# TAKING LIBERTIES

*Ideals of Freedom in Contemporary South Africa*

UNIVERSITY *of the* WESTERN CAPE

Lancaster University

LEVERHULME TRUST

# Taking Liberties:

## Ideals of Freedom in Contemporary South Africa

*Taking Liberties* was a practice-based research project funded by the Leverhulme Trust. It took place at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa, in collaboration with Lancaster University and the Centre for Transcultural Writing and Research. 

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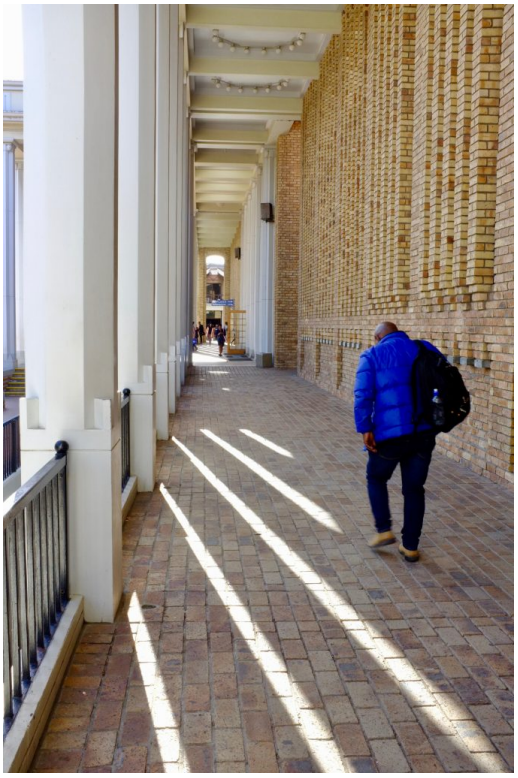
*Taking Liberties* was a practice-based research project led by writer and academic Professor Graham Mort from the Centre for Transcultural Writing and Research at Lancaster University, UK. It was situated at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa, and took place from February to May 2018. The project was funded by the Leverhulme Trust and used creative writing practice as an investigative research method.

In their 2014 general election, only one in three 'born free' (those born outside the apartheid era) South Africans registered to vote. In the face of widespread institutional 'state capture' corruption indictments, the fall of President Zuma, the failure to deliver health and social services or to adequately address urgent housing needs, calls for a minimum living wage, the problems of expropriation of land without compensation, and the advent of a critical water shortage in Cape Town, there is a growing perception that South Africa risks becoming a 'failed state' despite its economic wealth and the most liberal constitution in sub-Saharan Africa. What has happened to Nelson Mandela's vision of *ubuntu,* of shared humanity, living space and political power?

*Taking Liberties* continues an exploration of personal, social and political liberty through creative writing projects that began in Uganda in 2001 and continued through subsequent projects in Africa and Kurdistan. At its heart is the relationship between the political concept of liberty and our sense of personal freedom and responsibility. The project was situated at the University of the Western Cape because this is an institution with a long tradition of political resistance and because it has a linguistically and culturally diverse community of students, the majority of whom form a generation of first-time attendees, following the dismantling of apartheid.

In 2015, Lancaster University and the University of the Western Cape staged the second *Writing for Liberty* conference in Cape Town. The event brought together writers, theorists and critics to share their understanding of how authors have confronted oppression and contributed to human liberty and understanding. Our debates were often hard-fought, reaching down into an historical sense of partition and powerlessness. *Taking Liberties* built upon that legacy, engaging with staff and students at the University of the Western Cape and building on Graham Mort's earlier multilingual work there in Xhosa, Afrikaans and English.



This project was an exploration of original writing in new configurations, both individual and collaborative. It embodies a resistance to political rhetoric, showing how language inhabits more than one place of meaning at once: an exercise in ambiguity, counterpoint, contradiction and multivalence. All enacted through the subtleties and multilingual sleights-of-tongue that form the basis of research through creative writing. But perhaps it is only by embracing polyphony, by sharing the intermeshing narratives of self and history, that we can begin to understand the countervailing forces that co-exist in contemporary South Africa and that will influence its emergent participants and leaders.

*My thanks to all participants, especially thanks to Duncan Brown and Meg Vandermerwe for supporting my application to Leverhulme, to Kobus Moolman for his wisdom, generosity and hospitality, to Shirley Sampson for unfailing administrative support and to Delia Meyer for stepping in to edit and direct the performance poem against the clock. I remain grateful for the loyal support of Michael Wessels, who attended all my workshops and participated with characteristic sensitivity, insight, and a deep knowledge of South African society and literature.* **Graham Mort, January 2017**

**Special Contributions to the Taking Liberties site:**
Kobus Moolman, 'Creative Writing at UWC'
Julia Martin, 'An Open Space'
– originally published in *Becoming UWC: Reflections, Pathways, and Unmaking Apartheid's Legacy*, eds P. Lalu & N. Murray. Bellville: University of the Western Cape, 2011 (26-35).
Antjie Krog, 'To Write Liberty'
– Keynote to 2016 International Conference: Writing for Liberty, Centre for the Book, Cape Town

# Julia Martin, ‘An Open Space’

1.

The first buildings were structures of discipline and containment, the straight lines, grey concrete and face-brick walls of an architectural modernism adapted to the service of apartheid. Within a few years of the parliamentary decision to establish separate universities, the University College of the Western Cape appeared in Bellville South, replacing a farm and a diverse environment of coastal bush with a tidy design of lawns and garden beds that linked a Science block, an Arts block, an Education block, an Admin block with sports facilities and a library into a single concept.

The entity that this campus was designed to house and educate was what they called the Coloured (so that he could uplift his community, so that he could lead his own, this gesture from the white hands of the conquerors, for the guardian must provide for his ward). In documents from the mid 60’s that define and celebrate the institution (its special task, its magnificent project), the foundation of it all is a plan to secure in this location the unquestionable idea of race.

Young men of that time (and they were nearly all men) were required to wear ties and jackets. Young women (such as there were - by 1966 only 12.5% of the total) were dressed in cotton frocks and court shoes. Promotional photographs show students gazing into microscopes, making their own beds, and viewing the indigenous plants that had been set to grow beside the concrete paths.

That the plants the planners chose for the new landscape were indigenous was, it seems, no accident. For indigeneity too was part of the rhetoric: their own place, their own people, their own local plants. The badge devised for the Coloured college set the columns of a Greek temple, that icon of culture and learning in the West, below three king Proteas. For not only was the Protea the national flower of the Republic and a plant that grew wild in the Western Cape. It was also (or so the rector explained at the time) a flower which our Coloured people cherish, thus typifying, he said, the appreciation which they have for their own.

By the late 1960’s, the built environment of the campus was well established, the labs were stocked with instruments and apparatuses, and there were ambitious plans for more and more development. They had thought of almost everything, it seemed.

Yet for all their zeal, what the ideological architects crucially failed to imagine was how things grow. Seeds must travel. Roots inhabit the soil. Trees, however neatly set in lines, will take their own shape. And human feet transgress the concrete walkways, treading their own paths into the world. In all their proud assertions the authorities had somehow not anticipated that, in building an institution of education, they were creating the conditions in which people could actually become educated.

The other thing the planners did not foresee was that assembling a number of the oppressed together in one place would enable them to organize. In 1970 the disciplined students burnt their university ties.

2.

During the 1970's, student activism became more overtly political and (with the appointment of Richard van der Ross as Rector in 1975), management structures began to change. But the decisive break with the founding idea of the Coloured came in 1982 with the University's formal rejection of 'the political-ideological grounds on which it was established.' The heroic, mythic decade that followed was an exceptional time in which the physical space of the campus became a site that was repeatedly (and in very literal and lively terms) being claimed, contested, reclaimed, renamed and reconstructed.

There were many days when, instead of sitting receptively indoors, students would gather on the lawns, or toyi-toyi singing and carrying posters along the roads and paths, or run together ('Hek toe! Hek toe!' they cried at the end of a meeting) to stand at the threshold on Modderdam Rd for the passing world to witness their protest.

Often, when the grim vehicles of the state drove into the territory, there were teargas and rubber bullets, and many people running. I remember one such violation in particular. After an encounter of some kind with the police outside the B Block, they chased everyone indoors with their batons, and we all ran. I kept running with several others all the way to my office in the Arts Block (a room built under the old regime with a grey Formica floor and numbered cupboards on the walls instead of bookshelves). Arrived at the door, I fumbled with the keys, but managed at last to let the frightened tide of twenty or more students rush in before locking it again. Outside in the corridor of the English Department they thundered past for what seemed a long time, shouting and firing teargas. The stuff came in under the door and we were all gasping, crammed in there together, opening the windows, talking a bit, waiting for the invaders to leave.

In a more formal register, members of the UWC community inhabited this place with marches and assemblies. Perhaps most memorably, in October 1987 (it was Spring,

and the campus was alive with myriads of yellow daisies), a great mass of professors, deans, students, cleaners, administrators, gardeners, lab technicians and members of Council took part in the First General Assembly of the University. It had been called to protest the Government's attempt to restrict academic autonomy by imposing conditions for the granting of subsidies. Some people were dressed in academic regalia, others were in jeans, and everyone walked together in a great throng around the campus to claim this place of learning, all of us, as our own.

This particular action was accompanied by a detailed critique of the proposed measures that led to a Supreme Court decision that upheld the collective objection. For alongside all the physical marching, things were of course also happening in words and argument: letters, lectures, seminars, and conferences to debate and redefine the intellectual priorities of the institutional territory, what the new rector Jakes Gerwel had influentially named an intellectual home of the democratic Left.

Whatever else this metaphor of place came to evoke, the reconstruction of UWC's social and intellectual identity took place amid a great deal of building. Among other ambitious projects in the late 1980's, the University Centre was completed, the Great Hall complex was renovated and extended, and the cramped old library was replaced by a fourteen level structure in which a person might walk from one disciplinary region to another in a wide spiral around a central circular space. Together the new buildings created a bold and eclectic environment (some said too opulent for a Third World campus, while others disagreed) that combined a postmodern variety of architectural elements with lots of glass, and space in which to walk and sit.

As for plants and trees, the quiet work of landscaping and gardening continued to cultivate the campus through all the tumult of those years: planting, watering, tending, indigenous still. Beyond the fence the plants grew wild in a sandy region of shrubs, reeds, wetland and Spring annuals belonging to the University that some prescient decision-makers had saved from development in the early years: slanghout, besembos, skilpadbessie, katstertriet (their names full of stories), a little community of hares, tortoises, mice and mongoose, frogs, cobras, sometimes a grysbok, and over 82 species of birds. In 1988 the tiny remnants of West Coast Strandveld and Coastal Fynbos preserved in the Cape Flats Nature Reserve (small memory of the ecologies that used to be everywhere here), became a centre for environmental education, a location for Outreach, as it was called.

In all this period of redefinition, if there was ever a focal point for the kind of action with which the University had become identified, it was in the midst of the original layout of the campus, an area between the A Block and the B Block where people tended to gather, and which police cameras tended to observe. They called it Freedom Square, a brave and certain name, as befitted the time.

3.

Fifty years now after the first teachers and students were brought together here, the trees outside my office window have all grown tall, and the branches are full of chattering white-eyes. Sometimes a cinnamon dove visits the sill, or a cat leaves her prints on the desk. The policeman in the corridor have gone, the walls are lined with novels, and these days the students who come to sit on sofa, floor or carpet, their bags full of books, bring poetry and stories, sometimes even a guitar. Their parents' struggle seems distant history.

These days they want to talk about love and Palestine and the corporate branding of their clothes. About music, imagination and the politics of food. About poverty, displacement, desire and education. About the internet, the spiritual quest and the globalization of the mind. They want to discuss the contemporary song lyrics of disaffected youth, and William Blake's two hundred year-old vision of oppression and liberation, his story of the bearded old tyrant he named Urizen and the fiery young man called Orc who rises to overthrow him, this figure of energy who too in time becomes rigid with power and age, another total system that calls again for resistance and renewal.

For all their techno-cool, the present generation of students seem more tender than their predecessors were, less confident of victory.

4.

Once the construction of the wide spiral library, the Great Hall with its crest and classical columns, the noisy junk-food Caf and the refurbished managerial enclave of the Admin Block was all complete, an open space remained in the midst.

