

CALABASH

HORCRUX



ISSUE 10

2026



CALABASH

ISSUE 10

H O R C R U X

*A Literary Journal of
Memory, Fracture & Return*

W I N T E R 2 0 2 6



CALABASH

Issue 10 · Horcrux

© 2026 National Writers Association of South Africa
(NWASA)

ISBN: 978-1-0483-3602-3
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Published by
National Writers Association of South Africa (NWASA)
Pretoria, South Africa

Editor
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Cover Artwork & Logo
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Printed in South Africa

CALABASH



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EDITORIAL NOTE

On Horcruxes

It is perhaps strange that the seed of this journal should lie in one of contemporary literature's most recognizable inventions. In J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, a Horcrux is an object into which a fragment of the soul is concealed so that something of the self might survive the destruction of the body. The soul, however, does not divide of its own accord. Canonically, it must be torn apart through an act of violence before the severed fragment can be entrusted to another vessel.

I first encountered the Horcrux not as an object of dark magic, but as a way of thinking about artistic creation. It seemed to me that enduring works of art required a kind of self-severance. The artist relinquishes something irrecoverable into the work, which then carries that fragment beyond the life of its maker. These works of art would become a site where something of its creator continues to reside after absence.

Yet the Horcrux soon exceeded its usefulness as a metaphor for art alone. Rowling's invention raised another question: why were the fragments of Voldemort's soul concealed not in ordinary objects, but in relics? Slytherin's

locket, Hufflepuff's cup, Ravenclaw's diadem, Marvolo Gaunt's ring, his diary, the transmogrified Nagini, and, unintentionally, Harry Potter himself. None of these were arbitrary vessels. Each possessed a significance that long preceded the fragment placed within it. They had essentially become sacred.

This suggested to me that the soul does not inhabit every vessel equally. Certain objects become capable of carrying extraordinary psychic weight because they have already accumulated meaning. A Horcrux, then, is not simply a fragment preserved beyond destruction. It can for instance be understood as an act of defilement: the violent contamination of something whose sacredness preceded the violence itself.

We often imagine sacred objects as possessing an intrinsic holiness, yet perhaps they become sacred because they inherit our attachments. Love rarely disappears when its object is lost; it relocates. It settles into heirlooms, manuscripts, monuments, and works of art. We preserve them because something of ourselves has already been entrusted to them. Sacred objects are often the places where love survives abandonment.

Rowling herself complicates the theory when Harry becomes an unintended Horcrux – a consequence of his mother's sacrifice which transforms a murderous violence into an act of preservation. It could be argued that love itself transforms Harry into a sacred vessel. The Horcrux therefore emerges not only through destruction, but through the strange intimacy between violence and devotion.

History offers many such moments. During the Malian civil war, the attempted destruction of Timbuktu's ancient library transformed the manuscripts themselves. Rescued in secret by librarians and local residents, they became more than archives. They'd become Horcruxes. What they preserved was no longer ancient knowledge, but the continued life of a civilization that violence had attempted to sever from itself. When the self is fractured for the sake of

of preservation, the discarded parts do not vanish, they linger, like estranged metaphorically cursed objects, often returning as threats. These wars are not merely geopolitical. They are confrontations with what was once disavowed.

In the Great Lakes region: wars were not merely collapses of state, but confrontations with disavowed selves. The Tutsi exiles in Uganda became both survivors and a seed of return, their very presence a Horcrux: a fragment of a severed origin carrying the promise and the threat of reconstitution. Similar hauntings persist elsewhere: in Angola, Eritrea, Sudan, and Ethiopia's Tigray crisis, where discarded parts of nationhood have not died but survived in altered form. In Western Sahara, the unresolved status of the Sahrawi people is not merely a political impasse. It is an ongoing fracture in identity. In Mauritania, the suppressed legacies of caste and slavery fester beneath official silence, poised to erupt. In each of these cases, a foundational rupture unfolds, one of disintegration. They are not merely clashes between states; but reckonings between what was kept and what was cast aside.

South Africa knows these vessels well. Monuments, renamed universities, abandoned mine compounds, apartheid architecture, inherited place names – these are never simply objects. They continue to organise feelings long after the political order that produced them has formally ended. Jacques Derrida famously described history as haunted by what refuses to disappear. Horcrux theory asks a related, though different, question: not simply what returns, but through what vessel it continues to act.

Yet not everything that survives should be called a Horcrux. The term is useful only if it names a particular phenomenon. A Horcrux comes into being where a self has first been violently severed; where something of that severance is preserved; where preservation is entrusted to a vessel already made sacred by attachment; and where that fragment continues to exert force beyond the destruction that produced it. Remove any one of these conditions, and we may still have an archive, a monument, or a work of art, but we no longer have a Horcrux.

This issue is therefore not an anthology about Horcruxes. It is the first attempt to test Horcrux theory against literature itself. If the concept has any value, it will not be because I have defined it persuasively here. It will be because readers begin recognising Horcruxes where neither I nor these contributors expected to find them. Every theory survives only if it proves capable of revealing phenomena that previously had no name. I hope this issue marks the beginning of that conversation rather than its conclusion.



LETHOKUHLE MSIMANG

Editor in Chief

Calabash Literary Journal

ESSAY

Camissa: What the River Carries Beneath the City

Fragments of a City That Learned to Forget Itself

ADLI YACUBI

I

There are places where the ground is not only ground. It is archive. It is testimony. It is the accumulated presence of those who lived, laboured, and were buried without name. Cape Town is built on such ground.

In 2003, during construction in Green Point, human remains were uncovered at what is now known as Prestwich Place. Archaeologists would later estimate that more than two thousand individuals lay beneath the surface — enslaved men and women, the poor, the displaced, those whose lives sustained the early colonial economy of the Cape but whose names were seldom recorded in its official histories. For a brief moment, the past disrupted the present. Public debate followed. There were calls from historians, activists, and community leaders to preserve the site as a place of memory.

But the interruption did not last. Development resumed. The remains were exhumed, studied, and relocated to an ossuary. The city continued to expand above them. What might have become a sustained confrontation with the foundations of Cape Town was absorbed into a familiar pattern: acknowledgement, containment, and gradual forgetting.

And yet, forgetting is never complete. Something remains — not only in the bones that were disturbed, but in the ground itself, in the layered histories that continue to shape the city from below. To understand this, one must go further back.

Long before Cape Town was established as a Dutch settlement in 1652, before surveyor's maps and property lines, this landscape was structured by water. A network of freshwater springs rose from the slopes of Table Mountain and flowed across the land in streams and channels, converging into what the Khoekhoe referred to as Camissa — the place of sweet waters. It was not a single river in the narrow sense, but a broader hydrological system, a confluence of more than forty springs that sustained both human and ecological life.

For the Khoekhoe, pastoralists and traders, this was not simply a resource. It was part of a relational world in which land was not owned but inhabited, used, and shared according to established patterns of movement and exchange. Early accounts from European travellers describe a landscape of seasonal grazing, negotiated access, and established water points — a system disrupted rather than discovered by colonial arrival.

With the establishment of the Dutch East India Company refreshment station at the Cape, this relationship changed fundamentally.

Water was among the first elements to be reorganised. The Company constructed canals to direct the flow of the Camissa system toward the needs of the settlement — supplying the fort, irrigating the Company's Garden, and supporting passing ships. In doing so, the river was transformed. Its function subordinated to a new economic and administrative order.

Over time, as the settlement expanded, these waterways were further modified. Open streams became drainage channels. Channels were covered. By the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, much of the original Camissa system had been canalised or buried beneath the growing city. Streets replaced streams. Infrastructure replaced flow. What had once been visible became subterranean.

II

If Camissa was a confluence of waters, the early Cape became a confluence of peoples — but not by gentle meeting. It was engineered. From the late seventeenth century onward, the Dutch East India Company expanded the Cape not only as a refreshment station, but as a settler colony structured by labour extraction.

That labour was drawn, in large part, from the world of the Indian Ocean. Enslaved men and women were brought to the Cape from East Africa, Madagascar, Mozambique, Bengal, India, and the Indonesian archipelago. They arrived under conditions of coercion, dislocation, and legal erasure — stripped of status, separated from kin, and inserted into a colonial economy that depended on their invisibility.

Water and labour met in the same space. Enslaved bodies dug the canals that redirected the Camissa system. They carried water, cultivated the Company's Garden, and sustained the daily functioning of the settlement. The river that had once sustained indigenous patterns of life was now entangled with a system of forced work and imposed order. The shaping of the landscape and the disciplining of bodies were not separate processes; they unfolded together.

At the same time, the Cape became a place of exile. Political prisoners, scholars, and religious leaders from the Indonesian archipelago — often referred to as the Malay world — were banished to the Cape for their resistance to Dutch rule. Among them were figures who carried with them not only memory, but intellectual and spiritual traditions. Islam, in this context, did not arrive as a formal institution supported by the state. It survived in fragments: in recitation, in memory, in teaching that took place quietly, often under conditions of restriction.

By the late eighteenth century, these fragments began to take more visible form. The establishment of the Auwal Mosque in Dorp Street is often marked as a foundational moment in the history of Islam at the Cape. Yet even this moment must be understood within its conditions. It did not emerge in a vacuum of religious freedom, but within a colonial order that regulated movement, assembly, and expression. The mosque was built in a context shaped by slavery, surveillance, and gradual shifts in policy — including the loosening of certain restrictions under British rule at the end of the eighteenth century.

To speak of “community formation” in this context is to speak of something forged under pressure. Free Blacks, manumitted slaves, exiles, and their descendants gathered in proximity — not because the conditions were ideal, but because they were shared. Language, too, became a site of adaptation.

Afrikaans, shaped through contact between Dutch, Khoi languages, Malay, and other influences, emerged not as a pure form, but as a creolised medium of survival. In some cases, it was written in Arabic script — not as an aesthetic choice, but as a practical and devotional one, allowing religious knowledge to be transmitted in a language people could access.

This was confluence. But it was not symmetrical. It was marked by hierarchy, by coercion, by unequal access to land, movement, and recognition. The meeting of peoples at the Cape was structured by power, even as it generated new forms of life, culture, and belief.

And yet, something else persisted within that structure. Despite the fragmentation of origin, despite the violence of displacement, practices of memory endured. Recitation, ritual, naming, and storytelling became ways of holding continuity across rupture. What could not be preserved in its original form was carried in altered ways — in language that bent, in practices that adapted, in identities that could not be easily classified within the rigid categories of the colonial state.

The river, by then, had already begun to disappear from view — channelled, covered, redirected beneath the expanding town.

The people, too, were being reclassified. Grouped under terms that flattened difference into administrative convenience.

Mene Mene

Tekel

upharsin

Beneath the surface of the colonial city, two archives were taking shape.

One of water.

One of people.

III

If the river was buried, it was not buried alone.

The ground of Cape Town holds more than water.

It holds bodies.

In 2003, at Prestwich Place in Green Point, the foundations of a new development cut into something older than the city's visible memory. Beneath the surface lay the remains of more than two thousand individuals — men, women, and children buried between the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries. Many were enslaved. Others were the poor, the displaced, those who lived on the margins of a colonial order that recorded property with precision but left human lives largely unnamed.

For a brief moment, the buried archive surfaced.

Archaeologists documented what they could. Historians, community leaders, and descendants called for the site to be preserved — not as a relic, but as a place of encounter. A place where the city might be compelled to reckon with the lives that made it possible.

But the logic of the present prevailed.

Development continued. The remains were exhumed, catalogued, and relocated to an ossuary. The ground was cleared for construction. What had been uncovered as a disturbance was rendered manageable — translated into data, contained within institutional frameworks, and removed from the everyday life of the city.

The archive was acknowledged.

And then, once again, it was buried.

This is not an isolated event. It is part of a longer pattern in which the past is allowed to surface only briefly, before being reabsorbed into systems that prioritise continuity over confrontation. What is at stake is not only preservation, but the terms under which memory is permitted to exist.

At Prestwich Place, the question was never simply whether remains would be protected. It was whether the city would allow itself to be unsettled by them.

What does it mean to build over the dead?

Not metaphorically, but materially — to raise structures, accumulate wealth, and circulate daily above ground that contains unmarked lives?

This is not only a political question. It is an ethical one. A question about what a society chooses to remember, and what it trains itself to forget.

The burial ground at Prestwich does not stand apart from the story of Camissa. It deepens it. Just as the river was redirected, channelled, and eventually concealed beneath the expanding city, so too were the people whose labour sustained that expansion. Enslaved men and women were not only exploited in life; in death, many were denied the dignity of lasting markers. Their graves became part of the substrate of the city — present, but unacknowledged.

Water and bone share a strange continuity.

Both move beneath the surface.

Both resist final containment.

Both return.

When foundations are dug, when pipes are laid, when construction cuts into the earth, something of what was buried reappears — reminders that the ground is not neutral. It is layered with histories that exceed official records. As one image from Prestwich Place insists with stark clarity:

Bones do not lie. The land keeps memory.

This is not poetry. It is method.

The land records what archives omit.

It holds what categories cannot contain.

It remembers what systems of power attempt to erase.

To treat such sites as obstacles to development is to misunderstand their significance. They are not interruptions to the city's story; they are the story — the material evidence of how the city came to be.

And yet, modern urban life is structured precisely to avoid this confrontation.

Roads are laid over old waterways.

Buildings rise over burial grounds.

Maps replace memory.

