

# **Poetry**

**. . . piece by piece**

**Commemorating ten years of NMMU**



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. . . piece by piece

Commemorating ten years of NMMU

Poems from the 2015 NMMU  
Arts and Culture workshops

Selected and edited by  
Brian Walter,  
poet and workshop facilitator



2015

## **Arts and Culture**

South Campus  
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## Foreword

This is the second year in which I have been fortunate enough to be involved in the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University's Arts and Culture poetry workshop series, and its resultant publication.

I think back to the first session this year, when I first spoke to the group. At that point we had 6 sessions ahead, and two editing sessions per participant, with the goal being to write poems fine enough to stand securely and proudly in a collection.

A daunting task: but I assured the writers that I would try to get them to write regularly, to reflect on their writing, to learn about creative editing, and see their work through a few drafts of the collected text: in other words, to engage in a genuine writing process. The writers took up the challenge. The work in the paired editing sessions was particularly stimulating. Working with two or three participants at a time means that writers learn from each other.

The results are published below; and we trust that readers find the poems below an enjoyable, stimulating and engaging read. The range of verse has impressed me, as has the diversity of thought and opinion. The accomplishment of a poem such as Sinaed Stuart's "Poetry . . . piece by piece" – from which this publication takes its title – is frankly pleasing to a facilitator: and that is one poem out of many in this collection that could be mentioned.

The writers in this collection show a readiness to tackle issues, to write up experiences, which gives the collection its energy, its willingness to engage. At the same time, there is a backbeat of wisdom, of maturity, of experimentation with voice and form, which adds an artistic depth to the poems.

Although we didn't visit George this year, we have had contributions from the George Campus students from 2014, and a new writer joined the process by email.

Nolwazi Gumenke, the student working entirely by email, wrote: “Thank you very much for your help with the editing and I really appreciate the communication; I feel a part of NMMU.”

Moreover, we have a contribution from the Missionvale Campus, where we were joined by the Helenvale Poets, as part of an outreach venture. Finally, some staff members also joined the writing course this year.

The number of contributions meant that this publication represents a selection of all the poems written during our workshops. While selecting is always a hard thing to do, it has the virtue of showcasing the best of a poet’s work, and enhancing the quality of the collection.

I would like to encourage these poets to continue writing, and to send their work to local poetry journals. Precious Mahlangu, who is featured here and who also attended last year’s workshops, has self-published a collection of her work this year. I encourage the poets to get their writing out on various platforms.

I would like to thank Mr Michael Barry and his staff from NMMU Arts and Culture, in particular Ms Nicki-Ann Rayepen, who has been the organiser and administrator of these sessions. Kelly Felix designed the cover. Beyond the staff of Arts and Culture, Dr Linda Kwatsha offered willing help. The Resonance Poetry Movement, first movers of this venture, also deserves recognition.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge and thank all the writers for trusting, and working with, the process to achieve this end product. Without you, the course and editing sessions would have been neither so much fun, nor so stimulating – nor this collection so interesting.

**Brian Walter**

Poet, workshop facilitator, editor

Port Elizabeth

2015

## **Busisa Miggels**

*I am a young woman who loves technology, reading books and socializing with peers. My career ambitions are to see myself grow in the field of IT, as it is a male dominated career, so that I can be part of the women who are growing in the area of technology.*

*Writing allows me to voice my expressions as it is my platform to craft my ideas, emotions and the way I view things from different perspectives to create a picture with words and to tell a story. My writing themes can be anything that catches my eye that gives me inspiration to write about everyday challenges, nature, and my relationships with God, family and friends.*

*The poetry workshop has been an eye opener as it has taught me different things, to draw inspiration from different views and to accommodate for my readers.*

Busisa Miggels is studying for a BTech in Information Technology on the North Campus.

## Unchain me

*i.*

I was born free  
escaping that early death penalty,  
wrapped around  
by my mother's umbilical cord:

but now I'm like a dog leashed  
to a pole, my chained arms crying  
for freedom, shovelling around  
to create a space to breathe.

Each step I take on this earth,  
each word I say with my mouth,  
creates a piece of chain  
and I've been bandaging myself.

Words of this life are free.  
Each word creates a formula  
of my own invention  
and can heal, and unchain me.

*ii.*

Liberation is a form of love  
that brings down the walls  
of lies and hatred, anger and ego.  
Liberation is freedom, unleash the dog,

unleash the crawling past  
that creates the footprints  
of each step I take,  
that grasps my breath:

unchain me.

## Uncover

It takes a caterpillar  
to uncover the life  
of a butterfly  
that flies flawlessly  
in the limitless blue sky,

like a bud covered  
with layers of leaflets  
wrapped around each other,

till bees are allowed  
where the sun rays beam  
towards the flower,

like night light in the dark sky,  
waiting for the perfect timing  
to blossom,

revealing its fragrance  
in the dim tense space;  
to breathe in freedom.

## **Missing voice**

I sit quietly  
waiting for your voice  
like a soft soundtrack  
in the background.  
My ears search for your voice  
like night robbers.

My heart tries to call you.  
My soul is weary  
of the jacket of hope,  
hoping to hear your voice,  
to touch it with my hands.

My eyes are open  
but blind  
to the world,  
my ears are open  
but deaf  
to the sea  
where your voice seals through the waves.

Defeated by the world's fights,  
my ears reach for your voice:

allow me to hear  
as one of your disciples.

## **Mother-string**

My life is a journey  
a string that begins  
in my mother's womb  
as she liberated me with love  
to grow into this world.

Each string I connect  
creates the story of my life,  
each friendship, each sisterhood,  
each love, each relationship,  
forms a knot  
that tells the trials of my life  
as I walk the tracks  
that crack in the way . . .  
but my string with my mother  
is unbreakable.

## **Bereavement**

Wish I could not wake up  
to hear the layers of today unfold

wish I could rest in my bed  
to cover myself from today's sorrow  
when my mind ponders  
the wound buried in my heart

yesterday's ache  
is still this morning beating  
pain in my heart.

My mind is wishful  
as I try to shake  
this morning's loss.

## Tiffany Marais

*I hope to get my Master's and Honour's Degrees within the first ten, or fewer, years of practising. I hope to be content in my working environment, but never complacent, and always to strive to achieve more. I would also love to be a life-long learner because I truly believe that teachers must never cease to learn.*

*I write because I enjoy language and literature. I believe that the world is filled with metaphors waiting to be discovered. I write to convey a message, to address concerns, to relax, to materialize my thoughts and sometimes purely for enjoyment. Apart from the factual articles that I write for a website, mainly covering football, I also write about things that are important to me. These include football, religion, love, writing, poetry, beauty and more or less anything that I find interesting or have experience of.*

*I have learned to write freely to allow my thoughts to flow but also to have the eye to capture the essence of something. I have learned that someone else's opinion can be of great worth and that finding different perspectives are of critical importance to the development of a poem. I have also learned that writing is a process and should be treated as such: a work is created through frequent reviewing and valuable editing.*

*I recommend all writers and aspiring poets to attend these workshops.*

Tiffany Marais is a B Ed (Foundation Phase) student who aspires to be a teacher who will have the eternal motivation and determination to make a difference.

## Sheep

My world is happiness,  
love, faith and gratitude.  
Your world is knives, guns,  
blood and attitude.

I roll with scriptures  
and messages of old,  
people who lived  
and the stories they told.

You roll with wild music,  
fancy cars and expensive clothes;  
you roll with sliver, diamonds  
and every kind of gold.

You claim you no longer live that life,  
you say it's sold.  
But I think you're a lost sheep,  
and not of this fold.

## Cry

Through the tiny windows of my aching soul  
I see a broken woman  
who served,  
loved,  
lived;  
I see a striking woman  
who yearns to be healed,  
and will not yield.

So I cry in pity  
for this proud, fallen woman.  
I cry tears of pain  
because I never thought she'd be hurt by change.

I cry invisible tears  
with the incoherence of a starving child:  
yet she chooses to believe the smile she sees.

So I cry,  
and until she hears me,  
sees me through her windows,  
I will not cease to cry.

### **Battlefield**

Your haunting face  
dances through my memory,  
and I shudder at the warmth in your hazel eyes.  
Defiled and rejected,  
your image slowly fades.

Love dares not enter the battlefield  
of my mind, of lurking insecurities  
where trust is bruised.

"Perfect love casteth out all fear:"  
but this love  
has surrendered  
and been perfectly cast out by fear,  
by crushed hopes  
where dreams are put to sleep.

I'm a prisoner in my mind.

## Dreams

My soul yearns to feel the unknown love,  
familiar in my dreams alone.  
I am drawn by the soothing love  
of someone upon whom I have laid only closed eyes.

In my dreams  
I see perfectly,  
I know *you*.

I sleep to dream about you,  
lost in time;  
engulfed by fantasy;  
embracing the unknown;  
and when I wake  
I seek your eyes  
in a sea of unfamiliar faces.

But all I am given is a sleepless dream . . .  
about a familiar stranger.

## Chasing

Like sand  
through the hourglass,  
time rushes away.  
Its hands cannot undo.  
Its eyes cannot unsee.  
Its ears cannot unhear.

A moment becomes a memory  
when we're chasing butterflies  
whilst angels are among us.  
We realize too late that this life  
is not to earn,  
but to learn, Heaven.

Regrets refuse reversal,  
but the clock ticks on.

Procrastination is a thief;  
and begging  
will not be ransom enough  
to make time stay.

## Mmaphete Moloto

*Writing has always been part of me. It's like I'm both here on earth and in my own world. You can't explain who Mmaphete is without including that 'She is a writer': it just won't be me that is explained.*

*I write about love, and about everything and anything, expressing my emotions and what I see.*

*I learnt a ton of things on this course. I know I grew a lot as a writer. I started seeing everything around me in a new way. The tree and flowers started talking to me and I was listening. I appreciate everyone in the group as well as the facilitator.*

Mmaphete Moloto is a 1<sup>st</sup> year Biomedical Technology student on North Campus, who aspires “to do medicine afterwards, and then law. I love medicine, law and arts. Why not have it all!”

### Forlorn

The moon is truant.  
The sun went down  
on my dear time of need.  
The stars are quiet.  
The trees are without wind,  
the birds asleep:  
no string of false hope,  
alone.

### **The absence / Now**

It was not your eyes that got my heart.  
You have been the ghost of my nights,  
the very presence of love.  
Take my hand,  
love my soul:  
I beg not to be the last one in the kraal.

It wasn't your eyes.  
It was the light in them,  
the curve of your lips  
that lit my dark,  
your touch  
that filled the blanks.

Though I'm now curled knee to chest  
it was your voice that brought me alive,  
then.

