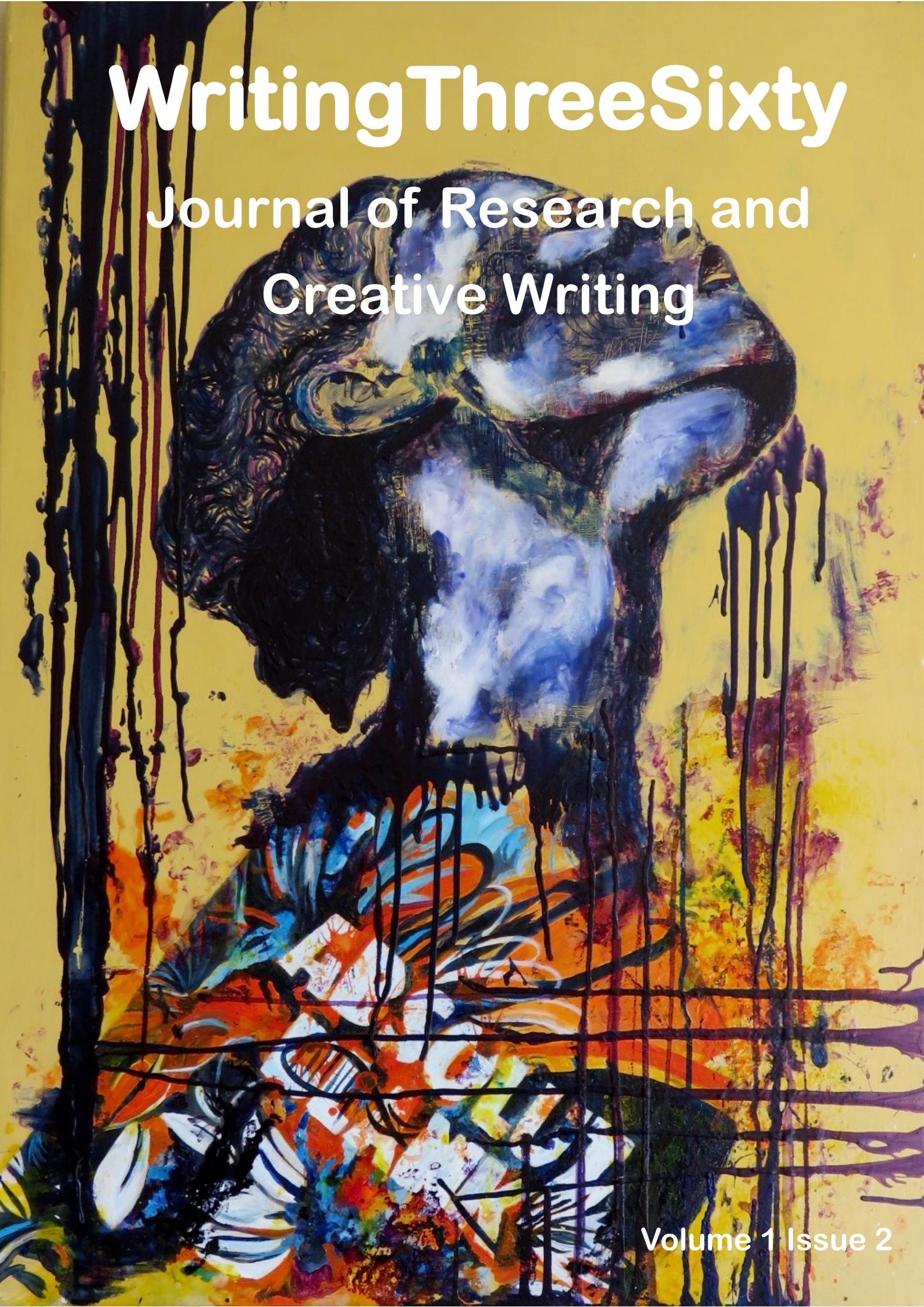
WritingThreeSixty

Journal of Research and Creative Writing



Volume 1 Issue 2

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Letter from the Editorial Board

Welcome to the second issue of *WritingThreeSixty*.

WritingThreeSixty is a bi-annual, multi/ inter/ trans-interdisciplinary journal which includes creative writing and is edited by graduate students in the Arts Faculty of the University of the Western Cape. The journal aims to provide a platform for emerging scholars and creative writers. We welcome submissions from authors across the Arts and Humanities.

The journal is a forum for research essays, book reviews, poetry and short fiction. As a professional publication, it is dedicated to providing a forum for academics and writers to engage about the history and future of critical research and creative writing.

Since its inception, *WritingThreeSixty* has provided graduate students with the opportunity to manage and run an online academic journal, gain practical editorial experience in the field of academic publishing, and contribute to the research outputs of students, alumni and emerging scholars and writers, affiliated or unaffiliated with UWC.

Second Issue

This issue features research submissions, poetry and short stories. Also included in this issue are exciting interviews with two esteemed poets, Professor Antjie Krog and James Matthews. Our Book Review page is set alight by *Africa Ablaze!*

WritingThreeSixty attended a number of literary events this year, some of which have been featured on our Articles page published to our online site https://uwcjournal.wordpress.com/ These include four articles about the 2015 Franschhoek Literary Festival. The launch of *The Fetch,* the latest offering by poet and author, Finuala Dowling. The inaugural event of the Friends of the Library (FOTL) which coincided with World Book Day.

Note of thanks

We would like to thank Deshal Pema for providing us with her painting titled *Alter Ego* which we have featured on our cover and Dercio for providing us with his photograph titled *The Secret Place* as seen on page 59. A special thanks to our copy editor, Rhonda Crouse, Dr Mark Espin and Dr Fiona Moolla. Finally, our sincere appreciation and thanks to the contributors for their submissions and the peer reviewers for their time and effort.

Sincerely,

The Editorial Board

28 August 2015

Second issue layout and design by the Editorial Board

Fractured Selves and Fragmented Realities:
Trauma, Repression and Modes of Healing in
Rachel Zadok's *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*

Abstract

In South Africa, there has long been a difficulty in addressing trauma, particularly in a manner which accounts for both western and traditional forms of healing. This article examines Rachel Zadok's *Gem Squash Tokoloshe*, an engaging narrative which has not received a wealth of academic criticism, and explores the lasting effects of childhood trauma. Drawing on the findings of Melanie Klein's childhood studies as a means to interpret protagonist Faith's behaviour, which occasionally borders on the schizophrenic, I attempt to provide a viable paradigm for delineating traditional African healing within western clinical terminology. In understanding the role that traditional healers play in South Africa, I draw on Gavin Ivey and Tertia Myers's study, "The Psychology of Bewitchment". In their study, Ivey and Myers make extensive use of the Kleinian psychoanalytical model to interpret a more traditional African belief and integrate its manifestations within a western therapeutic understanding. Although the two models appear to be divergent, the integration of two different schools of thought that nevertheless reveal an epistemological congruity in treating ideas as things allows psychotherapists to manage a broad spectrum of patients.

Key words: trauma, narrative, traditional healing, repression

Fantasy and the dialectic of memory and forgetting

Gem Squash Tokoloshe (GST), says Rachel Zadok, is "a book about belief, and how a child's parents, her society and her schooling all mould her reality and the way she views her world" (quoted in Russouw 3). Seven-year-old Faith's major belief structure centres on the fairies that her mother, Bella, insists are real. "They lived on the peripheries of my vision," Faith tells the reader, "well hidden from my curious eyes, but I knew they were there. Mother was forever warning me about the dangers of bad fairies" (*GST* 7). Understanding the imaginative construction of these fairies, the role they play in both Bella and Faith's lives, and the results of this psychic experience on the developing child requires careful analytic work. Drawing on the theoretical work of psychoanalyst Melanie Klein proves illuminating in analysing the fantasy construct of the fairies and the manner in which mother and daughter use the fairies as a receptacle for traumatic experiences, while a general engagement with trauma theory aids in better understanding Faith's character as well as the novel's narrative structure. I conclude with speculation on the similarities between Klein's clinical approach to trauma, one which is based the western Cartesian split of body and mind as separate, and the holistic practices in traditional African medicine, which treats body and mind as a single entity.

The first half of the novel, set in 1985, is told in first-person past tense, while the second half follows after a fifteen year gap, and is told in first-person present tense. The implication of this is that the first part of the novel is told chronologically with minimal retrospective comment, while the latter half is rooted in the world of the now grown-up Faith as she attempts to process her childhood memories, still haunted by the events of one particular night, a night of which she has no memory. Growing up, the young Faith witnesses the disintegration of her parent's marriage. One morning, Faith finds that her father left during the night. Bella spirals into a state of depression, seemingly disappearing into the imaginary world of the fairies. Slowly, Faith's once happy life on the farm begins to disintegrate. Bella's instability as a mother has already been intimated earlier in the text when Faith comments that: "Some days a strangeness would take hold of her, and she would disappear into the orchard for hours, leaving me alone on the farm" (*GST* 8). Slowly, Bella becomes more and more distant from her daughter, forgetting to feed or care for herself and Faith. Bella's depression reaches the point where Faith comments: "It was like Mother had gone to bed the night Papa left and never properly woken up" (*GST* 61)

Already feeling alienated from her mother, Faith is shocked when, on her seventh birthday, Bella abandons her at the Roadhouse. Fortunately, Marius, who appears to have remarried and is dining with his new wife, stumbles upon his daughter for the first time in months. Marius takes Faith home, only to find Bella wielding a gun. Marius is furious when she fires a shot into the dark, nearly killing Faith. Their fight escalates to the point where Bella hits Marius with a spanner, and he retaliates by punching her in the face, and then leaves once more. Unknown to them, Faith is observing their altercation. Naturally, Faith finds this event deeply unsettling and, for a moment, believes that her mother may be dead: "Mother's broken face bobbed between the dots and I slid downwards. Everything went black. I struggled to breathe; it felt like there was a heavy weight on my chest" (*GST* 53).

During this time, a neighbour hires Nomsa to help Bella with the housework on the farm, and Nomsa soon becomes a maternal figure to Faith. One night, Nomsa is murdered, but the details appear to be completely absent from Faith's consciousness. This traumatic event is not only shown to be central to Faith's loss of worldly attachment, but also mirrored, structurally, by Zadok's text. Faith blacks out, briefly apprehends that something has happened to Nomsa, and then the gap in chronological continuity is indicated by the narrative leaping forward fifteen years, creating a gap in the epistemological continuity. When the second part of the novel picks up, Faith has been living with family friends, Molly and Mia. The reader has to piece together that Bella was incarcerated for Nomsa's murder and has recently died.

This peculiar gap in temporality can be more fully understood with reference to Anne Whitehead's discussion of the intersection of trauma and fiction. Whitehead suggests that "[n]ovelists have frequently found that the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterised by repetition and indirection" (3). This resonates with Cathy Caruth's assertion that trauma "is a break in the mind's experience of time" (61). What characterises trauma, she suggests, is the manner of its belatedness, how it is only truly

experienced after the fact. In respect of Faith, this is evident in the inaccessibility of those traumatic memories. Faith is "plagued by violent nightmares, nightmares that left [her] feeling terrified yet unable to remember anything about them" (*GST* 181). Despite Nomsa's death being one of the defining moments of her life, Faith finds that she is unable to recall anything at all about that event.

Framing the two parts of the novel are a prologue, "The Soul Stealer", and an epilogue, "The Baby Snatcher". These two extracts are written in a broken language, supposedly spoken by Dead Rex, whom Faith calls "the worst of them" (*GST* 10), referring to the fairies. The three pages of prologue essentially reveal the traumatic event which remains missing from Faith's conscious memory, while the epilogue stands to inform the reader of Faith's role in Nomsa's death.

The prologue establishes that an evil presence is woken by "a hunger in his guts" (*GST* 1). The presence then actively shapes events, by calling out for Faith, whom he calls "mosetsana", because "she be still pure, blank canvas, torment not yet painted on her soul" (*GST* 2), and leading her to the scene of a horrific event. Dead Rex revels in the reaction, as he "feel mosetsana panic, feel mosetsana pain, feel fear, feel confusion. Her soul scream what her body hold frozen" (*ibid*). The culmination of the prologue is Dead Rex, in a bid to cause further pain, telling the young girl: "He be hurting her … Hurt him back" (*ibid*). In the epilogue, we are told that, after leading Faith to Nomsa's room, Dead Rex is able to "Taste the burnt sulphur of gunpowder on her hand. Taste the fear in her heart and the scream of her soul when she realize that it be not easy to shoot straight. Guns have life all of their own" (*GST* 328).

What the reader finally learns is that, on the night of Nomsa's death, she was raped by Bella's prospective suitor, Oom Piet, before being shot by Faith, who we imagine must have been aiming for Piet. Bella, realising that her daughter pulled the trigger, allows herself to be arrested for the murder.

Traumatic rupture of the self

In his clinical studies, Bessel van der Kolk explored the implication that separation anxiety can have on a young child. Psychological trauma, he suggests, originates from the subject's fear that there is neither order nor a form of continuity in his or her life (31). Van der Kolk further elucidates this by saying that trauma occurs primarily when an individual feels that he or she is unable to process memories or experiences, which leaves him or her feeling that their actions are meaningless (*ibid*). This is seen in the manner that Faith slowly begins to lose her sense of continuity. One loss after another finally results in Faith losing not only her childhood, but also her ability to feel safe or secure. The adult Faith is plagued by nightmares of these repressed memories, and asserts that her inability to remember what happened that night is more frightening than the truth. Her inability to remember her past has deeply compromised her ability to conceive of a future. Immobilised by trauma, Faith frequently asserts that she is a spectator to her own life, making it impossible to embody her own existence or selfhood.

Mieke Bal defines selfhood as "relational, based in language and culture, and dependent on others for its constitution and sustenance" (Editor's note xii). The self, then, is contingent on relationships with others. What begins as a biological function, attachment to a maternal or paternal figure, becomes crucial to how children navigate their experiences in the world, and establish not only a sense of self, but also a sense of how their community is structured. Faith's sense of self is constantly reconstituted in relation to her parents or caregivers. According to Van der Kolk, losing a sense of parental security can be incredibly psychologically damaging, and should a parent become a source of danger, this will have a lasting effect on a child (32).