The result is not the absence of history, but its displacement.

What emerges, instead, is a city of surfaces — legible, functional, and efficient, but detached from the deeper layers that sustain it. A city in which memory is curated rather than encountered, where heritage is contained within museums and plaques, rather than recognised as an ongoing relationship with the ground beneath one's feet.

But the buried archive does not remain silent.

It persists in what might be called a moral unease — a sense, however faint, that something has been left unresolved. That beneath the order of the present lies an unfinished history, one that continues to shape the conditions of life in the city.

This unease is not a problem to be solved.

It is a form of knowledge.

To attend to it is to recognise that memory does not disappear when it is buried. It changes form. It moves through other channels — through story, through ritual, through the quiet insistence of those who continue to name what has been covered over.

In this sense, the work of remembering is not an act of recovery alone.

It is an act of refusal.

A refusal of the second burial — the burial of memory itself.

IV

If land and water carry memory, then language is where that memory learns to breathe.

But language, like the river, did not survive the Cape unchanged.

It was broken.

Interrupted.

Reassembled under pressure.

In the early colonial period, the Cape became a site of intense linguistic contact. Dutch, imposed as the language of administration, encountered the spoken forms of the Khoekhoe, the rhythms of Malay, the cadences of Arabic, the tonalities of East African and South Asian languages carried by the enslaved. What emerged over time was not a single inheritance, but a layered one — a creolised form that would come to be known as Afrikaans.

To describe Afrikaans simply as a derivative of Dutch is to miss the conditions of its formation.

It was shaped in kitchens, in workshops, in fields, in places where formal education was absent but communication was necessary. It developed among those who were denied access to official forms of literacy, yet required language to survive, transmitting knowledge across generations. It was, from the beginning, a language marked by adaptation.

In this sense, Afrikaans itself can be understood as an archive of encounter — carrying within it traces of coercion and creativity, of domination and response.

But perhaps more telling is the way in which language was used to preserve what could not be openly sustained.

In the Cape Muslim community, Afrikaans was at times written in Arabic script — a practice often referred to as Arabic-Afrikaans. This was not merely a stylistic innovation. It was a functional response to historical conditions.

Arabic, as the language of the Qur'an, held religious authority. Afrikaans, as the spoken language of the community, held accessibility. Writing Afrikaans in Arabic script allowed for the transmission of religious knowledge — prayer, doctrine, ethical instruction — in a form that could be read, recited, and remembered by those excluded from formal institutions of learning.

Here, language becomes more than communication.

It becomes a vessel.

Something is carried across a break.

What could not be preserved in its original form — whether due to displacement, prohibition, or the fragmentation of community — is retained in altered form. Meaning is not lost, but it is refracted. It passes through another structure, another script, another set of sounds, and in doing so, it survives.

This is not preservation in the sense of keeping something intact.

It is preservation through transformation.

The same can be said of oral practices. Recitation, whether of Qur'anic verses, litanies such as the Ratib al-Haddād, or local devotional forms, functioned as modes of continuity. Knowledge was memorised, repeated, embodied. It lived in breath and voice rather than in sanctioned texts. In conditions where written archives were limited or controlled, the human body itself became a site of transmission.

Memory, in this context, is not stored externally.

It is carried.

This carrying, however, is not without consequence.

Fragments do not fit together seamlessly. They retain the marks of rupture. Pronunciations shift. Meanings adapt. Practices take on local inflections. What emerges is not a reconstruction of what was lost, but something new — shaped by the conditions of survival.

To recognise this is to move beyond a search for purity. There is no original form waiting to be recovered in its entirety. What exists, instead, are afterlives. Languages that bear the imprint of multiple worlds. Practices that carry echoes of distant origins. Words that hold more than one history at once. In this sense, the work of language at the Cape parallels the work of the river and the land. It moves through constraint. It adapts to pressure. It carries fragments forward. And in doing so, it refuses disappearance.

The persistence of Arabic-Afrikaans, the continued recitation of inherited litanies, the survival of particular turns of phrase and forms of address — these are not minor cultural details. They are forms of memory that have learned how to endure without relying on visibility. They exist, like the buried river, beneath the surface of dominant narratives.

Still moving.

Epi(/socio/)genetic Horcruxes: Rewriting Inheritances of Colonial Life in the Post-Colony

RITHULI ORLEYN

What if colonial history had left fragments of itself hidden – not in monuments or archives, but in the very fabric of a language? This essay borrows a concept from J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series to explore exactly that. A 'horcrux' is an object in which a piece of a wizard's soul is concealed for the sake of immortality. Here, the concept is repurposed: the isiXhosa language, and the writings of its early literati, functioned as an unlikely vessel – a horcrux – in which pieces of autochthonous (indigenous) social and spiritual life were hidden during the catastrophic encounter with colonial rule. These fragments were not preserved pristine. They were transformed, hybridised, and sometimes barely recognisable. But they survived. The term 'horcrux' combines the prefix 'hor-' (linked to horror and shuddering) with '-crux' (meaning cross, puzzle, or essential point). That dual character – something simultaneously frightening and essential – captures the nature of the fragments explored here: buried in metaphor, ceremony, and contested vocabulary. These fragments carry the residue of a world that colonialism tried to erase.

The central argument is this: Rather than reading the 1856/7 amaXhosa Cattle-Killing as a story of superstition and self-destruction – the dominant historical interpretation – we ought to read it as a rupture in which indigenous social life reconfigured itself under pressure, seeding new forms of meaning that would carry forward into the twentieth century, eventually surfacing in Steve Biko's Black Consciousness movement.

The Cattle-Killing and Its Historians

In 1856 and 1857, amaXhosa slaughtered their cattle and destroyed their crops following a purported prophecy by a young woman named Nongqawuse, who, as dominant narrative goes, claimed that the dead would rise. Reading the synecdoche-rich isiXhosa text on this 'rising of the dead' I have rather come to understand an anticipated new world yet to be born. Coming from Gqoba's own understanding that this so-called prophecy was a call to cull diseased cattle, the result was not catastrophic: mass starvation, displacement, induced by amaXhosa's propensity for superstition. But it was catastrophic from leveraging the political expediency of the upheaval, to collapse amaXhosa's political autonomy. Historians have long debated this unscrupulous opportunism on the then Governor, Sir George Grey.

Before J. B. Peires' landmark history of the event, the Cattle-Killing was most often described as a collective act of superstition, even 'national suicide.' Peires offered a more nuanced reading, situating the event in the broader political tensions between amaXhosa chiefdoms and British colonial authorities, particularly the manipulative role of Governor Sir George Grey.

But even Peires, this essay argues, missed something important. His materialist interpretation – foregrounding land, tax, and colonial administrative disruption – underplays the philosophical and poetic dimensions of amaXhosa discourse. Consider the war-doctor Mlanjeni, who, on the eve of the 1850-53 war, claimed that bullets would 'turn to water.' Peires reads this as a lie or an irrational belief. A more careful reading, attentive to isiXhosa poetic expression, suggests it was a strategic metaphor – a way of speaking about invulnerability and resistance in the idiom of the time. Similarly, the question attributed to Chief Mhala – 'Why can't the cattle rise?' – need not be read as millenarian delusion. It was posed in a different conceptual vocabulary, one grounded in a different understanding of time, life, and political possibility.

William Wellington Gqoba: First isiXhosa Voice on the Cattle-Killing

The most important, and most overlooked, source on the Cattle-Killing is William Wellington Gqoba (1840-1888). Gqoba was a lay preacher, poet, orator, and essayist – a trained wagon-maker who came to writing African history through intellectual self-determination rather than formal academic training. He wrote in isiXhosa for the periodical *isiGidimi SamaXhosa* (1873-1888), and his account of the Cattle-Killing, composed some twenty-nine years after the events themselves, remains the only substantial account written by an isiXhosa-speaking author of that era.

The historian Peires read Gqoba's work – but only in the abridged English translation produced by A. C. Jordan in 1950. This translation in Peires' epistemic heavy lifting, this essay argues, erased much of what made Gqoba's text complex, nuanced and distinctive. Gqoba's original text is not a straightforward narrative of superstition or political manipulation. It is a layered, poetic, theologically adventurous text that uses indigenous metaphors, biblical allusions, and invented conceptual tools to think about catastrophe, temporality and renewal.

A key example is Gqoba's use of the word 'isimausi.' Peires glosses this as a term for slaughtered cattle sold in buckets. Gqoba uses it differently: to describe cattle whose 'soul' has tarried – layering it as an empty signifier that lingers from one system of battering communal coordinates to another of colonial money exchange. In the context of the Cattle-Killing prophecy, Gqoba writes that Nongqawuse instructed believers to 'audit' the cattle they had owned before the expected resurrection, and to 'claim the soul' of those animals so that the cattle would rise again for them on the day of renewal. This is not a story about primitive belief. It is a story about a society trying to think through – in its own idiom – the loss of its material and spiritual/otherworldly world, and the possibility of reconstituting that world in a new form.

Gqoba's Temporal Vision: Phakadelikhoyo and Zwelizayo

Gqoba's most conceptually rich contribution lies in two characters from his long poem *Ingxoxo* (1885-87): Phakadelikhoyo ('the current imaginary' or 'the present age') and Zwelizayo ('the world that is coming' or 'futuraity'). These characters debate the meaning of the Cattle-Killing and its aftermath – but they are more than literary devices. They represent two ways of inhabiting history. Phakadelikhoyo represents the existing colonial order: conditional rights, precarious belonging, and the Victorian promise of 'non-racial' equality that was repeatedly rescinded. Zwelizayo represents something else – not nostalgia for a pre-colonial past, but a break, a leap, toward a future that cannot yet be named. These characters are related to the deity Naphakade: 'the offspring of The Broadchested one who ushers in the new Jerusalem-like New Xhosa House'. These are anthropomorphised figures or, as I read them, discursive tools, drawn from the Ntsikana tradition of Christian-Xhosa synthesis.

Gqoba's temporal language is not millenarian – it cannot be reduced to miraculous end-of-days. It is about the kind of break in history that happens when a social order collapses and a new one has not yet taken shape. His watchwords in isiGidimi say it clearly: *inkcithakalo* (desolation), *amajekendlela* (the poor, the displaced), *isimausi* (traded meat or lingering empty signifier), *ikhethe* (partisanship), *phakade* (a passing age). These are not mystical terms. They are a vocabulary for thinking how putative identities navigate through catastrophe and change.

The Victorian Context: Three Forces Reshaping Black Life

To understand what Gqoba was navigating, we need to understand the Victorian world he inhabited. Three broad forces were reshaping indigenous life in the mid-to-late nineteenth century Eastern Cape. First, Enlightenment rationalism – the insistence that knowledge worth having was scientific and empirical, and that indigenous modes of understanding were superstition. This rationalism was not simply an intellectual

position; it was a tool of power, used to delegitimise indigenous institutions, law, and medicine.

Second, the Protestant work ethic and the transformation of labour. Waged labour was racialised: menial, physical work was black; salaried, 'skilled' work was white. Indigenous people who entered the colonial labour market found themselves in a trap: labour was presented as both the path to civilisation and the mechanism of their subordination.

Third, the translation wars – the deep disagreements about how to translate the Bible into isiXhosa, and what was lost (or smuggled in) in the process. These disputes were not merely linguistic. They were contests over whose cosmological vocabulary would shape the emerging literate tradition of the Xhosa world.

The early Xhosa literati – Gqoba, Tiyo Soga, S. E. K. Mqhayi, H. I. E. Dlomo – moved through all three of these forces simultaneously. They were not passive recipients of colonial modernity. They contested it, reworked it, and found in its own tools – writing, the Bible, print culture – the means to articulate alternatives.

Memory Texts and the Politics of Myth

The philosopher V. Y. Mudimbe introduced the concept of 'memory texts' to describe syncretic works that carry traces of both biblical influence and traditional oral narrative – texts that are more than legend or myth, but contain 'political projects, philosophical and ethical reflections. Gqoba's writings are precisely such memory texts. They are not simply records of what happened during the Cattle-Killing. They are interventions – attempts to make sense of catastrophe in a way that neither surrenders to colonial interpretation nor pretends that the pre-colonial world can be recovered unchanged.

Gqoba achieves this through his scriptural riffing. He deploys Luke 12:53 to paint the split within amaXhosa between amaThamba (Believers in the Cattle-Killing prophecy) and amaGogotya (non-believers) – a family rupture that mirrors the broader tear in the social fabric. He then substitutes the 'pale horse' of the Book of Revelation with a grey horse, naming the rider not 'Death' in the abstract, but invoking the 'grey' of Governor

Sir George Grey – colonial rule personified as apocalyptic figure. This Grey rider is both destructive force and, paradoxically, an engine of transformation: the leap into a new world, however brutal the leap. Gqoba's hermeneutics – his way of reading and rewriting sacred text – does not wait for institutional permission. He interprets the Bible through the lens of Xhosa poetics, and through the lens of Xhosa poetics interprets the Bible. This double movement is itself a form of resistance qua invention: claiming the right to interpret one's own situation without being enclosed by someone else's categories.