### **Potion**

What if I  
took the armour from my ribs?  
Would you see me then,  
and mend my heart with fibre,  
your black pool eyes  
and sinew hands?  
Your kiss?

## **Insanity**

Love takes you miles,  
a rollercoaster for the insane,  
as I unfold my unknowns  
I'm drowning  
in the mystery:  
a fragrance,  
a touch soft, gentle and sudden  
you don't see.

## **Drift sand**

We were magic,  
glistening,  
our heart drifting to the same beat,

and like the sun  
we were untouchable.

For a moment there  
I had all of you,  
but somehow like the sea washes its dirt away  
I got lost.  
You smoothly drifted out of grasp.

I kneel on this sand  
trying to savour its warm love,  
the stars that promise me forever;  
and just like you  
it flows dancingly out of my hand.

### **Old shoes**

Hush as sand you slip in.  
What have you to offer today?  
You didn't like the rush of my feet,  
the softness of my leaves,  
the melody the wind and I make.  
I have slipped from your shoes.  
I need no longer try them.  
Old shoes look old,  
more so  
when one has new heels.

### **Forgetting John**

I shut you tight as a jar  
like a flower without roots  
the tricks for mending hearts  
have left open wounds.  
The last star fades  
as the sky clouds me.  
I'm blind but persistent  
sitting with weary hands,  
mesmerized by the ash grey sky,  
  
the ghost trees,  
the looming building,  
and from my open window;  
only two stars;  
the moon wails alone.

## **Me**

Stereotype me:  
why don't you  
put me in your little box  
tie your short rope around my neck  
feed me air  
measure me  
name me  
choke me with your stares  
your wisdom  
I'm not good enough  
to be the definition of beauty  
to be called glam  
choke me with your compliments  
your disapproval:  
I need to be.

## **Word knitting**

the strands of my thoughts;  
get bigger and bigger in a ball of fur  
the pages blur  
and my heart is poured  
I knit my thoughts to life  
lay my heart in ink  
the charge of my pen in hand  
rushing to catch every thought  
knowing when to turn;  
and start a new jersey  
my heart expressed  
I live

## Sisanda Mrwebi

*I like to write because writing is the only way I am able to express how I feel about things which happen to me and around me. I write various types of poetry, including elegies and free verse.*

*Through engaging with the group I learnt that poetry can be written based on anything, even a tiny string can be described in many words in poetry.*

*Coming from 'not a very big town', Queenstown, the group's weekly workshops have taught me to engage with people from different backgrounds, cultures and religions: by this I mean the poetry group promotes diversity.*

Sisanda Mrwebi is studying for a Bachelor of Environmental Health, with courses on both South and North Campus. She says, "My ambition is to be one of those people who make change in the world via their jobs: I want to deal with outbreak response, and not merely do business licensing."

## **Ndingumntu**

Vul'amehlo ndingumntu,  
ndinik'ithuba ndize ngenkqu,  
ndakukunkunkutha, ndikubhukuqe,  
ndikuthembis'izulu nomhlaba,  
ndikukhohlise . . .  
kaloku ndingumntu,  
kaloku ndingumntu.

Ndakuluthath'uthando lwakho ndiluxovule,  
ndakuzibuth'ingqaqambo zakho ndizisondeze,  
lumka kaloku, vul'amehlo mntwan'omntu,  
twez'indleb'uv' oku, Ndingumntu.

Ndakukudanis'ungabinathemba,  
ndakukufanis'ubeneskhwele,  
ndakukukhohlis'ungathembi namnye,  
vul'intliziyo yakh'ungandiniki yonke,  
kuba ndakuy'ishiy'ilihlwil'elingenakulungiswa.

Ndifana ndodwa,  
kodwa ndithi thotha,  
ndifana nabo bonk'ingamampunge ke lawo,  
ndilumkele ndingumntu.

## **The living dead**

The dark clouds  
feel too heavy, I can't escape.  
I am bent, my back hurts.

They said it was a myth  
till I became the proof,  
now their mouths are shut.  
No one seems to know I'm still alive.

When I visit my loved ones  
they run to the corner:  
if they see me  
they cover their faces.

## **Growing**

I was seven! I played with younger children  
ugqaph'upuc', but undize was my favourite.  
We enjoyed ourselves  
and wished for the day not to end.

My age-mates were too old  
to mingle with this childish being,  
quiet, an introvert, submissive,

but full of self-respect:  
when something mean was said  
I softened, and silently told  
my heart to keep calm.

## **Nights**

Calm me down.  
I can't sleep  
take my hand,  
walk me somewhere...  
where there's peace and quiet.

Sleepless nights,  
with an ache in my heart,  
a lot in my mind,  
tears in my eyes,  
shivering.

## **Inner being**

This is not me,  
but a house I am kept in,  
made of many parts  
working hand-in-hand  
to satisfy what my soul desires.

I am inside this body,  
a silent soul  
seeking peace.

## **Behind that smile**

Do you ever think  
about what eats her so hard?

You don't give yourself time  
Time 2 wonder wat eats her so much  
to wonder what kills her

who was once your first love?

## Lonely

No one seemed to care;  
life was not just.  
Dreams were there  
and he gave himself hope,

“I know God’s watching  
He won’t desert His child,”  
his parents did try,  
it was just not enough.

At nineteen, he prayed day  
and night hoping  
*something*  
would come up.

The serpent whispered  
– he felt his ears being shut –  
“there’s no God,  
can’t you see?”

The struggles  
and lost dream;  
he’s still crying: “God,  
show Yourself”.

## Allissa Matroos

*I love to write because my pen gives me the chance to change the world around me, even if it is just for a moment. The imagination is meant to be nurtured, not stunted, and writing gives me an opportunity to escape the demands of academia and find my natural voice, and bring all the facts and fictions of my imagination to the surface.*

*I write about people or events that change my life in some way, but I like to do it in a way that does not only speak to me, that is not only cathartic to me, but to the readership I hope to have.*

*I have learnt that I do not have to be profound all the time, that I can use fewer words, and to trust my instincts when it comes to editing; but also keep an open-mind when a third party has something to add. It has definitely been a rewarding experience.*

*Not everybody gets an opportunity like this, to share ideas and opinions with creative people who are as passionate about writing as you are. Thanks to Brian Walter for advice and guidance, and for bringing us together.*

Allissa Matroos is a BA Honours (Journalism) student on South Campus who would love to become an established writer.

## **Friendly city**

“Gelvan, Schauder, Cleary Park!”

The sliding door operator barks  
as he dangles from the taxi,  
yelling, goading, flirting and spitting  
till the twilight hour.

I watch from my window  
as the lights become a thread of gold  
and the road stretches on  
like a lock of black hair,  
twisting and turning into the root of the city.

The city, this city, my city  
shows me its dark splendour  
what it gives me is what it gives you,  
it’s a dance, a fast dance –

my city gives me hope, experience, warmth  
that my window reflects back and forth  
until it is a part of me, part of you,  
shattering my loneliness, shaping my destiny,  
twisting and turning in the heart of humanity:

like the sliding door operator,  
my city beckons me.

## **I am**

I am  
I am a coloured  
I am a coloured South African  
I am a proud coloured South African.

And I see all the smiles democracy brings,  
the many eyes singing with content,  
the hands working to build tomorrow,  
the hands working,  
to build,  
build a funeral pyre for bodies,  
human bodies  
people  
who are not South African like me.

I see all the smiles  
that democracy brings  
and I smile back,  
knowing I am a part of a country  
that is a family.  
A family that would fight for one another.  
Die for one another.  
Kill for one another?

Democracy  
De-mo-cra-cy  
A word that's supposed to mean something to me.  
A word that I was born in time to see  
flourish into a reality.  
So I can say with certainty,  
that I am a proud coloured South African.  
That I am a coloured South African.  
That I am a South African.

That I am...  
afraid.

## **Bible**

He gave it to me there  
in the happy time.  
On the first page  
his handwriting greets me happily,  
distantly...

His words hold me and I feel safe.  
I want him to come out of words  
and live forever,  
like the words of Jacob and Moses,  
so I can grab him and never let go.

But  
his voice always fades away,  
till all I am left with is  
my Bible,  
which he gave me  
in the happy time.

## **Autumn braai**

Leaves are all green,  
waiting..  
waiting to grow,  
grow to death to  
wait for life.

And while they hang,  
hang to wait,  
we stand together,  
celebrating.

Meat on the coals,  
friends around the bend,  
laughing at life, to life, with life  
We eat and dream  
for our lives  
to begin.

Never stopping  
to think about our autumn  
when our lives grow to brown,  
grow  
to death.

### **If I could**

You lost me in the dark  
and left me behind,  
to follow your shadow  
which flits in and out,  
in and out  
of view.

If I could just tie a string  
to your shadow,  
maybe you would lose me  
a little less.  
I would pull so tightly,  
the string would stretch taut  
till you tumbled back  
into my sight.

If I could just tie a string  
to your shadow . . .

## There

There, in the arms of my mother  
I find my power  
I find myself whole and protected,  
exorcised of the evil  
that has sterilised many minds.

There, in the feet of my mother,  
lies my future.  
I will follow anywhere  
her footprints  
until I make my own;  
they lead me to an independence  
that I will depend on.

There, on the back of my mother  
are my childhood burdens  
that I never carried  
and never will.  
One day I will have mine to bear;  
yet even then, she will not let me walk alone.

There, over there,  
by my mother and nowhere else  
will I find the me that I want to be.  
In her arms that protect me,  
in her feet that lead me,  
on her back that carries me  
and in her heart that holds me, there,  
there,  
there.

## Thando Ngxambuza

*Writing is the only way I get to have an opinion on everything, and have a conversation with the world and say things that I probably would not normally say.*

*I write about my life experiences, as well as issues faced by society: abuse, injustice, criminality and relationships. That is, I also tell the stories of other people.*

*On this course I have had the opportunity to collaborate on a poem. I've learned different writing skills and how to interpret feelings and emotions in pictures and nature. I've also learned that for a poem to be a good poem, it doesn't have to be a whole page. A few words can send out a strong message and make a great poem.*

*I believe that in being a writer you are the voice of the voiceless and somehow touch on things that everyday people would not include in a normal conversation.*

*It's freedom of speech, the power to speak your mind and be of relevance to the whole universe.*

*The workshops have been a highlight of my growing in terms of my craft and how I view things while putting into consideration the views of others. Poetry is not about self, but the laughter, closure and healing it brings to other people. Writing is a skill, a talent that I believe I possess, embrace - and it humbles me to know that my thoughts and stories will be acknowledged.*

Thando Ngxambuza is a 2<sup>nd</sup> year Information Technology student on North Campus, wishing to be a business analyst.