This understanding of the child's selfhood as relational is fundamental to Melanie Klein's theories of infant ego development. Explicating Klein, Julia Segal explains that the child views his or her "mother and the other people around him through 'fantasies' which [are] constructed from external reality modified by his own feelings and existing beliefs and knowledge" (28), and maintains that "children relate to the whole world through their unconscious fantasies. Nothing is seen simply as it is: some kind of unconscious fantasy is attached to every perception: structuring, colouring and adding significance to it" (29). The actual behaviour of the parents then reinforces or disrupts these fantasies. Van der Kolk's argument is supported, then, by Klein's view that a parent's behaviour will have long-term effects on their child.

Within the novel, these long-term effects are visible in Zadok's protagonist, who is deeply disturbed by the events of her childhood. Clearly, witnessing spousal violence, experiencing abandonment by her father, and then watching her mother's psychological breakdown, result in Faith seeing her parents as dangerous, something which deeply fractures her ability to relate to other people as well as to herself. She says: "What I knew of bad things in life, I knew from [my mother]. All the stories she'd ever told me about the bad things … she now seemed capable of herself" (*GST* 98).

The fairy-sick mother and the child of the fairies

With no knowledge of her father's whereabouts, and Bella having retreated into her bedroom, an opening is created for Faith to establish a relationship with a new caregiver. In such situations, where the primary caregiver is rendered invalid by illness or other factors, a child's need for psychological security increases exponentially (Van der Kolk 32). For Faith, being separated from her mother leads to feelings of severe isolation and discontinuity. It is at this point that Nomsa enters the narrative. With these rapid changes and disappearances in her life, it is Nomsa who, in Faith's eyes, becomes "the only solid thing in the world" (*GST* 109). Fearing her mother's "illness", Faith turns to Nomsa as the only person able to provide the stability and safety that childhood should include, the type of nurturing which Bella has been increasingly unable to provide.

On their first meeting, Nomsa already shakes one of the foundations upon which Faith has based her reality: the fairies. Faith is shocked when Nomsa laughs at Bella's malevolent creations. Instead, Nomsa

offers a trade: "I also know of someone special who brings rain. If you tell me about your fairy I will tell you about my queen" (*GST* 74). Nomsa, therefore, provides Faith with an alternative belief structure and way viewing the world. Not only is she capable of providing the nurturing that Faith is lacking, but her cultural myths also appear less menacing. Moreover, the myths Nomsa is willing to impart are not based on secrecy and deception like Bella's fairies. Rather, Nomsa offers to tell Faith stories about whomever it is that brings the rain, implying a figure who is imbued with the values of renewal, growth and nurturance. Bella, naturally, feels threatened by Nomsa's appearance, telling Faith: "That woman doesn't belong here … She'll make the fairies leave … I don't want us to be alone, Faith" (*GST* 75-6). As Faith grows more attached to Nomsa, Bella retreats into herself. Eventually, Faith declares: "I decided that I would no longer love Mother. I would never again care what happened to her" (*GST* 103).

At this stage in the narrative, however, Faith's understanding of the world does not allow for anyone else's trauma to be explained. She will only begin to comprehend what life was like for her mother when she returns to the farm, fifteen years later. Only as an adult, and in a bid to understand what happened to her as a child, will Faith be able to relate to her mother and what she must have gone through. Caruth's comment on the shared nature of trauma seems apt here:

> not as the story of the individual in relation to the events of his own past, but as the story of the way in which one's trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which one's trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound. (8)

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Although the causes of Bella's psychological breakdown are not fully explored in the first half of the novel, her belief in the fairies can be read as an initial attempt to voice her inner turmoil. In an article entitled "Young People's Mental Health: The Spiritual Power of Fairy Stories, Myths and Legends", Steven Walker argues that, within western mythology, fairies typically have healing abilities and act as medium of communication between humans and the natural world (83). Walker posits that "mental health practitioners can utilise such powerful narratives therapeutically and in a culturally respectful and spiritually innovative way" (81). While his article focuses on the uses of fairy tales in therapy with adolescents, it is not entirely implausible that Bella's paintings and stories are an attempt to exorcise her own personal demons and to re-establish some sort of control over her life. One may argue, then, that Bella's use of the fairy world is her

means of establishing her own narrative of a life fraught with difficulty. Faith, however, becomes convinced that Dead Rex has stolen her mother's soul, and she begins to refer to Bella as "the fairy-sick Mother" (*GST* 127). Steven Krugman argues that in such situations, a vulnerable child protects itself "by splitting the image of the abusive parent into 'good' and 'bad' parts" (134).

This process of splitting is typical of Klein's paranoid-schizoid position, during which the infant learns to distinguish between love and cruelty. Segal explains:

> Splitting is an action undertaken in phantasy which can be used to separate things which belong together. A father or a mother, for example, can be seen in two distinct ways: as, on the one hand, a weak, kind loving person and, on the other, as powerful, undermining and dangerous, each view 'cut out' from a more whole one. The two perceptions may never be recognised as relating to the same person. (34)

Within the novel, this phenomenon is clearly evident when Faith begins to see her mother as two distinct beings, the "fairy-sick mother" and the mother with the capacity to love. There is, however, a danger when splitting occurs. Segal explains: "When one set of perceptions and fantasies is kept apart from another, the child (or adult) splits not only the object but also him or herself" (34). At times, splitting is quite visible in Faith, both in her vacillating feelings toward her mother, and later through her identification with the fairies. The fairies, however, complicate the relationship between Bella and Faith. At one point, Bella says to her daughter: "I see them, Faith, the other world, the real one. It's perfect there, no one will bother us … I belong there, Faith, you belong there, with me, with us" (*GST* 100). At the height of her psychological breakdown, the fairies become entirely real to Bella, with their world seeming more real than her current existence. This is further compounded by Bella suggesting that Marius has not really abandoned his family, but is actually waiting for Bella and Faith to leave the farm, and join him in the fairy world. Faith, on the other hand, finds this idea terrifying and believes her mother is transforming:

> The way her eyes sank into their sockets yet glowed a brighter blue than they'd ever been. The way she walked, the strange shuffle like she never lifted her feet suddenly erupting into what seemed like flight … Mother was becoming one of them, crossing over into the realm of the fairies. Hadn't she said they were coming to get us? (*GST* 98-9)

Initially, Bella's paintings of the fairies may have been her own lifelong attempt to cast out her own psychological problems and give herself a sense of agency. However, as Walker notes, fairies "can also, when used as metaphor, frighten children and potentially cause psychological harm" (83). This can be seen in Bella's increasing inability to function, leading Faith to believe that fairies are "closing in on the house, surrounding us until there was no escape" (*GST* 79). The more unstable Bella becomes, the more Faith fears her mother and, as a consequence, the fairies become even more menacing.

When Faith begins to believe that the fairies are making Bella ill, she unconsciously splits negative experiences and projects them onto the fairies, bringing her own fears to life. Commenting on Klein's work, Segal provides insight on such projections:

> Klein thought that the importance of parents' actual behaviour lay in the way it was taken by the child as confirmation or disproof of existing phantasies. Parents added new elements to the children's phantasy worlds but generally these tended to reduce the terrifying aspect of the child's phantasies: however well or badly the parents behaved, reality was less monstrous than the child's phantasies. (29)

This argument would suggest that Faith uses the fairies to establish a fantasy in which they are responsible for Bella's illness. The reasoning for this is most likely two-fold. Firstly, the fantasy allows Faith to avoid the role that the abusive marriage has played in Bella's depression, and secondly, Faith is able to blame a third party for the neglect she experiences at the hands of her mother. Thirdly, the nightmarish quality of Faith's fantasies is more monstrous than reality, allowing Faith moments of respite in which she sees Bella as her mother once more.

Bella's descent into madness terrifies Faith for two reasons. Firstly, with her father's physical absence and her mother's psychical absence, Faith's ability to discern an identity based on parental figures is entirely dismantled, and she loses what self-knowledge and ability she has to navigate the world. Secondly, Faith fears becoming like her mother. While the accidental shooting of Nomsa is the central traumatic event of the novel, the inability to recognise Bella as the woman Faith once knew as her mother is itself traumatic. Even after Bella is incarcerated, Faith still believes in the fairies and starts telling Molly the stories about the fairies, embellishing the stories that Bella once told her. It is apparent here that the fairies are not only Bella's creation. In fact, similar to the transmission of trauma, it would appear that tales of the fairies can also be passed on. Simply put, Faith's wholehearted beliefs become her reality.

> Reading Faith's relationship with the fairies through a Kleinian lens, one could argue that Faith has established a mode of projective identification with the fairies. Michael Feldman explains "projective identification" as a process whereby the infant projects (primarily) harmful contents onto his object (for example, into his mother) … In so far as the mother then comes to contain the bad parts of the self, she is not only felt to be bad, as a separate individual, but is *identified* with the bad, unwanted parts of the self. (75)

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While the mother is usually the target of this process, in this case Faith has extended the projective identification to include the fairies. Having posited the fairies as evil, Faith is deeply disturbed when her mother tells her: "you're a child of the fairies … I think the day I conceived, the fairies came and put you inside me. I used to wonder about that; your father wasn't even there, I think" (*GST* 129). Confusing her daughter's sense of belonging is enough to evoke a physical reaction, which is why Faith's response is again somatic: "I ran outside and threw up" (*ibid*). Hearing this from Bella also deeply disturbs Faith's sense of self. Removing Marius entirely as a paternal figure fragments Faith's identity, as if effectively re-writing her history.

Not willing to believe her mother about the manner of her conception, Faith begins to examine her face in a compact mirror and to compare it to Bella's painting of Dead Rex. She comments that "there was something about the way he looked at me, something in the expression, that seemed to me to be the same eye looking out from the compact" (*GST* 132-3). This initial physical similarity begins to rupture Faith's sense of self, and she searches the painting for more comparisons:

> There was a knob that stuck out on my wrist – everyone had it, I knew, but mine had always protruded more than other people's … I held my hand up and looked at his hand … *There, in the painting, were the same long fingers, the same knuckles, the same knobbly wristbone. Even the tiny freckle between the knuckle on my little finger and my ring finger was mimicked on his hand, on the hand of the most terrible fairy.* I backed away slowly, not willing to believe what my eyes were telling me. *My whole life was a lie. I wasn't even a person like other people were.* I was something else, a Halfling, a changeling. I knew from the fairy stories Mother read to me that people hated Halflings, left them in the woods to die. That was probably why Papa had left, because he knew and he hated me. (*GST* 133. My emphasis)

Although Bella has created these paintings, and based a certain likeness of them on her daughter, it is Faith's own process of splitting and projective identification that leads to the epistemological confusion. Despite having previously projected unwanted evils onto the fairies, Faith begins to struggle with separating the image she sees in the mirror from the painting of Dead Rex. Her fears of her father leaving are reinforced by the conviction that she must be a "Halfling", or something vile and unnatural, some kind of ruptured, half thing. It would then appear logical that Faith's first experiences of splitting arise from feeling un-homed in her body, and that this is a result of her wish to purge the undesirable from herself.

The primary danger of splitting lies in the fact that, through the process of splitting off and then projecting the part of one's self that the subject finds unbearable, the subject ultimately diminishes his or her own abilities and creates an object which is unbearable (Caper 139). In due course, the object becomes a receptacle for the purgation of these unbearable elements, but this is to the detriment of the individual's future, as this ultimately leads to a severe state of repression and an inability to face the world. Slowly, it becomes apparent that the fairies could represent those parts of herself that Faith finds unbearable. The fairies

begin to house the qualities that Faith most mistrusts in herself, and she soon finds them an easy targetof blame. When she thinks she may be accused of eavesdropping, Faith says: "I could blame one of the fairies" (*GST* 64), and later, after hurling a compact mirror at the painting of Dead Rex and having it ricochet and hit her on the head, she comments: "I blamed him anyway, feeling sure he had somehow been responsible for making the compact bounce" (*GST* 136).

The ease with which Faith places blame upon the fairies changes the manner in which we read the prologue. Only towards the end of the novel does Faith begin to remember the night of Nomsa's death. The prologue, however, is told from Dead Rex's perspective. Dead Rex, we are told, rouses Faith and leads her to Nomsa's room, commanding her: "He be hurting her … Hurt him back" (*GST* 3). The implication of this is somewhat distressing

Dead Rex, in a bid to cause more pain, has brought Faith to the site of Nomsa's rape, and he is the one who wills her to fire the gun. Faith's belief in the fairies is worrying here, because she is not the one to blame if Dead Rex tricked her into shooting Nomsa. Disassociating her actions from herself and projecting them onto Dead Rex appears to grant her an easy form of absolution in an unconscious attempt to escape trauma and guilt.

Repression, spirit possession and a return to the farm

Faith's repression, then, seems to shield her from memories that she cannot face. The fifteen years of her life that Faith spends in Johannesburg are mostly devoid of any form of meaningful existence, until she hears news of Bella's death, and the memories and nightmares come flooding back. Despite her repeated vows to despise her mother, Faith is still shocked to hear of her death, re-experiencing the loss of her mother as she did when she was a child. Faith comments that "the dreams are like ghosts, tantalizing images that slip away before I have time to fully grasp them … Perhaps Mother's causing them from the grave, unwilling to be forgotten and left to rot. The thoughts chill me" (*GST* 187).

Shortly after Bella's death, Faith encounters Elizabeth Mabutu, a self-proclaimed herbalist and healer, who offers to pray for her. Their meeting is a chance encounter on the street, but the older woman instantly makes Faith wary by telling her: "there is bad inside you … bad things have happened and need to come out" (*GST* 191). Unlike when she was a child, Faith regards this mystical encounter with cynicism and apprehension. While the fairies initially offered a world of magic and possibility, Mrs Mabutu's abilities are highly doubted by Faith. Despite what may be the scepticism of adulthood, the words that follow terrify Faith with their injunction to: "Go home" (*ibid*). The fact that her body responds first, signals the suggestion that Mrs Mabutu has reached something deeply repressed within Faith's unconscious.

It is, therefore, unsurprising that, shortly after this, Faith finds her "thoughts fragmented, sliding around [her] mind, intangible, momentary, briefly incandescent", and even believes that she hears Dead Rex calling out to her (*GST* 201). The implication is that Faith is beginning to recall some of the events sur-

rounding Nomsa's death, but cannot clearly place them. What appears possible is that, similar to the psychical process of splitting, Faith has managed to create a separation of physical spaces in an attempt to repress her memories. The split landscapes of farm and city stand as a metonym for the split in Faith's psyche, which requires reintegration. In fact, the entire novel is populated by physical separations that mirror Faith's unconscious feelings of disjuncture. As a child, there is a distance on the farm between the safety of the house and the danger of the orchard, representing the interior and exterior dangers in Faith's world, while the separation of Marius and Bella forces Faith to split her parents into good and bad qualities, much as she later finds herself doing with Bella and Nomsa. Even on a structural level, the novel is split in half by a large temporal gap.