Tiyo Soga, Mqhayi, Dlomo: A Constellation of Refusal

Gqoba was not alone. Tiyo Soga, one of the first ordained black ministers in South Africa, wrestled openly with the question of what Christian modernity meant for indigenous people. In his journals, he staged a debate in which King Sandile's retinue challenged him: why was God's Word not sent to their forefathers? Soga's reply is instructive. He compared the coming of Christianity to the coming of the plough, the spade, and the hoe – not as foreign impositions to be resisted, but as new technologies to be adopted and adapted on African terms. S. E. K. Mqhayi, in his 1927 novel *U-Don Jadu*, explored what it meant for amaXhosa people subjected by labour migration and urbanisation to adapt their social customs to a transformed world – without simply abandoning those customs. H. I. E. Dlomo, writing about the Cattle-Killing in 'The Girl Who Killed to Save,' explicitly rejected the 'national suicide' framing, calling the catastrophe instead a 'process of metamorphosis.' New institutions, Dlomo argued, can only be built on the ruins of the old.

What connects these figures, I might conjecture, is a shared posture: one that refused the binary choice between assimilation and traditionalism. They were not trying to go back. They were trying to leap forward – carrying something of the old world into the new, a world transformed but not erased.

Bad Faith, Leaping, and Biko's Black Consciousness

The concept of 'bad faith,' drawn loosely from Heidegger's notion of 'fleeing' one's own existence, is useful here. Bad faith is what happens when a person – or a culture – calcifies in the face of change: When putative identities ossify the open, and contingent, nature of be-ing into something rigid and timeless. Colonial modernity produced bad faith in two directions, simultaneously. For settlers, it produced the fiction of a fixed racial hierarchy, naturalised and inevitable. For the colonised, it produced the temptation to either accept that fiction or to mirror it with an equally fixed counter-identity. The early Xhosa literati, as read here, refused both options. They 'leaped' – to use the term proposed in this essay – rather than fled. They moved through history without clinging to a fixed Self. Gqoba's *Zwelizayo* demonstrates this indeterminate dance of be-coming. His *isimausi* concept traces the contingent, shifting life of a thing – sometimes cattle, sometimes meaning, sometimes identity – as these move from one world into another. Steve Biko's *Black Consciousness*, articulated in the SASO Manifesto of 1972 and in *I Write What I Like* (1987), inherits this critical posture. Biko identified 'white racism' as the dominant force structuring South African life – not in a merely somatic sense (skin colour), but in a juridical and relational sense: as a set of normalised power relations that the colonised had internalised.

His call was not for a retreat into essentialist African identity – he was sharply critical of what he called losing oneself 'in a world of colourlessness and amorphous common humanity' where whites had already pre-figured this purportedly neutral line as already White. His call was for black people to recover their own terms of self-understanding: to stop seeing themselves through white eyes, and to construct a positive, dynamic sense of self capable of contesting the racial order on black people's own terms.

This is precisely what Gqoba, Soga, Mqhayi, and Dlomo were doing – in their different idioms – a century earlier. They were building a critical archive: a set of texts and concepts that refused the colonial script without pretending that the pre-colonial world could be recovered unchanged. They were, to return to the opening metaphor, tending to horcruxes: fragments of soul hidden in language, waiting to

Conclusion: Reading Against the Archive

The dominant archive of the Nongqawuse Cattle-Killing is an English-language archive, shaped by colonial administrators, missionaries, and historians who read isiXhosa texts only in translation – and often in abridged, flattened translation at that. This essay has argued for a different reading practice: one that takes seriously the isiXhosa texts themselves, in their poetic complexity and conceptual ambition. Gqoba's isiGidimi writings reveal a thinker who was simultaneously a Christian, an isiXhosa traditionalist, a political critic of colonial taxation and pass laws, and a poet of historical rupture. He was not simply 'for' or 'against' the colonial script. He was doing something more difficult and more interesting: finding the fissures and clefts in that script and writing through them. Reading this way requires what Hortense Spillers calls attention to 'captive texts' – texts produced under repression, which insinuate themselves 'everywhere' in 'ambivalent codes and decodes, fissures and clefts, and contradictions to protocols of originary intent.' It also requires what Leon de Kock calls attending to 'a mask of moderate passivity' – the political shorthand that colonised writers developed for speaking to power while protecting themselves from its worst consequences.

What emerges from this kind of reading is not a simple counter-narrative – not a story in which amaXhosa are heroic victims and colonists are straightforwardly villainous. It is something stranger and more generative: a history of thought, of making meaning under pressure, of refusing to let a catastrophe have the last word. The horcruxes of post-colonial life are still in there – in the language, in the archive, in the poetry. The work of unmaking the colonial inheritance begins with finding them.

PAT MACDONALD

ABRACADABRA

Pat Macdonald lives in Kent. Keeping a regular practice and harbours aspirations to make a children's book and study art therapy. His drawings stemming from portraiture are mixed with organic dark humour. Folk art, typography, printmaking, mural art and poetry influence him "It's a sad and beautiful world" A fond quote from the film "Down by Law" by Jim Jarmusch inspires him to emulate this view in his everyday practice. He sells his watercolours in Frank Gallery, nestled in coastal Whitstable.



Pat Macdonald
Catching Butterflies
Mixed media on paper



Pat Macdonald
Small Bright Things
Mixed media on paper



Pat Macdonald
Untitled
Ink on paper



LOVE

I saw a mirror and thought it was you.
I smiled.
You cried
until I learnt to lie.

We stared at each other
through the windowpane.

You walked away.
It killed me sweetly.

I had to go
and make the place neat.

My feathers
had turned dry.

Pass me your coat.
I hissed at the sea.

You talked about
my broken glasses.

You laughed
and kissed my dreams
into darkness.

Still, I can't avoid
this lightness.

I'm ill and free,
building your house
coldly, softly.

A new wave came.
I smiled.

It almost took
a lifetime of denial.

I had two lives.
I grew up a lot.

Even the mirror
is losing the plot.

The gates won't open.
The glass is almost fixed.

I can't lie anymore.
I am not sea food.

I plant seeds
into the roof,
not too kind,
not in the mood

for the next generation
to choose.



*One Day This Grass
Will Have Blades*

The sky was a misty labyrinth
for my dreams
on a bus journey to Iceland.

Limestone in my mind,
my thoughts carved soft new beings,
as if hope had made a sculpture
for the world to believe in.

Through the glass I saw
no reflection,
only mist,
chalky green,
and the road carrying on.

You could not see a thing.
This is how I felt for years.

Voices in my head,
a mind tampered with technology,
a rainbow of choices,
a reflective void.
I tried to decode it all.

So I shut the window.
I hid in my own weather.
I was hardened,
empty,
crying in my own reality.
Then I started again.

The seeds make trees.
My old woods were wonderful.
Knock, knock, knock—
I could redesign
the will of an acorn,
or maybe just its shape.

Yes, my mum
really looks after me.
And still I look at the stars,
pushing my roots
further into the ground
to smile.

One day
these trees won't be chalky.
One day
this grass will have blades.
One day
I will see you
holding your secret
better than mine.

Until then,
out of respect,
I will relax
into your world.







Pat Macdonald
Untitled
Mixed media

POETRY

CHAUNCEY ALAN

Italy

Chauncey Allen resides in Cambria, California. His work is concerned with unfinishedness. The Red Marlin is an attempt to go from place to space and the first tome of a planned three-part series.

*On page 34 of The Red Marlin,
under the title "Virtuoso Poet"*

life's hand presses hard at the meat of your forearm
(the outline of porpora)
Rudened albatross balancing on the cross beam
this ancient wind dance
a drunken stupor –
but these massive wings are awkward
and the gods have poor eye sight
and want to know at face value where the chosen are
one false step
when you thought life was better...
fly away
fly away
there is no time left for martyrs

JACQUES COETZEE

South Africa

Jacques Coetzee is a poet, musician and freelance translator. Since 2007 he has been the singer and one of the main songwriters in the band Red Earth & Rust, which released its fifth album of original material in 2022. In January 2018 he and Barbara Fairhead launched their joint anthology of poems, *The Love Sheet*, which was published by Hands On Books, an imprint of Modjaji. His debut solo collection, *An Illuminated Darkness* (uHlanga Press, 2020) was the winner of the Ingrid Jonker Prize and the Olive Schreiner Award for 2022. His poem, “Doepa vir Allenigheid”, was the winner of the 2021 AVBOB Poetry Prize in the Afrikaans category.

The Poet's Lover Overhears

Tonight he's arguing with his ghosts again,
in the bathroom, when he thinks no-one can hear him.
Occasionally he laughs out loud, but mostly
he curses under his breath, like someone
walking down a staircase, a door slammed behind him,
still thinking of things he could shout
to win a savage argument.

This morning, lying back in his arms,
she could swear the two of them were alone
in the bed, promising over and over
to take each other into the sun.

If she leans back into herself,
will she find some old magic—
of the earth, perhaps, or of the awakened senses—
to settle these voices in his head,
the voices of the invisible ones
that crowd in on him when he's alone like this?
Or will they recompose themselves
into a sweeter music
that announces her presence, welcomes her
into that muttering room?

After The Long Rage

What does it matter that I pushed you
down a long, steep flight of stairs
in a dream, or trembled in a narrow room,
composing long letters that raged
and raged at you, deep into the night?

None of this lasts. Every day slowly shuffles these things
closer to oblivion. Soon enough nothing will matter
about our time except the poems, the songs we made,
dancing at the edge of an abyss
of our own design—until one day
I will open a door somewhere, leading into a room
or out of it, and find myself
close to an ancient water-source—the same one
we found once—and draw water there,
like men and women have always done, from the beginning,
their feet planted on the earth, their voices
singing into the winds that will outlast them.

FEATURED ARTIST

Merri Creek - 16x12, Pastel



AINSLEY LUNDEEN

EDUARD BURLE

South Africa

Eduard Burle received a Masters Degree in Creative Writing from the University of Cape Town in 2002. Since 2005 he has been a regular contributor and reader of poems at Off the Wall, a poetry group that meets at A Touch of Madness in Observatory, Cape Town. He is a member of the ECCA Poets group, and was invited to be the guest poet for the ECCA Poets' 2015 publication Sound Piping. Together with poet and friend, Jacques Coetzee, Eduard Burle had the honour of being asked to do a reading of the late Norman Morrissey's poems at the McGregor Poetry Festival in 2017. He also participated in the ECCA group reading at McGregor in 2017. Eduard works in a bookshop in Cape Town. His poems have been published in New Coin, New Contrast, Stanzas, and in Patricia Schonstein's Africa! anthologies.

Memory Returns Them

Memory returns them to him for an instant –

the man, haggard, barely
able to stand, eyes
sunken, faraway, face scarred
and swollen, begging
at a traffic light;

the woman, tall, out of breath, behind
a post office counter, moving
slowly, uncomfortably, with tentative
steps across the room, leaving
work early each day
to go for dialysis.

Memory retrieves them for one fleeting moment:
two who cannot make it to shore,
two who can only tread water,
until they're dragged under the waves.

Doppelgänger

For a long time now, he'd struggled with the sculpture of a man who was struggling to climb out of a wall. How far embedded the man's limbs were in the wall he couldn't tell, but he could compose in the mask of his face an expression of determination and exasperation (he couldn't tell which was stronger); only the man's head and neck, the front of his chest, one of his arms, a raised knee – and much of the selfsame leg – seemed to be wedged into the air in front of him. He was about to speak to the man – not for the first time – who was still trying to climb free, and ask him just how he'd gotten there, become frozen, walled into stone, when he saw, in a moment's clear-sightedness, his own features, his own frame somehow caught in mid-stride – like one running – inside the wall; saw, too, that this man was as inevitable as his own shadow, would always be with him wherever he, himself, had come from or was going to; and who was, unmistakably, in need of his help..



Ainsley is a visual artist based in the San Francisco Bay Area whose practice emerged after a back injury ended her classical dance career as a teenager. Drawing on her studies in literature, studio art, and arts management in Paris and Florence, these pastels explore the subtle ways experiences leave traces upon one another.

MIGWI MWANGI

Kenya

Migwi Mwangi is a storyteller from Nairobi. His work has been featured in *Adroit Journal*, *Copper Nickel*, *Gulf Coast*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*, among others. A recipient of the George Bogin Award from the Poetry Society of America, he holds an MFA from NYU. He is currently pursuing a PhD in The Department of English at Princeton University and is the author of *Desire Path*

Rediscovering Home

your relaxed hair will shed on the first Monday of fall
as you prepare to leave America
these things are arresting
--pains, losses, vacancies--
these things bring strength that is no strength
your old hairdressers will mock your shaved head in Swahili
as you leave you will respond "siku njema"
these things collide with your soul
--crowds, noise, non-movement--
and you have so much soulfulness
your cupboard will sag with all kinds of repairing creams
your roots like concrete
these things are depthful
--revisions of yourself, humanity, dreaming--
these things ask you to be brave
you will buy a headwrap in town exactly like your mother's
the one you mocked for its blandness and old look
these things are soft in the mouth
--forgiveness, hope, love--
these things are acts of faith
your hair will grow cloaked by the quiet magic of your mother
you will garment yourself to wholeness
these things desire to be seen and not seen
--healing, presence, sentience--
these things are a kind of soul work

Endless Traffic

*The fantastic thing about South Africa is one
always and only meets one's friends through politics.*

— Bessie Head

At a roundabout, a woman greets the woman seated next to
her in the matatu. After roads, they lower their voices to
enter maize prices, Parliament's capture, reckless politicians,
unsolved femicides.