Somewhere around the time that the heart of things seemed to shift from Freedom Square, this space or square (which was not a square, though built of grids and lines) was paved with bricks and began to be planted with indigenous shrubs and trees. Here a red umsintsi, her bright lucky beans scattered for anyone to collect. There evergreen *Ficus*, big roots bulging. And somewhere near the edge, a slow fountain rippling over a dome into a bowl of water at the centre of a star-shaped garden of flowers (*Felicia, Agapanthus, Plumbago*, visited by bees), in every season a different shade of blue.

Two men in suits cross the square together, talking hard. Six cleaners pass through, carrying bags of toilet rolls and bottles of pink cleaning fluid. The students saunter, stride and sit, sometimes even dance, talking in many languages. A young man in a grey top covered with peace signs walks alone, wrapped in the iPod sound, plugged

in. Others talk on cell-phones, send messages, chat. Two friends sit bent over a laptop. It's winter and almost all of them, men and women, are wearing jackets or hoodies, zips and polar fleece, perhaps a scarf. From the entrance beyond the bronze sculpture, a young man shouts out wildly, 'I love you Jasmina!' She turns, a vivid yellow bag over her shoulder, and waves, laughing.

I would like to imagine this inside/outside open space, the most inclusive architectural construct on campus, as a meeting for many disciplines and freedoms.

But first, I can't help wondering who was here before these last brief fifty years of occupation, what multitudes of hoof and paw and human foot tracked paths across this piece of earth, and how they were displaced.

Then, regarding the present moment and the brave inheritance of our recent history, I want to know how the life we now lead on this campus can enable us to awaken the vigilance and courage we all still need to act against tyranny and oblivion.

And as for future generations, here is a story. One morning (having left the high window of my office open as I often do), I noticed some little handprints on the wall around the glass above the door. They must have been the hands of a small child who was trying to climb through. Months later, the marks are still there, a kind of witness that asks to be remembered.

5.

Whatever else, high above our heads clouds wander easily through the blue. Pigeons and starlings fly. Across the square a cat with one torn ear moves quietly. Leaves flicker in the wind. During the day people are always moving through and talking, each gait particular, each voice distinct, crossing and recrossing, this mesh of all our paths.

Between the neat brick grids beneath our feet the green moss grows in tiny stars: bright as hope (I like to think), irrepressible as this human mind, ancient as green moss growing in this place.

- Julia Martin (1)

*(1) I would like to thank Stan Ridge, Julian Elliot, Ivy Kinnear, and Michael Cope for some useful conversations.*

*Please note that 'An Open Space' first appeared as follows:* 2011. 'An Open Space'. Eds P. Lalu & N. Murray. *Becoming UWC: Reflections, Pathways, and Unmaking Apartheid's Legacy*. Bellville: University of the Western Cape, 26-35.

# Kobus Moolman, ‘Creative Writing at UWC’

The Creative Writing programme at the University of the Western Cape is rooted in the Department of English Studies in the Arts Faculty.
The writing programme reflects this department’s strong emphasis upon textuality and diversity in delivering its range of courses. These courses include an elective at the undergraduate level, and the full range of postgraduate studies from Honours through to the Doctoral level.

Drawing upon the specialisations of its teaching team, the programme emphasises Fiction (both long and short), Poetry and Creative Non-Fiction. Recent developments have also made possible studies in Documentary Film and Scriptwriting. Furthermore, the programme benefits from the multilingual approach of UWC Creates, a non-degree resource facility in the Centre for Multilingualism and Diversities research where students write in Afrikaans, isiXhosa and English.

In collection of essays *Cooling Time,* the American poet CD Wright wrote:
For decades the critical question has been, Can poetry survive? Is it mutable, profound, sentient, resplendent, intense, stalwart, brave, alluring, exploratory, piercing, skilful, percipient, risky, exacting, purposeful, nubile, mirth-provoking, affective, restive, trenchant, sybaritic, nuts enough? Can it still enkindle, prod, or enlarge us? And even if yes, yes to all of the above, is it enough? . . . And if the answer is nay, all this and more is not enough, the question becomes, With what then will we hail the next ones, the ones who have to pick up around here after we’ve been chewing the roots of dandelions? [1]

The Creative Writing programme at UWC cares deeply about mentoring these “next ones”. In the selection of work by some of our current postgraduate creative writing students featured here on this website, I believe that “the next ones” are showing that writing can not just survive, but that it can in fact be relevant and resilient.
Beginning in the seventies in South Africa, and extending into the eighties, increasing emphasis was placed upon the need for artistic production to incorporate socio-political expression, that it reflects the historical context, and align itself with the progressive forces of resistance and change; in a word, that it be relevant.

The material here shows how writers are articulating an alternative notion of the term ‘relevant’. It is not that they eschew socio-political ideas (as a socially ‘engaged’

institution of higher learning students of UWC have an historical commitment to researching factors which inhibit socio-economic progress toward a more inclusive and equitable society). Rather, they are re-making the validity and consequence of the term by energising it with their own personal contexts and voices.

This is very significant. It shows that the students are connecting on an intimate level – the level of everyday lived experience – with not just writing as an imaginative, transformative act, but also with the idea that literature (that which they are ultimately participating in) belongs to them; that it can sound and look like them; that it can come from who and where they are.

But these poems and short stories are also acts of resistance.

In *Cooling* Time, Wright further argues that "If you do not use language you are used by it". In a time where many lament the impoverishment of written expressive language, "the next ones" are proving not just the resilience of words – that words still matter and still mean – but also that words can be fashionable and even fun. That through their words – written in their own way to the best of their abilities – the next generation can dare to redeem and emancipate their world; the beleaguered one we have bequeathed to them.

I am grateful to all teaching staff on the Creative Writing programme: to Meg Vandermerwe, to Julia Martin and Nkosinathi Sithole. And to Antjie Krog, Fiona Moolla and the late Michael Wessels.

I am especially grateful to Prof Graham Mort from Lancaster University who used his Leverhulme International Fellowship at UWC to develop this website.

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Head: Creative Writing
English Studies Department
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[1] *Cooling Time: an American Poetry Vigil*. (2005). Copper Canyon Press, Washington.

Antjie Krog, 'To Write Liberty'
Keynote to International Conference,
Centre for the Book, Cape Town, 2016

Before we talk liberty, perhaps we should ask: What are the books that the corrupt, the dictators, the intolerant, the tyrants, the fanatics and the millions who voted for them, tolerated them, fought for them, read? We know that they are often zealots of the One Book – interpreted by men who deny that even that special book is a metaphoric and historical text. On one-dimensional, one-sided YouTube slivers they whip together the destruction of especially women in tractates shot-through with religion, a big dose of ignorance and a Twitter-manufactured ego. We know that very few men of power have ever read books by the great writers of the literatures of the world. And this is the tragedy: that they forfeited that which could have changed them into humane human beings. Novels instrumentally "inflect the anguish of the actual in a way" that theoretical discussion of the same issues cannot achieve, "making possible a kind of understanding not accessible by other means – something akin to participatory understanding." (Gagiano, 2000:37) "The very order of being in the world is like an intricate weave of perception and response, of reacting and embracing the world we see". (Bell, 2002:15) Reading literature creates a reflexivity within our beings and a dialogical knowing and understanding of the world. It is disturbing to think enormous power is given or grabbed by men who have never lived the life-changing experience of being somebody else…

This forms the landmark of self-understanding: becoming somebody else through reading, experiencing art *precencing* itself, art being truth setting itself to work. (Heidegger, 1971/2001:165) The question I am asking is not why powerful people seldom read, but something else: to what extent would the novels, plays and poetry that we as writers produce, change a person? For me, literature is not there to entertain, or to enhance the ego of writers or places or civilisations, or fill the pockets of publishing houses, or be the vehicle of misplaced ambition, but in a very real way to take a reader and move him or her to another place. One wants to be a changed person at the end of the text, even in the minutest way, but something must have happened inside one among those words, something that makes one see life more intensely, more profoundly, differently.

Readings by writers that go viral – a million likes for a poem, more people writing blogs than buying books – make one forget that the experience of literature (whether

written or oral) honed on being driven to say what is not sayable, is necessary to awake the human being to its fullest humaneness.Through literature one becomes alive into a sensitised and conscientized thoughtfulness – *Ein andenkendes Denken* (Heidegger, 2001:ix) – to a kind of being that stands "in an authentic relationship as mortal to other mortals, to earth and sky, to divinities present and absent, to things and plants and animals". (Ibid, x) In other words: to experience how all of these are "beingnesses", to allow yourself to be trained by literature to live in total awareness of all this presencing of things.

"Art grows out of being and reaches into its truth. … (i)t is the topology of being, telling being the whereabouts of its actual presence (ibid, x) "… because language, understood rightly, is the original way in which beings are brought into the open clearing of truth, in which world and earth, mortals and gods are bidden to come to their appointed places of meeting." (Ibid, xii) Without it, we would be "brutes, or what is worse and what we are most like today: vicious automata of selfwill." (Ibid, xv) Art is the only way the world can be humanised.

Before we continue, it is befitting to look at the title of the conference "Writing for Liberty" against the background of the noise from the US, Brexit, political rightwing and religious intolerance, as well as the recent plea of writer Lionel Shriver to be freed from politically correct demands. (footnote 13)

Generally, a difference is made between liberty and freedom. Freedom is primarily, if not exclusively, the ability to do as one wishes and what one has the power to do. Liberty concerns the absence of arbitrary restraints and takes into account the rights of all involved. As such, the exercise of liberty is subject to capability and is limited by the rights of others.

But one cannot talk about liberty without considering the important distinctions that philosopher Isiah Berlin brought into the concept. In his essay "Two Concepts of Liberty" he distinguishes between liberty FROM and liberty TO. (Berlin, 1996:21 – 122): Liberty FROM coercion, the absence of interference FROM other people (Ibid 127); Positive liberty is Freedom TO: TO self-determination, TO being one's own master, TO fulfil one's aspirations. (Ibid, 131)

At first sight it looks as if these two liberties complement each other, but Berlin shows that since individuals are often seen by their leaders as being ignorant and uneducated, the ideal of positive liberty (Freedom TO) slowly begins to imply coercion: the unenlightened individuals must 'be forced TO be free'. A leader decides that his people cannot be truly free, because their freedom is being thwarted by immigrants, gays, women, atheists therefore coercive legislation – walls, fatwas, bans, censorship, are all justified to guarantee the liberty TO be free. Berlin warns us: this

distortion that happens with positive liberty has in the past served to justify much political oppression. (Ibid, 158, 257)

This warning, as well as the two kinds of liberties, is important for any argument about liberty. Shriver's lecture carries these components: she wants Freedom FROM admonishings of political correctness and Freedom TO determine her own theme and way of writing, how and about whom. We will return to this.

It is also true that all of us who are writing, come into contact with the entreaty of the marginalised. The cries of those suffering and those at the borders of the prosperous world where writers usually find themselves, are fleeing past our computer screens and keyboards. And if your antennae as a writer are attuned, then you sit torn and quite devastated, assailed by decisions, anguish and self-doubt.

The most important question put to the serious wordsmith is: How do the marginalised manifest in your work? Daily one asks oneself this. The Nobel Prize committee perhaps also asks this (the candidate should bestow "the greatest benefit on mankind" delivering "the most outstanding work in an ideal direction") (footnote 12) and it is of course the question with which all the great writers through the centuries have grappled. Some called it The Other, but I am talking about the marginalised: how do they manifest in one's work.

First we have to remember that we have probably been schooled in a particular concept of the individual. We have to be aware that this kind of individual is one of the most enduring of all western myths. It is this individual who stands there with his skin glowingly thick with celebrity hunger and ego, his ears clogged by consumerism and his eyes blinded by privilege. He and his agent and publishers think his house, his clothes, writing desk, recipes, relationships, children, twitterwit, facebook-fury are just as important as his work.

To write about the marginalised, the subaltern, the oppressed, the foreigner, the stranger, the other, demands an enormous destabilisation of the writing and even more of the writing self. It is more than just reading news articles, than gathering material on facebook, than doing an interview, than having a friend among the marginalised, than searching the archives, than going and living 'among the natives.' It demands of you to give up your power. All of it.

In the words of Wittgenstein from his "Philosophical Investigations" (1953:455, 457): "when we mean something, it's like going up to someone, it's not having a dead picture …." We go up unto someone – it means more than face-to-face, more than heart-to-heart, more than intellectual acknowledgement, empirical fact and experience. It begins as a two-way stream, as a reciprocal process. You have to give up your dominance, let go of the dominance of your culture, and release yourself in

the vulnerability of losing everything that you are, especially your writing. You have to become decentred. Become minority, go where you can't, *and be honest in the text about how you can never get there*.