Despite the vast divide in cultural identification, Mrs Mabutu is clearly able to connect with Faith's situation, and finally convinces her that the nightmares will not stop until she re-establishes connections with her ancestors. This, of course, is not something Faith is able to do until she returns to the farm. Arriving at the farm, Faith is amazed at the results: "even as my tired body groans with each uneven step, my soul sighs with relief" (*GST* 253). Within days, she begins to have more frequent dreams about the night of Nomsa's death, but Faith is still unable to separate dream from reality. It takes an encounter with Oom Piet to jog enough of Faith's memory to finally recall the events of that night. Piet is clearly concerned about Faith's reasons for returning, and he pushes her for details, eventually trying to see if she can recall any of the details surrounding the night of Nomsa's death. "You didn't hear something, wake up in the night?" he asks (*GST* 303). At first Faith only recalls witnessing him rape Nomsa, and is outraged that her mother protected him by taking the blame. But she realises the truth when Piet remarks: "She didn't protect me, girlie, she protected you" (*GST* 316). Faith comments that his words "reach into the core of me and rip me apart, things I don't want to believe but I can feel, in the soul of me, are true" (*ibid*).

Having recovered her memories of that night, Faith becomes even more ill than she was in Johannesburg. As the days blend into one another, Faith finds herself unable "to tell the difference between sleep and waking", and constantly hears voices whispering "Killer" (*GST* 319). The fairies re-emerge to haunt Faith, although none frequents her as often as Dead Rex, who attempts to consume Faith and draw her into the fairy world – possibly allowing Faith to understand how Bella experienced her depression. When she was a child, Dead Rex terrified Faith, but now his presence threatens to destroy her entirely, as her body literally begins to waste away. Eventually a sangoma is called, and his prognosis mirrors that of Mrs Mabutu: "There is a thing inside her, a thing that has been there for many years, maybe since she was a small girl. It grows. She will not let it go; for some reason she wants to hold it inside her, even though it will destroy her. If we are to help her, we need to get it out" (*GST* 321-2).

Faith makes extensive use of splitting and projective identification in her relationship with the fairies, which gives Dead Rex the agency to consume her now. These psychological phenomena are responsible for diminishing an individual's capacity to function as a fully actualised subject, suggesting that Faith's relationship with the fairies plays a large part in what plagues her now. Ivey and Myers suggest that

"frustrating interactions with caregivers, coloured too by the infant's projection of aggressive instinctual impulses onto them, result in the internalisation of 'bad' objects" (79). These bad objects are then split off and evacuated through fantasy, such as Faith's construction of the fairy world, in an attempt to preserve good internal objects. However, as Ivey and Myers note:

> In some cases, our internal world is felt to be, intermittently or constantly, a war-like space in which our good internal objects are perpetually threatened by invading bad objects and parts of self identified with these objects. In this situation, primitive defences based on the splitting off and projective evacuation of bad objects impoverish the internal world and lead to the perception of the external world as malevolent and persecutory. (*ibid*)

After their initial encounter, Mrs Mabutu arrives at the house that Faith shares with Molly and Mia with the simple explanation: "The child sought me out" (*GST* 229). She continues:

> Her spirit is restless, she has buried it for too long in darkness. There are many restless spirits around you, child … Some are ancestors, but there are others. Some very bad. Your mother collected these spirits around her, they brought sickness to your house … Your ancestors have spoken through me to try to help you … I, though, cannot afford to ignore the ancestors, so I tell you this one final thing. Go home. It is only at your home that you will free your spirit. (*GST* 230)

Mrs Mabutu makes it clear to Faith that Bella courted malevolent spirits, and that these have brought sickness upon her. Her last words to Faith reiterate this: "If you don't return home to free your spirit, you will get sick. You already are" (*GST* 231). In African traditions, suggests Suzanne Maiello, "[i]llness is not split into either physical or mental suffering. Body and mind are a unit … Consequently, the approach of traditional healers to illness is holistic and includes the biological, psychological, social and spiritual dimensions" (248). While a more western clinical approach concerns itself with the split world view that emanates from Cartesian thinking, an approach which treats body and mind as separate entities, traditional African healing is concerned with a holistic world view, treating body and mind as one, as well as maintaining connections with ancestral figures. Locating the human at the interface of different aspects of being, this view makes psychological reintegration possible in ways that are very different from the typical conception of clinical healing, which tends to the cognitive-behaviourist on the one hand and pharmacology on the other. In understanding the role that traditional healers play in South Africa, I draw on Gavin Ivey and Tertia Myers's study "The Psychology of Bewitchment". They define bewitchment as:

> a culturally sanctioned supernatural belief system used defensively by individuals to protect themselves against acknowledging and experiencing a range of painful and anxiety-provoking feelings, typically involving hostility, envy, and loss. Bewitchment arises when individuals split off and project problematic self aspects elicited by adverse or stressful experiences. (75)

In their study, Ivey and Myers make extensive use of the Kleinian psychoanalytical model to interpret a more traditional African belief and integrate its manifestations within a western therapeutic understanding. Although the two models appear to be divergent, the integration of two different schools of thought that nevertheless reveal an epistemological congruity in treating ideas as things allows psychotherapists to manage a broad spectrum of patients. According to Mrs Mabutu, then, Faith is experiencing an illness

which, although spiritual in nature, is inseparable from her body. Maiello argues that "[b]reaking the relation with the ancestors brings about illness, just as massive splitting, projective identification and 'attacks on linking' lead to severe psychopathological symptoms" (255).

Given Faith's experience of such a "war-like space", it is not surprising that traditional healers view these symptoms as bewitchment or illness. Bewitchment is "characterised by a preoccupation with destructive events occurring inside one's body … Victims frequently report feeling that they are being attacked from within" (Ivey and Myers 80). These feelings of being attacked are clearly present in Faith. The fairies, who have not bothered Faith for years, make an unwelcome return. Faith experiences this as an attack from within, but the manifestations clearly affect her whole body, and she feels like the fairies are "clawing [her], trying to rip [her] into small pieces to be devoured and regurgitated" (*GST* 320-1).

Over a period of three nights, the traditional healer stays in a hut with Faith, trying to draw the malevolent presence out of her body. During the first night, the healer spreads tar on Faith's stomach, which slowly sinks into her. The second night, Faith undergoes a transformation: her mind is compared to a pupating worm – the hard shell around her falls away and she feels reborn after the sangoma appears to plunge his hands into her abdomen and extract the bad object. This transformation is possible only after the evil within Faith has been removed. Within the discourse of traditional African healing, these bad spirits have been contained and banished from her body. While a Kleinian perspective of splitting would seem to perpetuate the process of separating elements of the psyche, it is only when Faith allows herself to be entirely consumed that she is reborn. As she surrenders herself to the protection of the traditional healer, he is able to contain fully that which bewitches her and extracts it from her body. Finally, after the bad object is removed from her body, Faith awakens on the third night to find the fairies absent: "They're gone, for the first time I can remember they are not there and I'm alone. I'm an empty shell, hollow and vacant, yet somehow I feel free" (*ibid*). In her own experience with traditional healers, Maiello reflects that "the sangoma's function seemed to be to re-establish channels of communication between the internal and the external world at deep unconscious levels" (246). For Faith, then, this encounter dispossesses her of the presences that pervaded her daily existence, reintegrating balance between her "good" and "bad" objects.

Ivey and Myers conclude that "the bewitched person is … operating from the paranoid-schizoid position, which makes it difficult to acknowledge and own one's hostile feelings, to evaluate interpersonal situations clearly, and to distinguish between reality and fantasy" (82). An individual in the paranoid-schizoid position, then, has difficulty negotiating the boundaries between the conscious and the projections of the unconscious, as well as an inability to manage interpersonal relationships with sufficient empathy. Ultimately, the help of the traditional healer suggests that Faith may be able to move away from the paranoid-schizoid position into the depressive position, wherein she would be able to concern herself with the well-being of others. This position, which concerns itself with the state of intersubjective relationships, is also fundamental to the traditional African world view, which decentres the subject, and is in stark opposition to the individualism of the western Cartesian subject.

Nevertheless, despite the potential that this encounter holds, it is not as fully realised as the earlier parts of the novel. While Faith's childhood and time in Johannesburg are covered in some detail, her recovery is perhaps a little too quick and convenient to be really convincing. The entire encounter with the healer is barely two pages long, which hardly seems sufficient to purge the harrowing events described in detail in the other sections. It may be a little too easy and too convenient that Faith never mentions her guilt over killing Nomsa, or acknowledges what Bella sacrificed for her. Oom Piet practically delights in Faith realising that she shot Nomsa, and there is never any sense that he will ever face rape charges. This could bring into question whether the novel really offers any true message of reconciliation.

Conclusion: Community and the other

Mieke Bal argues that interaction within a community is necessary for healing to occur: "the incapacitation of the subject – whose trauma or wound precludes memory as a healing integration – can be overcome only in an interaction with others" (x). Once purged of the fairies, Faith shows a vague awareness – for the first time – that community may be necessary for the development of selfhood, and that she has spent years pushing people away.

The first person she comes into contact with is the man who has healed her, and she realises that they "have spent an eternity together in this room and [she] know[s] he has seen the things that [she has] seen. [They] have a shared past, yet [she has] never seen him properly before" (*GST* 323). The healer is the closest person she has to a witness, and Faith understands that, in having cast the spirits out, the healer has established a spiritual connection with her, even if she does not have the opportunity to acknowledge his presence.

Furthermore, the man enables her to mourn her losses. "The tears flow easily," says Faith, "for Papa and Mother and Nomsa, for Oupa and Grandma English … for Molly, for the fairies, and finally for my small self that died with Nomsa" (*GST* 324). Part of what she held onto for fifteen years is the pain associated with all the people she feels that she has lost. Of course, she finally remembers that she still has Molly and Mia in her life, and she asks: "I wonder what ever possessed me to doubt them, to flee the safety of their friendship. Of my family" (*GST* 326). It is in reuniting with the two women that Faith is finally able to banish Dead Rex. In the epilogue, Dead Rex tells the reader that he sees the three women burning his painting and banishing him. Faith ends this novel on an optimistic note as she gathers the family she still has. The dialogical resolution of these endings suggests a movement towards communality in South African fiction that encourages the establishment of a developed form of intersubjectivity that can support individuals in their experiences of loss.

- Rowan Roux

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Relationships, Polygamy and Love in
Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*: A Critical Analysis

Abstract

This article focuses on marital relationships in Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives.* Set in a household where polygamy is practised, this article seeks to analyse Shoneyin's exploration of the traditional and modern aspects of marriage. It looks closely at the individual wives, their reasons for entering a plural marriage, and their relationships with their husband and co-wives. Through close analysis of the text, I attempt to show how Shoneyin invites one to consider relationships and marriage as she plays off the modern conception of marriage against a traditional one. I attempt to show that the secret in the household inevitably breaks down expectations of traditional marital roles as relationships are redefined in this post-colonial setting.

Key Words: Shoneyin, Polygamy, Marriage, Customary, Traditional, Modernity, Relationships, Women

Polygamous and modern marriages in African societies

In many African and traditional societies, marriage has undergone change as a result of the influence of post-colonial modernity. On the one hand, women and men may marry because of custom and to fulfil cultural and customary obligations while, on the other, choice and the notion of what Smith terms a "love marriage" is on the rise (158). Modernity and Christian culture promote monogamous marriages, where men and women marry for love and companionship. Traditionally, many African countries allowed a man to have more than one wife. He would enter into what is termed a "polygamous" marriage. The word "polygamy" is "derived from the Late Greek word *polugamos*, which literally means 'often marrying'… [and] consists in the maintaining of conjugal relations by more than two persons" (Jonas 142). As Jonas explains:

> From the early years, polygamy existed throughout Africa as an integral feature of family life, with culture or religion or both as its basis … it is widely believed that polygamy ensures the stability and continuity of the family and clan [and that] polygamy provides economic and social security for women … polygamy is considered to be the most efficient means of producing a large family in a given time period [and] in Africa, a large family is an economic asset. (143)

Traditional societies are often viewed as being non-progressive, and the value of polygamous marriages is not always understood in a modern setting. What research in Africa has found is that "young people across a wide range of socioeconomic statuses increasingly value choosing their own spouses, and individual choice is widely associated with the notion that marriage should be based on love" (Smith 161).

With conflicting ideas about marriage in African societies, tradition and modernity are played off against each other, creating many spheres in which marriage, relationships and individuals may roam. Lola Shoneyin writes *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* in this context of changing ideas about marriage. Her novel focuses on the Alao household, a polygamous family consisting of four wives and seven children. Her novel invites one to consider relationships and marriage as it plays off the modern conception of marriage against a customary one, inviting the reader to explore the challenges and benefits of both. The four wives do not enter the household because of love. Rather, customary practices allow for them to seek comfort in a household built by a caricatured man who displays grotesque arrogance and male pride. The dynamic that exists in the household is a complex combination of customary and modern marital practices. These marital practices and ideals are constantly shifting in the household, satirising the belief that modern ideals are progressive as value is also placed on customary marriage. Shoneyin depicts a household where the stereotypical ideas and expectations of marriage are broken down, showing that the modern within a customary setting presents challenges to both ideals. This essay will seek to uncover the satire present in Shoneyin's narrative. Through the analysis of spousal relationships, I will attempt to demonstrate how the novel uses the Alao household to comment on the stereotypes of modern and customary marital practices and how these ideals affect marriage and relationships.

Emecheta notes that "[modern] people think that polygamy is oppression" (176). The arguments in favour of this belief are that:

> The practice of polygamy undermines the self-worth of women … [because] usually, wives have no legal power or capacity to prevent their husbands from taking a second wife … in addition polygamy objectifies women [and] contravenes a woman's right to equality with men … [who can use] polygamy … as a tool … to whip women into toeing their line by threatening their wives that they will marry another wife [which can have] serious emotional and financial consequences for her and her dependants (Jonas 145-146).