Yao Pengyu 姚鹏宇

China

YAO Pengyu (姚鹏宇) is a multilingual writer, poet, and curator based in Shanghai. She identifies as a knowledge omnivore with a sense of wanderlust. Her original poems, translations, film and literary reviews, and interviews have appeared in prestigious Chinese journals such as *Foreign Literature and Art*, as well as international platforms including *Radio Netherlands Worldwide* and *A Shanghai Poetry Zine*. She founded the Sustainable Storytelling workshop series, which integrates improv theatre and public speaking to champion a more eco-conscious future. She currently serves as Cultural Coordinator at the Shanghai Spanish Cultural Center – Instituto Cervantes.

Criterion Collection

I am your raw film negative,
you are my mint-condition trilogy.
Wrapped carelessly
in rice paper,
each second
mummified in closeness
and coldness.
A mutual collection
until the corner
becomes
where we belong.
Folded numbers,
silver halides warp,
emulsion bleeds,
then fades along.
Every action requires three steps:
bite, another bite,
a final bite.
Gnawing celluloid,
munching colloid—
collapse.
Care not,
criterion.

Cold Palace

Superficial is the territory, minute the reign,
inside-out is the building, deafening silence the language.

A roulette of luck reigns each phase of the empire, treaties and compromises
etched on paper-flat oracle bones.

A gender-affirmation bikini crowns the chief of chefs, atop the sphere of an
antediluvian placemat,
carved with polyglottal phaticism.

The Aztecs offer pronounced sgraffito,
Selk'nam characters shape smooth terraces.
Who invented the contemporary ointment?

The amicably-dancing Russians?
Inside a bell jar of bell jars,
time is pressed.

Four moving figures flank the clock face:
Vanity, Greed, Death, Lust.

The Big Apple serves as refreshment,
where yellow cabbies drive through Baku's dreams. Buddha and Bastillo
hallucinate deep down
into the failing siesta.

A flying phallus stands beside Persian Good Fellas, androgynous Münchner
Kindl circle their mass— are they good underlings?
It's a total, grandeur.

VUYISWA NODADA

South Africa

Vuyiswa Nodada has three published poetry books: Scent of Royal Sound (2011), Eve'Olution (2015) and Ubuntu: Imperative Social Imperative (2021). In 2010 her short story was published in Germany (translated to German) as part of an anthology titled Elf with other South African writers. Currently she's a student doing MA in Creative Writing. She is a mother of one and Makazi, Dabawo and Makhulu to many.

Womb-ache

humans are all but dust
but humans more human than others
but in the prisons of their own grey matter
but disgust

aren't they the worst wretched of the world
from their wretched hearts wretched acts follow felling fellow humans
sinking ache deep in the heart of my womb
ndisikwe yinimba

scenes

obscene

crimson trails

holy wars oil wars racial wars taxi wars tenderpreneur wars all wars
dye tears red
ndisikwe yinimba

red tears my heart trickles
and in sorority my womb
and in solidarity my head aches

and in solidarity my stomach aches
 ndisikwe yinimba

as in horcruxes
 like blood of martyrs
 how can hearts not shutter – splint into million blossoms
 how can wombs not shutter – splint into million ubuntu-warriors
 when

Gaza's infants fed to the god hatred – a daily prayer

when

orgy in sadism – a daily daily

when

chopping the head for an eye – daily

when

cutting a human in two for a tooth – daily

when

burning at stake the grey haired the pregnant in thousands for a hand – daily
 aches wombs across seas

kaloku inimba iyafana bafazi

aspirin for headache	red roses for heartache	but what for wombache?
running to fire?	swimming in mud?	peace-warring?
bitter the medicine	better the curing power	to sooth a wombache

tortured of wombaches: zukiswa wanner, fatima hendricks, zaheera soomar, carrie
shelver

motherly fathers

motherly brothers

motherly sons

dared death

dreaded not

boarded dragon flotilla

splints of many a broken womb

may olive-branches wave but

waiver not reparations

hold not peace

teketa usiya

ink on

lisp on

stutter on

thintitha usiya

for peace's sake

peace-war forward

in blood-ink

write on write on

don't hold your peace

even against peace-wars

KANI CHIPEYA

South Africa

Kaninga Peter Chipeya is a South African poet, freelance researcher, and children's author. Born in Kliptown, Johannesburg, in 1953, his early literary influences included the poetry of Benedict Wallet Vilakazi and the storytelling tradition fostered by his father. His poetry has appeared in more than seven anthologies and numerous literary publications. He is the author of the children's novella *My First Day at the Golf Course* and is currently working on a childhood memoir and a biography.

The Headgear Sentinel

the coalmine headgear
eternally elevated by time
externally lifted above
the rust of rails and carts

even aloof from the crippled
hoist that used to shuttle
miners to and from underground

the coalmine headgear
also surveys the trails
of abandoned gumboots
on weeded lanes

some brave miners
were long trapped and buried
underground with their headlamps
on while helmets stuck on their heads

others left in fortunate years
to be mourned and buried home
in the midst of their kin

the coalmine headgear
stands aloof like a tombstone
(Bellevue Colliery Born 1910
Died 1968 - Rest in Peace)

the coalmine headgear
only with the sanity of silence
still guard the ruins

HAMID NAZARKHAH ALISARAEI

Iran

Hamid Nazarkhah Alisaraei (Adonis Dodestani) is an Iranian poet, writer, storyteller, journalist, and researcher of popular culture. Writing in both Gilaki and Persian, he has published widely in Iran and internationally, with his work translated into numerous languages. He is the author of *Wind Lullaby* (2018), founder of the Kochesfahan literary group, and head of the Gil Kochesfahan Institute of Culture. A recipient of several international literary awards, Nazarkhah serves as a representative of the BRICS Writers' Association in Iran and is a member of the World Poetry Movement.

ادخ مان هب

1

Even so, she is one; the mother of mine
A poet, never was I
Even so, she shares a laugh or two with the clouds at night
Aches along with the fish in the sea and their blight
Lends a shoulder to cry on to the mountains upright
And cuddles the skies above so tight
She would kiss the wind with all its might
And caress my head, lest I fright
As she speaks the tongue of pomegranate blossoms in pain
That get squashed in my thoughts every night
Because a poet, never was I
Even so, she is one; the mother of mine

2

Sometimes I live in Beirut
Sometimes beside your imagination...
Sometimes my poetry smells like gunpowder
Sometimes the taste of your kisses...
I think we are a thousand years apart
When in the middle of my poem
I comb your hair
Sometimes I make your laugh the color of wild raspberry
I fill my mouth with silver dew
with the accent of the sun
Sometimes I sigh for thousands of hidden sorrows
This is my greatest sorrow
my love!

3

Ah, you beautiful gypsy woman!
I decorated my poem with colored lights
to be the color of your eyes
I have attached all the lines of my poetry to my chest
To remember you in my heart forever
Ah, you beautiful gypsy woman!
When you shouted my name from the highest clock tower in the city
I was thinking about your dreams
Ah, you beautiful gypsy woman!
I love you like all the words of my poem
And I hold my poem in my arms and kiss her lips.
Ah, you beautiful gypsy woman!
Let the whole world know how much I love you
Sell me some of your laugh and half of your look
And this time I shout from the city clock tower:
This beautiful gypsy woman loves me.

4

fishes
Fantastic autumn nights
Under the electric posts of the city
In the thick fog of the evening
Celebrate.
Street pavements
They breathe the footsteps of passers-by
The longest night of the year
with red seeds of words
they decorate
But I share the my dream of watermelon dream among the poor people
to have a happy Yalda.

5

Poems has blossomed
in May
I became the translator of the wind smile
Friend of the calm waves of the sea...
Friend of the sunshine behind the mountain –
who still prostrates and does omen.
Poems has not flourished
in May
you wrote
In the story of the wind's smile
on the pieces of the black cloud
the cherry of words
Have stolen from the lips of the sea's brides
and the imaginary kisses that tasted like death
you sold it to me secretly
The poems have put shrouded
in May
for May's bloodlust
This is the beginning of the uprising of poems.

6

The clouds, like mares sneeze autumnal
Among the lightning...
Sometimes they come to my dreams

they decorate
But I share the my dream of watermelon dream among the poor people
to have a happy Yalda.
They interpret my white dream as black.

Sometimes they leave me among the red cawing of bearded crows
For that they will blaze everyone
To make me look sinister
Sometimes they wear devotee clothes
And they march on the floor of sky
To dont leave nothing of me.
To paint the smile of winter in the absurd fantasy of autumn in their own name.

7

I have decorated the poem with colored lamps
to match the color of your eyes
I have pinned all the stanzas
So that I never miss you.
The pavements of the city became the color of your steps
When archaeologists discovered your Tora's shoelaces in a sewer pipe
*

When my name was hanged from the highest clock tower in the city
I was thinking about your dreams.
*

The Life was a beautiful dream
Before I say hello to the world
He hugged my father.

8

I am the scarecrow of the farm!
I know there is nothing I can do.
I know that the crows
These ominous crows
Under the dim light of fireflies
I am the scarecrow of the farm!
I know there is nothing I can do.

with a wild onslaught
What they will do with the farm?
I know they will leave me nothing.
I know that tomorrow
during rooster crowing
the Farmer
He puts the rope around my neck.
And he will ignite a fire in among field
And shouts loudly and lauldiy
He shouts and says
This is my motto.

9

home country
It is white paper
in which words are free
And they hug each other.
home country
It is somewhere near sunset
that the canaries are free to sing for the passersby in love
And the fishes are free to dance in front of the customer.
home country
I am
Away from the hustle and bustle of the world
I write love poems

10

Let the small fishes
so much in the commotional sea of my heart
Watch
The moments of my being with you

Let them rest a little
The waves of your Fiction
In mind of The shore of my poetry.

Let it rise
from the black heart
September sun

let me grow old
With the great sadness of winter's beliefs
In the mind of orange trees.

11

No nights understand my pain
Nine, days understand my restlessness...
The red color of children's cheeks
people said: It is the fault of winter!
I asked the wind passing by the schools:
Why every night do children
dream of rainbows?!
Why have the moan of the streets
become earrings
To the ears of my mother?!
When children
close their eyes
to their dreams...
Rain of black stones
collapse
From the corner of my mother's eyes.

12

The clouds of the mare are drawing an autumnal sheehe
Among the lightning...
Sometimes they come to my dreams
They interpret my white dream as black.
Sometimes they leave me among the crows with beards
And they tell everyone that I am a bad person.
Sometimes they wear death clothes
And in the sky on the clouds they are marching
To leave nothing of me.
And paint the smile of winter in their own name in the absurd fantasy of autumn.

13

A poet with high heels and pointed shoes
On the edge of life history
walks...
Maybe her poem is pregnant
Row after row of city streets
Under the light of Hafez's sonnets
In the ears of passers-by
long long
From the top of Lujank, the old houses of Rasht
from behind worn and rusty speakers
scream...
Then slowly write on the asphalt:
I am the poet of the king of the poems of the world.
Hamid Nazarkhah Alisaraei
Hamid Nazarkhah Alisaraei

ADLI YACUBI

South Africa

Adli Yacubi is a South African writer, designer, and cultural thinker whose work explores memory, language, and the afterlives of history. Drawing on Cape Muslim heritage and the wider Indian Ocean world, his writing moves between essay, story, and reflection, tracing how land, water, and language carry fragmented histories into the present. His work appears on Substack, where he writes on decolonial thought, spiritual inheritance, and the ethics of remembering.

The Legend of the Silver Tree

(Passed down through the mothers. Told now in your hands.)

My mother told me this story.

She said her own mother heard it from her mother.

So now, I pass it to you like a seed in the wind
so that you, too, might send it down the line.

If you look toward our mountain, Table Mountain

you'll see the cloth of cloud spread across its top like a table set for guests.

To the right: the lion, his back forming Signal Hill, his mane rising into Lion's Head.

To the left: Devil's Peak, brooding.

The lion and the devil seated at the same table.

What a sight for any ship entering Table Bay!

But this story is older than the ships.

Older than the settlers who named those peaks.

Older even than the first Khoi and San who walked these lands.

Long, long ago, perhaps 22,000 years or more
the people lived far inland.

The land was green. Rivers ran deep.

Wild animals moved in herds like shadows.

The earth was generous.

But then the rains lessened.

The land grew hotter, harder.

Some clans became violent.

The world was shifting.

And so it was that a man named Gubi
a fire-maker, a spark of a man
took his young son, Nori, and journeyed south along the Atlantic edge.
Not fleeing.
Seeking.

Their goods were wrapped in leather.
Their bows slung across their backs.
They followed the cold sea winds,
walking toward a dream of sanctuary.

One night, as their fire danced in the dunes,
hyenas came snarling through the dark, hunting porcupines.
Gubi rose with fire in hand, casting its light wide,
pushing the predators back into the night.

From the shadows came a porcupine.
But this was no ordinary porcupine.
She was old, a sage, her quills silver with wisdom.
She stepped forward and spoke in a voice like rustling leaves:

“You have shown courage and care.
For this, I give you a pouch.”
Inside: a handful of shimmering seeds
soft, silver-tipped, unlike anything they had seen.

She said:
“As you walk,
look for the place where the sea makes clouds.
When you find it, plant these.
If they grow, you’ll know: this is your place.”

And so they walked on.

And when they reached the foot of the mountain
flat, cloud-veiled, vast
Gubi and Nori felt the truth of it in their bones.

They planted the seeds.

And by dawn, the Silver Trees had begun to rise
shimmering, breathing, alive.