The most important thing I would suggest matters about writing about the marginalised, is not whether, but *how*. Do we dive like the former colonisers into the pools of poverty created by our forebears, but this time with oh-such goodwill and best intentions, to rob once more of what there is, misinterpret again, speak on behalf again, again clueless of both self and other? Do we mind that we cannot speak the languages, that we interpret the interpreters and that it doesn't even dawn on us that we may be in the presence of a context, a worldview and a philosophy of which we cannot even begin to imagine the circumference?

There is indeed something obscene about writers equipped with the best education, knowledge of world languages and literatures, loaded with technical support and bursaries, with access to world famous writing schools, sought after agents, PRs, and publishers, who then feel they should package the marginalised to save western readers from ignorance. And the obscenity lies especially in the packaging – the HOW?

I want to illustrate how thoroughly and radically we should be thinking about the how, through some remarks from David Attwell's book *JM Coetzee and the life of writing* (2015). I choose Coetzee deliberately because he also started off by being angry at Nadine Gordimer's packaging of a group of people:

"I always felt that Gordimer disliked and despised and (most hurtfully of all) dismissed Afrikaners, and that her dislike and contempt and dismissiveness came out of ignorance. Not that I thought Afrikaners did not merit dislike and contempt; but (I thought) only people like myself who knew them from the inside qualified to dislike and despise them, in a properly measured fashion. …. Perhaps it is a comparable sense of being dismissed – dismissed from the banquet table of history – that fuels the hatred of young Muslim nationalists for modernizers and the West." (Attwell, 2015:43)

One of the most astonishing facts in this book on Coetzee by Attwell, is that Coetzee not only writes on a daily basis, but that he keeps a diary in which he questions and even attacks what he is writing – a kind of metafictional diary – writing about writing – because, concludes Attwell, of Coetzee's fear of living inauthentically, a brutal honesty about facing up to the conditions of one's existence (as a writer). (Ibid, 27) And what is our existence? Middle class. Safe. Brutally Coetzee looks at his work:
I show no advance in my thinking from the position I take in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. I am outraged by tyranny, but only because I am identified with the tyrants, not because I love (or 'am with') their victims. I am incorrigibly elitist (if not

worse); and in the present conflict the material interests of the intellectual elite and the oppressors are the same. There is a fundamental flaw in all my novels: I am unable to move from the side of the oppressors to the side of the oppressed. Is this a consequence of the insulated life I lead? Probably." (Ibid, 134)

Attwell says: A lesser novelist might have buckled under the pressure. Because Coetzee spells out "the problem of finding a class position that would render credible the feelings of outrage and alienation that were the novel's point of departure." (Ibid,137)

Coetzee understands on a very deep and intimate level that no matter how he feels driven ethically to write about the oppressed or the marginalised, the class gap between them is insurmountable. "It is an unbridgeable gap (and must be so with all comfortable liberal whites), and the best one can do is not to leave it out but to represent it as a gap." (Ibid, 144 – 145)

There are several interesting lessons to learn from Coetzee: in the first place: We are ethically driven to write about the painful points of the world. Second, "One has to remind the dominant culture that its representations *are* representation." (Ibid, 27) This means that somewhere in the text (just like oral story tellers often do) the reader has to be reminded that the writer is aware all too well that she is giving a representation, an effort to imagine. She does not claim that she imagines the truth, the reader must be aware that the text is trying to take responsibility for the impossible. If a writer understands this, it means that she understands her material and that she is witnessing her own act of writing.

In his book *Foe* (1986) based on the famous Robinson Crusoe story, Coetzee deliberately confronts his own limitations with the character of the slave Friday – the man saved by Robinson Crusoe forming a master slave relationship on the island. The questions Coetzee asks himself are the following: Who has to give words to Friday? Who is to decide how he will speak, how he will sound, what his vocabulary will be? It cannot, once again, centuries later be a white writer? But, if it is not the writer, then who? Instead of thinking I should not write about Friday, Coetzee develops out of this dilemma the idea that Friday cannot speak because he is maimed, his tongue has been cut out – "Friday's mutilation is undoubtedly the enigmatic heart of the novel." (Attwell, 2015:155) With this, Coetzee honours for me the ethical imperative to not turn a blind eye to Friday, to bring him into the novel, while at the same time understanding that he, as a middle-class white writer, dare not put words into Friday's mouth, while acknowledging that the maiming of Friday has always been done by white writers.

In his diary Coetzee writes: 'I deny him a chance to speak for himself: because I cannot imagine how anything Friday might say would have a place in my text.

Defoe's text is full of Friday's YES, now it is impossible to fantasize that YES; all the ways in which Friday can say NO seem not only stereotyped but destructive. What is lacking to me is what is lacking to Africa since the death of Negritude: a vision of a future for Africa that is not a debased version of life in the West. (Attwell, 2015:157) Even if one is tempted to say that Friday was again castrated by a writer, the moving and powerful concluding chapter shows up in a dramatic way the limitations put on representation by history. In his imagination the teller of the story dives down into an old ship where he finds the scarred body of Friday with a chain around his neck (Coetzee,1986:160):

'Friday,' I say, I try to say, kneeling over him, sinking hands and knees into the ooze, 'what is this ship?'

But this is not a place of words. Each syllable, as it comes out, is caught and filled with water and diffused. This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday.

He turns and turns till he lies full length, his face to my face. The skin is tight across his bones, his lips are drawn back. I pass a fingernail across his teeth, trying to find a way in.

His mouth opens. From inside him comes a slow stream, without breath, without interruption. It flows up through his body and out upon me; it passes through the cabin, through the wreck; washing the cliffs and shores of the island, it runs northward and southward to the ends of the earth. Soft and cold, dark and unending, it beats against my eyelids, against the skin of my face.'

It is when one reads this heartbreaking mixture of tenderness, brilliance and honesty that one becomes furious at the superficiality of the representation debate: I demand the freedom to imagine myself a women / a slave / a gay person and am tired of the chorus that tells me I may not. *Foe* presents a lesson: you may imagine whomever you will, but investigate *within the text* the complete impossibility and harm thereof.

In *Age of Iron* (1990) Coetzee broadens the contact with the other when the main character realises that the power and authority to judge others no longer lies with her: she has been completely handed over to the other. Dying of cancer, abandoned by her children, Mrs Curren acknowledges that she is being judged by the woman who works in her house: 'Florence is the judge.… The court belongs to Florence; it is I who pass under review. If the life I live is an examined life, it is because for ten years I have been under examination in the court of Florence.' (1990, 129)This is a mindblowing confession. Socrates' words are turned on their head: an unexamined

life is not worth living. Mrs Curren says a life unexamined by the marginalised, is a life not worth living. This is genius at work.

In an admirable way Coetzee sticks to this ethical principle in *Disgrace*(1999), but here he begins to take a further step in representation: he links the white character carefully to a black character – this time not as opposites like Mrs Curren and Florence, but as *doppelgängers*, mirror images. Like the white man, the black man abuses women, like the white man, he protects "his peoples". With their chauvinism they sow barren destruction, but both of them try to make up for it by working the land and accompanying dogs to their deaths. Despite this close connection between the white and black man, there is a moment when the white man says: 'In spite of which, he feels at home with Petrus, is even prepared, however guardedly, to like him. Petrus is a man of his generation. Doubtless Petrus has been through a lot, doubtless he has a story to tell. He would not mind hearing Petrus's story one day. But preferably not reduced to English. More and more he is convinced that English is an unfit medium for the truth of South Africa.' (1999:117)

Once again: the acknowledgement that there is another context, that he wants to hear it, but also realises that it would probably not have justice done to it by the thin muddy veneer that English has become, is an important acknowledgment of the middle-class gap.

During the apartheid years it was important for many writers to keep on saying: we are the same. Whether we are black or white, we hurt the same, we love the same, we yearn the same, the apartheid laws separating us are a travesty. But in the aftermath of 1994, this very sameness exploded in our faces. Suddenly, the only things we saw, were the many differences between us and how denial of these differences belied the unjustness of our past. It was an important lesson: to acknowledge and respect that difference; to keep on searching for real meaningful ways towards that difference. That is also the goal of the ethical relation Gyatri Spivak is seeking and calling for – that the subaltern, the most oppressed and invisible constituency, might cease to exist as such. In their introduction to the *Spivak Reader*, Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean suggest that Spivak is quite certain that such a revolutionary change will not be brought about by traditional revolutionary means, nor by intellectuals attempting to represent oppressed minorities, nor worse yet, pretending merely to let them speak for themselves. Keeping in mind the dangers of fundamentalism in any form, Spivak insists on two meanings of the concept "representation" (Spivak Reader, 1996:6): standing-in-the-other's-shoes and an imaginative and aesthetic representation. A staging in a theatrical sense. (Ibid:15) In discussing the issue it is made clear that no amount of raised-consciousness fieldwork can even approach the painstaking labour to establish ethical singularity with the subaltern. "Ethical singularity" is neither "mass contact," nor engagement with "the common sense of the people" … the effort of "ethical singularity" may be called a "secret encounter" this encounter can only

happen when "the respondents inhabit something like normality. …That is why ethics is the experience of the impossible." (Ibid: 270)

If no normality exists between the writer and his subject, even for an imagined moment, then the effort remains problematic and has to be discussed.
A small reminder before we return to political correctness and the two kinds of liberties: according to the Oxford Dictionary the term *political correctness* means: the avoidance of forms of expression or action that are perceived to exclude, marginalize or insult groups of people who are socially disadvantaged or discriminated against. So originally, political correctness meant to avoid excluding the marginalised. It remains a bit of mystery to me why this term has changed into something so much resented.

But, to the liberties of Isiah Berlin: the negative Liberty FROM and the positive Liberty TO. We write in order TO be. We write in order to liberate ourselves FROM narrowminded, conservative fanatics, obsessed with power, in love with their own privilege that inflicts bleeding sores on the body of the world. Writers such as Shriver wants to be free FROM what she regards as intimidation to be politically correct.

A writer is free to write what she wants, but only constant self-inquiry and destabilisation about the how will bring some kind of integrity to the project. To write meaningfully about those whom you *cannot,* and according to some pressure *may not,* write about, takes more than just putting a hat on your head. It requires the dedication of self-questioning and scrupulous searching. You may not like Coetzee or may have many gripes about his writing, but I specifically used him to illustrate the kind of trouble a writer of his calibre had gone to when he wanted to engage – one has to be prepared to harass, surpass, even crucify one's tamed imagination.

At the same time to give up engaging or refrain from engaging because of criticism, is to give up on perhaps the only redeeming feature of recent mankind and that is to dream oneself into the spaces and bodies of those not present at the "banquet table of history". We have to become each other, write each other, bind ourselves together, even when we cannot clearly hear each other's story – this is the only guarantee that we have against people who want to build walls, turn boats away, patrol beaches, refuse visas. We must be enabled to say: I am from Syria, from Pakistan, I am you, a fellow human being with dreams filled with beauty and longing. 99% of our DNA is entirely the same. Accept me as a multiple of you.

But equally important: when those patrollers begin to say: you may not write about this or that, then we have to recognise it as a move into that kind of fateful coercion of positive Liberty that Berlin talks about.

But there is a caveat here: post-colonial scholars have pointed out many of these gaps, false premises, transgressions, stereotyping etc in the work of important writers who wrote about the Third World and in this way immensely enriched the experience and production of literature. That must never *never*stop. But when it changes to "you may not, you have no right to," this is where coercion sets in: the unenlightened writers must 'be forced TO' refrain from producing a particular kind of text. Berlin warns: this kind of distortion of and coercion within Liberty has, in the past, served to justify terrible and very damaging political oppression.

Those who believe in the decisive power of literature may never say: your work may not be about me. Then you become the dictator who, in the name of Liberty, destroys the power of Liberty and that will necessarily lead to an even more aggressive, disastrous, destructive enclave-making and wallbuilding in the world. We dare not give up trying, as well as assisting one another, to be closer and closer to succeeding being one another.

Every one of us needs every one of us, as well as the beauty and resources of the entire world to be fully humane. That would be true Liberty. And in this, writing as a powerful intensifier of the conscience, chasing us into "the clearing of the truth of the world", is critical and decisive.

I want to end with a slight adaptation of the words of Ngugi wa Thiongo: The call for the rediscovery and resumption of writing is a call for a regenerative reconnection with the millions of revolutionary tongues in Africa and the world, demanding liberation. It is a call for the rediscovery of the real language of human kind: the language of struggle. It is the universal language underlying all speech and words of history. Struggle. Struggle makes history. Struggle makes us. In struggle is our history, our language and our being. That struggle begins wherever we are; in whatever we do:" (2005:108)

We dare not let go of that belief.

