, and anticipate,
the day when you and I will become one,
when the geraniums I planted will be
the same flowers I used to place on your graveyard.*

*My anger will come against you like thunder,
like the fork I used to soften your land.
My wife will hold my wrist and beg of me to let go.
Yellow, a shaded butterfly swings past my eyes,
turning and transforming me to a new attitude,*

*swinging and meandering
up in the sky
pleading with me
to let go.*

Let go of the suffering.
Let go of the words unspoken.
Let go, and let the colours of the rainbow
tell the story.

Let go,
and see the colours of new dawn.
Let go and then tell them a story.
Tell them about a farm you worked on
near a place called

Aberdeen.

Shine on me

Twinkle, twinkle little star.
Won't you shine inside my head?
Make the faces of a new dawn
blossom around the borders of my roots.
Make them glow in the evening.
Oh, won't you?

Twinkle, twinkle little star,
I dare not wonder what you are.
I'll steal your glow,
save it for when I am on the low;
and when my head is filled with darkness
lighten it up, won't you?

Twinkle, twinkle little star,
let my hair food sink inside my scalp
to make it shimmer from the root up
like the purple bottle promised it would.
Oh, won't you shine.
Let the load lighten my heart
or turn the T.V off, and scribble on pamphlets.
Rather go outside and ask the stars to shine.

Oh, won't you?

Make me smile now
so that when I'm wrinkled from all the flawless soaps
let my energy speak of an inner beauty,
kind, calm and spirited.
Punish me for all the years
I've allowed the ointments to destroy the edges of my smile.
But won't you please keep my heart pure and crisp like snow.

Twinkle, twinkle little star.
The mirror has told me what I needed to hear
I now cringe, crumble and fumble with fear,
fear that during the day I will be outdoors
and you won't be near.
Shine even when you are far, far way.

Twinkle.
When that happens
and my hands are too short to reach up high,
and my head is too close to the ground,
shine on the borders of my roots
and let the sprinkles of my tears
shower off all fears.

Twinkle, twinkle little star.
Won't you shine on my head?
Won't you?