Polygamous cultures have a history of male dominance, which may encourage these beliefs. The modern argument is that these traditions are out of date because they create female oppression. As noted in the introduction, there are many traditional benefits for women in these cultures. The criticism, one could argue, holds ground on the matter of freedom of choice and consent. If women are forced into polygamous marriages, they are oppressive; if women enter these plural marriages consensually, they may be considered fair and liberating.

To provide an understanding of polygamy from an African woman's perspective, Embry and Bradley present a tale of a woman who grew up in a polygamous household. She said that "it was the only thing that she knew. Her parents had lived in polygamy and Father's parents had lived in polygamy" (100). In many instances, individuals who have been reared in a polygamous culture accept it as the norm. Therefore, it is important that criticism of polygamy takes people's understanding and way of life into consideration.

Baba Segi, the patriarch

It would be helpful to look at the patriarch of the family, Baba Segi, named Ishola at birth and then, after the birth of his first child, Segi. This traditional … Baba Segi is respected in his home and is referred to as "my lord" by his wives. This term shows respect and male dominance. He is portrayed as a possessive, arrogant man, who boasts about having four wives and seven children. Early in the novel, we are introduced to his mannerisms, when the narrator describes a visit to Teacher, a man who lived in the community and whose wisdom Baba Segi values: "It annoyed him that Bolanle was the reason he had come, when just two years before he had boasted of his conquest: how Bolanle was tight as a bottleneck, how he pounded her until she was cross-eyed; and how she took the length of his manhood on her back – splayed out and submissive" (Shoneyin 4).

This description indicates a man filled with pride, who boasts of his physical dominance and his wife's submission to him. He is able to provide for his family, and his role as the head of the family is further asserted by his position in front of the television, his sharing of leftovers with his children and the assertion from his eldest son: "Yes Baba. I want to be just like you!" (Shoneyin 10). Furthermore, his dominance is solidified in typical male roles. Bolanle, his fourth wife, notes that: "In the two years I have been in Baba Segi's house, he has never apologised for his mistakes. He makes peace his own way and it involves tattered brown envelopes bursting with 50 - Naira notes, thrust beneath doors at dawn" (Shoneyin 90). He is portrayed as a grotesque, uncivilised man who handles serious situations with bowel movements and who spits when disgusted. He is oblivious to his wife Iya Femi's jealousy, in particular, and does not prioritise intimate communication with his wives. Baba Segi is concerned with his reputation, thus his marriages are "as much an economic, social, reproductive, and reputational project" (Smith 171). While his mother arranged his first marriage to Iya Segi, his choice to enter into more marriages is accounted for as follows: "I took a second wife, a peace offering from a desperate farmer. I took the third because she offered herself with humility. What kind of human being rejects the fullness of a woman? … But I chose Bolanle, I cannot lie. I set my mind on her, the way a thirsty child sets his eyes on a cup spilling from a spout" (Shoneyin 201).

The women who marry because of their customary beliefs all betray Baba Segi, while the chosen wife is loyal. Choice may be tied to the modern idea of marriage, but it is also a modern practice for wives to leave their husbands, as Bolanle does.

This shows the complexity of both types of marriage. One may conclude, from these examples, that Shoneyin has constructed a view of Baba Segi that would make him unsympathetic to a critical eye. However, Shoneyin satirises these extreme portrayals of manhood through his wives' secret. Baba Segi is unable to father children, which shatters the construction of pride and arrogance. Subtle irony is added to the narrative, for example when Baba Segi refers to Segi as "first fruit of my loins", or when Bolanle remarks: "Baba Segi, they are the very image of you" (Shoneyin 159, 20). These moments in the narrative are not coincidental; rather, they break down the traditional praise offered to a man. One can say that it is the wom-

en in the narrative who display dominance through taking traditional expectations into their own hands. To clarify the male role, it is important to analyse the role that women play in the Alao household and to assess what extent they are bound by tradition.

The empowerment of women: Baba Segi's four wives

Shoneyin explores the empowerment of women in polygamous marriages. It is assumed that: "African women do not speak but are spoken for, [they] do not choose but are chosen for" (Nnaemeka ??). It was shown in a study that, "once a woman is married, the ability to opt out – of either marriage or marital sex – is dramatically reduced" (Smith 173). Women are not seen to have agency, which subjects their marital role to Western feminist critique. However, Elizabeth Joseph, a plural wife, explains in an interview conducted to explore the lives of women in African, polygamist marriages: "[Y]ou would think that polygamy by definition would be oppressive to women … in fact, a plural marriage is actually empowering" (Nnaemeka ??). Polygamous marriage may empower women in ways that range from freedom to bond with other women to shared child care and stability. Sexually, it is argued that women are empowered as they are not objectified. Rather, they are valued as bearers of children, who are an asset and source of pride in many African cultures. In her critique of Western feminism, Emecheta points out that

> [s]ex is important to us [African women]. But we do not make it the centre of our being … few of our women go after sex *per se*. If they are with their husbands they feel that they are giving something out of duty, love or in order to have children … but as soon as they start having children their loyalty is very much to them … African feminism is free of the shackles of Western romantic illusions and tends to be much more pragmatic. We believe that we are here for many, many things, not just to cultivate ourselves, and make ourselves pretty for men. (Emecheta 176-177)

This observation is interesting in the Alao household, as the different women embody different ideals of the African feminism and sexual empowerment described above. As one explores this in greater detail, it can be said that the wives are indeed dutiful in their sexual relations with Baba Segi. None of them expresses sexual enjoyment, yet they do not reject him. The wives who have children seek to provide and make life easy for them and display a great deal of affection towards them. Iya Femi may be the only wife who incorporates the Western notion of making herself pretty for a man, but her motives are deep-rooted and she too shows a degree of sensibleness in her duties to her husband and family.

It is valuable to look closely at the women in Shoneyin's novel to explore their African feminism against the construction of Baba Segi.

Iya Segi, first wife

Iya Segi is Baba Segi's first wife. She does not marry him by choice, but to follow her money. In the chapter titled "Iya Segi", she reveals her motive and explains her feelings towards her husband and the other wives as follows:

> My new husband turned to me. "I am pleased you are here with me, if only to fatten me up a little," he said. "I will follow you anywhere, my lord." I raised my buttocks and let him fill me again. I would follow my money anywhere … When he brought home other wives, I did not complain. I did not say a word. I did not even show that I feared for my money. I just kept quiet and watched him. Who can tell what madness makes men go in search of things that puncture their pockets? Kruuk. But that was the path he chose and I accepted it. Women are my husband's weakness. He cannot resist them, especially when they are low and downcast like puppies prematurely snatched from their mothers' breasts. I do not blame the women either. They are too weakened by the prosperity he offers. Besides, apart from that Bolanle, whose nose is so high that it brushes the skies, the other wives do not offend me. (Shoneyin 103-104)

In the passage preceding this extract, Iya Segi describes her repulsion to a woman to whom she has previously been attracted. One can say that Iya Segi was in love with her money. This marriage cannot be considered a love marriage, but one of cooperation. While her response may be considered one of submission, it is worth noting that "some women … make polygamy work for them" (Emecheta 176). It is important to note that "the importance of rank among co-wives is emphasised. The first wife, usually the oldest, enjoys undisputed authority over her co-wives; she is the only wife not chosen as a 'replacement'" (Nnaemeka ??). Iya Segi echoes this sentiment when she says: "It is important that the wives know their place in this house. They must know what they can and cannot do. They must remember that I am the one who tells them when to eat, sleep or even work" (Shoneyin 72). While Iya Segi exerts her authority over the other wives, it is implied that she was not consulted in her husband's choice of a second, third and fourth wife. Jonas explains that "[u]sually, wives have no legal power or capacity to prevent their husbands from taking a second wife" (145). Tension arises when Bolanle, the fourth wife, enters the home. The observation that she has her nose in the air may be accurate. Bolanle describes the wives as "uncouth … need[ing] lessons in etiquette" (Shoneyin 20-22). The arrival of Bolanle allows the narrative to take on an interesting dynamic between modern and traditional; Bolanle's education sets her apart from the other wives, and their rejection of her is evident throughout the narrative.

While Iya Segi's anxiety around the sharing of resources is expressed, she leaves the burden to her husband. Her acceptance, it may be said, is so that she can remain with her money (although she later gives it up, along with her businesses, to maintain the dignity of the family). Baba Segi is the primary provider for the family and may enjoy the ability to provide because his "[m]asculinity, proven by [providing], foregrounds the connections between masculinity and money and between gender and economics" (Smith 170).Iya Segi's mother's view of men may have contributed to her desire for a woman and her love of money. "Only a foolish woman leans heavily on a man's promises" (Shoneyin 97) are the words of a scorned woman. When she discovers her daughter almost naked and covered in money, she decides to arrange a marriage, a traditional practice. Her mother's contradiction is shown when she gives the money to Ishola, Iya Segi's future husband. Iya Segi, however, soon persuades her husband to allow her to trade and make more money, showing that she has indeed gone back to her first love. Ironically, Iya Segi's mother, who encouraged her independence of men, fears that her daughter will not fulfil her role as a traditional woman. Ishola's mother quite accurately states: "Why would men mean anything to her when she's grown

up hearing you rip them to shreds!" (Shoneyin 100). Iya Segi does, however, learn the value of family, dignity and loyalty once her secret is revealed.

Iya Tope, second wife

Iya Tope, the second wife, enters the Alao household as a peace offering and payment from her father to Baba Segi. After a bad harvest, an arrangement is made for Baba Segi to marry Iya Tope. Describing her discovery of the plans, she says:

> Just when the sun began its journey to the tree tops my father summoned me. I was surprised to find him and Baba Segi sitting so close together, their arms touching as they drained the bottle of Schnapps that was normally only sipped at wedding and funerals. My father told me to bring the food in and I returned with a wide tray. But as I stooped at the doorframe, the men stopped talking. Baba Segi inspected me as I placed the plates on a low stool and fetched cool water from the earthen pot. He examined my face as I poured it into two plastic cups. My father watched him watching me. "She is not a great beauty," I heard my father saying as I closed the door. His discretion had dwindled with the Schnapps. "But she is as strong as three donkeys. And thorough too. What she loses in wit, she gains in meticulousness. This is a great virtue in a woman. I have three wives so I speak from experience." … When we arrived at Baba Segi's house, he pushed me towards Iya Segi and warned that I should show her great respect. He said I should be grateful I was in such good hands. Iya Segi smiled but I could see her chest thumping beneath her *buba*. (Shoneyin 81-82, 83)

Iya Tope is the quietest of the wives and even calls herself a "coward" (Shoneyin 56). Her role, while seemingly small, displays the submissive quality of a traditional second wife. She is the mother who turns her loyalty to her children and can be said to be "married to [her] children" (Smith 175). She is described by Bolanle as cordial and kind, which is shown in her demeanour. Iya Tope, it can be argued, represents a childlike womanhood. Still meticulous, she shows great admiration for her children and takes pride in braiding their hair. While this marriage, like that of Iya Segi, was arranged, Baba Segi, once again, did not pay a price, but received his wife as payment.

The relationship in the household is one of obedience to Iya Segi. She is seen to have little interaction with Baba Segi apart from their arranged nights together. Ironically, it is Iya Tope, the unattractive bride who was not chosen, who becomes Baba Segi's favoured companion once the secret of his children's fathering is revealed. Iya Tope, we know, grew up in a polygamous setting and can thus be said to have been trained for this arrangement. Iya Tope's nature and her avoidance of conflict could be based on what Embry and Bradley have noted, that "[d]aughters who accepted polygamy had learned ways to interact as plural wives from their mothers' examples … [as it is often] the mothers in polygamous families who set the tone for relationships between families" (101). Unfortunately, the subtle example Iya Tope sets is seen as a weakness by Iya Segi and Iya Femi, resulting in Iya Tope being dominated, ridiculed and forced into silent submission. Her relationships in this household are seen through her interactions with the other women and children rather than her interaction with her husband. Iya Tope may thus be more traditional than the other wives in the Alao household in that she accepts her place in the home and in relation to Iya Segi.

Iya Femi, third wife

Emecheta notes that "[w]omen are very quarrelsome and jealous" (178). This can be said to be true of Iya Femi, who offers herself as a wife to Baba Segi. She values herself over the other wives and is threatened when Bolanle takes her place as the newest wife. She is hostile and expects that she and her children should be favoured over others in the household. She is particularly resentful of Bolanle, who has aquired the education that she craved and was robbed of in her childhood. She loves material possessions and uses them to reignite the pampering she experienced as a child. After the slavery in Grandma's house, she tells of her choice to marry Baba Segi:

> There was a new house being built across the road and that was where I met Baba Segi. He was supplying the plumbing materials and he looked powerful yet kind in his yellow safety helmet. I offered him Grandma's precious boiled water. He accepted it and thanked me. The next day he brought me a basket of oranges. It was Taju who delivered them. I didn't waste time in telling Taju that I was looking for a man to marry me. I was desperate; I didn't want Grandma to come back and find me there. "Baba Segi is the one who has enough money to marry many women," Taju advised… "Then *make* him marry me. Convince him and put me in your debt for ever. I have no relatives so there is no one for him to pay homage to." … I don't know what he told Baba Segi but he did his job well. Less than a week later, Taju came alone in the pick up and parked across the road. It was mid-morning and the house was empty so I had time to pack *everything* I wanted. Before I drove away with him, I rubbed shit into every pillow in the house except for Tunde's. (Shoneyin 128-129)

She seeks to gain her self-worth through the Alao household, which provides luxury in comparison to her stay with Grandma. Contrary to Jonas's argument of women's objectification, she seeks to be objectified. Yet she shows respect and appreciation towards Baba Segi, revealing: "Don't get me wrong. I don't hate Baba Segi; on the contrary, I have several reasons to be thankful to him. He gave me a place of refuge … You see, when the world owes you as much as it owes me, you need a base from which you can call in your debts. In return for kindness, I have worked tirelessly to make him happy. I cook his favourite meals" (Shoneyin 132-133).

One can say, then, that she shows gratitude as opposed to love for Bab Segi. Her vengeful spirit cannot allow her to love a husband as a wife should. Furthermore, her children are not disciplined as she does not want them to suffer as she did. Iya Femi does not emulate what most wives in polygamous marriages try to achieve. She does not, as Nnaemeka describes it, "capture the essence of the following notions: harmony, responsibility, fairness, honesty, equity, order, friendship, respect, satisfaction, sharing, bonding" (Nnaemeka ??). If anything, it can be said that Iya Femi tries to break down these ideals. Yet, apart from Bolanle, Iya Femi does not express a need to get rid of the other wives, perhaps because "[i]t gives her freedom from having to worry about her husband most of the time and each time he comes to her, he [she has to be sure that he] is in a good mood" (Emecheta 178-179). Iya Femi can thus be described as selfish in this polygamous setting. Her entry to the home sets her apart from the first two wives as she is the first wife to enter the household by choice. Her marriage is one of gratitude not love. Iya Femi can be said

to be married to vengeance and a spirit of discord, which becomes prevalent when Bolanle enters the Alao household.