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*Antjie Krog, drawing by Anton Kannemeyer*

# WRITERS' GALLERY

# INA CONRADIE

## PROFILE

Ina Conradie is a student in Creative Writing at the University of the Western Cape. She is also a Senior Lecturer in Development Studies at the same university, and her academic interests are poverty, underdevelopment, and how to address social and economic exclusion. She has worked in this field for a number of decades, both in practice and in academia. She is also a reader, and both prose and poetry has been an interest since her school years. Her hobbies include hiking in the mountains and music.

## CREATIVE WORK

*Mandla: a history*

When he was born in Tsolo, fifty-nine years ago,
Nomzamo, his mother, cried with joy.
A son! We will name him for his power.
He will bring change and will turn things around.

At the *Imbeleko*a small goat was slaughtered
for the birth of a well-shaped boy.
The spirits would have liked a big one better,
but the chief had the land, so what could they do?

A twelve-year-old boy looked after the chief's cattle,
counted them to recall numbers one to fifty-three.
His father came back from the mines with TB,
and the chief gave them maize and milk cans with *Amasi*.

The seventeen-year-old *umkhwetha* was gaunt and grey
from an undeclared infection, pain and endurance.
He sipped his uncle's Smirnoff from a tall brown glass,
squirmed, and sat still till it settled inside.

A strong, lean young man worked underground

mining platinum at Marikana. Hot, backbreaking days.
An old injury returned, and the well-dressed manager
sent him back to his village to recover.

In Cape Town he hoped for easier work,
but the taxi he traveled in swerved too fast.
After two weeks he left Victoria hospital,
a plaster on his kidney, a bandage around his lead.

Mandla sleeps on a sidewalk in Sunningdale Road,
covered in plastic against the heavy Cape storms.
He picks the area's waste bins deep into the night,
and waits for the change that will turn things around.

**REFLECTION**

I have been thinking about writing this poem for a long time, but struggled to get the right form for it. It has been inspired by a man who lived on the sidewalk of our street in Cape Town for a while, and who came to our house from time to time for food and for other assistance. Gradually his story unfolded as I drove him to a doctor or a hospital, or to a local shelter for the homeless, where he just did not fit in. I have also been doing academic research on the recent history of the *isiXhosa* people in the Western Cape, and it struck me how this man's story so graphically illustrated main aspects of this history. The first three stanzas are based on my imagination and other experiences, but he actually did work in the Marikana mines and was retrenched due to his health. The taxi accident was also a real event, and this impacted very negatively on him. Although hospital care is readily available in Cape Town, hospital beds are scarce and people are discharged as soon as possible. He therefore lives on the street with his considerable health problems. I disguised all personal information, but this is essentially the story of a real person, into whose life I imagined additional information.

# KERRY HAMMERTON

## PROFILE

Kerry Hammerton currently lives in Cape Town, South Africa. Reading is her first passion although writing poetry is a close second. She has published poetry in various South African and international literary journals and anthologies – most recently *Hallelujah for 50ft Women* (Bloodaxe Books 2015) and *Cutting Carrots the Wrong Way* (Uhlanga Press 2017). Kerry's poetry is intimate and honest, and explores themes around identity, romantic relationships, depression, suicide, women's bodies and their experiences of sex. She writes to examine reality and also to create a space for belonging. She has an MA in Creative Writing (with distinction) from Rhodes University. She is currently a Creative Writing PhD candidate at the University of the Western Cape where she is exploring the lives of middle-aged and older women. Her most recent collection is *Secret Keeper* (Modjaji 2018).

## CREATIVE WORK

### Getting Ready for school

My father's right hand fumbles in harmony with my own. His left hand has had to unlearn its deftness. He's teaching me a Windsor knot for my grey and black striped school tie. Last night we polished shoes. Sky blue brushes. Polish on. And then sweep and sweep and buff until the shoes gleam. Once a week we do this, my father, my brother and I. Polish and brushes live under the kitchen sink with bleach and dishwashing liquid – secrets of clean and polished standing together in domestic tidiness. We bring order to ourselves: perfect knotted ties, shiny shoes, don't lie, always say please and thank you, be grateful, don't tell everyone our business, look after yourself because no-one else will, don't cry, do as I say, never say I love you.

**REFLECTION**

This short prose-poetry piece came out of workshop where Graham Mort asked us to think about when and how we learnt to tie shoe-laces as a symbol of liberty. As a child growing up in South Africa I spent most of my free time barefoot and putting on any pair of shoes was always seen as a constraint. That prompt, however, made me think about polishing shoes for school and my school uniform. My father always wore a tie to work, it was a symbol of economic freedom and strength – things that a child doesn't have. I changed schools when I was nine years old and was then required to wear a tie in the winter. At that age wearing a tie made me feel adult and grown-up. Later in rebellious teenage years that tie became a symbol of conformity and constriction, and outside the school gates friends and I would do everything we could to subvert the school uniform. My father also taught my brother and I to polish our shoes properly, my father was in the Royal Air Force so his standards were high. This idea of order and cleanliness is something that is taught to children, but it made me think about other things that are taught in families that are more subtle. When we become adults and have more freedom these ideas may sometimes impede our emotional freedom particularly if we don't work to free ourselves from their constraints.

**PUBLICATIONS (POETRY BOOKS)**

*Secret Keeper* (Modjaji 2018)
*The Weather Report* (2013)
*These are the Lies I told You* (Modjaji 2010)

# LISA JULIE

## PROFILE

Lisa Julie holds a BA (Hons) in English literature from the University of the Western Cape. She is currently completing an MA in Creative Writing from the same university. Lisa was born in Cape Town and grew up speaking English and Afrikaans. She grew up in an area referred to as the Cape Flats, an area consisting of a vast number of townships in which coloureds and Africans live. She is deeply influenced by the culture and language of South Africans.

## CREATIVE WORK

### How we know the day is ending

The *athaan* goes off and the children run home. And we don't see them again until morning
The street lights come on. The windows are shut and the curtains are drawn
The staff vans bring the daddies home. The police vans park and wait
The road is still and the mommies get tomorrow's bread and milk

The daddies call the big brothers from the corners. And the other boys hide the dice
The small children eat on the couches. The big sisters wash the babies
The daddies smoke on the *stoeps*. The mommies dry the nappies
The road is still and the big brothers unchain the dogs

The daddies roll up the prayer mats. And the mommies iron tomorrow's clothes
The small children find their beds. The big sisters rock the babies
The house is quiet. The daddies lock the doors
The road is still and everyone goes to sleep

The whistling starts. And the *manne* stand in circles on the corners
The police vans start circling and the dogs start barking
The road is not still and we watch from the windows

**Things no longer there**

The glass of whisky. The only one he was allowed to have.
The comedy that followed. Whenever he was allowed more than one.
The hydrangeas in the centre of the table. Because he no longer had the energy to work in the garden.
The sixth chair. Because somebody needed to put something somewhere high.
The citronella oil candle. Because Ouma couldn't take the smell and the *miggies* didn't bother her anymore.
The hooters somewhere down the street. That fetched the neighbours for the night shift.
The shouting competing with the hooters. Because the children wouldn't stop laughing and rocking on their chairs.
The neighbour's idling tow-truck. That revved over Ouma's prayer.
The talk about the *Heilige Gees*. First the nodding and then the yawning and then the sinking into the chairs.
The two children. Because the schools weren't good enough and because Ouma no longer had the energy.

**REFLECTION**

The individual pieces are both set in a Cape Flats setting. This meant that I needed to use a specific kind of language and particular voices in order to make the works authentic – in order to make them believable. The people of the Cape Flats played vital roles in the liberation movement in South Africa. However, the socio-economic conditions in reason times, seemed to have worsened. This reality prompted me to write about the various forms of restraint and the limitations of freedom – the limitations of liberty.

**PUBLICATIONS**

*Cutting Carrots the Wrong Way,* poems (Uhlanga Press) 2017
*Writing Three Sixty Journal,* poems (University of the Western Cape) 2017
*Underground Art & Literary Journal, Issue 8*.1, poems (Georgia State University) 2017

# ANTJIE KROG

## PROFILE

Antjie Krog is an Afrikaans poet, writer, journalist and Professor at the University of the Western Cape. She published twelve volumes of poetry in Afrikaans of which three volumes were compiled with English translations: *Down to my Last Skin* (2000), *Body Bereft* (2006) and *Synaps* (2014). She also published three non-fiction books: *Country of my Skull* (1998), on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission; *A Change of Tongue* (2004) about the transformation in South Africa after ten years and *Begging to be Black* (2009) about learning to live within a black majority. Krog has also co-authored an academic book *There was this Goat* (2009) with two colleagues Prof Kopano Ratele and Nosisi Mpolweni, investigating the Truth Commission testimony of Mrs Notrose Nobomvu Konile. Her work has been translated into English, Dutch, Italian, French, Spanish, Swedish, Serbian, Arabic and Chinese. *Country of my Skull* and *A Change of Tongue* have been nominated by South African librarians (LIASA) as two of the ten most important books written in ten years of democracy. She was also asked to translate the autobiography of Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* into Afrikaans.

Krog had been awarded most of the prestigious awards for poetry, non-fiction, journalism and translation available in Afrikaans and English, as well as the Stockholm Award from the Hiroshima Foundation for Peace and Culture for the year 2000, the Open Society Prize from the Central European University (previous winners were Jürgen Habermas and Vaclav Havel) and Gouden Gansenveer (2018).

*Drawing by Anton Kannemeyer*

## CREATIVE WORK

*faces executing*

how
how write
how do I write
how

this face disconcerts me  my existence are being interrupted
by the invasion of this face  the face sweats between limits
of holiness and caricature  between preach and scream

the face of the other takes me under cross examination

it precedes my understanding  it tolls
justice  with a restless bounce I am being watched
by all of us  this is a call up a spitting fire
a garment of command commanding me: comply!

and the face becomes the foyer of my bewilderment

how
how write
how do I write

how in a way that I can love these cruel vassals of hate
how?  the fact is: I don't love them
– I can't even endure their faces

there is no will within me to love them
to, despite myself, nevertheless, love them
nowhere in me something is hesitating which can be wedged open
so that I can sufficiently want to want to love them

therefore I have to realise: my not wanting to love them
says something about myself: how veritable
dare I say is my love for you?
love is not like thirst the more I love you
the more I ought to love them
the less I love them the less perhaps I love you
my dearest most defenceless beloved love?

how
how write
how do I write

how in a change-making way that the face is called the foreword
the smell of the brutal nose and the exterminated eye are the nearness
of the command that the face is the miracle  wonderfully wounded while we
break face to face across the horizons of the ordinary world

your face  conspicuous with the threads and scars from textures you had been
    dismissed from earlier
announces your bodily-ness: the emblem of dust
of the visibility of us all and the implosion of suffering when I make
eye-contact before the face gawks into the abyss

and then
how
how do I write

how do I write that these men are already myself

that their callous faces are mine that I am lying
there as the dark trampled body at their feet
because I live without akin-ness with them

how
how write

the  healing?

(*Based on texts of Levinas and JM Coetzee)*

**REFLECTION**

Every one of us needs every one of us, as well as the beauty and resources of the entire world to be fully humane. That would be true Liberty. And in this, writing as a powerful intensifier of the conscience, chasing us into "the clearing of the truth of the world", is critical and decisive.

**PUBLICATIONS**

*Poetry*

Dogter van Jefta (Human & Rousseau 1970);
Januarie Suite (H&R 1972)
Mannin (H&R 1974)
Beminde Antarktika (H&R 1974)
Otter in Bronslaai (H&R 1981)
Jerusalemgangers (H&R 1985)
Lady Anne (Taurus:1989)
Gedigte 1989-1995 (Hond: 1995)
Kleur kom nooit alleen nie (Kwela 2000)
Eerste Gedigte (H&R 2003) (Heruitgawe)
Verweerskrif (Umuzi 2006)
Mede-wete (Human & Rousseau 2014)

*English Volumes*

Down to my Last Skin (Random House 2000)
Body Bereft (Umuzi 2006)
Skinned (Seven Seas co-published with Umuzi 2013)
Synapse (Mede-wete translated by Karen Press; Human & Rousseau 2014)

*Non-fiction*

Country of my Skull (Random House 1998)
A Change of Tongue (Random House 2003)
'n Ander Tongval (Tafelberg 2005)
Begging to be Black (RandomHouseStruik 2009)
There was this Goat (KwaZuluNatal Press 2009)
Conditional Tense – Memory and Vocabulary after the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (African List of Seagull Books 2013)

*Prose*

Relaas van 'n Moord (Human and Rousseau 1995)
Account of a Murder (translated by Karen Press) (Heinemann 1997)

*Poetry for young Children*

Mankepank en ander Monsters (1989)
Voëls van anderster vere (1992) Buchu Books
Fynbos feetjies (Umuzi 2007)
Fynbos fairies (Umuzi 2007)
Mankepank en Ander Verse (2012)

# JULIA MARTIN

## PROFILE

Julia Martin lives in Cape Town, South Africa, and is a professor in the Department of English at the University of the Western Cape where she has been working for many years in the field of what is now called the Environmental Humanities. She has published extensively in conventional academic media, but also has a special interest in writing creative nonfiction as a genre that admits the imagination as a way of knowing. Her travel memoir, *A Millimetre of Dust: Visiting Ancestral Sites* (2008) concerns archaeological sites in the Northern Cape. More recently, she collaborated with Gary Snyder in the publication of *Nobody Home: Writing, Buddhism, and Living in Places* (2014), a collection of their interviews and correspondence over three decades.