### **Everyday should be . . .**

Mother forgets her stress,  
puts on her best hat,  
father locks away his frown:  
they walk out of their cage,  
hands held tight  
and engaged.

Children tidy their rooms,  
aunts and uncles,  
old people and cousins  
will be here soon.

Daughter wears a Sunday dress.  
Son wears a tie on his chest  
looking to impress.  
With a houseful,  
a new world unlocks.

Greetings shared,  
hugs and kisses,  
nostalgic in happy songs:  
memories of silly pet names,  
wishing it would go on and on.

### **Happiness awaits**

Beautiful wind,  
blow me free;  
eyes of wisdom  
walk with me.

### **Grandma's thoughts**

She looks at her daughter and smiles,  
feels to pat herself on the shoulder:  
she looks at the daughter  
who is her daughter's  
wonders;  
"World, what have you got for her?  
She wishes to be there

but she knows.  
Seeds give rise to beautiful trees  
Those give life to fruitful apples.  
She goes  
to ease her worries.  
She smiles.

### **I miss us**

We sit by the river,  
stare at dandelions blowing away,  
walk through the valley  
with trees whispering all that is silent;  
fly kites  
reaching for the rainbow.

We sit around the fire  
wishing truth from tales,  
climb the hill,  
call on the forefathers  
to hear our visions,  
breaths inhaled.

I miss us  
watching the night skies  
under the full moon  
looking out for a shooting star  
when we'd wish.

## **In memory**

If my father were easy  
I'd have known his hand  
to hold gently,  
title him  
my best friend.

I'd have known his heart  
not by beats,  
but to love his wife,  
comfort his home  
and not be the first to throw stones.

If he listened  
I'd have whispered to him  
my shortcomings,  
taken heart  
from his responses.

I hope heaven sees  
the light soul we seldom saw  
so he rests in the arms of peace.

## **Misunderstanding**

We should talk,  
save the flesh from body ache,  
from shouting to the world  
the business we shared  
once upon a day  
in hush reciprocation.

It may be just a crack  
to a wall  
that long withstood thunders and storms:  
it only needs covering.

We should listen  
without paying attention  
detailing weaknesses to our advantage.

We should look  
to identify why,  
to know how  
from speaking.

## Lutho Msutu

*I write to explore the hidden extensions of who I am and how I think; to better reflect on my experiences; to better understand the things around me from my own perspective. I believe that some things are easier and smarter to interpret through art than through everyday speech.*

*I am interested in articulating feministic views; human nature; worldly nature; earthly nature. I have learned that poetry/art is never complete or perfect and that the true essence of it is in the 'sculpting' of your work.*

*In this course I have found it creative to get others to help in refining my work. It leads to more creative doors being opened, that could be beneficial for you and for them.*

Lutho Msutu is a second year B Com Information Systems and Business Management student on South Campus

### Wind

The ground refuses to let go of the sand  
clutching it back  
till the wind takes it  
to places that only the trees can see.  
No wonder  
it is so grounded and humble,  
picked up but falling between fingers,  
from freedom driven hands  
and back onto the ground.  
But the wind and its rebel nature!  
And the careless living when it's with the wind!  
It joyrides,  
slow dancing to the wind's howl.

## **Colour**

Colour me wild  
colour me illegible:  
they've been tasked to put me in a box  
making it mandatory to define me,  
knead me into a mould,  
daring to shape me though they didn't create me

and when I disapprove  
they label me ignorant and a fool  
but to you I'm a charm  
and by you I'd rather be prosecuted  
thrown into a prison of hope  
hope that I will make sense to them  
till their fear  
and need to change me  
will surpass their fear of being imperfect.

## **When we fell**

We're not them:  
their glass shatters and scatters  
when hard times come  
but you and I  
we may crack  
but our shortcomings become masterpieces  
artefacts  
of what we used to be,  
celebrations of what we weren't:

then we fell  
through the same cracks we celebrated  
and nothing broke our fall  
so we floated,  
drifting  
in disbelief, we gazed at each other  
where a thrashing ocean  
of emotions pierced our stare,

a draining era,  
where we became like them,  
shattered  
and scattered.

### **Release you**

The journey of our mind  
seeks to release the “forbidden powers”:

flesh has a habit of lying  
and crossing fine lines,  
a flair for harvesting infamous grapevines  
forbidding the mind to read,  
vandalising, leaving a plain page

– set free those ideas you hoard.

You’ve filtered too much already.  
You’re the topic during smoke-breaks;  
their hostile breaths whisper you’re not ready.  
They’re plotting to keep you,  
to convince you,  
it’s all to please you  
but you hold the key.  
So do the rest of us a favour  
and release yourself.

## **Black and white**

I don't speak black and white:  
these polka dotted cells forbid me,  
my thoughts are stained with them  
and my perceptions are coloured outside the edges,  
constantly holding back my spilling rainbows  
fearing they'd mess over your dotted i's and crossed t's,  
your tucked in shirt and tied up laces.

I fumble,  
trying to make you see.  
But maybe one day,  
for the sake of rebellion,  
you'll come this side,  
break from your chains and bolts of law  
so we can both look back and mock,  
judge how others see the freedom in their cages

but not now –  
see, you're still one of them  
and I don't speak black and white.

## **Aha moment**

A sudden flow  
that can never be too much understanding  
the difference between –  
I heard the first time,  
but the second time  
I listened.

But each arrival  
makes her different.  
It's the world's imperfect response  
to making sense of you.  
And for that, I'll  
take  
my  
time,  
float  
on the situation  
until it makes sense of me,  
wait  
until it submerges me:  
I'll wait.

## **Shaded skies and script reviews**

When the world's volume is turned down  
your mind is left unaware,  
you are  
tossing and turning,  
trying to figure out how your past  
might have paved today,  
or how you will navigate tomorrow.

Everything is silenced.  
Your mind at its loudest  
reviews the day's script,  
constructing alternatives,  
what you could've said.  
You change "sleep" positions  
with each contemplation;  
trying to escape  
or change the conversation.

Shaded skies  
make everything darker  
so you look into yourself for the light.  
But the light is hidden  
under daily reviews of self-reflection  
and self-understanding.  
Perhaps it's better to know oneself  
in the dark  
when that light shines the brightest.

## Logamurthie Athiemoolam

*I find writing therapeutic. It enables me to reflect on a variety of issues affecting my life and to be more observant of what happens around me. I have been writing about the challenges of life, issues affecting our daily lives and nature and its beauty.*

*Many of the participants are gifted and write well, but need to learn how to develop the craft of writing: the editing sessions taught useful skills about eliminating unnecessary sections so that the poem could emerge. Free writing helped me to write ideas without thinking too deeply; exposure by direct involvement enabled me to identify themes to focus on.*

*The lessons were thoughtfully conceptualised and the process of writing / editing and reviewing was uplifting. Brian Walter enjoys what he is doing, humanising in his approach to teaching, and is able to bring out the best in students. I was motivated to write more than a dozen poems in a short period of time.*

*Thanks for an enriching, stimulating course. I have gained skills in how to facilitate poetry writing sessions in future.*

Logamurthie Athiemoolam is a professor in the Faculty of Education.

### **Waves**

Your ebb and flow  
carry with you  
mystical secrets;

always changing,  
never constant,  
you mirror life,  
forever restless.

## Temple

A temple of hope  
over-shadowed by the hill  
stands cloistered  
from greedy eyes.

Inside is  
the warmth of gods and goddesses,  
their caring eyes and glazed stare  
seem to glare at man imposingly.

Lord Subramaniya, glorious  
with semi-precious stones  
and sacred yellow cloth,  
gazes from his well carved sockets  
into space.

Lord Nataraja, dancing  
with raised leg surrounded by planets,  
dances the dance of life and death.  
His glazed stare beckons man to sanity.

Outside  
lies a wasteland,  
an expanse of trees and bush,  
and high above the cliffs  
huge concrete condominiums  
blight the landscape,  
phallic, conquering the earth.

Once this wasteland  
thronged with life,  
with sounds, sights and smells  
of people from distant shores.  
People with hopes of new beginnings:

From Africa, India, Mauritius, China,  
Malaysia and Europe they came  
and in love carved their hopes and fears,  
in love, far from lonely shores,  
they shared their hearts, their hopes and dreams.

Till the bulldozers came  
and all that they had built  
was left in ruins.  
Their cries  
and pleas  
were answered  
with might and force.

And then – like babies  
wrenched from mothers at birth –  
they were driven like beasts  
out of the land of Canaan.

Today at a lone temple  
of peacocks and birds  
Lord Shiva provides solace  
and hope to all who enter  
this tranquil space of peace and love.

## **Searching**

The beady-eyed school children  
stand huddled together behind the  
broken window.

Bright, shining faces search for  
meaning to their existence,  
beyond these concrete walls  
and barren lives.

## **Great Wall revisited**

The majestic wall  
meanders like a gentle river  
through the citadels.

Within these stones lie the secrets  
of pain and torture endured by captives  
to wall the barbarians out.

Yet walled in or walled out  
is of no consequence:

for the world was created  
without walls,  
and we were born free  
to break down the walls  
that wall us in . . .

## **Macchu Picchu**

Hidden from the greedy eyes  
of conquistadors,  
you kept your secrets enveloped  
in the mystical forests.

Your stunning stone structures  
form a hamlet of splendour,

and as the mists rise  
to touch the mountain lovingly,  
you create the perfect picture  
of truth and beauty –  
frozen in time ...

The golden eye gently smiles  
from behind the mountain,  
caressing the early mist,  
and as the spiritual valley sounds

echo the soothing ancestral songs  
– beyond time and space –  
reminding us  
of the illuminating divine within.

### **The Law of the Universe**

The universe gives  
and the universe takes.  
Be mindful of its laws,  
lest you get caught up  
in its web of despair.

For if you only take  
and have nothing to share,  
the universe will take away  
what you have. Sounds  
fill the air,  
touching tunes,  
stringing words into a necklace,  
yet grapple to find the tune  
of life.

My heart  
labours to note  
clear music on paper  
that will gentle your lips  
and touch the strings  
of your heart.

You hold your violin  
like an ageless gem close to your heart.  
And as you lift the bow to touch the gentle strings,  
the notes air  
with soothing sounds  
that touch my very soul.

## Carefree Valley children

A shadow of myself,  
in an era of care-free  
Valley days

steals glimpses of children  
peering into the stagnant pools,  
with eyes like moonbeams  
catching tadpoles in murky water.

Then down the hill –  
huddling like new born pups  
inside a rusted car bonnet  
– tobogganing.

They wade through bushes  
in search of adventure,  
eating blackberries and loquats.