Bolanle, fourth wife

Upon reflection of her time in the Alao household, Bolanle states: "I couldn't tell him that I felt as if I'd woken up from a dream of unspeakable self-flagellation. It started a few days after Segi died. I'd walk through the house and feel as if I was in the midst of strangers, people from a different time in history, a different world. I didn't feel soiled anymore" (Shoneyin 244). Her observation is tied to the fact that Bolanle was indeed modern in comparison to the other wives in the household. Her entrance into the polygamous marriage was curious given her university education. One would have expected her to enter a monogamous marriage, presumably for love. Of her choice to enter into the polygamous marriage with Baba Segi as his fourth wife, she says:

> Somehow, it all made sense when I met Baba Segi. At last, I would be able to empty myself of sorrow. I would be with a man who accepted me, one who didn't ask questions or find my quietness unsettling. I knew Baba Segi wouldn't be like younger men who demanded explanations for the faraway look in my eye. Baba Segi was content when I said nothing. So, yes. I chose this home. Not for the monthly allowance, not for the lace skirt suits, and not for the coral bracelets. Those things mean nothing to me. I chose this family to regain my life, to heal in anonymity. And when you choose a family, you stay with them. You stay with your husband even though your friends call him a polygamist ogre. You stay with him when your mother says he's an overfed orang-utan. You look at him in another light and see a large but kindly, generous soul. (Shoneyin 16-17)

After a traumatic rape and later an abortion, Bolanle describes herself as an empty shell. She chooses to marry Baba Segi in order to heal and find herself. As was the case with Iya Femi, a polygamous marriage gives women time and freedom, time which she needs away from the pressures of her mother and the modern world. Earlier it was mentioned that Baba Segi chose Bolanle; here she confesses to having chosen him. Their reasons may differ, but they are consensual marriage partners. Bolanle is educated and finds herself navigating "levels of oppression and … stances on glorifying/denigrating traditions [in accordance with] class, background, level of education … and commitment" (Latha 55).

Her modern experience of university makes her time in a home with uneducated, traditional women challenging. Prized by her husband, she is the one who opens the door for truth in the household. She rejects the modern world because it has scarred her. Western feminists may argue that tradition has caused her to think that polygamy is a solution when, according to them, it is a different kind of oppressive trap. Her mother cannot accept her decision because she has worked hard to educate her girls in the hope of a good, modern future. Against these Western ideals, Nnaemeka argues that: "[A]frican women who are in polygamous marriages are not morons or powerless, exploited, downtrodden victims. Many of these women are intelligent, highly educated, successful, independent women who *choose* polygymous marriage as what is good for them" (??). Ironically, it is not Bolanle's husband who has victimised and exploited her, but rather men whom she had met prior to her marriage. Iya Segi too is successful and independent, adding

to the above sentiment. Even though Bolanle entered the marriage for personal reasons, she is serious about her role as a wife and tries to bear children to gain womanly respect in the home. In a household that has practised tolerance, Bolanle is a source of conflict, even though she hides her disdain for Iya Segi and Iya Femi, and tries to be cooperative. The wives do not emulate what Embry and Bradley describe of polygamous wives when it concerns Bolanle; they are not cooperative nor do they build a bond with her because of her inability to conceive. They keep her from the secret of conception in an attempt to drive her out and to keep their children away from her (104).

Tension exists between Bolanle and Baba Segi because she cannot conceive a child. The secret in the Alao household allows the tension to build, because at no point is it considered that he may be the cause of their struggle. Futhermore, his male ego struggles under the weight of infertility and the pressure to seek modern help. Through the course of their marriage, Bolanle remains humble and submissive to Baba Segi and his wives. When she leaves, Baba Segi is saddened and offers always to be there for her, showing the affection he has for her.

Redefining marriage

The Alao household is filled with partners for Baba Segi. His pride lives in his family and tradition. His wives, however, have different reasons for and ideas about marriage. The narrative is a carefully written one; it not only plays with the secret, but also allows the characters to share intimate details about their lives in their own voice. Shoneyin has created a narrative that plays off modern and traditional ideals in a complex manner. Baba Segi may behave like a strong, bold African man, but he is unable to produce children, the essence of an African man. Iya Segi, who follows her money and encourages two of the wives to be unfaithful so that they can bear children, gives up her money to maintain the dignity of the family. Iya Tope, the ugly wife who cannot speak up for herself, ultimately commands most of Baba Segi's affection. Iya Femi's vengeful spirit leads to a breakdown of family.

She has to learn to live harmoniously with the remaining wives after Bolanle's departure. Bolanle chooses an extreme form of hiding, a place where she can disappear to recapture her soul. None of these portrayals show the modern notion of romantic love. Rather, the narrative shows that conflict arises when the old tries to take on the new. More so, the narrative shows that tradition is not easily lost or forgotten, and that it may serve as a place of refuge. The novel shows that family is the core of one's existence, always receptive when turned to in times of desperation, violence and extreme measures. If anything, the narrative may satirise the belief that modern ideas are progressive because it has found value in the traditional.

The change from first to third-person narration affords the reader both subjective and objective views of the narrative, allowing an interactive, thoughtful reading process. The Alao household is able to provide security for these women, a modern and traditional need. Iya Femi and Bolanle's choice of marriage is modern, against the traditional marriages of Iya Segi and Iya Tope. Curiously, the reader may wonder why

the women who have chosen polygamous marriage would choose a grotesque, uncivilised man, whose ways are as outdated as the setting. One soon learns that marriage is liberating for the women, particularly Bolanle. Furthermore, the household holds the traditional value of children. Yet there are tensions between the modern and the traditional. Bolanle leaves her husband, a modern ideal. There is an assumption that tradition allows one to grow as an individual within the sphere of customary values, while the modern allows for discovery. Many of these ideals overlap in the novel, implying that the modern in a traditional setting, and vice versa, is not a simple obstacle to navigate. Where traditional is sometimes viewed as a weakness in their relationships, it is important to acknowledge that the narrative breaks down many stereotypical ideas of marriage and spousal roles. Perhaps a dynamic assertion in the narrative is the fact that the traditional, grotesque man is, in fact, a generous, caring individual, a construction of a male that is often denied Shoneyin's narrative shows the complexities, not only of marriage and relationships, but also of the conflicts present within both tradition and modernity.

- Bronwyn Oliver

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Poetry

I’m So Sorry I Have To Die (A Tribute To Children Of War)

Mama, what is happening?

What is that sound?

Mama, I am scared.

What is happening to the ground?

Mama, why are you crying?

Please don’t be sad.

Mama, are you angry with me?

Was I being bad?

Mama, why are your hands shivering so?

Sit down to eat.

Mama, why do your eyes look so big?

I’m not upset because there’s no meat.

Mama, who’s that at the door?

Why does he have a gun?

Mama, I’m afraid of him.

Why does he ask if you have a son?

Mama, why is he shouting at you?

Now I’m getting scared.

Mama, please tell him to leave.

I know before you wouldn’t have dared.

Mama, why won’t he leave?

Why is he scratching in the house?

Mama, what does he want?

We’re not even hiding a mouse!

Mama, why do we have to go outside?

What about my food?

Mama, I'm really hungry.

He is not being very good.

Mama, why is he throwing out our stuff?

What did we do wrong?

Mama, when is Papa coming?

He really needs to move along.

Mama, what is that big thing?

What is it for?

Mama, why is it going towards our house?

Why are they breaking down the door?

Mama, please stop them.

My cars are still inside.

Mama, how can they do this?

Don't they know both my brothers have died?

Mama, please don't cry.

Look, I will stop them.

Mama, don't worry about me.

They won't shoot a child of ten!

Mama, I am your protector,

While Papa is not here.

Mama, I am your brave soldier.

You don't have to fear.

Mama, why are they aiming at me?

Don't they understand?

Mama, tell them I have to look after you,

There is no other man!

Mama, it hurts, it hurts so much!

I'm sorry I couldn't protect you.

Mama, what is happening to me?

Why is the sky no longer blue?

Mama, where are you going?

I cannot see your eyes.

Mama, are you angry with me?

I can hear your sorrowed cries.

Mama, I know I've disappointed you,

But I love you with all my heart.

Mama, I wish I could stay with you

And that we would never be apart.

Mama, I don't feel the pain anymore,

And you don't have to cry.

Mama, everything will be okay

I'm so sorry I have to die…

- Mariam Salie

Jealous Son

Jealous son,

Where were you

When like a miner

I dug and found Treasure?

Where were you

When I won her heart

When I paid the bride price

When the world watched and listened

To us say, ‘I do’?

Jealous son,

Poised to tear asunder

The connection that produced you.

On the sofa of her laps you mount

To raze her chest

That once stood like peaks.

Would you have met it juicy

If I had not tapped gently?

You sleep on-site,

You wake up to demand her smile.

Sidelined, I watch.

You have made me a

Jealous man.

Jealous son,

You have her all night.

On a cold bed I am left.

What am I to her?

Jealous son,

You will become a father;

Then you will understand.

- George Emeka Agbo

Short Stories

We Took Our Afternoon Naps Together

We took our afternoon naps together. There where the house became dark and cool late in the day. The linen had the smell of rain on it, especially at those hours, because the sheets didn't suffer the heat of skin at night. You know that smell of rain as it billows toward you, slow and inescapable across the brittle ground and grass. That is my best smell in this whole wide world. For some or the other reason, that bedding cottoned you in just that smell. We had volcanic blood in our veins, us two. That is why we *maar* headed to the south side in the heat of the day, to cool down a bit.

Fielies, again, hated the cold. Stayed *semier* in his own room for siesta, there where the sun *sommer* four o'clock, exactly in time for tea, would fall on his crown like a slap in the face. That's how *Fielies* liked to be woken, there on the other side of the old farmstead.

That was now peaceful: a little isolation. We didn't say much there where we lay, but we both knew that it was nice to be alone together. Sometimes I *sommer* woke up under her flank where I probably snuggled in against the cool of the dark room with its smell of African thunder. I'd pretend to be asleep if I woke like that, to memorize the knocking of her heart, the consolation of her breath on my forehead, and the hollow folding of her hand on my hip.

* * *

Piet and I have to fetch my parents. The government scraped the road just after the rains this year so it should only take about two hours in to *Otjiwarongo.* I'm kitted out in my new V-neck with a fall of frills from the collar all the way down to just a *tirtsie* cleavage. Piet fell for the shirt I packed out just so, nice and neatly over his chair, but I wasn't quite so lucky with the rest of his outfit. He's wearing his all-day-ever-day pants with the hole on his back pocket where his Leatherman has worn away at the khaki colour. He's kept with his dirty farm boots although, just this Christmas, I spent almost all the money he gave me to buy him a present with on nice new town shoes.

But no. And now here he sits next to me, whistling along to the old singles on the radio.

When we arrive, the two *oudstes* are standing in the front garden with their suitcases. Only the main road was ever tarred so we park trailed by a cloud of dust that's been signaling our arrival since the horizon. *Ouma* and *Oupa stay tjoepstil as Fielies* scurries around the corner with his grey suit pants and short-sleeve button up. He scuttles through *Elmari's* roses that prance dry and lonely circles of powdery dirt

on either side of the front door. “But my *magtag*, Pa, for what are you standing out here in the sun? I *mos* told you I would hear if Rosie arrives.”

I don’t want to, but like turning your head when you drive past an accident, I walk slower down the entrance corridor than the rest. And there it is, our family photo on *her* wedding day, hanging above one of *Fielies* on a tricycle, when he was two, in an oval frame. Next to it is a black-and-white one of her parents and our parents on the beach in their twenties. The one of her wedding day is in a thin silver frame of delicate vines that curl in the corners. In its borders she looks beautiful and happy. I’m two cousins to her left and I know that I’m looking straight at Piet in the crowd behind the cameraman, thinking, “If she’s going to bed some man, I’m *vir-flippen-seker* going to bat my lashes at the most handsome *kêrel* here.” Even my eyes lie a believable smile.

“Table is set. Shall we *sommer* so long have a seat?”

Every time I see this scar on my knee, I remember how I tripped walking up the church stairs that day.

“Sis, *Elmari* specially made your favourite sweet pumpkin and creamy green beans for lunch.”

Elmari’s food is bland as usual. The trip home is *maar* quiet. I sit at the back with Ma and open all the gates on the way, happy to escape the stale air in the car.

I ask Maggie to make us some tea as soon as she’s put the old people’s suitcases in their new room, the one with matching wardrobes for each, my christening dress above the desk and my grandmother’s vase filled to spilling with sprigs picked from the wisteria that crawls up the water tank outside their bedroom. By the time Maggie serves us on the back *stoep,* Piet has already balanced his feet on the edge of my freshly whitewashed pot with the *ranonkels* from the seeds I’ve harvested since *Ouma* first planted them on De Hoop. Maggie lowers the tray onto the glass top with a scraping sound from the thin film of dust that no amount of wiping can clean.

“*Dankie, ou dier*.”

With a nod to me she eyes *Oupa*. These two are going to cost her hours of extra work and she knows it. I take the doily off the milk jug and pour until just after the curve at the bottom of each cup. Except for Piet, who likes his half full. Maggie always lets the English leaves draw before she heats up the milk so I don’t have to wait for that before I fill each up to the gold rim just below the lip of my white set, a wedding gift from *Tannie Louna* and *Oom Lourens*. Her parents.

Piet starts talking about how last year we had the least rain in recorded history: twenty-two thumbs. For the twenty-second time since I married him I look at the *sering* tree next to the gate and vow to have it chopped down as soon as I can get Piet to spend the money on a sharp new axe. It is the exact same shape and size as the one on De Hoop, the one I fell in love with that afternoon.