## CREATIVE WORK

### An Open Space

The first buildings were structures of discipline and containment, the straight lines, grey concrete and face-brick walls of an architectural modernism adapted to the service of apartheid. Within a few years of the parliamentary decision to establish separate universities, the University College of the Western Cape appeared in Bellville South, replacing a farm and a diverse environment of coastal bush with a tidy design of lawns and garden beds that linked a Science block, an Arts block, an Education block, an Admin block with sports facilities and a library into a single concept.

The entity that this campus was designed to house and educate was what they called the Coloured (so that he could uplift his community, so that he could lead his own, this gesture from the white hands of the conquerors, for the guardian must provide for his ward). In documents from the mid 60's that define and celebrate the institution (its special task, its magnificent project), the foundation of it all is a plan to secure in this location the unquestionable idea of race.

Young men of that time (and they were nearly all men) were required to wear ties and jackets. Young women (such as there were – by 1966 only 12.5% of the total) were

dressed in cotton frocks and court shoes. Promotional photographs show students gazing into microscopes, making their own beds, and viewing the indigenous plants that had been set to grow beside the concrete paths.

That the plants the planners chose for the new landscape were indigenous was, it seems, no accident. For indigeneity too was part of the rhetoric: their own place, their own people, their own local plants. The badge devised for the Coloured college set the columns of a Greek temple, that icon of culture and learning in the West, below three king Proteas. For not only was the Protea the national flower of the Republic and a plant that grew wild in the Western Cape. It was also (or so the rector explained at the time) a flower which our Coloured people cherish, thus typifying, he said, the appreciation which they have for their own.

By the late 1960's, the built environment of the campus was well established, the labs were stocked with instruments and apparatuses, and there were ambitious plans for more and more development. They had thought of almost everything, it seemed. Yet for all their zeal, what the ideological architects crucially failed to imagine was how things grow. Seeds must travel. Roots inhabit the soil. Trees, however neatly set in lines, will take their own shape. And human feet transgress the concrete walkways, treading their own paths into the world. In all their proud assertions the authorities had somehow not anticipated that, in building an institution of education, they were creating the conditions in which people could actually become educated.

The other thing the planners did not foresee was that assembling a number of the oppressed together in one place would enable them to organize. In 1970 the disciplined students burnt their university ties.

*Please note that 'An Open Space' first appeared as follows:*
2011. 'An Open Space'. Eds P. Lalu & N. Murray. *Becoming UWC: Reflections, Pathways, and Unmaking Apartheid's Legacy*. Bellville: University of the Western Cape, 26-35.

**REFLECTION**

I was asked to write something about the physical environment of the University of the Western Cape for a publication celebrating fifty years of the institution's life. Write about the space, the editors said. The place. So I read whatever I could find about the early years of the institution, spread out architects' plans, and walked about the campus, looking and listening. My hope, I suppose, was that if I paid close attention to the details, the place itself would tell a story: that the walls and spaces of the built environment, the planted gardens, the small remnants of the indigenous coastal ecology which these supplanted (these things together, as they reside in

memory and in the present moment) might house a history. History, of course, is most of the time a narrative about human beings. But when you begin by looking closely at place(s) rather than people, the community of everyone else becomes more difficult to ignore. So while humans do appear to drive this story (of unfreedom and freedom and their entanglements), at the heart of it is an inside / outside space: a space that is open, possibly free.

**SELECTED PUBLICATIONS: BOOKS AND SOME ESSAYS**

'Making the Sacred.' *New Contrast*. 174. 44: 56-62. 2016.
'Recipes, love, and forgetting: A sparse domestic archive from colonial Natal.' *Social Dynamics*, 41. 3: 576-590. 2015.
'The Temple and the Trees'. *Current Writing,* 27.1: 61-77. 2015.
'Letter to the Management.' Eds Helen Moffett and Diane Awerbuck. *Stray: An Anthology of Animal Stories and Poems*. Cape Town: Modjaji, 13-15. 2015.
*Nobody Home: Writing, Buddhism, and Living in Places*. San Antonio: Trinity University Press. Co-authored with Gary Snyder. 2014.
'Grandfather's Suitcase.' *Scrutiny 2,* 17. 2: 97-110. 2012.

# LEBOHANG MOJAPELO

## PROFILE

Lebohang Mojapelo is a literary scholar and academic with main interests in African writing and scholarship. Currently studying towards a Master's in Creative Writing at the University of Western Cape, she is excited to expand her repertoire from academia to the creative. Lebohang also looks forward to a world where one day biologically engineered mini elephants are available for adoption!

## CREATIVE WORK

*Sometimes I float*

Sometimes I float,
my brain full of cotton wool
hovering over the edge of a cliff.
My mother thinks it's a problem,
the doctors too.
Diazepam, Prozac and Seroquel they try,
and yet even in my dreams I remain suspended in air.
I shut my eyes really tight
and long for solid ground or death.

## REFLECTION

The experience of living with a mental illness is a very difficult one to put into words. The trauma you experience has no register or space within ordinary language to convey what happens to the bipolar brain. This is very frustrating because as one who struggles with bipolar, I cannot comprehend it fully, let alone say what is happening to me in moments of depression or mania. This particular poem is an attempt to do this - floating seems so easy and fun and a heightening experience - which mania can feel like in the beginning. However, the feeling of not being in control is one that follows this high and leads to paranoia, but no matter what you do, it can be

impossible to come down from this. Being on medication is helpful but not a complete cure and living with this illness has left me longing for my life to end several times. I chose to use not too many words and very simple language to convey something very complicated in order for the reader to be able to place the notion of mental illness in their own realm of understanding. I understand that I will never be free from this illness but the more I write about it, the more I'm freed from the confines of this alienating experience.

# KOBUS MOOLMAN

## PROFILE

Kobus Moolman was born in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. He is Associate Professor and Head of Creative Writing in the Department of English Studies at the University of the Western Cape. He lives with his wife in the Riebeek Valley. He has published seven collections of poetry, two collections of plays, and edited a collection of poetry, prose and art by South African writers living with disabilities. He has won numerous local and international awards for his work, including the 2001 Ingrid Jonker award, the 2007 South African Literary award for poetry, the Sol Plaatje European Union poetry award and recently the 2015 Glenna Luschei Award for African Poetry for his collection *A Book of Rooms*. He was also guest editor of the first special issue of a South African journal dedicated entirely to the teaching of creating writing, *Current Writing*. His first collection of short fiction, *The Swimming Lesson and other stories*, was published in 2017. He has also recently edited a special issue on contemporary South African poetry for the American journal, *Illuminations*. His poems and stories reveal his growing focus on the body and on issues of disability.

## CREATIVE WORK

*Survival*

We who accept survival as our password
accept incompleteness as our blessing.
We who dress in blindness and in faith
do not know the colour of our palms
nor the weight of our feet upon the water.
We who have dust in our mouths all day
have stones on our tongues instead of songs.
We who quench fire with fire all night
know that wings are not the only ladders
to the dark, that heavy wood swims too
in the tide of the wind.
We who accept survival
accept survival as our curse.

(from *Light and After*, 2010, deep south)

**REFLECTION**

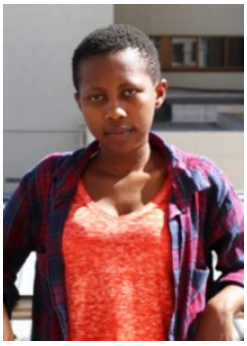
Although first published in my collection *Light and After* in 2010, this poem is still one of the only pieces I have written in which I attempt to articulate, even sum up – in whatever halting and circuitous manner – a kind of philosophy or world-view; a struggle to say something that represents my moral value system. Even writing this now makes me feel self-conscious. Its grandiosity seems almost adolescent. But despite my reservations, the poem does seek to encapsulate the tensions and contradictions involved in putting forward what I believe about human freedom, human values and hope. Its many motifs are drawn from both the local political field (the images of singing, stones and fire are motifs of political protest drawn from South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle, and the recent service delivery protests), and the general religious ('the weight of our feet upon the water'). But, intriguingly, the poem resists being read as a treatise or political pamphlet. It refuses to speak directly. It is deliberately cryptic. In its attempt to evoke its particular 'message' it speaks in a roundabout and contradictory manner. It is full of impossibilities that meet and become possible only in the language and the realm of the imagination. In the language of the future. Which is ultimately the language of survival and hope.

**PUBLICATIONS**

*Time like Stone*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press. 2000.
*5 Poetry*. Johannesburg: Botsotso Publishers. 2001.
*Feet of the Sky*. Howick: Brevitas Press. 2003.
*Separating the Seas*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press. 2007.
*Blind Voices: a collection of radio plays*. Johannesburg: Botsotso Publishers. 2007.
*Full Circle*. Johannesburg: Dye Hard Press. 2007.
*Anatomy*. (Limited edition, illustrated chapbook.) Lidgetton: Caversham Press. 2008.
*Light and After*. Grahamstown: Deep South. 2010.
*Tilling the Hard Soil: Poetry and Prose by South African Writers Living with Disabilities*. (ed.). Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press. 2010.
*Left Over*. Johannesburg: Dye Hard Press. 2013.
*A Book of Rooms*. Grahamstown: Deep South. 2014.
*Current Writing, 27 (2)*. Special issue guest editor: Teaching Creative Writing. 2015.
*The Swimming Lesson and Other Stories*. Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press. 2017.
*Cutting Carrots the Wrong Way: Poetry and Prose about Food from the University of the Western Cape Creative Writing Programme*. (ed.). Cape Town: uHlanga Press. 2017.

# NONDWE MPUMA

## PROFILE



Nondwe Mpuma hails from the rural plains of Mount Ayliff, a small town in the Eastern Cape Province. She is a Creative Writing Masters student at the University of the Western Cape. Nondwe Mpuma is interested in the concepts of memory and time in literature.

## CREATIVE WORK

*The House*

The house is a box, a box of things
taken out and put in. People are
put in and taken out again. Going
in is a choice but leaving is a bowl
of spaghetti. Bars can be put on
the doors, sometimes they are
visible and other times they are
not. These bars are walls between
inside and out. This is a box
marked a home and unmarked a
house.

*The Fufi Slide*

Flying and plunging into the river
plunging into the flat stomached, murky river
I slid down the rope from the peak of the oak structure
past the tree, past the last strip of land and into the river but
I had to hold on. To hang on before I let go.
when I did let go, I flew.
I was a feather.

**REFLECTION**

*The House* and *Fufi Slide* are creative pieces that came out of the Taking Liberties workshops where we explored the idea of liberty and what that means to us as individuals as well as a group of South African scholars at UWC. *The House* is written from exploring captivity within a space that some may view as home. The language is simple and I hope the idea of being detained within a space that is supposed to be very familiar to us, a place that becomes a 'house' instead of a 'home.' On the other end of the spectrum, *Fufi Slide* is written from a childhood experience. When I was in high school we were taken out for a geography trip to a farm outside of Durban where we stayed for a week. One of the activities that they had planned for us was a fufi slide over a dam. So instead of being harnessed, you would have a life vest on and you would hang on until you heard a whistle telling you to let go. You would have to let go in the middle of the dam. Those seconds of falling represent true liberation for me. The poem represents an exercise in playing with movement, focused on a few seconds of memory. I hope that when people read it they get some semblance of moving, falling. The workshops for me, made me realise that there are many memories, experiences and words waiting to be liberated.