Till they sit in quiet solitude,  
mesmerized by tranquillity,  
taking in the beauty of nature,  
listening to the bird songs  
and gazing into the azure sky.

On Guy Fawkes they twirl  
their star-lights with glee,  
glued to the flashing sparks  
that encircle their worlds.

Childhood pleasures lost forever  
replaced by iPad iPod children  
hooked on laptops and Playstations  
that steal childhood innocence.

## Olwethu Mxoli

*I don't like to write: I need to write. It is like breathing and food and water. I write to live. It is a necessary exploration of self.*

*My themes are love, loss, death, and humanity in its tragic nakedness. All our glorifying and disgusting facets.*

*I've learned that vulnerability is a strength: having a group of strangers crawl over your work and making suggestions is nerve-wracking. But they have ideas I had not thought of and it was helpful. Editing has become the most valued part of this experience for me, seeing my work whittled down to its core and having that 'Yes, that's exactly what I meant!' moment is priceless.*

*I laughed a lot this time. Losing my grandmother earlier this year has been tough, but the Friday workshops were a release from grief and a re-entrance into joy. Thank you to everyone, especially Brian Walter: you have been great through this, even if radical in your thinking and editing!*

Olwethu Mxoli is a 2<sup>nd</sup> year LLB student on the NMMU South Campus, who is attending the workshops for the second time.

### **The end**

I've found myself an old solution  
and I cannot get enough  
of your touch  
my arms around your neck  
slowly pulling you down under  
– heat will be our downfall.

## **The haunting**

I once did a rubbing of a man  
as if he were a very important grave,  
oiled him with trembling hands,  
circled his lips  
with my finger tips to draw a kiss,  
something soft to call my own.

I did a rubbing of a man at midnight  
when the moon had gone home  
and only the stars hadn't given up on me  
my hands pushed into being  
a sanctuary

I did a rubbing of a man at dawn  
as she opened her lips into day:  
ritual requires sacrifice.

## **Heavy**

only the crazy set themselves on fire  
to stop from feeling  
and to feel once more

because  
I want you  
like salt wants the sea  
like mud wants the river

I am sediment in your tank  
I hold back the pure  
my love is too heavy  
and your tongue too weak  
for my loaded kiss

## **Call them**

call the homeless back home  
early, to greet the sun  
with a breakfast bathed in grease,  
and orange juice

let them rest their creaky bones  
and talk of the old days  
let them know love  
and being wanted

when you switch on the street lights  
and close the curtains  
when you pull all of the day  
towards the table

save a seat for the beggar

## **Because**

Because distance is devastating  
I am most in agony when you are beside me  
when your fingers thread with mine;  
when you sing softly in my ear  
my mind holds your voice hostage.

I have to school myself in the letting go:  
my skin stores the impression of a touch.

My screen keeps spitting your face at me,  
a swipe that will bloom megapixel  
with my entire world  
and still have it too far from my reach.

Even in dreams you leave  
as smoke through fingers  
slithers and dissipates.

Because distance is a tragedy  
of heartbeats rather than cities  
I shrivel beside an eternity  
I cannot share.

## **Ladders**

*for my grandmother*

She always seemed ancient  
with vein netted hands  
and a softly crinkled face  
ancient and short  
with a voice as soft  
as a moth's wings  
but never dull.

She and I built a room of books,  
each corner stacked  
as high as we could reach.  
We built a ladder of spines.

Now, alone  
I build ladders on pages,  
cities old and new.  
I build them all from my spine  
to let strangers climb  
and wander through.

## **Sunrise**

I heard about the peeping tom  
who lingers at the windows  
and watches  
as you curl your toes in  
and shift your head away

I heard he waits for you to open your eyes  
and watches as you stretch your arms  
and curve your back

I heard about the peeping tom  
who never misses his daily visit  
who with his eyes kisses your elbows  
and the bottom of your spine.

## **Rising**

The night comes and goes as quickly  
as morning rips the sky  
demanding her being;  
the sun ravishes  
our windows, curtains and toes

a glowing orange crisping into white  
– miraculous sight.

## Geroda Mc Charlie

*Creative writing helps me give voice to everything I keep inside of me. My imagination can also take weird turns at times so writing, or thinking up stories, helps with that as well.*

*My creative writing is mostly personal. I write about myself, where I come from. My studies taught me that the poet should not be seen behind the poems but in my case the poet is the poem.*

*The sessions have helped me to be aware of the need to edit work, rather than just writing it and letting it disappear into the woodwork. I also learned that I am not a control freak because I can take advice on how to improve my poems without feeling like my world is crumbling around my feet. I am excited to be in a publication and to get my words out into the world.*

Geroda Mc Charlie is reading for her BA Honours in Afrikaans and Dutch. She would like to be a lecturer and researcher in the field of Afrikaans literature: "I want to contribute to the fight surrounding this language so as to help eradicate the stigmatisation of apartheid attached to it."

## **Disillusioned**

A silent scar,  
taut and tense  
with plight.

A tale of broken connections,  
mended while others remain open.

Does it show  
your rawness?

Does it explain your exposed, untethered  
vulnerability  
in the harshness of a cold, cold world?

It must hurt  
to be so raw,  
bare enough to crumble  
under the pressure  
of broken promises.

## **Stuck**

In a dark tunnel,  
delight flows free:  
when the imagined light  
of meaning  
and verse erupts into being;

when a small whimper of  
fearful excitement  
says: "write me,  
so that I may become  
life."

## **Late afternoon sun**

Shadows slip into warmth.  
Clouds on the breeze come  
and fill us with thoughts  
of a heavy life.  
Reminiscing in silence  
we are captured  
in radiant bars of dust and dust and dust,  
entranced by brilliant shafts  
of new light  
spilling down and through  
and into our thoughts;

clouds come and fill us with thoughts  
so profound  
they bake, they burn and then  
slowly  
they blow away, like ash  
and dust. Like nothing –  
they become caught bars  
of light

spilling back and through  
and into our thoughts.

## **Langafstand**

So ver as wat jy is,  
so lank as wat dit was,  
so goed as wat dit kan wees –

dit is hoeveel dit kos  
om liefde te smaak.

## Playful

Shadows chase light  
light captures heat –  
standing here as one  
we look  
but we don't see.

Only a girl filled with awe  
at the blazing sun  
deserted by the weight  
of being either or.

## Control

Let the idea glow  
slowly, until it hums with the  
potential of Komrij's *voltage*.  
Take his dictionary – grab at it –  
with a grasp so strong  
that your words can never be weak.  
Let it jump from you like the suppressed  
heat of power.  
Under the surface of your skin  
let it be you  
let it become you  
let it live on the paper,  
jumping from the tip of a precipice  
erupting  
into light  
staining its whiteness like a shadow.

## **Mirror**

You see what you want  
but I will show  
only truth,  
truth always mistreated  
by your eyes.

## **Waagstuk**

Mag ek die veer  
van my denke opneem  
om die wit gelaaide blad  
verewig met swart bloed  
te beklad?

## **Ongetiteld**

Moederskap is 'n geskenk  
van harttreurende liefde.  
Dit is die broosheid  
van weerlose gedagtes  
en die sorg  
van jare se omgee.

Moederskap is die gesmeek  
na 'n verstandhouding  
wat haar lewe lank –  
jou lewe lank –  
'n las sal wees.

## Untitled

As I walk past  
she summons me into what they call  
the entertainment room  
a room – for family, for fun  
and strife –  
saddened by the depression  
of living an unknown life.

She calls me to her side.  
Taking a slow pull on her cigarette,  
she pauses to exhale,  
looks at me, through used smoke  
and talks about:  
her existence  
her situation  
her desires  
her fears  
her life, while I remain silent,  
ever observant.

I now remember the words,  
the smoke of them,  
and my resolve deepens  
never to forget her mistakes.  
They will have no room in *my* home.

## Zizipho Mfazwe

*Writing is my way of expressing my thoughts, feelings and unspoken words. The pen and paper are the only friends that listen without judging and never get tired of listening. Sometimes it's a response triggered by external and internal forces.*

*I don't have fixed themes that I write about, however I sometimes write about my observations and concerns about the direction that the majority of the youth today seem to be taking. Some poems are triggered by what's being said or events that took place and admiring the beauty that surrounds me.*

*I have learnt that we all have different styles of writing, concerns, themes and together we can learn a thing or two from one another.*

Zizipho Mfazwe is studying towards a National Diploma in Nature Conservation on the George Campus of NMMU. Her themes often reflect care for the environment, as in this extract from "Plea for the Rhino":

Please  
spare my life,  
much more precious  
than the horn I possess.

It's just a horn...  
that's all it is,

a horn.

## I have seen

### *i. From wildlife perspective*

I have seen the beauty and the worst.  
I have seen them full of life,  
I have seen some of them dead.  
The morning mist hugging the trees  
and coating the hills,  
the dew gently caressing the grass  
waiting for the sun;  
the lush green forest  
where the swooshing trees  
and bird calls make music.

As night approaches  
the sun digs deep  
and disappears behind the beloved hills;  
the moon is slow,  
the stars glow in her light.  
The jackal calls  
and bushbuck bark  
to the ocean's gentle lullaby.  
The splashing waves  
determine to wash the dunes.

I have seen  
some gallivanting,  
some running from humans,  
or hiding in the bush;  
some roaring and charging,  
some soaring, some staring.

Oh! Yes I have seen . . .

*ii.*

I have seen the beauty and the worst  
mostly from two worlds,  
have seen fake smiles fading  
genuine laughter that makes you want to laugh,  
heard loud silence and riots,  
with tears painting the face with pain,  
truth disguised,  
people burying their heads in sand.

I've seen them happy,  
I've seen them sad,  
some crying,  
some thinking,  
others exploding like grenades of anger,

I've seen some love to ease the pain,  
some lonely,  
seeking company,  
but never finding  
where every man is for himself . . .

I have seen the best of both worlds!  
The beauty and the worst.

### **No access**

I have never seen him  
but his picture is clear:  
his thoughts hammer his head  
and hang from his shoulders.

He travelled miles for his dream,  
now turned to nightmare:  
for home has become too much to bear.

He lost his parents,  
and decided to take his life  
for on the other side, things won't be rough.

He paved his way  
with alcohol parading in his blood,  
locked inside his room  
drowning in misery  
and blood from his wrists.

He was hoping to meet his parents  
but his access was denied.

He was rescued  
just as he was knocking  
on that door.

### **We can overcome**

We may stumble between the rocks,  
crumble like old buildings,  
get crunched like paper.

In the morning we rise like the sun.  
We blossom like spring flowers  
and make our way to the surface  
through the soil, like a planted seed.