When I woke up from my nap, she had turned to *me* in our slumber and not the other way around. Her hand under my dress was sweaty against my belly. Her open mouth against my shoulder made it warm and wet there too. Her closed eyes made two perfect shapes and there was a soft weight on my hand where her ribs pressed against me. My eyes were still hiding from the afternoon light blowing in with the curtains. I turned to say thank you without thinking what for and kissed her open lips instead. I stayed there without thought. When my eyes opened her silhouette shaded me. My fingers were wet and I had learned that our hip bones matched perfectly; she pressed hers against mine 'till she slipped off, falling closer to me in laughter. When our laughter died she kissed me and slid her fingers around the little rise until we both felt it swell. We dropped off the side of the bed so that if someone came in they'd think we'd gone for a swim in the dam. By then we had figured out that the smell of rain in that room came from the *sering* at the window. Lying on the floor under it, I fell in love with our old tree.

* * *

After tea I leave Piet on the *stoep* to fill Pa in on the history of rain on the farm and I take Ma to unpack.

"*Ouma*, you see it's best you just keep the gauze window closed permanently. There are more snakes out here than in town with *Fielies*. Wait, let me do that."

I can feel her looking at me while I take her things out of the faux ostrich-leather suitcase at the voetenent of her bed: her oversized brassieres in a cheesecloth bag drawn closed with string goes straight into the second drawer; her pantyhose in the first; her bleached thin dresses on the rail to the left and her hand-knitted jerseys to the right. Her beige, old-person's sandals I find with their soles facing at the very bottom of the suitcase. They go under the dresses, facing me with their worn inners. It's *darrem* really a scandal that *Fielies* never bought them any new clothes.

"Ma, how would you like it if we went into town on Wednesday to fetch the rations and stopped by Edgars to get you a few *spickerish* dresses?"

"*Ag*, no what, Rose. That's now really not necessary."

Thank God. She stays sitting on the edge of her single bed, the one closest to the window because the man must *mos* sleep closest to the door to protect his woman. Poor old *Oupa* Guy, with his thin arms he can't protect anyone anymore. "Rose, way with you. I can't sit with my hands idle like this."

"Certain, *Ma*?"

She rearranges it all – twists every hanger to face left, heaps her panties in rows of five, swivels to see if I'm still there.

“Thank you, Rosie. What with the drive none of us had our afternoon nap today. Let’s have supper soon and get to bed early.”

We took our afternoon naps together. I take them on the north side of the house, where the sun strikes me like a slap in the face at exactly 4 o’clock, just in time for tea, so that the thought of *her* is not the first thing that burns when I wake.

- Ethne Mudge

Things Have Changed

"So that is why Mr Tortoise goes about with a rough shell. Tomorrow's story will be about the royal tears," said Nna-nna (Grandfather), as he ended the day's story.

We sat around him under the mango tree.

Every evening Nna-nna would gather together all his grandchildren.

"Come, my sons and daughters," he would say, "let me bless you with ancient wisdom embedded in the stories of our ancestors."

All seven his grandchildren would then gather under the mango tree in front of Nna-nna's Obi (chieftaincy house). Each of us would come with a small wooden chair called Nwanyinodulokwu, while Nna-nna would sit in his chieftaincy chair. The rays of moonlight made the atmosphere friendly. Such evenings were generally silent, except for the occasional shrill chirping of crickets from Nne-nna's (Grandmother's) nearby cassava farm.

Sometimes we would look to the moon and see a figure like a man breaking firewood with an axe. "What is that inside the moon?" we would ask.

Nna-nna would tell us that it was the angels preparing to cook.

He liked talking in parables. He would say that parable is the language of wisdom, and a child who learns how to speak in parables is already washing his hands so that he can eat with the elders one day. Each time Nna-nna used a parable, he would explain the meaning in plain language.

I loved memorizing parables. I wanted to have lots of them in my quiver, so that when I grow old, I will be able to teach my children and grandchildren this wisdom in parables. Nna-nna's storytelling usually began at twilight and would continue till nine o'clock.

I lived with my father, mother and little sister in the family's compound. It was a very big one. My two uncles, Aku and Edu, lived in the same compound with their wives and children. Aku had four children, while Edu had two. Nna-nna lived with Nne-nna in his Obi, which was at the centre of the compound. We were one big family.

Nna-nna always encouraged us to live in unity. "It is very easy to break a single stick in the broom, but when they are in the bunch, they become impossible to break. Such is the power of unity."

That was about ten years ago.

"Miraculously", things have changed. "Civilization" was a chief among Oyibo (White) man's many charms. Cunningly, we were taught that we were primitive, so we paid them to refine us, and we are still paying. The cost is immeasurable. Now, we live in the City, and the busy life of modernization precludes that communal leisure. We rarely see our parents' faces; sitting, never mind sitting together at the table of ancient storytelling. Television has taken the place of Ijele, that king of all masquerades which danced majestically to Igba-eze (royal band). We know more about Americans than we know about our own Igbo people. Even at school, all the things we are taught stretch our imagination into a strange land. I have never met Prince Charles and Princess Diana, but I assure you that I can write their biographies. We should therefore not be too amazed at our craving for a longer ponytail hairstyle and a lighter skin. But what will be left of the wisdom of our forefathers a hundred years from now?

- Kenechukwu Ikebuaku

Book review

***Africa Ablaze! Poems and Prose Pieces of War and Civil Conflict*: A review**

Africa Ablaze! Poems and Prose Pieces of War and Civil Conflict
Selected by Patricia Schonstein
African Sun Press, 2013
430 pages
ISBN 978-1-874915-19-51
Price: R390

Patricia Schonstein is a writer well known to South African readers. Her earlier collections of short stories, songs and poetry were followed by her debut novel, *Skyline*, which was short-listed for a Sunday Times award in 2001. This latest collection, subtitled "Poems and Prose Pieces of War and Civil Conflict", is a follow-up to her earlier anthology, *Africa! My Africa!*

The literature of war has an enduring appeal. Last year marked the centenary of World War I, and a number of new anthologies and new editions have filtered onto bookshop shelves. Literary works rooted in African, and particularly southern African, conflicts are rarer. This collection promises to be a welcome addition to a thinly populated subgenre.

Africa Ablaze! is an ambitious work. Schonstein has set out to gather "a wide range of voices, all held together by her preoccupation with, and questioning of, war and genocide". This determined task begins bravely with an extract from Richard Whitaker's "African" translation of the *Iliad.* Here, the combatants face each other armed with African traditional weapons and so this device functions to neatly relocate an ancient myth in a familiar landscape:

> "When they met on level ground, they clashed assegai on assegai, hide on hide, man on bronze-armoured man…"

This turmoil, this moment of raw, brutal energy that splits attention and conscience, is deeply engaging – the ideal locator of Africa as a continent of ancient battlegrounds. Clever use of such early sources is followed by a traditional Zulu war song and found poems from the Anglo-Boer War. This impressive, non-partisan commitment to present and explore conflict literature does much to establish the merit of the collection. It underscores the falsity of any feeling that war literature is somehow rooted in the "pity of war" associated with the trench poets of World War I.

Schonstein has set herself an unenviable task. Her acknowledgement that literature is larger than poetry is moored in the selection she offers, sometimes juxtaposing opposing voices for ironic effect. Thus we

have the surgical prose by James Whyle, describing the wounding of a Lieutenant Gordon during the Frontier Wars:

> "The lead travelled on and its hope changed and it left Gordon's right thigh and entered his left and destroyed the femur just below the point where its ball sat in the socket of the pelvis…"

In proximity to the (now) outrageously politically incorrect poem "Fuzzy-Wuzzy" by Kipling:

> "We've fought with many men acrost the seas,
> an' some of 'em was brave an' some was not:
> The Paythan an' the Zulu an' Burmese:
> But the Fuzzy was the finest o' the lot."

Predictably, Anglo-Boer War writing is well represented, including Hardy's achingly beautiful piece, "Drummer Hodge". What would any writing of that war be without this iconic piece? But it is the careful selection of oddities, including this found remnant – a diary entry from Maria Fischer, a Boer woman about to be consigned to a concentration camp – that adds a particular poignancy:

> "We must leave our menfolk, children, fathers, brothers, sisters, house, everything, yes everything, and us – what shall become of us?"

With a notable eye for detail, Schonstein's inclusion of Wendy Woodward's tender piece, "South African War Horses", swells the range to cover animal rights in this vast literary debate on war. This is not a serendipitous choice. It reveals Schonstein's commitment to a balanced, representative collection that dissects contemporary theoretical concerns.

Both world wars are well represented. Established works by well-known poets are complemented by a few oddities, such as HW Schmidt's "Bully Beef":

> "In the field kitchens
> Pork, sausages and potatoes
> So long a rarity –
> Were frying.
> There was British beer to drink
> And tinned South African pineapple for dessert…"

These inclusions remind us that war is an inclusive human experience, and that not only the victors pen their stories. The targets behind the guns have stories to tell too: be they terse, humorous, valorous or grief-stricken.

A strength of Schonstein's anthology lies in her pursuit of those pieces that speak to the forgotten, lonely wars, the conflicts that hardly registered on critics' radar. Thus a found poem from the former Belgian Congo:

"The soldiers stripped the nuns of their garments
And forced them to walk naked in the streets
Jeering at them…"

This seems an appropriate introit to works we recognise as post-colonial, issuing from liberation struggles. Again the deft selection balances the prosaic and the extraordinary. An excerpt from Mandela's manifesto at the Rivonia trial secures the authentic representation of South Africa's freedom struggle, along with a number of pieces that do justice to it.

The editor's constant, panopticon gaze is impressive. We find on opposite pages what appears to be an excerpt from a technical manual for a Kalashnikov rifle:

"The AK-47 can be stripped in under a minute and cleaned quickly in almost any climatic conditions…"

and a broad, quasi-philosophical piece by Frantz Fanon:

"In guerrilla warfare the struggle no longer concerns the place where you are, but the place where you are going…"

The credits continue for the rest of the anthology. The Rhodesian / Zimbabwean conflict gives space to Chimurenga and opposing voices. But what excites are the number of found voices, the anonymous ones whose words, perhaps lacking technical sophistication and artistic polish, speak clearly and pointedly to the horror of war:

"When he came out on a pass
He used to sleep in the lounge
On the couch
He would make me lock myself in the bedroom
Because he was afraid to hurt me"

The ghosts of Mugabe's Gukurahundi whisper too.

South Africa's Border War is given space on this broad canvas, a noteworthy strength of this collection. Unlike the Rhodesian Bush War, which generated a sizeable volume of memoir and other writings, South Africa's Border War has remained an unexplored literary frontier. *Africa Ablaze!* does much to rectify the situation. Soldiers, activists and others are afforded space and respect to tell their stories. Those interested in the Border War would find the broad selection reason enough to acquire this volume. One cannot easily choose a single piece without neglecting the range and pitch of the others. This simple piece of stark prose from Jillian.

Edelstein's TRC work, *Truth and Lies: Stories from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa* – "So Wallace is rêrig dood" – hammers home something of the awful price extracted from ordinary citizens by the apartheid regime:

> "She had sustained the vain hope that it had been the wrong body, that one day she would find him again."

The final pages of the anthology range widely. Scattered pieces from Rwanda, Sudan, Ethiopia. Indeed, most of Africa's "other" contemporary wars are represented. It is ironic that one wishes there were more – until the realisation dawns that these poems and stories are birthed in deep tragedy. Wishing for more demands that others pay a terribly high price.

Schonstein's work is to be commended. Nothing has been published to date that matches this collection for its scope and commitment to arranging a choir of competing voices. My own interest in war literature is well served by this work. I would submit that most people who are invested in South African literature would find this anthology a valuable addition to their personal library.

It seems churlish to suggest room for improvements in this collection. One concern is that the book is issued as a paperback in a non-standard format that is easily damaged and will not long tolerate careless handling. As a work that belongs in a university or public library, this book would need immediate rebinding if it were to survive repeated handling. A glaring omission is the lack of a comprehensive introduction. The anthology tops 400 pages and would benefit greatly from an expert academic essay to unpack the wide range of themes and concerns resident in these pages. While I understand that critical fashions are subject to change, I believe that even general readers would appreciate the selection more if this were supported by a critical context. The notes attached as appendices are barely adequate and the list of contributors appears slim and incomplete. One hopes these issues could be attended to in a future edition. Visual imagery complements this sort of literary archaeology. Perhaps a future edition could be fleshed out with period photographs and / or works of art.

Despite these considerations, *Africa Ablaze!* fulfils its mandate to

> "remove the presumed glamour from war, exposing instead its carnage, the subsequent wasteland it gives rise to and the dirge of mourners trailing in its aftermath".

This anthology is a fine investment. It is available at most good or independent bookshops and online at http://www.printmatters.co.za.

Reviewer: Mike Hagemann

Interviews

22 July 2015

Antjie Krog: Poetry Is The Answer!

WritingThreeSixty sat down with esteemed author and academic, Professor Antjie Krog, on Thursday 4 June 2015, in her office at the University of the Western Cape.

WritingThreeSixty: You come from a family of authors and your mother [Dot Serfontein] is a famous Afrikaans writer. Growing up, did you know you wanted to be a writer?

Antjie: I have kept a diary since I was very young. I wrote down useless things that happen with you when you are six or seven years old. I suppose it had more to do with a desire to have secrets and to have those secrets articulated. Then, when I was ten years old, my grandmother died and it was the first funeral I attended. I found it fascinating. I saw my parents crying, uncles and aunts crying; yet I did not cry. I have her name, Anna Elizabeth, and I loved her, but I think maybe I did not quite understand what was happening. But that evening, I wrote and described the whole funeral in the diary. After a month or so, I paged back and I read that piece on the funeral, and I cried. I think maybe, at that stage, I realised the power of words and the power of being able to articulate such a thing that you can recall emotions. That you can get back emotions that you felt. I realised then that I was actually crying at the funeral. But my writing side was observing so acutely that I could cry about it only after writing it down. So that mixture was a very powerful stimulant for me, for my writing.

I have to say the notion of success was a strange notion in my time. Although my mother was a writer, we did not regard her as successful in today's terms. She wrote, she did interesting things, but it was always very clear that there was no money; there was no glamour involved. It was for the satisfaction of being able to articulate something well. I guess what I am saying is that, when I think of success, I think of the success of a poem. Does this poem succeed in expressing as close as possible what I want to say?

WritingThreeSixty: What is your greatest achievement thus far?

Antjie: One is very aware of the contamination around all these so-called achievements. I have received many prizes, but you know that they are all linked to who is on the judging panel or who won last year, who is writing with you, how old they are, their gender, their race, all of that. In the end, there are so many arbitrary things around any kind of achievement that I do not pay any heed to achievement, to the notion of achievement.