**PUBLICATIONS**

*Carrots the Wrong Way*, An Anthology of Poetry and Prose about Food from the University of the Western Cape Creative Writing Programme, (uHlanga Press), 2017.
*Writing Three Sixty,* UWC Graduate Journal, Vol. 3 No. 1**,** 2017.
*Underground,* Georgia State University's Undergraduate Art and Literary Journal, Issue 8.1, 2017.

# SANELISIWE NYABA

## PROFILE

Sanelisiwe Nyaba is an Honours Student at UWC, a mother and a human facing the fear of calling herself a writer. She has aims of furthering her studies in Creative Writing and looks forward to the dreaded journey of painful growth both in writing and in life. She had a short story published in 2017 in the literary magazine New Contrast.

## CREATIVE WORK

**I guess then I am poor**
"Hide your poverty child!

They must not see it
written on your body
the smell of it
will water their eyes
they may sneeze you out
all of you
and then
they will cover their noses
to erase the sight of you."
Well, nobody wants to be forgotten.

**No**
No sounds
of city trees and city birds here
only city cars
and city footsteps
and city hoots
and city screeches
And city skies
whose sun runs
across like a hedgehog

and city voices
and city breath painting
the city air
with city poverty
No sounds here
of city dogs and city cows

**Stillness**

These are trying  times
to be a
mother black human
to be young and feel old
to be old and feel young
sometimes rain streams down
sometimes it comes like wet powder
sometimes the sun's tendrils tickle my skin
sometimes it has prickly rays
the trees stand still, why cant you
because we think that we will not exist if we stop moving
because we think we cannot stand still to exist
and yet
the end of the stalk hovers higher
and the root reaps deeper
in its eternal home

**REFLECTION**

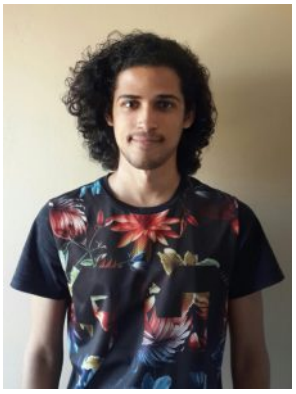
My poetry is still of the age of a new born child. The idea of liberty and freedom are viewed from this contradicting perspective of youthfulness. I grew up in informal settlements. Struggle engulfed my own life and that of those around me. I do not remember feeling poor until I entered school and break time became awkward because I seemed to always lag behind on the way to the tuck shop. The idea of poverty having to be hidden comes from this experience; no one wanted to know whether you were poor or struggling, the same story became boring. So you did not speak of it until serious enquiries were made: that I did not come to school because I did not have money for transport, that I am late because I spent the first few hours of my morning knocking on neighbors' doors to  borrow transport money. At least then you have an identity: the student that stays absent or that is always late or that does not care.

In the second poem, there is a sense of things functioning for themselves, as if everyone is on autopilot. The city has come to represent different things as time has unfolded. Many come here to work in order to support families they have left home. Others call the city home for its ability to inhabit different individuals and their unique ways of expressing themselves. Whatever the reason, we are all somehow tied to the city. Cape Town has a deep history of apartheid which makes itself so very blatant in the contrast between rich and poor. This brings into question the idea of democracy in present day South Africa.

The poem *Stillness* is a poem written for myself. I find myself a keen observer of those around me, how they affect me and vice versa. There is a need to stay moving and doing and creating in daily human life. I have always been fascinated by the calm and dignity that trees emit, as if watching us through their wisdom and pitying us in our world driven by human arrogance because humanity's belief in our superiority blinds us from learning from the different forms of life which exist around us. Perhaps different life forms exist in order to teach us that inactivity does not mean death, that the noise inside our heads is not a sign of life, and it may in fact be a sign of death as it can be suffocating and stops us from seeing beyond what stands in front of us. This idea shatters the idea of freedom and dignity; it wants to argue that perhaps we have not even begun to grasp what freedom is, and therefore whatever freedom we exist in now may in fact be a form of imprisonment. The structure of this poem is a way of freeing me from myself specifically in the way that I have approached poetry structure and form.

# KENNAN PEDRO

## PROFILE



Kennan Pedro lives in the Southern suburbs of Cape Town, Western Cape, South Africa. He is a second year student at the University of Western Cape, studying English literature and philosophy. Kennan started to develop a love for poetry in the sixth grade and has continued to write poetry over the years. He plans to finish his degree and travel abroad to teach English and experience different cultures.

## CREATIVE WORK

*Stigma*
Stuck in a concept of time.
A hammer in search of a nail.

Bound by society,
a chain of seven billion links
Too strong to sever this invisible bond.

We look at the bigger picture,
Too concerned with the frame
In which the picture lies.

We are our own construct,
Limited
by our own minds.

The only freedom we will ever know,
Lies behind the imagination
of reality.

To liberate society,
Is to free yourself.

**REFLECTION**

Stigma in this instance refers to the negative qualities attached to being human in our modern society. It explores the fact that our own minds are what prevent us from breaking free of the stigma. The first stanza looks at time, which is a concept we cannot free ourselves from and the fact that we are our own solution to a problem we are not fully aware of. The first stanza and the last stanza both have two lines because they are connected. The first stanza is in search of an answer and the last stanza answers that question (we find the nail). The second stanza looks at society being what bounds us from being free but similarly it keeps us linked to each other. Words such as bound, chain, links and bond emphasise this point. The third stanza looks at self reflection. The "bigger picture " is a construct of our minds and what we perceive. The last line of that stanza tells us that the picture is a lie. The forth stanza's vocal point is the line "limited". It has two meanings, one being that we are limited in our minds and the way we think and the other being that we are limited in a sense that we are unique. The fifth stanza looks to offer insight.  Freedom is in our imagination and reality is the lie (our imagination moulds our reality). The final stanza can have its two lines interchanged and still hold the same meaning because as much as the individual is bound by society, society is made up of individuals. We are liberated from within.

# ANDREA PETERSEN

## PROFILE

Andrea Petersen is from Scottsvile, a working class neighbourhood in the Western Cape. She is a postgraduate student in the English Departement at the University of the Western Cape. Andrea has been a part of the Creative Writing group at UWC for two years and through this she came in contact with the *Taking Liberties* project. She writes mostly poetry and short stories.

## CREATIVE WORK

*'n Huldeblyk*

My mother removes
her beige pumps.
They smell like
cheap plastic, and
reveal her worn-out
feet decorated with
callouses that look like
red pins placed on maps
on countries you've
visited and countries you
wish to see.

My mother's feet have
walked. Walked across
borders and cities.
Walked to my principal's
office when my dad didn't
pay my school fees and
I couldn't attend my metric ball.
Her feet have walked to Shoprite
on Saturday mornings and
walked back with bags full of
chocolate, and rusks, and
Joko tea.

They've walked across an
aisle to offer her life to a
man that looked like her
dead father who watched her
while she slept.

My mother smells sharp;
like acetone.
If you stand too close
For too long she
becomes nauseating.

My mother smells of
too much.
Her Red Door is always
applied too severely, an
overdose of desperation.

My mother smells like
cheap plastic.
Plastic that's been
burnt.
Thrown away.
Used to wrap up leftovers.

My mother smells heavy.

Heavy like the air on a
winter morning when the
clouds are preparing to
burst with rain.
My mother will burst and
break and suffocate under the weight
of her callouses.

**REFLECTION**

Writing for Liberty, to me, is an opportunity to be honest and forthcoming, without any pretence. 'n Huldeblyk is a poem honouring my mother, just as she is. Her feet and the image of her walking becomes an important image in the poem. I tried to juxtapose the image of her walking, which to me has associations with freedom and adventure, with images of hardship and struggle. Through the poem I wanted to depict

the possibilities, the possibilities of visiting countries and crossing borders. These possibilities are contrasted against images of desperation and poverty. I wanted to be honest. I wanted to be honest about who she is, who she is to me and who she is to herself. In that honesty I find my own personal freedom. And I am able to provide this character of 'my mother' the freedom to be just as she is.

# MARTHA QUMBA

## PROFILE

Martha Qumba resides in Cape Town, South Africa. She is a student at the University of the Western Cape, doing Geography, Philosophy and English. This year, she was among the students who participated in the Creative Writing workshop, Taking Liberties, hosted by Graham Mort at the university, English department. The purpose and focus of the workshop was for participants to explore the notion of freedom in contemporary South Africa and also to also sharpen and develop their creative writing skills.From the workshop she learnt some important techniques like how use certain objects in writing a poem also how these objects can be used as a tool to convey hidden messages of freedom in particular. Another useful thing was the importance of using metaphors in a poem especially when the poet challenges some certain doctrines or the poet's responses to those doctrines. One fascinating lesson for her was when Graham used a kind of a cupboard knob, asked the students to write what they think about it, that it is a symbol of freedom. Martha is a freelance journalist also a script writer. She writes poems, short stories and children's book. In 2016 she launched her first children's book, *How Whitey is Different from Darkie,* and it was translated into seven official languages of South Africa.

## CREATIVE WORK

*Peoplaspiace*

In a pierced Space
In a pace of pierced
A place of displaced
Of displaced peace
Of displaced space
Of misplaced piece
Of pieced and pierced
Of space
Of people pierced
Of piece peace
Of pierced peace
Of misplaced people

Of peace displaced
Displaced pace
The space of the displaceable
A space of pace
A piece of space
People of space
People of pierced peace and displace peace
This is it!

**REFLECTION**

*Peoplaspiace* stems from Migration course taught by Professor Daniel Tevera at UWC and it is based on the experiences of black migrants in the diaspora. It's a combination of words 'space', place, 'people'. It paints my experiences of being black also the experiences of other black migrants. When migration occurs there's always a contestation of spaces between the people the local people and migrants, these contestations sometimes have unpleasant results. This poem in particular talks about the emotional experiences and treatment they get in return. It captures their hurt that a space can cause to them and end up being displaced.

Again, it shows that their feelings are not considered because of their blackness and they deserve it, so to speak. It doesn't only look at migrants however the consistent evictions happen to black people all over in South Africa. I have, in my mind, people who live in shacks and backyard dwellers. Recently, in Cape Town, there was a riot where poor black people were just occupying any open space and the way they were evicted. It's a daily phenomenon and it has become like a 'black curse'. It also addresses the issues of freedom, poverty, oppression, slavery, and resistance, on one hand how neo-liberalism functions in the country.

In a country where freedom for all is being emphasised, *Peoplaspiace* tries to interrogate that notion whether this term is just a way holding people to that far-fetched hope. Too, with this poem, I'm trying to tell the world that in this world there's no space, peace and place for blacks. I trust that blacks in the diaspora would be able to relate to it and see the difficulties of being black. I know, too, that it's a sad poem but it doesn't want people to be sad. The struggle continues. Be aware!

**PUBLICATIONS**

*How Whitey is different from Darkie,* a children's book (Saliwa) 2016

# DAVID SCHMIDT

## PROFILE

David Schmidt teaches, writes and consults about public leadership, urban governance and public policy. He has worked for city government, for NGOs and as a consultant. He has been involved in social change since his student days and serves on the boards of various development and education NGOs. He is married and has two daughters. He once came third in a song-writing competition and is currently immersed in a Masters in Creative Writing at U

## CREATIVE WORK

### Lorca's Lover: An Account of a Life in One Room in One Moment

I live in a room that is crumbling away and I am trying to remember his last poem that is hidden somewhere in the walls and a layer of paint bubbles up and peels off revealing the layer below, telescoping me back in time not sure if it is the room or my memory that is collapsing in on itself suffocating me like a coffin and I scream poems of dark love to no-one. I live in a room where the rats come out in the dark through holes in the floor and eat the peanut butter I leave for them on the bookshelves because they have finished off the remains of the volumes of verse that once fed them and I have papered over the darkness of the walls with newsprint to ease the years and a simple table sits in the centre under a hanging light, an Underwood typewriter on it that I use to tap out articles on architecture for cultural magazines that all start with a room because a room is always changing with so many shifting stories concertinaed into it, even as the building that contains the room remains the same. I live in a room with the walls black after the fire with the sky of night above me, the moon waned to a sliver and on one wall I have etched in the charcoaled paint with my finger his words *only mystery makes us live, only mystery* that somehow express my grief for I cannot explain what drove me to rampage across the Russian steppe or why bleeding out gladly in the snow with everything burning down around me I found my way back. I live in a room where I can still find small traces of him, a strand of his long black hair in the dust under the bed or a clipping of a fingernail caught between carpet and wall and I have painted the walls blood red to represent my family's shame in me and mine in them and his blood was spilled in an olive grove, I leave one small corner unpainted where he had written in tiny letters even I was not supposed to find *Ay, the pain it costs meto love you as I love you!* I live in a room where he paints wild horses galloping across the Andalusian plain on one wall, spring blossoms against blue sky

the free air of Harlem on another, day of the dead processions from Mexico, land of our dreams and in the middle of the fourth wall is a teak door from the Amazon carved with fertility icons and my father bolts it from the outside so I cannot escape with him to Acapulco even as we hear the banging hammers of the steel being sharpened in the Granada armoury. I live in a room of painted scenes from Shakespeare plays and Spanish operas, I was born to be a performer, beautiful and desired as a boy, ready to take the world, I draw a straight black line tight around the room and tell my mother it signifies my fealty to art and I lie on my bed looking up at the full moon on hot nights with water pouring over me for the line is the tightrope I am walking and it is there that he found me. I live in a room in a cot with white walls under an embroidered boy-blue blanket full of the smell of eucalyptus oil that my nanny rubs into my chest and my father is making cooing sounds and I look up at him, he looks like Federico until I see the brush-metal moustache, I can hear the fountain, I understand perfectly as my mother's smile comes into focus for the first time and then everything is light.