Mistakes pave our journey.  
Challenges dose us with patience.  
Obstacles engrave us with strength.  
The past will be a memorial  
to what we went through  
and the present will be evidence  
of what we have become.

We will roar like lions  
and growl like baboons.

Victory is near.

### **Paradigm shift**

They smoothly colonize the mind,  
confuse the soul,  
communicate with the heart  
and are eloquent with hidden agendas.

With tears from the sky  
disappointed by a lack of confidence,  
a hunger for knowledge,  
and thirst for competency,

holes are dug deep.  
One can hear the silent cry  
from the deeper ends,

some adamant to know –  
but resist feeding the mind  
and enhancing the vocabulary  
to catalyse the process  
and approve the paradigm shift.

They gently install propaganda,  
hoping others continue ignorant  
to keep the privilege  
of being called “knowledge catalysts”.

## **Caged thoughts**

Ideas danced in her head.  
She walked alone  
the alleys of her imagination.  
They knew nothing  
of her world inside her head,  
where each consequence  
each outcome was considered;

she silently wondered  
what would have happened  
if she'd opened her window to the world  
to give them a glimpse of her mind.  
From the mist of her thoughts  
she suffocated,  
scared to open the only window  
to save her life,  
she endured the slow painful death  
inside her cocoon.

I now wonder:  
what if she'd shared her thoughts?  
How many lives would she have touched?  
How many lanterns of hope lit?  
How many people empowered?  
But the thoughts died inside her body.

## Parusha Chetty

*I find writing therapeutic: it aids in beautifying the grotesque, while sharing my perspective and opinions on contemporary culture as well as the trials faced by the modern subject. My writing attempts to expose the subjugated realities that have been imposed by current societal structures and, in turn, to bring forth the psychological effects of such subjugation.*

*My main cradle of inspiration lies in nature, employing it to plant seeds of a spiritual reality.*

*This workshop enabled me to convert thoughts into forms that I could share with other poets and mentors in a positive, open manner, allowing for a beneficial and constructive flow of critique amongst fellows. This has allowed me to adapt my writing style into one that is more insightful and comprehensive.*

Parusha Chetty is a 3<sup>rd</sup> year Psychology and English Literature student on South Campus.

### **Seeds**

Moments of recognition  
evolve  
into memories

– a life compilation  
of connections that penetrate,  
imprinting seeds of growth.

## Memory

The sun illuminates  
my multi-coloured skirt,  
my hand's shadow casts  
a roof over the bright page.

With a gentle force,  
the wind slowly  
tosses my hair,

allowing it's fragrance  
to leak into the air.

And I feel the moment pass.  
The reality of youth,  
engrained  
in this memory  
forever.

## Make up

Lining her lips,  
she marginalizes herself.  
Hiding behind blotches  
of foundation and dusts  
of eye shadow,

she drains herself  
of her colours  
replacing them  
with a Lacy Red.

Her beauty fated  
by her concealer,  
a breathing façade.

## **Bold as love**

My body  
alive with sensation,  
is enticed  
by the little wings  
of Jimi Hendrix

making sweet love to my mind.  
In this moment  
of unabridged ecstasy  
I feel you.

## **Intoxication**

Each glass  
brings me closer to your lips,  
this red fluid,  
creating warmth.  
A living inaction of Freud's Theory,  
a frightening comfort.  
Another glass would lead me to you.  
A beta blocker to my rationality.

## **Indulgence**

With each sip of wine,  
I get closer to the tender taste of your lips.  
The musky smell of your temptation  
– penetrates  
my blood stream.

Tainted by the alcohol  
and imagery of your seduction.  
I unravel in the subconscious indulgence  
of future fantasies;

allowing detail to punctuate reality,  
allowing for an euphoric escape.

## **Stranger**

With a force more rapid  
than my heart  
I run,

threatened by my own fear,  
living in the mirage created by our minds,  
I find,  
that stranger called truth.

## **Mama**

Her gentle greetings  
flavour my coffee.  
As she glides onto her stage,  
beside the stove,  
she breaks the eggs

with the same strength  
that broke patriarchal impositions,  
she continues her chores:  
combining a unique blend of masala and borrie  
she mends it in  
with hands in need of mending.

A housewife by denotation,  
an inspiration by meaning.  
Watching an embodiment of history,  
I see her scars,  
and I write them on this page.  
Returning the beauty she was stripped of.

She's the fuel to my thoughts,  
the ink that moves this pen.  
A broken woman's life heals another's.

## Margie Childs

*I like to write to clarify what I am thinking. I also like to write to day-dream and have thought adventures. Writing is a creative pleasure, but it is also an exacting craft. Often the best word or idea hovers just out of reach. Writing offers a way to capture the elusive. My themes emerge from everyday preoccupations, from thoughts about my family, to activities I enjoy and also to considerations regarding my work.*

*My keen interest as a workshop participant was to learn how to write and teach poetry more effectively. Watching the way poetry writing was presented gave me insights for my own teaching.*

*I also wanted to gain further insights about poetry and poetry writing so that I could use poetic inquiry as a research practice. This workshop has opened interesting thought spaces for me to explore. The idea of distilling knowledge and experiences (data) into poetry offers interesting possibilities.*

*I have learnt the value of editing – this is where the poem really grows and takes shape. Self-editing is necessary, but collective editing offers so much more. Working in a pair with the facilitator made for a rich pool of ideas and understandings.*

*With fluid pairs we got to know more group members and encountered their lives and ideas through their poems.*

Margie Childs lectures in the Faculty of Education, and says: “My career ambition is to have fun! This is why I became a lecturer. Literacy teaching offers many opportunities including poetry excursions with pleasant word picnics and occasional thought fe(a)sts.”

## **Language of my home**

Fluid words enliven.  
Rich ideas tumble in thought.  
Language of my home,  
language of my heart and soul.  
Holding my history and hope.

## **Art on Monday**

Turpentine – that sultry helper –  
enables exploration and rethinking,  
swabbing away colour  
that does not work.

In the quiet absorption  
of the Art Class,  
adults are rendered children again,  
eagerly adventuring,

cautiously fumbling,  
always  
supported, extended  
and stretched,

while the smell of turpentine  
fills the humid space,  
spurring bold commitment  
to colour, line and shape.

## Sounds like art

Cars outside  
rumble over bumps:  
Freddie Mercury belts inspiration

then gives way  
to a to-and-fro amidst easels  
and board  
and humming conversation.

The voices are light wafts  
and whisps,  
trailing away;  
deep velvet commentary  
and guidance

providing a sure background,  
interrupted now

by the pick, pick  
of an HB pencil  
picking.

## **Torn away**

### *On visiting the South End Museum*

South End has had its day.  
The canvas reminisces  
of time gone by,  
sloping to the sea  
amidst the quaint shelter of buildings  
now laid bare,  
and joyous lives forced away.

Beautiful children  
– laughing and playing with glee –  
where are you all now?

Your spirits are here,  
right here,  
but you,  
all gone,  
removed, torn away.

This yellow afternoon light  
still holds the joy of childish play;  
in this moment  
frozen,  
a reminder of lives ripped asunder  
a call both to build anew

and remember.

## **For my daughter**

Missing lies heavily around my heart  
and creeps stealthily up  
today.

Some days it pounces and tears  
in a sharp loneliness,  
tasted  
as my ears strain for sounds of lost laughter remembered.

Her insight echoes centuries  
of love, her compassion flows  
from wise women long past  
pooled into her blood, warming her heart.

I miss the composed  
comfort of her words.  
I long for an arm in arm stroll  
savouring the delight of togetherness.

## **Mother tongue**

My language is a warm, soft blanket  
with stitches hooked together in gentle wool,  
telling her story of childhood comfort and care.  
The words and memories she holds  
enfold and offer tender reminiscence.

The mantle of linked thoughts  
is a genesis and birthing.  
This cover allows connecting  
encourages reaching out to those  
wrapped in differently knitted comfort.

## Nolwazi Gumenke

*I am twenty years of age and often post very long poems on Facebook. Coming to NMMU has inspired me to write even further. I am very appreciative to everybody who contributed their time, and skills to make this publication a reality.*

*I am an opinionated individual, and value meeting new people and travelling to new places. Writing is something I do for life. I write to breathe: it's that one place I go to, no matter how I feel. I'm not very good with baring my soul to another being, so writing is a chance for me to get real with myself and the world.*

*I believe in words. I believe in speech but also value silence. I believe that poetry, just like any other art, gets better with practise, the more we write the better we get.*

*Through this year's publication I learnt the importance of allowing other people to read my work and to take criticism positively, and the power in shorter pieces. I am a very needy human being, who loves to get attention from my loved ones and spending quality time bonding. These feelings of vulnerability and dependence are starting to show in my writings.*

Nolwazi Gumenke is a 2<sup>nd</sup> year B Com General Economics student on the George Campus, who worked in this course entirely by email.

## Love poet

I am not a love poet,  
but if I were

I'd write you an endless poem  
about how I turn to the empty side of my bed  
without screaming.

I'd write about how you got me high  
– weed and vodka  
never got me as intoxicated as the thought of you.

Your kisses give me a hangover for days.

But if I were sober and a love poet,  
I'd write about how you came out of nowhere and took my  
entire world  
to an awakening.

If I were a love poet  
I'd write about how you got me smiling  
and all my tomorrows a-dance .

Should I be a love poet  
all my poems would be about you,  
your name all over my notebooks.

## Happy never after

I let you touch me  
not realizing I wasn't the one you were reaching for.  
You placed me on a pedestal,

not to explore my beauty,  
or for inner peace, but searching  
for your place in the world as a man.

You were, still are,  
in search of another woman,  
but you reached me first.

For a while my nakedness  
made you feel less of a foreigner  
in the world of love.

Lost in the darkness of lust  
you curled your body around mine  
and held me like the answer.

But as the night gave in to dawn,  
so did your skeletons  
come out to play.

I am not the answer,  
I am woman  
flesh and bones,

not here to heal you  
or bend my bones  
to lift you higher.

## **Release me**

We both know why you left.  
And why you keep coming back.  
I'm confused about why I keep allowing you  
to walk all over me

Lust so thick...  
and spirit so weak.

You were not supposed to undress me  
That first weekend  
But  
I let you,  
taking the light out of a night already devoid of stars.

Yeah, I know you think  
she is saying this because you are not here,  
but when your lips press against hers  
she will swallow the words  
and have them resurrected as goosebumps and orgasms.

No.  
Not this time.  
I won't let you keep doing this to me.  
I can't keep doing it to myself.