Basically, writing is the only thing that I do reasonably well. Even in terms of personal success. I do not think I am a good mother or teacher or wife or person. You just see your failings. You just see what you do not do right. Life in itself is fraught with failure. Even if you do something well, it could still be done better. Yet, life is also wonderful, and one is glad that one lives.

WritingThreeSixty: *Country of My Skull* has been widely published and was later made into a film entitled, *In My Country*. What was it like for you, as the author, to have your book made into a film? And what did you think of it at the time?

Antjie: When they approached me about the film, I immediately thought that the story was not mine, but that it was a South African story. I had no right to say you must involve me and I get to say how it is made and control it, because it is not my story. Then, in many ways, the film has been very disappointing, and sometimes I think I should have demanded more control over it. But, as I said, it was not my story.

WritingThreeSixty: What book do you wish you could have written, and do you still want to write and publish?

Antjie: My publishing career started when I was seventeen. I am now sixty-three. It is a long career. So, when you are at my age, you begin to think it is time to shut up. Life in South Africa, as it is happening right now, should be told by people from a different generation, people with technical skills, people with different life experiences, young people. It is time for people like me to say the terrain is now a terrain of others. So, I suppose, if I wrote something more, I would be pleased and surprised. I think academic writing I will still do, because in many ways, it is so safe. The academics will not like me saying that. Academic life is safe.

WritingThreeSixty: At the Franschhoek Literary Festival (FLF) in May, you spoke to Alexander Matthews about your new collection *Mede-wete / Synapse*. It is said that this is your first new collection in eight years. Why the time gap? Did it take eight years to write?

Antjie: In the past ten years, I have been doing several other things, like working with Professor Ratele and Mrs Nosisi Mpolweni on *There Was This Goat*. I wrote *Begging to Be Black*. I wrote a whole book of academic essays titled, *Conditional Tense: The Question of Identity after the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. So I was doing other writing.

The other answer is that I did not know how to write about now. I felt I had to intellectually engage with a new vocabulary and a new way of putting a volume together. It was also about: How do I say the things I said in *Begging to be Black* and the things I worked out in academic essays? How do I translate that into poems? It took me a long while to work that out.

WritingThreeSixty: In the discussion with Alexander Matthews, you also mentioned that the last section of this collection is, and I quote: "the biggest risk I've ever taken as a poet". How and why is this so?

Antjie: I tried to devise a new language to encompass the philosophical undertone that is part of the first part of the collection. In making new words, and in ignoring syntax, and in transgressing all grammatical rules, you take risks. One of the risks is that you become completely incomprehensible. There is something not always bad about incomprehensibility. As long as something is there that you can hang onto, that can pull you, and it becomes a kind of audio experience. So you hear a lot of things that you do not understand. But somehow you understand something. But the danger, of course, is that the small thing that you can hang onto can break and people could just find it gibberish, garbage. The other risk is that you perhaps do it in Afrikaans because you can make an argument for Afrikaans. I think that the same argument could apply to English, that English is also a language in which oppression and horror have been committed. So it can also perhaps do with a new distortion. But I have not heard English people saying that. So that is another risk; it is an ideological risk.

WritingThreeSixty: You are from Kroonstad, and in this collection of poetry, you pay homage to your place of birth. As a writer, why is it important to write about home and one's homeland?

Antjie: I do not necessarily think it is important to write about your home, but in this case, I wanted to start actually from the place where everything went wrong. So I begin on the farm, in the yard, in the home where you thought everything was okay. But it turned out to be very wrong. The root of all wrongness.

WritingThreeSixty: This collection is deeply personal for you, as you write about where you grew up and the passing of your father. Why did you decide to share these personal accounts of childhood and family life with your readers?

Antjie: I think one needs to make a distinction between private details and what is taken up in literature. You can say it is about the death of my father. But if, in the poem, it does not become more than a poem about my father, then the poem has failed. So it must become more. It must become a metaphor for something else. The farm, the yard, the home in the Afrikaner community – and most other communities – is patriarchal. So the volume opens with the death of the father, the death of the patriarch. It ends – that whole yard section – it ends with the death of Mandela, which is the death of the political patriarch.

So all of those things are chosen to say more than the personal. But because they are the personal, my power over them is much greater. If I write about your mother or your father, whom I do not know, I do not have that much power. I can look at photographs, I can interview them, I can interview you, etcetera, and I can imagine. But with my personal story, I have power over my surroundings. But maybe someone can write better about my parents than I can. But when you write about the personal, it just has so much more

power. That is why young writers are often encouraged to begin to write about the things that they know well, because then they would have power over it. But it must, in the end, become more than just the personal. My experience has taught me that the more accurately you describe the person, the more universal it becomes.

WritingThreeSixty: Do you have a favourite line or quote from the collection? You also mentioned something about a distortion of language, a new language and "syllable disturbances", which is an interesting concept. Could you explain that and provide some examples of it from the collection?

Antjie: I have many lines that I like because they represent for me intense energy captured with unusual sound. For example:

> "the pelvis tilts like a songbrewed slave of light;
> from behind he starts to freefall into the endlessness of her neck
> she lifts her chin distant terebinths and calligraphy
> the line of her lower jaw feasts on stars.
> I am an aqueduct alarmed with happiness,
> one foot firmly planted on gold, the other
> athwart the land while one hand takes
> the other claws from the unbuttoned fly
> dangle Baron Boerdick, Viscount Saltdick
> and their mate the Duke of Acorndick."

One of the most important words was the title *Mede-wete*, the Afrikaans title, because it does not have an English translation. It took me a long time to get to an Afrikaans title. Most of the lines have to do with sound. There are also examples of changing one syllable, such as "bewinterment", which recalls both bewilderment and to be affected by winter, "godness" which recalls goddess, and "eyenibs" which recalls something soft, like eyelids, and something harsh, like "eyenibs".

WritingThreeSixty: What are the poems about, and what are the central themes in *Mede-wete / Synapse*?

Antjie: The essence of the volume is its title. "Fellow consciousness" is actually the literal translation. It means that we are connected in various known and, especially, unknown ways with human beings, with nature, with everything. I explore and interrogate that through the yard section. The yard then becomes not only a place of the father and injustice, but also it becomes a place of stars. A place of trees, a place of politics, a place of grandchildren and happiness, a place of hunger and death. And, especially, a place of failing to live up to or experience or honour this connectedness. The last part is an attempt to find a new language in the hope that this will bring you closer.

WritingThreeSixty: At the FLF 2015 discussion, you said that "poetry is the answer", and that everything you know in life, you have been taught through poetry, for instance "how to live and how to grieve". What does poetry mean to you? And why is it the answer?

Antjie: Good poetry intensifies one's experiences. So, if you read the right poems and you come across good poems, they assist you in intensifying how you see spring, how you see winter, how you love, how you grieve, all that. The way in which I have experienced life, I have learnt that through poetry.

WritingThreeSixty: What are you working on now? What is your next project?

Antjie: I am one of three judges of an African poetry competition. They apparently have received 2 000 poems from across the continent. It is organised by a Ugandan writer, Beverley Nambozo Nsengiyunva, the founder of Babishai Niwe Poetry Foundation. It was previously a Poetry Award for Ugandan women, but now includes all African poets and runs as an annual poetry award.

For more information on *Mede-wete / Synapse* (2014), published by Human & Rousseau, visit the site: www.humanrousseau.com. The book is available for purchase from Graffiti Boeke for R200.00.

Interview by Bronwyn Douman

Editor: Martina van Heerden

Interview with photos available on our WordPress site: https://uwcjournal.wordpress.com/interviews/

14 August 2015

James Matthews: The Stories Behind The Dissident Poet

WritingThreeSixty met with renowned poet, James Matthews, on Thursday, 6 August 2015, to discuss his most recent publication, his past collections of poetry, as well as his time spent in prison.

WritingThreeSixty: Your most recent collection is titled *Gently Stirs My Soul.* Where does this title come from? What is the inspiration behind the title? And tell us about the book.

James: Well, actually, it is not my title; it is the publisher's. I gave them the manuscript, and they came up with the title [that is taken from the first poem], but I like the title.

The poetry is of a nature that I have never done before. All my poetry had a theme. Let me give you my feeling about poetry. I wish I could write a poem about a bird in flight. Then I look at people, shackled, and chained. The meaning is now clear. I shall write a poem about beauty and a bird in flight..

I could not comprehend what was happening to us because of the apartheid government. I saw myself as a dissident poet. And the role of a dissident poet is to fight an oppressive government, like **[**Pablo] Neruda. This is how I see what a poet should be. My thoughts and verses are like a gun that shoots at the oppressors. With my mental amnesia, it took me 18 months to write this collection. I had no conception of how this book would turn out. It was not planned; it just worked out. I do not know if I would ever bring out another collection similar to this. Now that I have reached a certain stage, I do not know exactly where I am going.. I did an experiment with my book *Flames & Flowers*, where there is a love poem on page one and a political poem on the opposite page. I just wanted to see if I could pull this off. It also confused people, because things should be normal, the poetry should run in a certain way. I do not need a structure [for my poetry].

I have noticed that people seem to appreciate this book. I am not into degrading women or swearing that does not make sense. We hope what we write can be role models for younger poets.

WritingThreeSixty: You mentioned that your environment and corrupt Members of Parliament inspire your writing. Is there any literature that also inspires you?

James: Well, firstly, I was not caught up much by literature. For instance, I could never get into the Brontë sisters, but I really like Dickens. Particularly *Oliver Twist*. And when I speak about writers who were politically minded, I think of John Dos Passos, an American writer, and [Pablo] Neruda, a Chilean writer. There were also times I would read Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou. I was drawn to Maya Angelou.

WritingThreeSixty: Were you angry when they banned your poem? How did you feel?

James: Well, all I could say was, "Shit on you, baby." Anger would be futile, just write some more. When they ban your books, you know you are winning!

WritingThreeSixty: Do you think that South African writers today place more value on being published than they do on the work they produce?

James: If they are, then they're on the wrong track. I write for people to appreciate that age is a beautiful phase. I read for senior citizens and at church halls. Three weeks ago, I read to about thirty-five serious senior citizens at a house in Bokmakierie, and they appreciated me. So when I walk in the streets, they would come up to me and embrace me and say, "James, thank you very much for writing such beautiful lines for us." They make me feel very humble.

WritingThreeSixty: You mention that "age is a beautiful phase".

James: Yes, just to give a line from a love poem: "I am flushed with the lushness of love."

WritingThreeSixty: What does this line mean to you?

James: The line itself explains. Well, let me read it to you:

> "Each poem connects with each other.
>
> I am flushed with the lushness of love
>
> embracing me as I sit in the cold heart of loneliness
>
> loneliness masquerading as exuberance
>
> shield from my pain images in my eyes are dead dreams
>
> and engraved in my heart dead dreams now …"

I do not take myself seriously. I take my work seriously.

Cry Rage! (1972) was the first book of poetry read in Parliament. And after reading it, they could not decide if it was a book of poetry or a petrol bomb, so they banned it. Three or four of my books were banned, [including] one book that I edited, *Black Voices Shout! [An Anthology of Poetry]* - was another way of showing how black poets fought against apartheid.

WritingThreeSixty: You seem to place more emphasis on "wanting to be read" by ordinary people than on wanting to make money from your writing.

James: It's funny that you say money. I was reading at the big library in Cape Town and there were students from Washington and local students. One local student asked me a very stupid question: Do you make a lot of money writing poetry?" I said no, I do not have a Mercedes Benz. And no, poets do not really make money.

James shares a story about the time he spent in prison.

James: *Cry Rage!* came out in 1972. Now younger people - well, I am older than most people - but younger people who are in their sixties, they still talk about *Cry Rage!* I can remember coming here [UWC] and stopping at a robot and this guy rolled down his window and recited three verses from my prison poetry. A lot of students from here were taken to Victor Verster [now Drakenstein Correctional Centre], Peter Jones included. There were about four or five. I was taken because of my writing. I was working at *Muslim News* as a journalist. These two cops came while we were getting the paper ready.

We were there for about six months. We were each assigned a cell, and I really appreciated solitary confinement. What happens when you are four in a cell? And you do not like each other? You are there for twenty-three hours a day!

I wrote my poetry, and my daughter would come with my grandson. He was a baby. And I would get some of my friends to speak Xhosa to distract the cops. And while they were doing that, I would take my finished poems and put them in my grandson's nappy. My daughter would keep the poems, so when I got out, I could publish them. When you sent out letters, they would censor the letters, so I could not send them to her. I named that book *Pass Me a Meatball Jones.* Much later, when the book was no longer banned, I called it *Poems from a Prison Cell.*

WritingThreeSixty: Did all the work you wrote in prison get to your daughter, or was any lost? And with your "mental amnesia", do you feel at times that you lose some of your work?

James: Most of the poetry I wrote in jail I got out to my daughter. Now I have a computer. One good thing is, I lie in bed, and I write one or two lines on my computer. The other day I was at the shop and I thought up this poem: "Gauges of bool, spilled from my mouth, an open wound, to smear the faces in senses of the corruptors in parliament." It is the beginning of a poem I am working on.

WritingThreeSixty: You do not use much punctuation. E.E. Cummings used this style as well. Is there a particular reason for this?

James: You are quite right; I got that from E.E. Cummings. There are also no titles – because you are intelligent. I do not need a title and I suspect that readers are intelligent enough to understand [my poetry], so they do not need titles.

WritingThreeSixty: The theme of butterflies appears throughout *Gently Stirs my Soul*. Why do butterflies have such a significant presence in your book of poetry?

James: Butterflies are my totem. Let me explain why. I was standing outside my front door and a butterfly circled my head and it settled on my shoulder. Then it descended to rest between my feet. The butterfly looked at me and I looked at the butterfly; there was a lengthy silence and we bonded. Then the butterfly flew away, and I was released from my enchantment. So this is how I feel about butterflies. There are a lot of times I use butterflies in my poems. When I write, it's as if it came into the light, into the verse.

WritingThreeSixty: What advice do you have for aspiring poets?