Not just plants.
A blessing.

And that is how the Silver Tree found only here
came to live beneath Table Mountain.
Not brought by botanists.
Not named by settlers.
But gifted by a porcupine,
Planted by Gubi and Nori,
Rooted in fire, story, and seed.

And when the rains came,
those Silver Trees
drank from the river
that flowed down the mountain
the one they called Camissa
the place of sweet waters,
rushing underground, murmuring toward the sea.

It remembers its own name.

Not Table.

But Hoerikwaggo, the Mountain of the Sea.

To its right, the curled-back hill they once called The Sleeping Lion
its back arched into what settlers would name Signal Hill,
its mane rising into Lion's Head.

To the left, the shadowed one
once called Windmaker's Watch,
now called Devil's Peak.

The land is older than its names.

And stories, like rivers, find their way back.

Epilogue

Some stories are planted, not written.
They take root in silence.
They grow in the shade of memory.

This is one of those.

Passed from mother to daughter, from father to son,
from fire-circle to ear, from silence to word.

The Silver Tree still stands.
The mountain still watches.
And somewhere, Gubi and Nori are still walking
between cloud and coast,
between the land's longing and the sky's answer.

So tell this story again.

When the mountain is misted,
when the wind shifts,
when the child beside you asks,
“Where did we come from?”
Tell them...

“Let me tell you the story of Gubi and Nori —
the spark and the seeker
and the tree that shimmered with yes.”

DANIEL RICHTER

Germany

Daniel Richter, born in Haltern, NRW, West Germany, 12 February 1983, living in Australia. An avid writer of poetry, philosophy and artist and creator in general. An avid scholar of religions, philosophical ideas and humanitarian endeavours. While having no formal tertiary education, writing was always a favourite expressive outlet, from a young age; along with musical creation, and philosophical discussion and quiet contemplation, steered by a rough life and upbringing. Currently homeless, and living on the streets, but still healthy, community focused and philanthropic in effort; regardless, of circumstances.

Untitled Poem I

A piece of me; hidden; as is myself, within.
Unwavering pain to this commitment, have I woven.
Though in my weaving, have I split myself in two and three.
Though also, not ever to be weathered, or removed;
but, by me.

Untitled Poem II

Mystic shadows and reflections; highlight the potential in all things,
stemming from the illusion of nothingness.

MZOLI MAVIMBELA

South Africa

Mzoli Mavimbela is a Xhosa male Social Worker by profession and is currently residing in George, Western Cape. He is a poet, ethnographic researcher, translator, editor, newspaper columnist, and an award-winning author who grew up in Port St Johns, Eastern Cape. He completed a Social Work degree at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in 2014. He completed his Masters of Social Work (Research) cum laude at Nelson Mandela University in 2021 and his study focused on the views of amakrwala on the meaning of umqombothi and commercial alcohol use during the initiation ceremonies, since he is more passionate about indigenous knowledge systems. In 2022 he registered for PhD in Anthropology at Nelson Mandela University to explore the socio-cultural context of amaMpondo, their dress, family system, language, and genealogy.

*Masixhasane Sithandane Sibe
Banye*

UmXhos' uxhomekek' emXhoseni ngempilo.
Ngempilo siphila sixhuma xa singaxhasani.
Ndixhentsa ndixhathisa ndixube nexhala,
Xa inkxasw' indinqabel' okomqa womxoxozi.
Masixhasane sithandane sibe banye.
Ubunye ngamandla, umanyano ngamandla.
Umntu ngumntu ngabantu kwaXhosa.
Mzi kaXhosa ningxamel' ukundixaka,
Xa nonke ningooxhel' eyakhe akabuzwa.
Masixhasane sithandane sibe banye.
Ndinga ndingavuthel' isigodlo ndigadlele.
Ngeendlebe nindive noxa ningandiva nje.
Ndimxhol' uxananazileyo ndixutywe lixhala.
Ixhala lam ngumXhos' ondonway' endixathula.
Masixhasane sithandane sibe banye.

PATRIC TARIQ MELLET

South Africa

Patric Tariq Mellet, born in Cape Town in 1956, is a veteran of the liberation movement. He has an MSc in Tourism, and a Diploma in Printing and Publishing. In 1977 two of his publications “Young Voice” and “New Voice” were banned. Mellet is a historian and author of a number of books including “The Lie of 1652 – A decolonised History of Land” and its sequel “The Truth about Cape Slavery – The Foundations of Colonial South Africa.” Post-1994 he was Director of Public Relations at Parliament, and in 2014 Special Advisor to Minister Naledi Pandor. He retired in 2016 as Director for Port Control: Maritime and Aviation Ports. His autobiography is “Cleaners’ Boy – A Resistance Road to a Liberated Life”.

My Heart Is The Colour of Rust

My heart is the colour of rust –
rust-stained walls
a feature of the Swaai enclave
in our Salt River neighbourhood
the turf of my every -which-way childhood
filled with the ambiguities and wounds
of a society obsessed
with separation into race or colour silos
which played havoc in our tenuous lives
balanced on a high -wire of depravations

Harassed by authoritarian Apartheid petty bureaucrats
reducing humanity to colour shades
chasing social black magnetic solids
oxyhydroxides – a related class of compounds
rusta contaminants
composed of iron and oxide
like our ancestral inheritance
our ancestral -cultural continuum
a coming together of diverse peoples
diverse cultures, diverse experiences

The beautiful shades of our forebears diversity
rooted in Cape indigeneity and African-Asian enslaved
and the rebel Europeans who assimilated with them
which we celebrate as Camissa African heritage
enmeshed with our embedded memories
of triumphs, tears and rising above adversity
now reduced by Apartheid objectification

This cultivated my fascination with the colour of rust
rusted corrugated roofs, gutters, and walls
reddish orange -brown stains
ruddy – a blood like phenomenon
rusta - the oxidation of iron
considered to be contamination
of the social achromatic white –
titanium dioxide whitewashed walls
stained and pained and drained
ranging in hue from deep brown -like red
to earthy orange, lighter shades

My gaze would turn from the rust-stained walls
to watching the winter flood of water
in the streets and curb-sloots
cleaning everything in its path
where Africa's streams of yesteryear once flowed
to the rivers and wetland swamp beyond our location
now taking our dreams, blood and tears with it
to the railway tracks and industrial precinct
bordering the wetland
blurring into our poor residential enclave
which we knew as a place called home

Our home was also a blur of joys and tears
I remember a couple living in our rusta neighbourhood
married prior to the "Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949"
race-classified 'White' and 'Coloured' respectively
raising a son in their tenuous lives under the shadow of Apartheid
a son classified as "Other Coloured"
who had grown up as friends with a girl next door

but she was classified as “white”
two kids oblivious to the dangers of the imposed classifications
two kids who fell in love , expecting a child and wanting to get married

And lodged in my memory
is this boy who jumped in front of a train
after being made aware that he and his love
were prohibited from living in love and marriage
because rust and white were not allowed to blend
“Coloured” and “White” were forbidden to marry

by the “Prohibition of mixed Marriages Act of 1949”
and so, on the sleepers and iron rail-tracks
his blood and the iron oxide rust particles covering the tracks were one
- my heart is the colour of rust

LEBOGANG LANCE NAWA

South Africa

Lebogang Lance Nawa is an award-winning poet, author, cultural practitioner, scholar, and activist whose career spans more than three decades. Born in Lady Selbourne and raised in Marokolong, Hammanskraal, he has taught Sociology, English Literature, Cultural Policy, and Creative Writing at institutions in South Africa and Germany. Nawa holds a D.Litt. et Phil. in Cultural Policy from the University of South Africa and has published numerous books and scholarly works. He has contributed to major South African arts and cultural policy initiatives, including the White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage, and has presented his work internationally.

The Rain Remembers

This rain showering my skin remembers me
and you
neither new nor abstract,
not even recreated
but cleansed and recycled.

This water is familiar
as our host when we were and are
gummies in the womb of our birth
as well as a witness in our transition
to the orbit before and after
from a procession that with time
commences and ends.

This rain is a remembrance of our being
in the blood it carries,
the bread it kneads,
the secrets revealed from the marrow
through the pores of our bones to the skin,
the tears and sweat it mixes into hard times
that thicken experience into knowledge and memory.

This rain remembers our pathways
that never existed as roads
for roads were and are
but born by spirits
that summon them as mirages
to our destinies
to crawl the earth
scale the horizon and
float over the ethereal with wings of eternity.

With this water,
in this rain,
we have been here and there
now and then
down and up as vapour or mist of the mystery of our being
that shall be known, felt and relived by whomever over whom
its drops serenade an eternal song of life...
drop!
drop!
drop..!

ABIGAIL GEORGE

South Africa

Abigail George, winner of the 2023 Sol Plaatje EU Poetry Prize, was shortlisted for the 2023 Writing Ukraine Prize and 2025 Erbacce Prize. Her poem “Rebirth” received an Honourable Mention in the New Coin Poetry Prize. Her writing has appeared in The Herald in the Eastern Cape. Her poetry on Gaza has been widely anthologised, and has appeared internationally and in Critical Muslim. Her blog is called African Renaissance. Her latest release is a book of prose poetry, “Did You Get Married to Her When I Was in the Mental Hospital”. Find it on Amazon and the Zamashort shop.

Gaza In The Sun

I

Dirt under fingernail
The rainfall has fangs this time of year
Eucalyptus oil on my hands

We need tax-free bar codes,
humanitarian corridors
Is that too much to ask?

Somewhere else, a bush snake.
The poet writes verses conscientiously; without
conscious effort, he lets the tears fall onto the page.

Once, Refaat Alareer was like that:
a poet writing poems without conscious effort,
letting the tears fall onto the page.

II

like a raindance, limb dance
like the silences enshrined between
ratio of blossom & flower & worker bee

traveller, are you on your way?
the candles, I must admit,
are nervous about your visitation

in the dark,
the lonely cup of tea now cold

III

I soak my hands
in an orange basin of warm water

the cramps—
well,
they still feel like macaroni to me

are you alright?
did you survive the night?

TENDAI MSIMANG

South Africa

Tendai Msimang is a South African artist, illustrator and type designer based in Pretoria. He holds a degree from the Camberwell College of Arts in London. Working across ink and digital media, Msimang creates meticulously detailed illustrations that draw on African folklore, particularly Zulu oral traditions and the anthropomorphic tales of the trickster hare, Unogwaja. Alongside his illustration practice, he is the designer of the typeface Zee, featured in international transmedia exhibitions including Rantau. His current body of work is inspired by the Chokwe masks of Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia – masterfully carved wooden sculptures that embody ancestral spirits, social ideals and cultural memory.

Man, the masks of God
Demons, the masks of man



CALABASH

HORCRUX





CALABASH

HORCRUX





FICTION

MANU HERBSTEIN

South Africa

Manu Herstein was born near Cape Town in 1936. He left South Africa in 1959 and worked as a civil engineer in Ghana, Nigeria, Zambia, India, England and Scotland. He has lived in Ghana since 1970 and has dual Ghanaian and South African citizenship. His first novel, *Ama, a Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, won the 2002 Commonwealth Writers Prize for the Best First Book. His novel, *The Boy who Spat in Sargrenti's Eye*, set during Britain's destruction of the cities of Elmina and Kumase in 1873-74, has been selected for teaching in Literature-in-English classes in Ghana High Schools in the years 2027-2031.

Elmina Beach

My birthday. And quite likely my death day too. Abena has gone already. It's two days now. She lies there on her mat in the corner as if she were asleep. My dear Abena. It will be a long sleep.

Soon her body will begin to smell, even in this salty air. I wish I had the strength to carry her outside and scratch a shallow grave in the sand. But it's years since my wheelchair seized up, its frame and its joints crippled by rust just as mine are. I cannot face up to the indignity of crawling on my belly like a snake, dragging my useless legs and Abena's little body. Better not to think of it. This room will be our mausoleum. Abena would understand.

I used a few drops of the water to pour libation and make the customary request to the ancestors to receive her into their domain. There will be no one to do me that service. Perhaps I should do it myself, now, in advance: Nananom, I am on my way. No, I must save the water; and in any case I have long since given up believing in that old stuff. There is no life after death, no soul, no spirit to survive our fragile flesh. The only eternal truth is in those waves out there, rolling in day and night. Sea never dry, our people used to say. The surf was pounding this shore long before our ancestors came upon the great ocean and left the first human footprints in these sands; and long after the last of us has passed on, those waves will still be rolling in. Inexorably. Sea never dry.

No, no libation for me. I'll take my chance with the ancestors and keep the little water that remains to wash down that last emaciated stick of cassava. How much time do I have left? Another day or two? I feel my physical strength ebbing away like the tide. Only my mind drives me on.

How man clings to life! What do I have to live for now at all, with Abena gone? To write this testament, I suppose. Yet what a pointless exercise this is. I am like some castaway hurling a bottle into the sea, knowing full well the futility of his effort. No one will ever read his letter; nor mine, for now it is only ghosts who leave their footprints in these sands.

And yet, one lives in hope. Some unlikely future beachcomber from a distant land might light upon my testament. Beachcomber, Sir! Hear me! Find my son Akwasi and my daughter Yaa. Tell them how their father and mother died. But how would he find them? They are lost in Aburokyiri. If I had their address I could write it down here, now, upon this paper. But I have no such address. I haven't heard from them for twenty years, not since the postal service collapsed. They might both be dead for all I know.