Boy, you got me standing by my window at midnight  
praying for a shooting star.  
You got me talking to the moon,  
pleading for a sign,  
pleading with heaven to let you slip  
and give me peace.  
Pleading with heaven to unchain me from you.

We both know why you left  
and why you keep coming back.  
I'm just confused about why  
I keep tying my heart on your ankle  
for you to drag through mud.

### **Breath**

Slow down.  
You don't have to touch and go  
always in a rush.  
Your words sound like raindrops moving backwards  
from earth to the sky.  
One day you're here,  
and the next you disappear.

### **You and I**

Let's create a third person within us  
who will resemble us both,  
a little us of some sort  
for we are not one:  
we are two hearts desiring for a love that burns so bright  
that it gets messy.  
Let's redirect our steps.  
Redirect them  
to a little me, little you  
coming together  
to a little us of some sort.

## Tendeukai Manase

*I believe poetry is a good way to express oneself without having to actually 'say' anything, or to say it in a way that is not direct. It is also very relaxing and stimulates the brain.*

*I write about whatever comes to mind, inspired mostly while listening to music.*

*I've learnt that there are many different ways to convey something and that anyone has the ability to write something good. Also that anyone that writes will appreciate your work and effort whether or not it's a great piece.*

Tendeukai Manase is a 3<sup>rd</sup> year B Com Business Management and Information Systems student on South Campus, who would like to be an entrepreneur.

### **Green**

I sense  
green  
which you might not sense.

I grow faster  
than you grow.  
I create that which you cannot.

I shall still help you.  
Watch me as I grow  
and you will learn.  
You will also begin to sense.

Breathe in what I give you  
and you shall also grow.  
I sacrifice  
for you to transform.

## **Tell me**

Tell me everything.  
just tell me:  
about the time you got in trouble  
for eating bugs when you were young.  
Tell me how your friend made you mad;  
what you did when you got up this morning;  
what you dreamt.  
How did it make you feel?  
I want to know

Let me walk with you  
the sun our umbrella.  
Then you can tell me more.  
Put aside your jeans  
and wear that colourful sundress  
that matches your caramel skin.  
Then tell me  
why you don't like to wear dresses.

Ramble on about all these 'useless' things.  
Trust me.  
Tell me everything till you can't remember the next thing.  
Then maybe I can tell you  
one or two things as well,  
  
if you want me too . . .

## **Power / charisma**

You lecture me  
about power.  
Is it instilling fear  
in those weaker than you?  
Going to the gym  
and lifting the whole building?  
Is it the ability  
to speak with a single word?

Is it relative  
to those who believe they have it?  
Power  
surely comes  
from within.

I have never met someone weak  
who demands  
attention.

## **I know it all**

I know everything.  
I know the price of life.  
I know pain and suffering.  
I know happiness and elation.  
I have wisdom as well as knowledge.  
I know morality and profanity.

I know everything.  
I know religion and that which is not.  
I know what causes existence and what kills it.

I really do know everything.  
I know words form a book and a story.  
I know what each letter means.

I know everything

until I decide to take a step.  
A step out  
of my house  
of mirrors  
and know  
I know  
nothing.

### **Day of dolphins**

I've still got sand in my pocket,  
each particle  
a story.

Waves crash  
into the harbour  
trying to break down the barriers  
separating us.  
The sun sensually  
caresses  
my uneven face.

The occasional hello  
of a friendly fin,  
  
silently expressive.

## Marlon Witbooi

*This series of poetry writing sessions has enabled me to learn through expressing and reflecting on my feelings and circumstances.*

*I learnt to be more critical in my writing, especially in the editing phase. It is through this process that simple, powerful messages can be taken from our feelings and thoughts on a page and turned into pieces of art.*

Marlon Witbooi is studying towards an Honours degree in Group Dynamics on the South Campus. He aims to become a Counselling Psychologist with specialities in small group, individual and mass counselling.

### Lost

Mist in the skies  
like lost souls dwelling  
before the start of time,  
a night I don't want  
after any day of this kind –  
terror in my bay,  
oceans of emotion flow free  
as the resurrection of her memory  
takes place in me.

How can I get rid  
of memory?

It sleeps in the wind,  
lives in the darkness,  
waiting, baiting . . .

## Letter

Why would I go against those  
who have already put beauty into words,  
on paper that can be destroyed,  
hoping that it may live once more?

Why would I quaint the reason  
for wars to be declared,  
or snatch the inspiration  
that guides all artists' hands?  
Why would I cripple humanity  
by boxing in what is expressed in so many ways?

Need life be taken for another to prosper?  
Is mystery to be tamed in a few words –  
love, from me to you.

What my eyes have witnessed, my heart felt,  
my hands touched, my nose smelled  
from me to you, I give:  
too little to share,  
but other than my flesh it's all that I bear.

I dare not cheapen your canvas  
in efforts to highlight your essence  
I wish only to bring praise

and cherish  
love from me to you . . .

## Whispers

It's in the silent whispers  
when our eyes meet  
when only two are in the world  
when we're smiling in sync,  
that anxious feeling –  
and the only thing to hear  
breathing, hearts beating;

it's in having nothing  
yet grateful for life.

Too complex for the mind to wonder  
too fast for the eye to see,  
only the heart can feel  
the love we share,  
you and me:

let the whispering  
of the heart  
be true.

## Wind

Wind whispering, wishing, washing  
through the trees  
on this warm winter's night,  
serenity drifting in the motion  
of its flight –  
all the while the wind whispers  
wishing, washing  
on this warm winter's night.

How I long for you  
in my serene, peaceful state.  
Separation seems such a cruelty  
while this winter night  
dines us with a warm summer breeze  
and I yearn for my missing piece.

May time prove us to be  
not a moment  
passing through your memory.

### **To grow everyday**

Your beauty opens  
like the flowers in spring,  
it shines like the morning sun  
refreshing me day-by-day  
like the air I breathe;

you continue to give life  
to the dead bones of me;

as you sprout  
and your roots go deeper  
you form more and more  
part of me,  
manifested to your throne  
in my heart  
a place I hope you call  
home.

## Nehemiah Latolla

*I fell in love with poetry in my early teens and fell for the craft upon reading Shakespeare's sonnet "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun." His use of words, rhyme and emotions was a truly spiritual experience and I told myself: 'I want to do that!'*

*Growing as a poet over the past 7 to 8 years has been a rollercoaster of feelings and self-discovery. I would describe myself as a selfish romanticist, in that I do not necessarily think about the reader but rather as an exchange of emotions with my pen and paper to provide healing to myself. That a reader can read and identify with my craft is a blessing and a bonus.*

*My work deals with romance, whether it be heartbreak, finding love or having a crush. I also write about social issues. In my writing I always try to become a character (using my past drama experience) telling the story as if it were happening to myself. Someone once asked me how I did it and I replied that my age did not lend me much experience so whatever I felt about an issue, I tried to feel ten times more to be able to highlight the beauty, pain or brutality of a situation.*

*This course has extended my writing. I have learned the difference between spoken word poetry (my previous forte) and a written literature style of poetry (what I learned here).*

*Working with a group in my writing was a new experience for me, and this programme has shown me the possibilities of collaborating with other writers in future.*

Nehemiah Latolla is a full-time MTech (Chemistry) research student, studying Natural Products specializing in Organic Chemistry. He says: "I was drawn to this career path as I have always wanted to contribute to the betterment of human life."

## **Writer's prayer**

*to my mother*

Sitting contently in the corner pew  
every Sunday morning,  
you superseded friendship.  
Nurturing, prayerful, you guided your thoughts  
as you sung "hallelujah" to the musician's chords.

When I saw a tear in your eye  
with a child's mind I tried to console you.  
You happily tapped my head, in turn consoling me  
while focused on your prayer so earnestly.

I pray that the same passion  
becomes mine as I construct a poem  
with your discretion,  
so my knowledge can flow endlessly  
to inspire dry eyes tearfully.

## **Freedom's captive**

Your soul was supposed to grow with mine.  
I reached for the words  
in the morning, after the storm.  
Would you stay?

I am breaking down the walls  
we built.  
Words spilled from my mouth.  
I knew you wouldn't stay.

You look me in the eyes,  
distraught.  
You had to find yourself,  
while my time seems cavernous.

I confided in freedom;  
took up her chains  
and bound our fate.

### **Sonnet: falling in love**

You say that before me  
your paths were bare;  
a song sung stormily,  
from your chest

sending stationary bodies  
to orbit,  
collisions with UFOs  
smoothing sorbet souls:

till my being became  
a vain reflection of the mass  
you filled with veins transporting life.

Echoes of salvation are still felt,  
admitting to reason  
when faced with doubt.

## **Nudity**

*for Jason*

A mangled body  
lies in the still of night.  
Having lost recognition  
of what to believe in:  
being told to pray for grace  
while contemplating suicide.

Remembering the pulpit mocking,  
those words cutting flesh.  
Screams, muffling the echoing:  
of lies told and false faces worn,  
trying to cover the damage  
while haemoglobin rivers still seep through.

But scars needed air to heal,  
deception needed an exit.  
Acceptance created belief.

A repairing body  
seeks its own truths,  
and as the sun comes up  
embraces its nudity.

## **Cost of freedom**

Remember the marches?  
Those defeated boisterous sounds  
as melanin marked faces  
chanted a cry for freedom.

Shallow graves?  
Baring black bodies  
mangled  
for seeking choice.

The desire for a voice?  
When taught silence  
and "*Ja, baas*"  
to prevent violence.

Segregation?  
Families torn apart  
the devil wearing a mask  
of good neighbourly habits.

That grants me clear perspective,  
refuge when I feel lost.  
A compass reminding me,  
the high cost of freedom.

## Child unseen

I want to speak up:

so sick of thinking  
of those many times a child  
– left to her own devices –  
a trusted family friend  
thrust his wants upon her innocence:

her emotions brooding,  
she wanted to block the pain,  
brushing past the vein to scar her wrists  
with her pocket mirror  
once held to display her beauty.

Her loud screams of anger were muffled  
to dine with the hopelessness  
of a mother too busy trying to save a marriage,  
overlooking a daughter she should have cherished.

I wanted to scream for her.  
I want to be a siren in silence.

## Phila Dyasi

*I write under the name NuBlaccSoUI. All my writing is to document my life and is a platform to share my stories. They are, more often than not, similar to the experiences of others so the narrative of each being is never lost. I see myself through the world's eyes as a Social Commentator.*

*Black/Nubian consciousness is my latest theme. I am focusing on promoting self-awareness, self-pride and self-love of my people whilst teaching the untold history of the original members of the human family through my essays, poems and raps.*

*As a rookie in the spoken word world, I am experimental: having dealt with various themes such as spirituality and God, lust, love, betrayal, loss, death, justice, and freedom.*

*Any art form requires constant (constructive) criticism for development and growth to exist and this brief course helped me realise the shortcomings in my works and also the commendable aspects to keep and those to improve. The course taught me how to go about editing a rough draft and make a poem out of it.*

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

## **Portrait**

Black woman, brewed up strong  
– your sun-deep skin  
estranged from the outside,  
in this summer's sunset  
dust settles on your dreams.