**REFLECTION**

This poem explores the idea of liberty as the defying of prevailing social conventions and taboos recognising that such transgressions are invariably costly and leave guilt and shame in its wake.

I have tried to express this tension between constraint and breaking free of constraint in the form of the poem. The constraint is represented by the one room with its four walls where everything happens. I have not used paragraph breaks and have justified the text to further reinforce a claustrophobic box-like effect. The freedom is represented by the long uncontained sentences that stream wildly even without obvious pattern at first reading.

Time is another constraint. The poem happens in a single moment but time is also subverted and a whole lifetime is compressed into that moment as the unravelling backwards of an old man's mind – the first stanza his death throes, the last his birth. I had in mind an inverted version of Walter Benjamin's "angel of history" – the protagonist propelled into the past while he faces forward watching the pile of debris that is his life growing skyward before him.

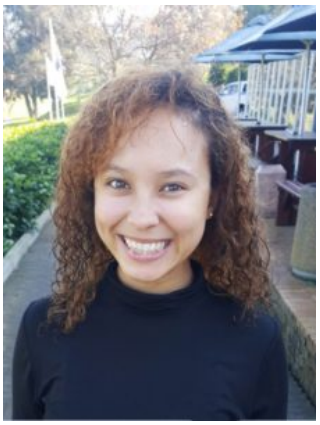
The facts have some correspondence with the life of Juan Ramírez de Lucas who had an intense affair with Lorca when he was a teenager. This relationship delayed Lorca's flight to Mexico leading to his murrder by Franco's falangists. The rest of his life can be seen as coming to terms with the disgrance and the guilt like his volunteering for the Spanish "Blue Division" and his lonely years as an architectural critic. The poem uses words common in Lorca's poetry that allude simultaneously to

both the erotic and death – blood, water, iron and the moon. The two lines taken directly from Lorca's poetry are marked by italics.

Hopefully, the poem provokes an unbalancing. That to choose freedom is to walk a tightrope – between glory and catastrophe, desire and destruction, self-actualisation and oblivion, yourself and the other. Losing our footing is inevitable eventually. Nonetheless, we live in hope.

# SARAH JANE SEALE

## PROFILE



Sarah Jane Seale grew up in Strandfontein Village in the city of Cape Town, South Africa. She currently holds a Bachelor Degree of Theology and is pursuing an Honours Degree in English at the University of the Western Cape. Sarah enrolled in the Creative Writing elective this year and became a participant of the *Taking Liberties* project through her involvement and interest in writing creatively. She is interested in writing Children's and young adolescent's literature and desires to positively impact the youth, of South Africa particularly, with her poems and short stories.

## CREATIVE WORK

***My grandmother smells of patience***

My grandmother smells of patience.
When I come home from school,
she is sitting on our front stoep,
waiting.

She is waiting for rain.
Rain that hasn't fallen in months.
She is waiting for something
that won't come
anytime soon.

She waits for the time when
she'll get to go home.
"Not here, Sarah, this is *your* home.
But there, where your grandpa is."

She is waiting for my grandpa.
Someone who was kidnapped by angels.
She is waiting for someone
she won't see

anytime soon.

She will keep waiting,
and waiting.
Sitting on our front stoep.
Smelling of patience.

***An Incident in the Life of Anna May Hugh***

Anna May Hugh woke up at two.
A.M.

Anna May Hugh then went to the loo.
There she vomited up black bile.

Anna May Hugh was then rushed to you.
Then she was admitted to Tygerberg Hospital.

Anna May Hugh was at the hospital from half past two.
There she waited. And she waited.

Anna May Hugh didn't know what to do.
Whatever she took in came right out.

Anna May Hugh wanted to see you, Dr Le Roux.
But you were busy. Too busy!

Anna May Hugh was dehydrated and blue.
But nobody asked her if she was okay. Or if she was thirsty.

Anna May Hugh was weak, it's true.
But others were sicker and they were seen to quicker.

Anna May Hugh was finally seen to.
Thirteen hours later. Four buckets of bile later.

Anna May Hugh saw Dr Le Roux.
She cried from exhaustion. And then she cried fromnfusion.

Dr Le Roux, you saw Anna May Hugh.
And you saw her again. And again. And again.

Anna May Hugh hated Dr Le Roux.
She cried from anger. And then she cried from helplessness.

Anna May Hugh took off her gown and her shoe.
She hated her expressionless reflection in the mirror.

Dr Le Roux was the man that the dead girl sued.
While Anna May Hugh was the girl who pulled through.

***The Red Lady***

I saw a red hat and red shoes on a Red Lady walking in the red sun.
I saw a white bag and a white watch on the Red Lady walking to her white house.
A Blue me approached the Red Lady in the black street.
The Blue me spoke to the Red Lady and asked her: "What do you carry in your white bag?"
The Red Lady smiled. This was the colourful contents of her colourless bag:
"My late husband's silver anchor from the red boat he used to love.
My niece, Clara's, pink ribbon from her birthday outfit which I never saw.
My black and white piano miniature in place of the one I never listened to.
My collection of gold game tokens from all the nights I never played.
My glass of red wine I never ordered at Lorenzo's.
My garden of dead chrysanthemums that I never watered.
A blue jar of stars I am saving for the night I get to star-gaze.
And a picture of you, little girl, to remind me to save a piece of me for you."

**REFLECTION**

Taking part in the *Taking Liberties* project was really an experience of growth for me and my writing. It afforded me the opportunity to explore the idea of freedom in a way that I had never previously done. A democratic South Africa was only three years old when I was born and the after effects of Apartheid surrounded everything and everyone I knew. My mother was a key figure in explaining the richness of our tragic histories and shared stories with me about her mother. My coloured grandmother once gave birth to a beautiful white-looking son whom she named Edgar, and at the same time he was born another black-looking baby was entering the world whose name would also be Edgar. The negligence of the hospital staff under the Apartheid government resulted in my grandmother taking home the baby she knew wasn't hers. Three months later her son was returned to her. My mother and her mother waited and waited, not only for Edgar, but for change. For things to be mended in their homes

and in homes everywhere, and for South Africa to become one. My grandmother never lived to experience the freedom she had always longed for. These poems are written in memory of her, and to remind myself that I can never take my freedoms for granted.

# NKOSINATHI SITHOLE

## PROFILE

Nkosinathi Sithole is Associate Professor in the English Department at the University of the Western Cape. He studied for the BA and BA (Honours) at the University of the Witwatersrand (where he studied African literature, History and IsiZulu) and the University of KwaZulu-Natal where he attained his MA and PhD degrees in English Studies. His areas of interest include South African and African literature, African languages literature, Oral Literature, and Religion and Spirituality. He is also interested in creative writing and his first novel *Hunger Eats a Man* (Penguin SA, 2015) won the Sunday Times Barry Ronge Fiction Prize and jointly won the University of Johannesburg Debut Prize for South African Literature in English. He started writing poems and short stories in IsiZulu when he was still an undergraduate student at the University of the Witwatersrand. The collection of IsiZulu short stories won the Ernst van Heerden Creative Writing Award in 1998. As an academic and writer he is interested in the interface between African-Languages writing/IsiZulu writing and (South) African Literature by Black writers. *Hunger eats a man* was initially self-published with an IsiZulu version called *Indlala Idl' Indoda.*

## CREATIVE WORK

***Namuhla ngibona ngicimezile***

Manje sekuyiminyakanyaka,
Ngimile kuleli gqunyana lami,
Ngithi ngifun' ukubona konke.
Amehlo am' avel' avaleke,
Ngibon' izigingqi zilele.

Awam' amehlo mangiwavala
Ngibon' ombayimbayi beqhululula
Nebhazuka kaRitifu iqothula,
Isizwe sakithi sijilingana,
Sithungel' emhlabathini ngomkhonto.

Ngibuye ngibon' izandla zakhe,
Zibovu yigazi labangenacala,
Zigcwele ukungcola kokweba,
Ngibon' ongilamay' ekhal' isililo,
Sobukhuni bempil' eAfrika,

Ngiyayizw' inhlokomo yesililo,
Siqubuk' emaxhibeni komame,
Bebon' amabhesh' ephequka
Ebheka phezul' elandel' imiphefumulo,
Izidumbu zisala zidindilizile,
Ondlebe bezeqa ngokwenama.

Ngiyabonga-ke nakuwe phitha,
Ngokuleth' inkaliph' eAfrika,
Yokhokh' ababeyiziduphunga,
Ababengenze lutho luncomeke,
Ngokuqoqela kuw' okungokwabo.

Nakini zimishini ngiyadumisa,
Ngokusakhel' isizw' esaziyo,
Ukuth' amasik' abamnyama
Awubuqab' ading' ukuvithizwa,
Amasik' empel' awondlebe
Bona bephucuzekile benenkalipho.

***When I close my eyes, I see***

It's been many years now.
I am standing on my little hill
hoping to see it all;
my eyes simply shut and
then I see dead bodies.

When I shut my eyes
I see machine guns destroying
and Retief's bazooka laying to waste
my nation fighting for dear life
stitched to the ground by the spear.

I then see his hands red

with the blood of the innocent,
dirtied with sin, 'thou shalt not steal'.
I see my elder brother wailing,
life is hard. For some hard is easy.

I hear the noise of lament
issuing from women in the huts,
seeing loin-skins turned upside down,
heading upwards following the souls,
and bodies remain quiet but not still,
as the light-eared jump over them with joy.

I thank you, Father Peter,
for bringing wisdom in the Africa
of our forefathers who were idiots,
who could do nothing worthwhile;
by taking from them all their land.

And to you missionaries I give praise,
for building a nation that knows
that black traditions
are barbaric and must be crushed;
only whites have God on their side,
for they are civilized and wise.

**REFLECTION**

I wrote the poem "Namuhla ngibona ngicimezile" many years ago when I was still an undergraduate student at the University of the Witwatersrand. I have made very little changes in the translation, but have kept the original as it has been. During this time I was being introduced to African Studies, but learning it mostly from the perspectives of History, African Literature and African Languages. It felt to me like an enlightenment period where I got to know myself, perhaps for the first time, as an African; a proud African. Through the poem I was trying to reflect on the issues of colonialism and the civilizing mission. I was amazed to be taught by white scholars who were not shy to talk about and critique colonialism and the cultural imperialism that went hand in hand with the civilizing mission. I think the poem was a response to a series of lectures on colonization and missionization. In one of the lectures I learnt that in one of the African countries Africans would have their hands or fingers cut off as punishment for not doing their work or for doing what they should not have done. I could imagine the pain those people must have felt. This is the paradox of colonial discourse and the civilizing mission because there were many examples of barbarism

that came with colonialism but the rationale for it was that it was saving Africa from itself. They were civilizing the barbarians while in fact they came with their own barbarians!