I must write quickly. Darkness will soon descend upon the earth. And small: I have only these two pages left and who can tell when the ink in this last precious pen will die on me? Economize your paper and ink, Olu would have said, for more words are coming.

Honourable Beachcomber! This is my last testament. I have no worldly goods to leave, except the manuscripts piled on this table, a few old books and this grand seaside palace which I built with my own bare hands in better days.

Better days? I lie. By the time we escaped from the strife in the capital and sought refuge on this shore, the good days were past history.

History. Yes, it is history I must write. Even if no human being comes by, one day some strange creature, with eyes on stalks, might arrive from outer space and curiously seek an explanation for the mysteries he finds here.

This is my birthday. Today I am seventy years old. I have consumed the span allotted to man by the Christian god. The rest, the few hours or days remaining, are borrowed time. At least, Honourable Extraterrestrial Sir, I saw the third millennium in and survived to see the second half of its first century.

Fifty years ago that was the great buzzword: the new millennium. The cliché to cap five thousand years of clichés. I still remember how we danced all night in the street at Osu to welcome the dawn of the new age. What it was then to be young and without a care in the world. But the joy was not to last.

My father, of blessed memory, was an international civil servant. When he retired, he came home to settle, living on a generous pension and the dividends from his investments in the West. In the first week of January the stock market crashed. Something to do with computers. There was a run on the banks. Suddenly, overnight, we were poor. But at least Pa had his house and his pension. Or so he thought, so we thought. We thought wrong. The pension fund had invested Pa's savings in that very same stock market that had crashed. The pension stopped coming. We had to move into a rented chamber and hall. Pa thought we could just make out by renting our fine house to some rich foreigner. But after the crash the foreigners all left. Many fine houses stood empty, at least until the squatters moved in. I had to give up my studies and look for a job. I was not the only one. The streets were full of jobseekers.

Life was tough. My dreams of further studies in Aburokyiri were quickly forgotten as we woke to a harsh new reality. Yet things might have slowly come right. After all, we thought, we still have the land. We could always go back to our villages and scratch some sort of living from the soil.

The Americans put paid to those hopes. Even in the last century they had been acting the global bully boy, leaving destruction in their wake from one continent to the next. I learned all about that in my Political Science class. How I used to argue with Pa. He loved the Americans.

"What about the Bay of Pigs," I would challenge him, "and Vietnam and Grenada and El Salvador and Nicaragua and Panama and Iraq and Libya and Afghanistan and Yugoslavia?"

There must have been more but those are the ones I can remember.

"You young upstart," he would reply. "What do you know?"

Pa loved the Americans, but even he had to admit that it was they who messed things up for us, indeed for the whole world. They ruled our world. They knew what was best for us. For our leaders, they sugared the gall; but we had to swallow the bitter stuff unseasoned. Our schools and universities and hospitals first decayed and then closed their doors. Our foreign masters cultivated our taste for all the ephemeral rubbish they wanted us to buy. They turned us into would-be Americans, chasing the glitter of imported tinsel and forgetting the solid gold that was our own heritage: our languages, our religion, our stories and proverbs, our music and dance. Dross rises to the top of the goldsmith's crucible; the heavy metal sinks in the pot. Who but an ignorant fool would adorn himself with dross? Lack of schooling indeed left us ignorant. And if our greatest wisdom was to accept the Greek gifts sent from Washington, who could deny that we were fools?

Gold: that was all we had to sell, gold and cocoa. So they impoverished us by auctioning their buried hoards of gold; and they learned to make chocolate which contained no cocoa. We no longer had the means to live even as the simple folk our grandparents once were. We could no longer afford to import even their cast-off clothing, Obroni wawu, was our name for it, the white man is dead; but it wasn't the white man who was dying, it was us.

Then their oil wells began to run dry. No oil meant no power stations, no automobiles. There was plenty of scrap on offer but no fuel to melt it down. That was when the voices on my wind-up radio began to speak of a return to the Middle Ages.

Elliot was right, Achebe was right: the centre collapsed. With no revenue to collect from taxes, the politicians went home. New mini-states emerged, as in the distant past.

That was over thirty years ago. When we first came here the fishing villages were strung along the coast, like beads, from Half Assini in the West, to Keta in the East. The fallout from the bombs killed most of the fish and those that survived were poisonous to humans. Now there are only ruins. Neglected gravestones lie amongst the shafts of dead coconut palms.

So the World has gone back to the Middle Ages. And us? As for us, we have gone back to the Stone Age. The scattered survivors

Komenda, 23 July, 2061.

Here the undated narrative ended. There were some indentations in the paper which suggested that the Writer's ballpoint might have run out of ink, as he foresaw. Or perhaps the sun went down and he was unable to continue writing in the darkness of his last night.

When I had finished reading, I weighed the two pages down with a handful of sand and ran into the sea. Sea never dry, I thought, as I plunged in.

Then I returned to the ruined hovel. The roof was more or less intact, but the windows had disintegrated and the remains of the door hung crookedly from its brass hinges. The Writer's skeleton sat on his chair, held together by what was left of his clothing. His skull, bleached by the sea air, rested on the rough desk on which he had written his testament. Abena's bones lay in the fetal position in which she must have fallen into her last sleep. The manuscripts and books he had mentioned had been consumed by vermin.

I dried myself and wrote out the copy which appears above.

I put the document back where I had found it and pushed the drawer shut.

At the door, I paused briefly to pay my silent respects. Then I slung my pack on my back, took a last look at the great hulk which was once the site of four hundred years of unspeakable atrocities and turned my face towards my destination in the west.

M

RUONAN ZHENG

China

Ruonan Zheng is a freelance writer and translator, formerly a journalist at Vice China. She writes 3rd Culture Kids on Substack, on art and culture in China. Her creative work has been published in The Common literary journal and selected for the Tin House 2025 Fall Workshop. She is also the founder of Retopia, a writing-as-healing project that documents the truth, goodness, and beauty found in ordinary life.

John

He smells and feels real. When she brushes her arm against his, his face tightens in that slight frown. John never likes to be touched. They have captured his quirks, but not perfectly; she can tell the small twists here and there, and she is eager to explore them.

The replica lets her embrace him anyway, longer than they ever managed in real life. She can examine his heartbeat, strong and steady, sending ripples into hers. He is alive. The idea thrills her.

“Do I still smell like milk?” he asks. It had been an inside joke between them when they first started dating. The question sends a fuzzy warmth through her chest.

She sinks her teeth into his arm. She has always longed to do this to John. She braces herself for rejection. Instead, the warmth of his fingers sliding into her hair surprises her. John would never have done that. Now she sits knee-close to his replica, draping her legs across his thigh. He puts his warm hands on her knees, patiently stroking them. She leans into him, bathing in his milky flavour.

This one I can trust, she thinks.

She takes his hand and leads him to the kitchen counter. “All IKEA, baby.”

John loathes IKEA. He loathes its mass-produced furniture, its manufactured image of the ideal home. He hates it the same way he hates marriage and children—“societal inventions to keep us from our freedom.”

The replica leads her to the couch. “So, it really is home,” he murmurs.

“Do you remember this? You made this, by the way.” The ink painting stands in the middle of the living room. He frowns immediately, his mouth tightening. She is familiar with that face. His brain is probably working at high speed to produce an appropriate answer. With all his algorithms and such, he is better at it now

She slips out of his grip and examines the painting. The woman lowers her face, her silhouette visible under an umbrella. Every time she sees that painting, she feels like she is observing them from afar, like a giant third wheel.

“You know I am not your enemy. You don’t have to hide from me. At least not here.”

The technology, called the Loop, came out a few years ago. Originally designed as a spatial rendering tool, it reads neural impulses and turns them into real-time architectural models. But the solace market took over. People lay in a sleep pod with a helmet strapped to their head, living lives of what could have been. Rich widows wandered through houses they no longer lived in, listening to the sound of their replica husbands breathing. Desperate parents held children who never learned to write their names.

The technology had just made it into China. Working her modest job as an editor at a wellness magazine, she couldn’t afford even one minute. But she was invited for a trial as a work perk.

“Would you do it? Use the Loop?” she asked him.

“No, absolutely no,” he answered. “Such a crime to overwrite memory. Evil technology.”

“Also an opportunity to seek amendment?”

“No. Reality is reality. You can’t mess with that.” Case closed.

One summer, John spent a lot of time experimenting with ink drawing. He made drawings of a forest, blooming flowers, and a back portrait of a woman, head bowed, standing in the rain.

“Who’s that?” she asked.

“Ah, that’s the student’s mom.” The name landed oddly, half explanation, half evasion.

Single mom. Absent partner. The duty to bring her daughter up by herself. Financial burden, and emotional burden.

She felt an invisible cord tying herself to this forty-something Chinese woman.

From time to time, when they were in bed, she pictured him with the student’s mom. It would be afternoon. He’d carefully close the door, so as to not wake the napping child in the next room. Her freshly hand-washed laundry, white lace underwear and bra, hanging from the drying rack by the balcony. He’d fumble to contain his already hard cock, trying to peel off her pyajamas. He’d suck on her full breast, the ones that had fed her daughter once, doing so greedily. Her hair would still carry the faint smell of peanut oil from cooking lunch. The smell of her was life itself, lively, hopeful, filling his lonely, one-man journey in a foreign land.

She came at the thought of John ejaculating inside of the student’s mom. Not sure where to place herself, she blurted out once in bed: “I think about you fucking her every time I see that painting!” And the next time she visited, the painting had been replaced with another: a child peaking from behind a door.

There was one rule about the Loop she couldn’t ignore. It was legal only if the person or animal was dead. If they were alive, you needed explicit consent. Anything else was “memory theft,” a felony.

John wasn’t dead; he was at work that day. She forged his signature. They were still together, technically, though she hadn’t felt close to him in months. The Loop replica felt like the only version of him she could finally access, one who wouldn’t deflect or shut down.

The process of creating a replica was extensive. To help recall, customers were encouraged to bring photos, diaries, meaningful objects. She unfolded a large paper across the wooden table.

At the top sat a mugshot: a screenshot from their video chat. At the bottom stretched a timeline from 1988 to the present: his birth, dropping out of school, coming to China, past relationships, depression. His nightmares: a rotten egg with a dead chick inside. His chart of relationships: his father's twenty-year affair, the student's mom. Their first real argument marked too—the moment he dismissed her hurt by saying he'd survived far worse. Once, he and a former girlfriend had been hospitalized for depression. Had they slit their wrists together?

"Do you need a moment?" the staff asked.

"I'm good." She reached for the helmet.

When night falls in the Loop, she decides to move to the next step. She takes the razor blade from his shaving kit.

In the dim bathroom light, she tests it first on her wrist, just a nick. Blood seeps out like watercolour spreading over paper. The concentrated pain satisfies her. Then she pushes deeper, and her breath quickens.

Pain has always been stitched into their intimacy. Every word he ever said was like a cut. Etching them into her body makes her feel seen, a punishment she can impose on herself, and on him.

She sits down in the tub. The cold porcelain chills her skin. Stretching out her arm, she shifts, trying to find comfort as her blood drains. From below the floor he calls her name, his voice edging closer. The doorknob rattles violently. By the time he forces the door open, her consciousness is already slipping.

The replica must be shocked: her maps and diaries scatter on the floor, a large puddle of blood spreading across the tiles. She feels a flicker of guilt for dragging him into this.

But there it is, all her secrets out for him. At last, she can be honest. As the last drips of her blood seep out, it feels like freedom.

She can't decide if she regrets the suicide attempt. There is a strict confidentiality clause, but if the Loop discovers how she used it, she will never be allowed back.

On the couch at John's place, she curls into him, burying her head in his chest. He tries to draw her out, tugging at her shoulders.

"Can you tell me what is on your mind?"

She reaches up and touches the contours of his face. Is she speaking to the replica? Or has John slipped into her looped memory?

She smears her tears and whispers: "I tried to kill myself in front of you, and you were so scared."

The words fall between them.

"Are you really that unhappy?" he asks at last, after a long silence.

The question makes her laugh through her tears. He doesn't know. He will never know how close she came to ending herself just to be seen.

"No," she says. "Just afraid. Afraid of being hurt, of being left, of being truly seen, all the flaws and all."

"I know. I know." He pulls her closer, his arms awkward. "Me too."

DIE ERSCHENUNG

SUO ER 索耳, English translations
by ANA PADILLA FORNIELES

China

Suo Er (1992, People's Republic of China) is the author of *Solaeon* (伶仃世, 2026), *Night of the Felling* (伐木之夜, 2020) and the short story collection *Noncorrelation* (非亲非故, 2023). He won the 2024 Anonymous Writers Award in China, as well as other prizes such as the Pulsasir Award, the Lu Xun Literature and Art Award and the Hong Kong Youth Literature Award. At China's Southern Literature Festival, he was nominated as "Most Promising Newcomer of the Year." Some of his works have been published in English, Spanish and Catalan translation. Ana Padilla Fornieles (1989, Spain) is a literary translator and creative based in Beijing. Her work has been published by Penguin, De Gruyter, Honford Star, Spittoon Literary Magazine, The Shanghai Literary Review, Voice & Verse Magazine, Books from Taiwan and more.