The fingers of your left hand  
fancy reaching out, pursuing  
plundered passions  
that give blood to life.

Your work is outside  
where dirt piles  
into dunes of doubt  
and stories of silence.

## **Dearly departed: you are missing from us**

It has been an odd, lonely ten years.  
Time fades into nothingness.  
But grief stays,  
slays at the soul,  
silently, skilfully, slicing at self,  
ever so...slow...ly!

It festered in a dark cold corridor corner  
in a closed case,  
a passage of pain, infinite.

## Closure

A nightmare with the sun out,  
dark light.  
White lies so blinding.  
Black truths so frightening.  
It's like I saw our future  
through a fortune teller's crystal ball,  
had high, huge hopes for our love.

Marginalized,  
separated,  
let's elope.  
I never thought I'd lose you like this . . .  
That Johannesburg tremor shook and shifted  
our worlds' planets apart  
but you are still a part of me,  
always.  
But these words won't come. At a loss for:  
words.

The handle on truth to find closure.  
Love.

Emotionally a wreck, heart cracked.  
The heartache, the pains that won't divorce my soul.  
The sorrow, the fact that the time  
we spent together was never enough!  
My sliced heart,  
my sentiments too melancholic.

I still pray for you.  
I'll carry you in my heart.

## **Lethal legacy**

My life in my backpack,  
with some oxygen tank,  
pipes resuscitating dreams and giving breath  
to water-filled lungs that once sank  
a bare, black and blank stare.

The health system done killed not healed,  
selling poison pills to the already ill;  
premature death, the lawyer  
didn't have time to draw up a will.

Misleading masses with matters  
of their health is hazardous:  
Pharmaceutical-Man is a murderer,  
and Karma's double-sharp knife

took his own son's life.

# Luvuyo Dolonga

*Writing (and reading) helps me to connect with like-minded people, past and present. There is nothing more rewarding than discovering an inspirational book written decades ago, but whose themes still resonate today.*

*I hope to accomplish a Socratic ‘gadfly’ purpose through my writing in that I would like to redress as many social and economic ills as possible by forcing us to take a long hard look at ourselves and effectively deal with the ‘ickyness’ that plagues our society.*

*I have learnt that sharing ideas provides valuable insights into how different individuals have come to see the world the way they do. Engaging creatively can help foster greater understanding between individuals who have a mutual desire to expand their knowledge base beyond the mundane rhetoric that is droned into us daily.*

Luvuyo Dolonga is a BA Law student on South Campus.

## **Words**

Words  
give voice  
to the binary of my brain  
the manifestations of my mind

allowing my thoughts

to breathe.

## **Bloodthirsty economy**

My judgement clouded,  
my free-spirit grounded  
by all this bullshit that has me surrounded.

Too many voices, too much noise,  
too much nonsense!  
I had to lose my mind to discover my sanity.  
I just cannot deal with all the blatant dishonesty.

Sons and daughters of Africa  
led astray by our leaders' hypocrisy:  
this un-African sentiment of "ME! ME! ME!"

Our daily struggle for economic parity  
is stifled – at every turn – by senseless bureaucracy.  
Please tell me,  
where is this "equality"  
for which my parents fought so gallantly,  
guaranteed to them, constitutionally?  
Why is my mother still an economic refugee?  
To maintain this top-heavy economy,  
whose governance is dictated to by foreign policy  
and never for the benefit of you and me?  
Luxury fleets and exotic suites –  
that's the reward for government seats,  
who cares if the masses have nothing to eat?

Tell me,  
how do we survive this pseudo-democracy?  
With its terminal phobia of transparency  
advancing the apartheid legacy  
through its capitalist philosophy.  
'Ubuntu' was trending during the TRC –  
a clever ruse  
to excuse  
all manner of depravity:

“Add crocodile tears,  
mix well  
with empty apology . . . ”  
and voila!  
You’ve escaped accountability.  
Legacies are built – raping  
Africans’ forgiving psychology.

Don’t you dare look down your nose at me!  
You blood-money beneficiary,  
walking with the poise of blue-blood aristocracy  
as you trample all over those living in abject poverty:  
what the hell do you want from me?  
I extend my hand in a show of unity  
and you recoil  
as if my complexion is a form of leprosy.  
S’undiqhela kakubi kwedini.  
Learn what that means  
before you condescend to me.

### **Starving African**

My hunger pangs wake me.  
My daily reminder to hustle some food  
and maybe some money;  
no muesli for breakfast,  
no bacon with parsley,  
no silver-spoon treatment  
for the son of a darkie:  
respect and fair treatment  
are such foreign concepts  
for struggle survivors  
with no cadre contacts.

My rude awakening ends my temporary reprieve  
from life's daily beating,  
this assault on my psyche,  
that leaves my soul bleeding.  
I bet this wouldn't happen  
if my name were Visagie;  
my faith in humanity  
ever depleting.

I write this in rhyme  
to lighten the tone,  
because these hardships of life  
won't leave me alone.  
I try to be strong,  
I try to push on  
but there's nowhere to hide,  
they follow me home.

### **No crime**

Rhyme is no crime,  
  
I put pen to paper  
and it just happens,  
  
every time.

It's not like I do my writing with a rhyming dictionary.  
I read a lot of Dr Seuss growing up,  
  
obviously.

I sit to reflect,  
ponder, consider  
but with no rhyme, words refuse to come  
  
hither.

## Ammaarah Abrahams

*My career ambitions entail furthering my studies and continuing to compose poetry: my craving for writing which started at a young age keeps manifesting throughout the years.*

*I write out of complete passion – I desire nothing more than writing candour – and the freedom to express my thoughts is achieved through writing. I write about anything that triggers some genuine deep emotion (whether dismal or joyful), philosophical aspects, some past personal experience or mere observations of everyday happenings.*

*My writing style never remains constant: my techniques and themes, similarly, are continually changing.*

*Being in last year's poetry workshop was really massively helpful and enjoyable. It brought me to join another year. Thank you all for encouraging me to find my own voice.*

Ammaarah Abrahams is reading for her BA degree, majoring in Psychology and English Literature, on South Campus. She attended the writing workshops in 2014.

### Winter's night

There is nothing more insanely beautiful  
than possessing the instinct  
to hear your own muted soul  
through the storming rain  
that gathers all parts  
of its shadowed grey sky,  
and blind puffy clouds,  
shouting harsh pitches  
that mimic your own shallow heart.

## **Naked by nature**

Nothing bares you more  
than the darkness of the evening  
and the focus of the single bright moon  
illuminating your loneliness  
with the shadows  
of your drained heart.

Not even the mocking clouds  
and the taunting moon  
can bare your skin more  
than loneliness.

## **Hate love**

You hated you  
I hate that you hated you  
I hate that I hate that you hated you  
I hate that I love you.

You loved how I loved you  
and damn,  
I hate how you loved how I loved you.

## **Parasite**

Never have I come across  
such a selfish soul  
that drains every part of my liveliness  
to compensate for his yearnings.

Never have I come across  
such an inconsiderate mind  
that peels away at my hopefulness  
to fulfil his tortuous desires.

Never have I come across  
such a greedy spirit  
that chews and spits at my faithfulness  
to accommodate for his longings.

One could blame me  
for allowing it  
but who nurtures a parasite  
better than its host?

### **Where's the memo?**

Why isn't there a memo  
that cautions us against the hurt  
that we will inevitably endure in this world -  
that blatant suffering that will become of us  
when growing up into oblivion of questionings?

I am now staring at this world  
with forced grown up eyes.  
Matured in some ways too soon,  
naïve in some ways too late.

Not wondering how it is  
that I got to this point  
of uncertainty.

### **Credo**

"I gave up on optimism. It kills me," I pointed.  
"Then what doesn't kill you?" he questioned.  
"Realism and reasonable cynicism."

## The curse of knowing

*i.*

I cry myself to sleep  
and I cry myself awake,  
a continuously cursed ritual.

My heart never rests  
my mind never settles.  
How can a single terrible decision  
of another change all my life  
in the space of blinked tear-dropped eyes?  
Is one quick choice you make  
able to disrupt the present  
and the future all at once?  
What's the point of the past,  
when all was for nothing.

Deadly thoughts occupy  
me consciously,  
and worrisome feelings  
subconsciously.

I am living a nightmare  
but have to be strong,  
for others.

*ii.*

I swear that nothing  
puts more pressure  
on my weak shaking  
shoulders

and the strength I have  
to carry for others  
than what  
I have to carry for myself.

## Sinaed Stuart

*Writing has always been a way of expressing myself. I find that poetry speaks more truth to me than any person I have ever encountered. I have always known that I was a poet. Poetry is beautiful, thought-provoking and a priceless art form.*

*I mainly focus on feelings, emotions, things that I have experienced. There is not a single theme or concern that I have not written about, or do not want to write about. I want to experience and share my feelings of those experiences as much as possible.*

*I have learned that there are so many different ways to look at the simplest things. That others' perceptions may not be as mine, but do carry the same value to them as mine would to me. In preparing for this publication, I have learned that my poetry is powerful enough to be placed on a platform of its calibre.*

*I have had an amazing experience while participating in the workshop responsible for this publication. I am grateful for all that I have learned and experienced over the last few months, and thankful to have met so many individuals who share my love for this amazing art form. From here on I see bigger and greater things happening for my poetry. I feel inspired and therefore will not rest until I am an inspiration.*

Sinaed Stuart is a BA General student at NMMU, majoring in Psychology and Anthropology. She wishes to be a Cultural Anthropologist and/or Clinical Psychologist.

## **Emancipation**

The abscess feeds on life, the core.  
It penetrates through the skin, infecting life.  
Lurking in dark humidity  
it becomes enflamed by destruction,  
ignorantly attacking the soul,  
growing from oneself and weakening one's temple:

we need to lance through infections  
of the inner, most vulnerable, self  
to ooze the freedom of the undeserving,

seeking peace, the serenity to overcome  
and unencumbered healing.

## **Locked**

My tangled locks,  
bright yellow tips loose,  
move with the wind.  
I'm trying to fly, these locks of mine  
land restless on my shoulders,  
then return to the sky.

The tune of my hair and the wind  
harmonious, beautiful and safe, a haven  
for my feelings, a shelter for my thoughts:

a safe I keep locked.