**PUBLICATIONS**

*No Matter When*. Translation. "BW Vilakazi's *Noma Nini*". Cape Town: Oxford University Press. Forthcoming, 2018
*Isaiah Shembe's Hymns and the Sacred Dance in Ibandla lamaNazaretha*. Leiden/Boston: Brill. 2016
*Hunger eats a man*.(A Novel) Johannesburg: Penguin South Africa. 2015
*Indlala Idl' Indoda*. (IsiZulu version of *Hunger eats a man*)Scottsville: VukaNath Books. 2012

# MEG VANDERMERWE

## PROFILE

Meg is a Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing and English Literature at the University of the Western Cape, where her responsibilities include, UWC CREATES, the first multi-lingual Creative Writing programme in South African Higher Education. She has published academic and creative work in South Africa, the UK, the US and Vietnam. Her two works of fiction, *This Place I Call Home* (2010) and *Zebra Crossing* (2013) were praised by critics, and *Zebra Crossing* was selected by the *Cape Times* as one of the ten best South African books published in 2013 and was Long Listed for the 2014 Sunday Times Literary Award. In 2015 it was chosen by Booker short-listed author, Sunjeev Sahota for the *Guardian* newspaper in the U.K, as one of the Top 10 books about migrants. For 2016, Meg was asked to act as Senior editor for *New Contrast*, South African oldest literary magazine. Her new novel, *The Woman of the Stone Sea*, which is set in a West Coast fishing village and features an IsiXhosa water maiden (*umamlambo*) and a local crayfish fisherman is due for publication in 2019.

## CREATIVE WORK

### Extract from *The Woman of the Stone Sea* (novel)

When Hendrik reaches the cove he turns the engine off. He is close enough to row and there is enough light to see. If you are not careful, even with good visibility, the current can carry you along and before you know it, trouble. A boat's wooden bones can smash as easily as 'n babatjie's. But he has being doing this his whole life. He knows what he is doing. He takes the oars out from under their tarpaulin and drops them into the oarlocks. He positions the boat so that he is sculling at a right angle to the waves. It is easier this way. It is harder for the waves to carry you into the rocks if you take them at an angle. But jissus it is hard work. His shoulders feel the strain. He is getting old, and not just in his body as he rolls over the waves towards the shore. The oars splash. Icy seawater sprays up, hitting his bearded cheeks and aching hands.

When the water is finally shallow enough for him to jump out and drag the boat the last few meters onto the beach by its tow rope, he does. The ocean, she wants his boat and seems to pull it away from him, back towards open water, but he holds fast. He still hasn't seen anything.

It is only when he has pushed the boat so that it is safely beached, and buried the anchor into the sand for good measure, that he catches sight of her. No, not his Rebekkah. The back of a black woman down at the water in a cradle of rocks. The cradle of rocks around her meant he could not have seen her from the sea. He is disappointed. Ja, he is not ashamed to admit it. Even after five years it is the belief that she will come back to him, that gets him out of bed each morning.

'Meisie! What are you doing out here?!' A gathering wind scoops up his bitter shouts, 'Hey!'

She isn't moving. Is she ignoring him? Or maybe she does not speak Afrikaans. Another fokken darkie inkommer, Hendrik thinks, an outsider not born in the village. Last year at election time, the ANC bussed what seemed like hundreds of them in. Darkies who could not speak a word of Afrikaans or even English. Darkies who they say, came all the way from the Eastern Cape. The government wanted them to sway the vote, but they failed. These days this village is loyal to the Democratic Alliance, a political party that the villagers say, actually cares a fok for the Coloureds and whites.

So what is she doing here in the Reserve? Hendrik wonders as he walks towards her through the shivering fynbos. Gryp, that is all these darkies know how to do.

'Meisie! Girlie! What are you doing here? Private property. You can't squat or build your shack here.'

They bring crime too. Murder, robbery, verkragting.

It is completely light now. The water has that brilliant early morning sparkle and he can see her clearly. With a grunt Hendrik pushes through another scrub bush. She is slumped over, body half in and half out of the water. If he were drunk, he would think he was seeing things, but he is sober.

She is naked. Naked but, Hendrik's eyes travel down. Lewende Vader. Hendrik stands gawping, his mouth open and closing in silent shock, like a freshly snagged snoek.

**REFLECTION**

*The Woman of the Stone Sea* builds on questions and themes, which I began to explore in my previous novel, *Zebra Crossing***.** These include: what does home mean in a South African context; what is the relationship in this country between the supernatural world and the so called 'real' and how can we navigate our painful history and disappointing present in order to carve a noble and hopeful future. In the novel we encounter Hendrik, a coloured fisherman who lives in an unnamed village on South Africa's West Coast. At the start of the novel Hendrik attempts to commit suicide because he is unable to come to terms with the fact that he has been abandoned by his wife (Rebekkah) who walked into the ocean several years earlier and has not been heard from or seen since. However, his suicide attempt fails and he wakes up sodden but alive in his own home. Convinced that he felt and saw something in the ocean where the attempt was made, he returns to the cove the next day. What he finds is not his beloved Rebekkah, but a *umamlambo*, an isiXhosa water maiden. The extract is taken from that scene.

During the rest of the novel, the reader is left guessing whether the *mamlambo* is in Hendrik's mind (a psychological delusion brought on by his loneliness and grief) or whether her presence is real. The unlikely relationship between Hendrik and water maiden or *vis vrou*, as he calls her in his mother tongue Afrikaans, will hopefully provoke the reader to consider the enduring interracial prejudices and tensions between South Africa's non-white communities (in this case the coloured and isiXhosa ones) but also a shared history which is often overlooked.

**PUBLICATIONS**

*The Woman of the Stone Sea* (RandomHouse/Penguin) forthcoming 2019
*Zebra Crossing* (Oneworld and RandomHouse/Penguin) 2014 and 2013
*This Place I Call Home* (Modjaji Books) 2010

# MICHAEL WESSELS

## PROFILE

Michael Wessels was Associate Professor and chairperson of the Department of English at the University of the Western-Cape. His research explored new ways of reading San oral literature and the politics of indigeneity. He also wrote about the representation of place and spirituality in South African literature. Other teaching and research interests included postcolonial and Indian literature, romanticism, travel writing and ecocriticism. He was the author of *Bushman Letters* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2010). He had published more than thirty accredited articles and chapters in books in his career. He loved wilderness, and in particular walking in mountains. And he had a deep knowledge of local flora and fauna. He was also passionately interested in creative writing, and had recently begun publishing his poetry in local literary journals. He sadly passed away during the 2018 Taking Liberties Cape Town project.

## CREATIVE WORK

***Bullock Cart – Madhya Pradesh***

shrill midday sun
no tree or bush
to bring relief
to eye or mind

rutted track
an emaciated man
on a laden bullock cart
ten metres behind
a woman haunts the dust
sari hanging from her bones
like a sloughed snake skin

a load
on her head
always a load

the bullock stumbles

falls on its knees in the stones

wearily she hands
the load from head to earth
hacks at the animal's flank
with a claw of a foot
the great creature labours to its feet
foaming at the mouth

a vision of a drunk crawling up stairs
arrives from another world.

**REFLECTION**

In this poem Michael Wessels creates an almost nightmarish world of human and animal suffering. As articulated in Michael's own research and teaching, his poem testifies to a connectivity of the humana and the animal worlds. The woman in the poem is as borne down by the load on her head as the bullock is by the load he is pulling. And notice how the woman actually 'hands' her load over to the earth ('wearlily she hands / the load from head to earth'). The earth too is sharing in – made a participant in – this awful weight carried by everyone in the poem. And what is this weight? It is both literal and figurative. In Buddhist tradtion it is the load of suffering borne by all in the world. This tradition was known intimately by Michael from his many and long pilgrimages through India and Tibet, and his time spent meditating in caves in the Drakensberg in KwaZulu-Natal, where he encountered the San rock paintings that formed so much of his professioanl research and personal passion. And how to break free of this cycle of suffering? This cycle that sees the man travelling on top of the cart, while his wife walks behind carrying her own load. This cycle that sees the woman visiting her own pain and weariness upon the bullock, who can only foam at the mouth in response. And, then, this strange otherworldly image that visits the author in the last two lines, the 'vision of a drunk crawling up stairs'. What do we make of this? Are we drunkenly crawling toward a future? In the tradition from whence this poems comes, it seems that only compassion for the earth and compassion for the bullock and for the woman and the man, can release us from the load on our heads.

(Kobus Moolman)

**PUBLICATIONS**

*Bushman Letters*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press. 2010.
K. Tomaselli and M. Wessels (eds). *San Representation: Politics, Practice and Possibilities*. London: Routledge. 2015.

PERFORMANCE POEM:

‘LIBERTY’

## ‘Liberty’

### *In memory of Michael Wessels*

Akuhlanga lungehlanga
        it has not fallen
                before it has fallen

        Liberty
        it’s a revolution
a freedom song
        loud and carefree

Free will
        a small house with
                small windows
a homecoming to
        feasting devils
                decoration for a white
        and silver coffin

Imagination
        the trick
                is not to mind

The mind
        a cow held captive
                uyinkomo esesitrobheni

Follow the drinking gourd
        the northern stars
                to a mountain that
        sinks into the sea
                an ocean rising above it

* * *

Voëlvry
meaning free
as a bird
free as an outcast
a fugitive
meaning
without borders
meaning
without meaning

Freedom is a jealous child
a mumbled prayer
for the dying
a nightmare dream of falling
to the abyss
its fleeting images
of night

A twisted smile
an untouchable gift
an uneaten fruit
red-faced, spittle-spraying
anger, an angel faithful
to your deliverance
a dizzy figure skater
in the fortune teller's
clouded mirror

* * *

Indlovu ayisindwa ngumboko wayo
an elephant is not burdened
by its own trunk

Amatsha ntliziyo ngawo ahleliyo
truth sets you free

Sweet release!

Truth is that knife slipping
across your fingertips
a rubik's cube
a squawking guineafowl
dodging traffic
a dream incinerated

A prayer for
the children
an ocean the size
of a raindrop
in freefall
free as vapour
free as air
or breath

* * *

A mythical bird
in an old baobab
forever young

A monster
misunderstood
a monstrous
misunderstanding

Mind forged manacles
mental freedom

Break down the walls!

Reclaim the streets!

Spring to the mountains!

ukuntingela entabeni!
ukuntingela entabeni!

* * *

A life without freedom
is a body
without a soul

Akuhlanga lungehlanga
it has not fallen before
it has fallen
that window
on darkness
that mirror
of disparity

* * *

Vryheid!
Vryheid!
Vryheid!

Freedom is trying
to pronounce
itself
to say itself
speaking in the tongues
of liberty
of nakedness
Inkululeko

* * *

Free speech

is the key
to jail cell doors
a white lie exposing
subtle truth
without shadow
without reflection
a constant nightmare
a fading dream

Inkululeko
freedom is a naked
fugitive
unchained

* * *

Voëlvry
a bird
untethered

Ukhululekile
a falcon
set free

Wathinta abafazi
you strike a woman

wathinta imbokodo
you strike a rock

Voestek!

* * *

Ukugqabadula
is to gallop away
to flee to freedom

Limping, wounded
pale as death
at the shining hour
the unnavigable river
flowing through boulders
a dance
with unknown steps.

Ibalek'u moya
free as wind
as air
as breath

An angel with black wings
a weeping willow
a circus dream
loud and carefree
a feral creature

I'd rather die
on my feet
than live as a secret
than live
on my knees

* * *

Ibalek'u moya
free as wind in
a hawk's wings

Voëlvry
a fugitive
on the loose
a dream bird

Akuhlanga lungehlanga
it has not fallen
before it has fallen
though it will always fall
that window on darkness
that mirror of disparity

Akuhlanga lungehlanga
Akuhlanga lungehlanga

## The Making of 'Liberty'

The performance poem 'Liberty' took shape over a period of several weeks through a dedicated workshop held in the English Department at UWC. We began by looking at forms of political rhetoric, gradually progressing to a series of writing prompts, then an exploration of the word 'liberty' and its associations in English, Xhosa and Afrikaans. A workshop exploring metaphor added new layers of poetic response to this 'raw material' which was transferred to slips of paper to enable table-top assembly and editing.

Each section of the poem was assembled by a separate team of participants, then brought together and the sections ordered until the whole text was extant. That text was then fixed by gluing it to sheets of paper and the poem typed out to undergo further editing and refinement.

Workshop member, Delia Meyer, then led a final performance workshop. In preparation, the text of the poem was marked up with expression marks and distributed between multiple voices, like a script or musical score. Rehearsals developed the poem further through some improvised elements and a final version of the poem was performed and recorded. Just as there were many possible ways to assemble the original raw material into poetic form, so there were many possibilities for this choral treatment. We wanted to preserve a sense of spontaneity in our approach, so the rehearsal and performance of the poem were achieved in just an hour.

*I'm indebted to the enthusiastic participation of Pozisa Zinja, Delia Meyer, Lisa Julie, Sindiwe Magona, Martha Qumbe Kerry Hammerton, Tyhlor Talliard, Kennan Pedro, Sarah Jane Seale and Michael Wessells.*

Graham Mort