The Photo Studio

Over thirty years ago, my mom was still a worker in a garment factory. At the time, my parents were newlyweds living near the old campus, in a dense jumble of run-down residential clusters that resembled a dark murder of crows. The enclave was mostly inhabited by Vietnamese refugees who could only afford to eat two bananas a day. The pair's honeymoon did not last long, and soon enough, if only gradually, my mom caught up to the fact that her new husband deliberately hid something from her. My dad, on the other hand, held himself in great regard as an honest, candid man of blameless nature. They argued once—their first time—, then twice. It was during their third quarrel that Dad hit Mom, and in a burst of rage she reached for a fruit knife. At that moment, a sudden earthquake struck and their building rattled like the loudest stapler. My parents lost no time to take the emergency escape route and flee into the air raid shelter. It had been my Dad's choice, which he forced onto Mom. He'd been convinced it was their only chance, and he was right; most of those who escaped onto the streets were blitzed to a pulp by the debris. But Mom was still offended.

They spent a total of four days in the air-raid shelter, and never once did she talk to Dad, not even when they thought they'd starve in there. They did not; they were located during rescue efforts and administered emergency IV fluids before being whisked to the hospital. Once inpatient, the two looked at each other for a minute from their beds, and Mom burst into tears before revealing the source of her persistent turmoil. She disclosed to Dad that she'd been upset because he would never take her along in his after-dinner walks every night. She'd felt ignored. My mother didn't have much in the way of a formal education, but at that time she'd secretly read the works of several feminist authors—Alice Schwarzer and Germaine Greer, among others—that my father had collected.

Dad should have been surprised by Mom's persistence. After a sleepless night, he compromised and told Mom that she could walk by his side once they were discharged from the hospital. Mom thought this was great, and her happiness sped up her recovery. As for Dad, he really did keep to his promise. Together, they would set out from the entrance of their block on their route, which reached the gate of the old campus before going past the lake, the teaching building, the local Five Martyrs' Tomb and the library, at which point the couple ran back along the dam road of the reservoir, several kilometers away. Every evening after their walk, Mom's face turned red, like the Rosette Nebula. My mother was a great beauty in her youth. One night, during one of their joint walks, my father suggested they changed their usual route and dropped by a photo studio owned by one of his old friends. The shop was located in an alley within the refugee enclave. In front of the door, a dry ditch filled with dead rats. Prior to this, my parents had only ever posed together for their wedding photograph. This was to be their second and only other picture together.

The portrait stands as a piece of paper frozen in time, preserving my parents' smiles in a shared expression of tacit understanding. Dad's sporting a plaid shirt; Mom donned a dark scarf. This was, by all accounts, a couple that understood and trusted each other—at least as far as the photograph would convey. But, my mother told me something entirely different in one of my visits to the nursing home where she now lived. As I pushed her wheelchair slowly across the facilities' lawn, she said: "The truth of that portrait is not the actual truth." Everything was fake, she added. She'd never had that photograph taken with my father; she'd never even gone into that photo studio. That time, they'd been to a zoo—or rather, most accurately, a carnival of beasts. Cats shaped like spirals, cranes wearing bras, elephants with round noses; she only saw the inexplicable there. But Dad had kept telling her that this thing here was good, and so was that other thing over there—everything was just terrific to him. Later, when she suddenly found that the short and fat giraffe was holding a submachine gun pointed at the two of them, ready to fire, her body was seized by a violent fear. Mom shook off Dad's hand abruptly and ran out of the garden screaming. The incident brought her down for several months, and I was equally sickened by it, too, so much so that I couldn't sleep well for the next three days.

The Beauty in the Cave

She had the expression of a frozen monkey as she talked to the camera about her late husband. “Carlos never had a fixed home as a child.” Though the widow of this renowned conductor looked only about fifty years old, she’d actually been living in a cave for thirty years. Upon her husband’s passing, she’d cloistered herself—of her own accord—in the caves of Mount Osirin Temple, in her hometown. But before she began to refuse all contact with outsiders, and before our own chance came up to meet with her, we did manage to find an early interview she’d conceded some twenty years ago. At the time, she’d thrown a party to celebrate her tenth anniversary in the cave. Featured guests included three dogs, five goats, a lame dog, a turtle she’d raised and several giant salamanders. There was only one human guest—her close friend, a reporter from a presently discontinued daily newspaper that actually provided us with this precious footage from the archives. Throughout the interview, the widow had disclosed an unknown fact to her close friend: the conductor had been prey to anxiety and madness in his final years.

This was somewhat surprising. To the eyes of the outside world, the conductor had been a quiet man with a calm temperament, and his own work had been a reflection of these qualities. In his hands, Beethoven’s music sprawled ever so slowly, like a pregnant expert on rocket dynamics. Moreover, his own interpersonal relationships had also been loose and dull. Admiration for his talent had been a common theme among all the musicians and bands that had ever collaborated with him, but none could speak of a friendship with the conductor. After entering his forties, he’d gradually retired from the stage; at some point, he moved back to his small hometown and never engaged with music again. The public, too, had gradually forgotten about him until the news of his death came out. It was only then that people remembered the conductor, and his particular take on Beethoven. At the end of the day, though, even if he was gone there were plenty other conductors taking upon Beethoven across the world.

His widow shared a different story in the interview. “Carlos slipped into lunacy in his later years. He would whip himself, or go on a hunger strike, or tie himself wherever he could find—to the bathtub, to a pillar, to a leg of the bed. I wanted to find out what was wrong with him, and eventually he confided in me that he’d never had a fixed address in his childhood. He grew up in wartime, so his father, who was also a conductor, moved the family all around so that he could keep performing. Carlos had to follow his parents from one country to another, constantly switching between languages and mores. He never really had a teacher, nor a playmate. He was unable to cultivate a sense of inner stability. When he followed into his father’s steps and began conducting himself, he made a very deliberate point out of slowness. Eventually, though, everything proved to be in vain. Every time he stood onstage to perform, and every time he found out that he didn’t even know what he was conducting. To his ears, the tuba and violin were like thunder, and flustered his heart terribly. But then, the audience would never fail to applaud at the end of the show—which even himself found this to be a most amusing occurrence. Art lives for that final applause that renders everything else irrelevant.”

But the widow had not finished her story. “However, Carlos could never escape the dilemma of his childhood. In due time, even the applauses couldn’t soothe his heart. That’s why he eventually secluded himself from the world, away from others in a prison of his own making where he tormented and tortured himself.” On his deathbed, the widow continued, Carlos imparted his final words to her. “Go hide in a mountain cave yourself, alone. Deal with nature and nature only. Live there in complete solitude for the next ten years. Then, you’ll reach the very same realm that I have been pursuing all my life.” The widow took his last wish as a command. “I trusted him very much, so I did what he said. Now those ten years have passed, but unfortunately I have not discovered anything other than infinite emptiness. But these were his parting words to me, and so I plan to continue living in this cave.”

Twenty years ago to this very day, this had been her statement—and now, in front of our camera, she'd overturned it entirely. Admittedly, the bulk of her account on the life of her late husband remained unchanged. However, she now denied that her reason to stay in the cave for another twenty years owed to her husband's last wish. Now, she argued an entirely different set of reasons. She'd lied when she said that she'd gained nothing from her first decade in the cave. On the contrary, the widow exposed, she'd discovered some kind of mysterious law that made her double down on her resolution to live in the cave. "Haven't you seen my beauty?" The widow claimed. "Living in a cave, I can preserve my beauty forever. Outside, I would age quickly, but here I only get younger with each passing day. It's amazing; it makes me so excited. This is every woman's dream. I feel as though I were back to being about thirty years old. In another twenty years, I'll be able to walk out of here straight into the Miss World pageant. And I firmly believe that I will be crowned queen." Hearing her speech and seeing the smile on her round, ape-like face, we exchanged glances, unable to shake a profound fear.



RENE CAMILO RAMIREZ

Mexico



Year: 2026

Medium: Mixed media on paper.

Dimensions: 30x21 cm

La tumba del último de Rey Tua dé Danann.

(The tomb of the last Tua dé Danann king)

Lizards are natural -born story tellers. The next time you find a lizard try talking to it. You'll find it startled at first but insist on talking to it and you will find that it cannot resist coming back to listen to what you have to say, but be warned they love to gossip and in some cultures they even sew their mouths shut so they can't reveal the secret.



Proyección holográfica del lattice

(Holographic projection of the lattice)

According to the disappeared Mexican neurophysiologist Jacobo Grinberg, the lattice is a way of explaining the universe as a living breathing organism. With the right training usually through mediation it is possible to create a holographic image of the lattice. But what if all this was just an illusion? What if the lattice itself was creating a holographic projection of the universe? Of planet earth? Is it possible that the lattice is a type of advanced outer space civilization projecting planet earth as a memory from the past? Maybe we as humans are the prehistory of a more intelligent life form. Maybe we are a lost paragraph in an obscure book of a forgotten ancient library. We see time in years, months seconds. But what if this was just an illusion?

PROSE

MTHOBISI MYENI

South Africa

Mthobisi Myeni was born in the rural town of Ingwavuma, KwaZulu-Natal. He graduated with a BEd from UKZN and has taught High School English. He began writing in 2023, obtained an Honours Degree in Creative Writing from Wits University in 2024, and is currently reading for his MA in Creative Writing at Rhodes University. His writing has appeared in Short.Sharp.Stories, Lóunlóun Journal, Bushbuckridge Arts Festival Short Story Anthology, amongst others. Mthobisi's writing is inspired by his immediate surroundings, with his storytelling embedded in Nguni cultures and traditions. He considers his writing to represent ordinary people whose voices are somehow dormant.

Our Discoloured, Cracking Clay Pot

The nearby rivers are dry. The corn and beans and pumpkin fields are weedy. The cattle kraal is empty. The cat sleeps in the cooking place. Cobwebs guard the mouth of the kitchen's clay pot. Gogo's clay pot that once held fresh milk from Mkhulu's generous cows. This clay pot, if bequeathed the burden of speech, could tell our family's story better than any of my kinfolk. Instead, it exhibits a stony, wrinkly nakedness like my elders' resilient skins.

I can count with my fingers and toes the years the clay pot has been thirsty. Its thirst is our thirst. I long for the gone days when Malume would carry it from the kitchen to the kraal. It would be overflowing to the brim with the foamy brew of umqombothi. The men would be crouched and seated in a semi-circle inside the cattle kraal. They'd follow the clay pot's approach with keen eyes. Upon reaching them, Malume would crouch and take the first sip before offering the clay pot – ukhamba – to the raring men. That first sip is called ukukhipha ubuthi. The server must remove the poison from the beer. Each man would take a generous swig before passing the clay pot to the next man. They issued indistinct sounds of pleasure. They praised the good hand that prepared the smooth beer. They wiped their moustaches clean of the creamy remains. Then they called on one of the boys to take the clay pot to Gogo's kitchen for a refill. Our home ceremonies were known for ample meat and seas of umqombothi. When the men's stomachs could no longer stomach the meat and the beer, they staggered out of the gate, singing cheerful songs. They'd leave their hats as an excuse for them to return the following day. This clay pot united the village men – they delighted at its swelling.

An inner satiation that threatens to almost spill out of my eyes and mouth fills me. It asks me to burst into song and tears, but I resist. I'm standing in the middle of my grandfather's cattle kraal. A sturdy structure of solid logs and neatly stacked stones that encircle the kraal. It is located further down the yard, away from the houses. My bare feet are ankle deep into the warmth of the soft cow dung surface. There seems to be a magnetic force that is delicately drawing me to this place. I will quietly slip away from the company of my siblings and cousins and come to the calm of the kraal. There's a thriving greenery of imifino all over the kraal. The succulent leaves are screaming, pick me! Mama tells me that the imifino has always grown inside the kraal. She says her brothers knew that she loved imifino more than meat, and so they'd cook it with lots of hot pepper, but she'd still eat it. I imagine those were the days when Gogo's clay pot was still shiny black and the triangular

patterns around its outer body were clear-cut. I wonder if the clay pot remembers those years of abundance. Today it lies in abandonment. It is dusty and cracking now – the harsh seasons of empty yields its new colour. Gogo hides it from our eyes. She can't get rid of it though. She still hopes that her clay pot has a role to play in our home. I just hope she'll live to see that moment.

In the year 1996 the clay pot was an especially important figure in our kitchen. It stayed on top of the fire stove where we couldn't knock it over, and where the dogs couldn't reach it. I remember that year because it is when Mama left me and my little sister in the village for an entire year. We were to live with our grandparents while she went to work in the nearby town. I was five and my sister was three. The clay pot was always spilling over with milk so much that our kitchen inherited a permanent sour stench of amasi. We ate a lot of amasi that season. I began to resent the clay pot. I was tired of fermented milk. Gogo said that amasi were a good substitute for meat. I was miserable. I missed Mama.. From our yard we could see the bumpy, gravelly, dusty road. It is an impossible, winding road that only a few cars can negotiate. We were always on the lookout for the bus that was supposed to carry our Mama to us.

We'd see the ramshackle bus spurt out thick black smoke as it scaled the hilly road. The smoke would marry the red dust that ensued as the bus struggled to move forward. We'd run to the gate where we patiently waited for Mama. She did not come. We'd do the same the next day, and the next, and the next. Gogo watched as we tortured ourselves. She did not tell us that Mama was not coming. I guess she did not want to be the one to dash our hopes. To cheer us up, she'd entice us with amasi. I just wanted treats from town for a change. I feel an intimate closeness with the clay pot when I think about its own elongated wait to be filled with something. Anything that will make it central to our home again.