## **The broken wall of my soul**

As I stare through the broken classroom wall  
I see myself, as I peek at the faces  
looking away from me,

I no longer see the rubble  
that once was a window.  
Now I see the face within that wall,  
of who I was before,  
how I felt when I felt that I belonged  
like the faces, I once had a place of my own, too.

But like that broken wall, I have been  
shattered, destroyed, left undone  
my life no longer complete.

I remember a time when looking inside  
my heart, my mind, my soul, was easy.  
Now looking through the broken wall of my soul  
seems an impossibility.

I am on the outside, outside that broken wall  
of a shattered-soul, outside my thoughts,  
outside my life.

## Calling

Lead me, show me, make me follow your way  
let the voices, the poetry in my head come alive.

Page after page

as I make my way through dark  
consciousness  
lost in the words in my mind:

cut through my darkness, doubt,  
to my words, words coming from inside.  
Bring forth the voices in my head,  
the rugged scraps of words unspoken;

give them life, meaning,  
carry them through tunnels of interpretation.  
Acquaint them with surrendered existence.

Let their presence be not for naught,  
but for a deeper interconnectedness of sorts.

Lead me, show me, and make me follow this way:  
let my voice, my poetry, come alive.

## **Give me life**

A lapse of judgement, a mistake once made:  
the emergence of two unknowing souls  
in tunnels of abandonment, dirty walls  
are a temporary haven,  
where two parts of nothing find solace.

This is where life begins,  
when two become one: one from nothing,  
here purification commences  
emergence is complete, we grow  
from strength, being fixed, taking form  
feeding from life within, from life around  
internally getting stronger and stronger,  
with heartbeats like drums, like thunder  
before the storm comes.

Crammed in a cocoon, a safety net  
yet to erupt like the faucets of Heaven  
finding my way through dark and humid passages,  
till there is light  
stripped from my food,  
shivering from pain-up my spine,  
a strangled cry gasps for air,  
pain like a dagger through my ribcage –

the windows to my soul are open,  
the silence of the world is broken.  
I am in a warm embrace,  
I am home.

## Poetry... piece by piece

*For my mother, Tracy*

Short and stout, with painful fingers and back,  
your knees throb when you lie in bed  
– your arthritis has seen easier days.  
But from sunrise to sunset, I see you  
hunched over your wooden desk.

From patterns, sketches and photos  
your aspirations come  
as you meticulously move layer after layer,  
cutting with precision, every piece.  
Dresses, curtains, alterations and all  
magical.

And I have a type of magic of my own.  
I cut through page after page  
trying to find the right words  
with ink-dipped scissors,

metaphors, similes, images in my head  
whence my inspiration comes,  
putting together, piece by piece  
trying to make my creation the perfect size.

Ma,  
I may never be able to do what you can  
as brilliantly as you always have.  
But for every pattern you may draw,  
every dress you make,  
and every curtain you stitch together,  
I will write,  
drawing the patterns of every poem in my head,  
cutting through layers of consciousness,  
sewing my poem together,  
word for word.

## Precious Mahlangu

*Under the name Precious Wordpotter Mahlangu, I am a writing and reciting poet, and recently published my first book, African Child Cries, which contains poems both from last year's course publication Beneath the Bridge of Metaphors, and this year's text.*

*My definition of poetry depends on my situation but, first, poetry is my understanding of freedom. I speak free of judgement, free of societal expectation and free of cultural and traditional norms. I am a well-known introvert, but poetry exposes the extrovert in me.*

*I write and recite with the hope of changing, inspiring, bringing light in darkness and uplifting lost hopes and dreams...my poems are different, inspired by different things and different people yet they all have one thing in common, a mission.*

Precious Mahlangu is a final year Education student at NMMU's George Campus. She attended the workshops in 2014, and – like the other George Campus students in this collection – worked this year by email correspondence.

### **Familiar**

I am my grandfather's tobacco pipe,  
my grandmother's walking stick.

I am my sister's partner,  
my brother's keeper.

I am my mother's cup of tea,  
my father's goose egg.

## **For death has come**

Tell the clock to stop moving,  
the sun to bid its farewell.  
Give over to the night's darkness.  
I need something to match my dress.

Let the trees stop dancing;  
change the sound of the winds.  
Tell east to swop places with south  
and north to rush west,  
allow winter to come in summer,  
and autumn in spring.

Silence the noises of loneliness.  
Let there be no emotions.  
Bring closure between the past and the present.  
Distance memories from moments.  
Disable the heart from loving,  
and the mind from remembering.

Drop the flowers and raise thorns.  
Make parties mournful and funerals joyous.  
Prevent the eyes from dropping more tears.  
Limit the pain that a human heart bears.  
Let nightmares be sweeter than sweet dreams.  
Turn the playground motionless.  
Mute the church bell.  
Slow down the hustler's rush hour.  
Close all the doors and all the windows,  
make air unbreathable.

Turn paper back into trees,  
dry the ink in every pen.  
Detach the strings that bind the rich and the poor.  
Equalize the darker and the lighter.

Put a number to the stars and colour to the shadow.  
Undress sadness of its sorrow.  
Collect secret dreams from the pillow.  
Tell the diary to reveal the hidden.  
Kiss nature like an enemy.  
Hug the mountains and make promises to river flows.

If death be natural let all else be.

### **Dark man rules**

I live in a house made of tin.  
My supper is served from a bin.  
Yet, with only one hand I can count my sins.  
Another man's definition of crime  
is my job specification.  
The sight of a woman's purse  
affects me like her cleavage.

I remember tales told by my old man,  
so I swallow temptation and let a black man pass.  
What can he be making? A penny or two?  
But at the sight of a white man  
I unleash the demon in me,  
die to the inner voice screaming mercy.

I have dreamt of this day  
night after night as I lay on my bricks-balanced bed,  
counting the holes piercing my privacy.  
I sharpen my only tangible inheritance,  
my old man's okapi.  
The mission is accomplished in my head.

History says my lacks are from a white man.  
School fooled me into thinking I am equal  
to a man who knows no lack.  
Television drew me a picture  
of how I could retrieve what's mine.  
Education tried convincing me otherwise.

The method of drawing the knife;  
a perfected skill.  
The redness on his face strikes me for fear.  
They have it too.  
His words disappear around the corners of his mouth.  
At wind-blown speed my hand dips into his left pocket.  
I feel the thickness of his sweat,  
the rhythm of a shaking man,  
and withdraw my wage.

He pleads for his life,  
deconstructing the conversations  
I am having with my black ghost.  
He offers all he has.  
I hear two little names; Stacy and Tray.  
Maybe I should care.  
Anger overpowers my mission  
as I see the sadness of my old man,  
telling me the tales of a white man.

I raise the hand with the okapi,  
have it rest on the man's soft flesh.  
This one has red blood.  
He screams, it is pain.

And then I wait  
for his blood to turn white,  
for the pain painted on his face to subside.

I wait  
for the knock of satisfaction in my heart.  
Nothing.  
A sense of freeing freedom?  
Nothing!  
The sight of a white man in pain gives me no joy.

So I turn the knife around,  
whisper my apologies;  
combine the steel in my hand with my own flesh,  
use my last strength to look at my hands,  
my blood  
as red as that of the white man beside me.

I missed the lesson where humanity  
ruled all men equal:  
not their colours and inheritance.  
The life in their blood.

### **A song for you**

Tongue tangled,  
husky voice  
– right words.

Lethal notes,  
toxic beats  
– right words.

Vulgar melody,  
insolent chords  
– right words.

I want to sing  
a song for you.

## Afterword

The 2015 Poetry Writing Workshop was an inspirational space for NMMU students and staff. These reflections of three students and one staff member offer a glimpse into our experiences.

### **We joined the course for different reasons**

**Lutho:** I wanted an escape from the hustle and bustle and the mental drain of university and figured that the course would allow me the opportunity to just let my mind wander on its own without any right or wrong path - and that's what it did!

**Tiffany:** I joined the poetry workshop because poetry is something that I hold very close to my heart. I thought it would be interesting to learn some new skills and to brush up on a few old ones. I expected to examine a few poems to see what's effective and what's not. I thought that we would play around with a couple of ideas and work on perfecting one poem throughout the course.

**Parusha:** I joined Brian Walter's poetry workshop with hopes of learning new techniques of artistic writing and improving my writing skills. Through the duration of the course my expectations were not only met but exceeded.

**Margie:** My hope was to learn how to write and teach poetry more effectively, and also to develop insights so that I could use poetic inquiry as a research practice.

### **Our experiences were varied**

**Lutho:** I experienced the process of carving my barest thoughts into art and, although hesitant at first, wanting to preserve my rawness, I learnt to incorporate it into my writing.

**Tiffany:** I used to write from experience and not on demand because I thought that writing solely from experience made a more heartfelt and effective poem. I have, however, learned that experience comes through more effectively when focusing

less on the perfect thing to say and more on using images to convey the message.

**Parusha:** The workshop has acted as an interactive nurturing ground for writers to grow into their potential. Each session has incorporated practical writing experience that indulges the free flow of the imagination.

**Margie:** The carefully crafted learning space was a place of creativity, exploration and experimentation.

### **We gained a range of skills and insights**

**Lutho:** The concept of free writing has allowed me to find poems in almost everything around me. Through this I learnt that most of the poems don't make a grand entrance into your mind. Instead, they come in the form of the simplest things and it's through the constant exploring that you find the art, in both the editing and the piece itself.

**Tiffany:** The most beneficial, but also most painful, thing to adapt to was the concept of editing. This essential process has taught me to find the core of the poem, to find more effective ways to convey a message through the use of a variety of tools, to find alternative ways of saying things, and to let go of what does not contribute to the effectiveness of the poem.

**Parusha:** This workshop has provided me with a platform to share my message as a writer in a comprehensive way that does not stifle the essence of my poetry. I have learnt to appreciate criticism and work with other poets in a critically symbiotic manner.

**Margie:** The synergy of editing in a team was a powerful way to take our understanding forward. This seemed to be a key element of the workshop process. Working in pairs with Brian gave us the opportunity to learn about another poet's work and to see our work through new eyes.

Our expectations have been met and exceeded. The program has been both enjoyable and challenging. Perhaps in the future it could be extended by a week or two? Working with Brian was a privilege; he encouragingly shares his experience and fuels the growth of young (and not so young) minds by unclogging suppressed mind-sets and unquestioned worldviews.

This is a course for anyone who wishes to constructively escape the industrious life. It would suit those who are open to a little bit of wandering and wondering with thoughts and words.

There are poems everywhere and they are eagerly waiting to be discovered and explored.

**Lutho Msutu**

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2015