James: I once conducted a class of poetry at an underprivileged school in Lotus River. It had about thirty youngsters who were divided into groups of about ten. I told the teacher to take a hike! So I told the students: "Each one of you is going to write a poem of twenty lines. It must not be done by three or four. Everyone must write. And when it's complete, you can decide which poem is the best." The poem that was decided on was "Gardens of Love". This youngster wrote: "When I am in my garden, I am filled with love." I showed it to the teacher and she said: "James, this young boy often comes to school angry, and his anger spills onto those around him." That line, I assumed, was therapy. In that moment, he was so calm.

So to come back to poetry, there are three things you need to know: Imagination, creativity and discipline. Use your creativity to make beautiful things with your imagination. But then you need discipline to pull it together. My advice would be to "pull it together". If you have those three things going, you can make sense, beautiful sense, with what you are writing.

WritingThreeSixty: What are you working on now? What is your next project?

James: I am working on a novella, possibly titled *Hope House.* I must always have a project to focus upon.

For more information on *Gently Stirs my Soul* (2015) published by Rhodes University, visit http://www.ru.ac.za/corylibrary/latestnews/gentlystirsmysoul.html.

Special thanks to Dr Mark Espin for arranging the interview.

Interview by Kareesha Naidoo and Nehna Singh

Editor: Martina van Heerden

Interview with photos available on our WordPress site: https://uwcjournal.wordpress.com/interviews/

Contributors

George Emeka Agbo has MFA and BA degrees in Visual Arts, and PGD in Museum and Heritage Studies, all with Distinctions. Currently a PhD student of Visual History (with focus on Photography), his research examines how Facebook, through its photographic practices, constitutes an alternative space for civil resistance in Nigeria. Agbo is an Andrew Mellon fellow and Ivan Karp Doctoral Research awardee. He is more broadly interested in how creative productions in the visual arts get appropriated in sociocultural, political and historiographical contexts.

Dercio is currently studying Geo technical Engineering (MSc) at The University of Cape Town. His inspiration comes from many photographers he has met along his journey as an 'Instagrammer'. He always tries to look at the world differently from others and admits that he take pictures just for fun. Instagram name : @drawing_with_lights

Kenechukwu Ikebuaku is passionate about youth development, as he believes the future of Africa lies in investing into our youths today. He was born and raised in Obosi, a small town in South-Eastern Nigeria. He holds a BA in psychology and philosophy, a BA Honours in psychology, and is currently doing a Masters programme in development studies. His interests are performance poetry, short stories, youth empowerment and African development.

Ethne Mudge is a Masters student in Creative Writing at the University of the Western Cape who loves her dog, long baths and even longer naps, in that order. She has spent years as a copy writer, an amateur law student and a wannabe photographer. Currently she is writing a fiction based on the life of her favourite and most irksome grandmother. This is the third time she has had to write about herself in the third person and secretly enjoyed it.

Bronwyn Oliver is an English school teacher who is passionate about acquiring and imparting knowledge. Her passion within the subject lies in literary studies. She would like to pursue a Masters Degree in English Literary studies and has taken a particular interest in pre-apartheid literature as well as narratives driven by feminist ideals. She believes that the ability to read is a gift that should be afforded to everyone. Narratives intrigue her because they often challenge her world view and opinions. Her hope is that individuals will continue to be drawn to various narratives and that stories are always told.

Deshal Pema is currently a first-year student at the University of Cape Town studying towards a Business Science degree in Finance. Art has always been her creative outlet and uses it to explore the ideas of human nature and life itself.

Rowan Roux completed his M.A. at Rhodes University in 2012, and has spent the last 2 years lecturing and working as a proof-reader and editor. In 2015, he started his Ph.D. at the University of Cape Town.

Mariam Salie is a married, mother of three, currently completing her Masters in Clinical Psychology and Community Counelling at Stellenbosch University. She completed her undergrad (BA) and Honours in Psychology at University of the Western Cape. Poetry is her outlet and she writes more as a hobby and a way of expressing her innermost thoughts and feelings. She likes treading harshly and pushing boundaries in every way: her mind, her circles, and her life. She is a sucker for stimulating conversations with an exceptional vocabulary in this time of short hand and superficial ideas.

Reviewers

Dr Marius Crous is a senior lecturer at the Department of Language & Literature at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in South Africa. In 2014 he won an award for Emerging Researcher of the Year at the annual Teaching & Engagement Awards at NMMU.

Keith Gottschalk is a South African poet, known for his anti-apartheid poetry. He studied at the University of Cape Town 1964-70, where he was a tutor and junior lecturer to 1983. Keith Gottschalk worked in the Political Studies Department at the University of the Western Cape. He served as Head of Department (2004-2006), when he also hosted the SA Association of Political Studies biennial conference. His forty scholarly publications are mostly on South African political dynamics. His current research and publications focus on the African Union family or organizations and African integration, and on space policy for developing countries. Keith has also published a poetry collection *Emergency Poems* plus over one hundred poems in literary journals. Finally, Keith is the Vice-President of the UWC Convocation, Chair of the Friends of the UWC Library and an Exco member of the South African Space Association.

Dr Bronwyn Law-Viljoen is a senior lecturer and head of Creative Writing at the University of the Witwatersrand, the editor and co-founder of Fourthwall Books, and a former editor of *Art South Africa*magazine. She received her doctorate in literature at New York University as a Fulbright scholar in 2003. She taught writing and literature at New York University, and completed an extended internship at the Aperture Foundation in New York before returning to South Africa to take up the post of Managing Editor at David Krut Publishing. She has contributed to and edited many books on art, design, and architecture in South Africa. She is currently writing a novel.

Professor Julia Martin teaches in the Department of English at the University of the Western Cape. Her research involves experiments in ecological literacy, with a focus on the genre of creative nonfiction as a lively medium for contemporary writing in the Humanities. This interest in reading and writing literary responses to the crisis of environment and development began with a particular focus on the work of Gary Snyder. More recently she has written about the representation of place(s), interconnectedness and deep time, in a variety of texts. She has published widely, including the volume *Writing Home* (Cape Town: Carapace, 2002) and *A Millimetre of Dust: Visiting Ancestral Sites* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2008).

Dr Fiona Moolla is a specialist in the novel, as well as African literature and orature. She has a special interest in cultural and philosophical constructions of the person in African, European and Islamic worlds. This translates in practice into an ethical concern with human beings in a dynamic, connected, charged cosmos. Dr Moolla's monograph, *Reading Nuruddin Farah: The individual,* the novel & the idea of home was published by James Currey in March 2014. Some of her recent publications include: "The Body Unbound: Ritual Scarification and Autobiographical forms in Wole Soyinka's Aké: The Years of Childhood " (The Journal of Commonwealth Literature), "When Orature Becomes Literature: Somali Oral Poetry and Folk Tales in Somali Novels" (Comparative Literature Studies). Dr Moolla has been a recipient of both Mellon and Fulbright scholarships and has received university awards for research and teaching. Her experience includes freelance journalism and non-academic publication. She is the author of award winning published short fiction (HSBC/SA Pen, judged by J.M. Coetzee) and children's fiction and non-fiction on literary topics (Cambridge UP).

Professor Wendy Woodward teaches Southern African Literature, Animal Studies and Creative Writing in the English Department at the University of the Western Cape. *The Animal Gaze: Animal Subjectivities in southern African Narratives* (Wits University Press, 2008) was awarded the Deputy Vice Chancellor's Book Award for 2006-2008, and her second volume of poetry, *Love, Hades and other Animals* (Protea, 2008) was recently published. She organised the colloquium, "Figuring the Animal in Post-Apartheid South Africa", (May 2011) where a decision was taken to form the Animal Studies Round Table in Africa (ASRA). In mid-2011 Prof Woodward was a Visiting Professor at the School of English and Philosophy at the University of Wollongong and keynote speaker at the Global Animal Conference. She is a Research Associate of the New Zealand Centre for Human-Animal Studies in Christchurch and is on the academic advisory board for the Minding Animals International Conference in Utrecht in 2012. Her current research focuses on the urban animal photographs of Fanie Jason, as well as on the practices of animal-reading, affect and ethics.

Editorial Board

Bronwyn Douman

Editor: Creative Writing

Bronwyn is currently doing her Masters in Creative Writing at the University of the Western Cape. Her mini-thesis will include a collection of short stories titled *The Marginal Grey*. She is currently working as a tutor at UWC in the English 111/121 course and the English for Educational Development (EED) course in Law. She is a published short story writer, her work appears online in Aerodrome, UWC CREATES *This is My Land* anthology and in an e-book entitled *The Ghost Eater and Other Stories*.

Mike Hagemann

Journal photographer and Assistant Editor (creative writing)

Mike is currently doing his PhD at The University of the Western Cape. He is researching the poetry written by Chas Lotter, a Rhodesian soldier who served throughout the duration of the war, a war he also served in. He completed his MA at UWC in 2004 / 2005. He has taught high school English, Geography and Tourism for 30 years before deciding to take an extended sabbatical. His academic interests are art photography, comix, humour and queer studies. He has published a number of poems and short stories locally and internationally.

Kareesha Naidoo

Editor: Academic and Critical Research

Kareesha is currently doing her Masters in English at the University of the Western Cape. Her topic is titled "Between Text and Stage: The Theatrical Adaptations of J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*". She is interested in Postmodernism and enjoys reading and studying the works of South African novelist J.M Coetzee. She is currently working as a tutor at UWC for the English for Educational Development Law (EED) course.

Nehna Daya Singh

Assistant Editor (social media)

Nehna is currently doing her Honours in English Literature at the University of the Western Cape. Her research paper is titled; "A critical and curious gaze into the Indian-oceanic passage in *The Travels of Abu Taleb Khan in Asia, Africa and Europe"* in the 19th century. She is the content editor and communications

coordinator for SayHelloDesign under the Centre for Student Support Services at UWC as well as a Research and Teaching Assistant in the English Department. Nehna is a part of the 2015 team for the South Africa Washington- International Programme (SAWIP).

Martina van Heerden

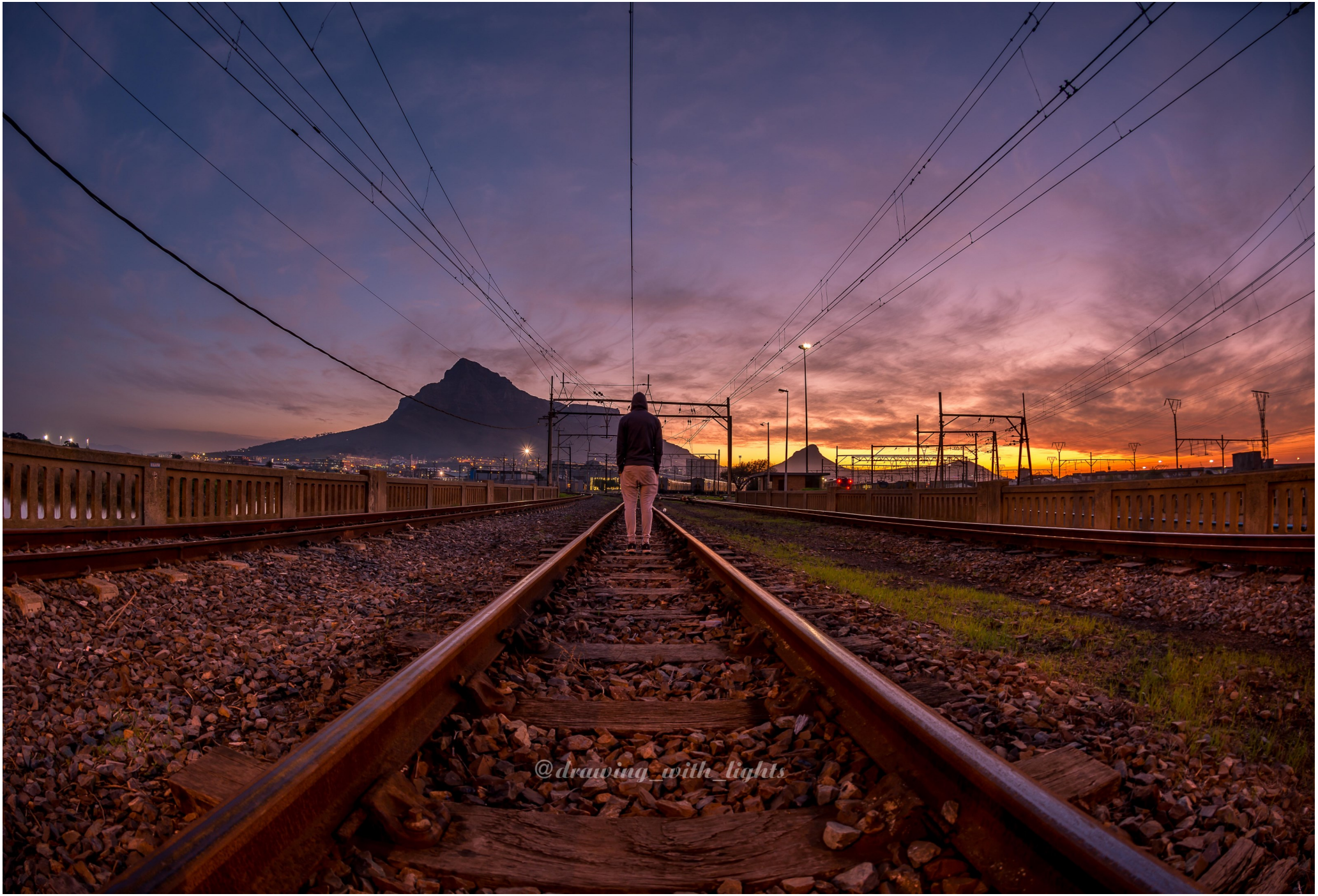
Copy Editor

Martina is currently doing her PhD in English at the University of the Western Cape. Her thesis, currently titled "What Lies Beneath Tutors' Feedback? Examining the role of Feedback in Developing 'Knowers' in English Studies", focuses on the perceived pedagogical role of feedback in English Studies. Her research interests include academic development, academic literacies, feminism and science fiction. She is currently working as a tutor and lecturer for the English for Educational Development Law and CHS courses, as well as a tutor for English for Education Development: Science and English 211/221.

Wihan van Wyk

Editor: Academic and Critical Research

Wihan is currently in the process of finishing his Masters in English at the University of the Western Cape. His thesis is titled, "*Shelleyan Monsters: The Figure of Percy Shelley in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Peter Ackroyd's The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein"*. His academic interests primarily lie with 18th century literature, particularly Romanticism and the Gothic, and further extends to Science Fiction and Fantasy. He is currently working as a tutor in the English 111/121 course, and is also as a research assistant at the university.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