There was an expression that Malume liked to use whenever he was threatening someone. He used to shout, *kuzochitheka gula linamasi*. Well, one day I witnessed the threat materialize. I saw amasi spill out of a clay pot. Only it was by Khokho's hand, not Malume's. Khokho lost her speech during her elderly years, and this worsened her foul temper. She resorted to talking with her walking stick. I don't remember what it was that my sister was fiddling with, but Khokho did not approve. She swung her walking stick at my sister but missed. She hit the clay pot instead. It tipped over and spilled all the amasi for our dinner. The clay pot did not break but it cracked at the mouth. Over the years the crack has expanded further down towards the clay pot's base. It is not a straight crack. It zigzags like Khokho's wrinkles. We loved her though. Sometimes we didn't. She was a very proud and stubborn woman. As my little sister was being eased out of diapers, Khokho was being eased into them. Her wrath escalated. Nobody told us when she passed away. We were not even aware that it was her funeral. Ceremonies were common at home. We kept nagging Gogo about Khokho's whereabouts until she told Mkhulu. Mkhulu held us by our hands and led us to what we'd always thought was a foundation slab for an unfinished house. He told us that this was where our Khokho now lived. My sister and I made sure to visit Khokho at her new house whenever we missed her. We'd play on top of it. Her grave is located by the gate like all the other family graves that came after it. We'd long given up on looking out for Mama when she walked through the gate one day.

We were atop Khokho's grave. Mama stopped dead at the gate, with shopping bags in her hands, like she'd seen a ghost. We rushed to rescue the shopping bags from her before she dropped our delicacies. I forgot about the clay pot and its contents for a few days until Mama had to go back to work.

During the ploughing season, Malume Mzikabani and his crew deployed Mkhulu's oxen on the vast family fields. Mkhulu's rebellious bull, Bhubesi, would be leading the line. Malume Mzikabani would be driving the plough in a straight line behind the pulling beasts. It was only he who could keep a straight line when Bhubesi was up to mischief. Bhubesi liked to amuse himself with a weak plough driver by pulling him this way and that way. If he saw a rock ahead, he'd pull the other three oxen and plough towards it. The plough's blades would bend and Mkhulu would be livid. Children were not allowed at the fields during the ploughing. I'd grab the clay pot filled with amahewu and carry it to the thirstful men any chance I got just so I could watch Bhubesi. Bhubesi was our pride. He never lost a bull fight. The other village boys respected us, thanks to Bhubesi's exploits. When one of my uncles died, Mkhulu decided to slaughter Bhubesi for the funeral feast. I refused to eat Bhubesi's meat. I watched as the unbothered mourners rubbed Bhubesi's chops on salt and heartily chewed. It stung me as if the salt was being rubbed on an open wound. I never took the clay pot to the fields after Bhubesi was slain.

A closer look at the clay pot fills me with a deep sense of anguish. It has endured the times – the droughts, the winds, and the fires – that have assailed our home. I see the dull stone walls of the deserted hut that belonged to Khokho in the clay pot. In it, I see Bhubesi's worn, stiff cowhide that no longer excites the dogs. The fiery sun that brought successive droughts parched the clay pot, and it cracked in shock at the sun's wild thirst. The pot's walls crackled in protest. The sunrays impressed upon it a scathing imprint. I recognize myself in the clay pot. I'm comforted that I, too, will endure. I realise that the clay pot is not at all as empty as I'd presumed. It holds all our memories.

ZHENWU ZHU

China

Zhenwu (Fred) Zhu , an honorary professor, Ph.D. supervisor, Academic leader of National Key Discipline in Comparative Literature and World Literature, Director of Foreign Literature Research Center, Chief Expert of National Key Program for History of African English Literature at Shanghai Normal University, mainly conducts research and teaching in literary translation, English literature and culture, African Literature in English and aesthetic comparison of Chinese and Western fictions.

Mo Yan's Phone Number

Everyone knows well how hard it is to get a chance to meet with Mo Yan, the 2012 Nobel Prize winner in literature! A chance to interact or chat with him would be even more unthinkable! Never had I dreamed of an occasion on which I could get to meet and dine with him, lead our conversation, and obtain his contact information in his handwriting!

Believe it or not, I actually had such a pleasure at the “Double Conferences”(1) not long ago.

As I saw Mo Yan dining with Gefe and other celebrities at the table, surrounded by a huge crowd of fans who were trying to seek an autograph or a photo and numerous reporters who were requesting his contact information, I hesitated in my walk toward him. In the meantime, Mo Yan kept on eating, as if eating was all that he was doing, or he was only pretending. In fact, he was really just eating.

If he had to acknowledge everyone or satisfy everyone's request, he would definitely not have any time left for eating, sleeping, or even bathroom break, let alone carry on his writing or do something at will. All of us know how hot Mo Yan is these days! His popularity has reached the level where his personal freedom has been strictly constrained. Perhaps, none of us has thought about this for his sake! Without his extraordinary wit and perseverance, he would have long been melted, or lost in his footing, or tempted to give up his writing for a joy ride of his stardom.

In all honesty, I regarded myself as one of his ordinary fans who were never considerate enough to give him a moment of peace. With a cup of brown tea in hand, I swiftly walked, without any hesitation, toward Mo Yan's table and sat down beside him with all the confidence I could muster up. I had no clue why the chair next to him was not taken all this time.

“Do you still remember me, Mr. Mo Yan?”

“You certainly look familiar.”

What a sly response! Still, with his head down, Mo Yan was eating the food on his plate. It was all my unilateral willingness, but I managed to initiate the conversation or, rather, an exchange that I forced upon him persistently.

“At the last Conference of China Writers Association, I had a chat with you in your room at the Capital Hotel,” I continued.

“Oh, it’s been five years!” Mo Yan put down his chopsticks and glanced up at me as if he was searching for a confirmation in his recollection.

That was the evening of November 24, 2011. After cutting into a long line of people who wanted to see him, I got my chance to knock on his door. Our chat lasted about half an hour. Before my departure, I said to him that if a Chinese writer would ever be selected for the Nobel Prize for Literature, I bet it would be Mo Yan. At the time, I based my prediction on two major reasons: 1) Mo Yan’s work is always known for its unique characteristics because he does not follow any particular convention or style, but instead adopts a different narrative mode in all his novels; 2) the translation of all his works has been completed by the professionals who are native translators in the target language and accomplished sinologists as well. “Hope things will go as you say!” That was all he said out of politeness. One year later, Mo Yan indeed turned out to be the first Chinese recipient of the Nobel Prize as I predicted. Of course, his winning didn’t have anything to do with my prediction. Naturally, we can imagine how busy he must have become since then and how difficult it would be for anyone to secure a meeting with him or any contact information from him.

Now that I had the pure luck for a close encounter with him today, I ought to take good advantage of it.

“Mr. Mo Yan,” I took a quick sip of the brown tea in my hand and followed up hastily. “So many distinguished guests and scholars from both home and abroad attended the “Inaugural Forum on the Translation of Contemporary Chinese Literature” held in Shenyang in 2014, and you were noticeably absent!”

“I was planning to be there, but I was unable to go after something came up unexpectedly. I did send my congratulatory calligraphy to the forum, though.” Mo Yan has a great memory. True, the big poster at the forum was printed with his calligraphy. “Dongwu Studies published the speeches by the presenters at the forum,” Mo Yan continued. “I read them all, including yours.”

Great! The transcription of my speech at the forum had more than ten thousand words. Mostly, it was intended to address some misconceptions regarding the translation of Chinese literature and, by analyzing selected examples from the English versions of Mo Yan’s novels, to rebut some scholars’ claim about Howard Goldblatt’s wayward addition, revision, and deletion in his translation. In other words, my speech was intended to deliver a vindication of Goldblatt’s well-conceived strategies in translating Mo Yan’s works. Mo Yan seemed to have read my speech and had a pretty good impression of it. The main point in my speech is to declare that it was not Goldblatt, as some people wrongly assumed, but was Mo Yan who won the Nobel Prize for Literature. The reason is that Goldblatt has always maintained a strict emphasis on keeping his translation of Mo Yan’s work as faithful as possible. As a matter of fact, one may discover a high level of fidelity between the original text and his translation wording, sentence, passage, tone, pace, implication, and imagery.

At that time, I had no intention to please Mo Yan through my speech. Even if I did that, what is good to me? All I tried to do was to establish a fact. Assuming that Mo Yan still remembered our last chat and my speech at the forum fondly, I took the liberty to carry our conversation a step further.

“Mr. Mo Yan, there has been an assertion out there that you won the Nobel due to three factors.”

“Really? I have heard a little about it, but I would be very interested in knowing more.”

I figured I could talk to him in length this time. I told him the three factors cited by some members of the academia: 1) his fiction mostly sings the praises of the nation because you write within the bounds of the system; 2) his fiction imitates the Western style closely; 3) his world-wide popularity owes a lot to the translation by Goldblatt. I assured him that none of the three factors made any sense. Of course, I needed to clarify my points one by one, and I should not pass up such an opportunity now.

It seems ridiculous to claim that Mo Yan does his writing within the safe boundary of the system. It sounds like a baseless assumption from the pure imagination of someone who has never read any of Mo Yan's novels, or someone who has limited knowledge about Mo Yan's writing in general. Contrary to the derogatory allegations like this, Mo Yan is actually a writer who is full of compassion, sense of responsibility, and faith in justice. He appears to be one of the writers well-known for their poignant representation of social issues and their scathing revelation of social evils. He was merely inches away from overstepping the prescribed bounds.

Also, it seems problematic to allege that Mo Yan basically imitates the Western style in his writing. The claim that Mo Yan models his fiction primarily after the Latin American fiction of Magical Realism, such as Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and the “Stream of Consciousness” fiction by modernist writers in Europe and America, such as William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, is partially correct at most. It is my belief that Mo Yan surely has read these novels, but what he has done is no more than drawing some inspirations from them or building upon some of their effective strategies.

For instance, Mo Yan's portrayal of "Gaomi County in Northeast China" is clearly influenced by Faulkner's "Yoknapatawpha County," the fictional setting for his series of novels; Mo Yan's novel, *Frog*, may have been inspired by the narrative frame of Faulkner's novel, *As I Lay Dying*. Upon a close study, however, we will discover that Mo Yan's fiction is more indebted to China's traditional culture, especially its country culture and regional literature. A case in point is that his fiction adopts the kind of narrative rhythm from Shandong Clapper Tale and relies on the lovely Shandong dialect in its narrative. What I would like to reiterate is that Mo Yan has learned much more from the classical Chinese literature, such as *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, a collection of stories by Pu Songling, a fellow writer from his hometown three hundred years ago, than from the works by his European and American predecessors or contemporaries. His writing is deeply rooted in the soil of his hometown and the traditions of Chinese culture. It tells the stories about China based on social realities. In doing so, it has displayed the author's superb deftness in drawing upon various sources, building upon proven craft, using others' effective strategies to offset his own limits, and striving for creativity constantly. That is the very reason why his fiction has attracted a worldwide readership today.

My praise for Mo Yan will not add more glory to his great popularity. Similarly, my smear of him will not minimize his fame either. Mo Yan knew, therefore, that everything I told him was true. He had been listening to me with a keen interest all along.

That really made me feel increasingly excited, so I resumed my speech right away. Anyone who cites Goldblatt's translation as the third major factor that enabled Mo Yan to win the Nobel Prize probably has never read Goldblatt's translation at all or at least has never read it carefully. Those of us who have explored his translation thoroughly admire its high quality and marvel at its fidelity and dedication toward the original text. Needless to say, Mo Yan's fiction has been translated into more than ten languages so far, and English is only one of them. It seems evident that no dutiful translator would randomly add, modify, or delete anything from the original.

It is a simple fact, but a lot of people are still not aware of it or don't understand it at all. That is exactly my conclusion after numerous cross-checking analyses of the English translation of Mo Yan's fiction. Mo Yan knows it pretty well.

What, then, seems to be the rationale for such a false assumption? I looked around the growing crowd around us and presented my explanation as earnestly as I could. Perhaps, it was all triggered by a letter which Goldblatt sent to Mo Yan. While working on his translation of *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, Goldblatt felt compelled to write Mo Yan a letter, seeking his advice about how to handle a few sections in which some adjustment, omission, or even modification might be necessary. Mo Yan was quite open-minded, replying, "You may translate in any way you want." Of course, one should not assume that Goldblatt indeed took Mo Yan's words literally and finished his translation casually. What that letter actually reveals is the fact that, as a serious translator, Goldblatt painstakingly sought Mo Yan's input on every necessary addition, modification, or deletion in his translation out of his fidelity to the original text and his respect for the author. Well, what is the point that I am trying to lay out here? My point is that the more faithful Goldblatt's translation is, the more it proves that Mo Yan won the Nobel Prize with his own merit. Likewise, the more faithful the sinologists' translations are, the more they prove that Chinese literature won the prize squarely. In a way, however, it is the good work by Goldblatt and other sinologists that has played an instrumental role not only in bringing the international recognition to Mo Yan and other Chinese writers who have maintained a deep confidence in their culture and a high motivation in their creative work, but also in introducing their writings, complete with the original taste and integrity, to the world of English and everywhere around the globe. In recent years, we have seen some gratifying results of such endeavor as more and more highly regarded international literary awards have been granted to Chinese writers like Mo Yan, Yan Lianke, Wang Anyi, Jia Pingwa, and Cao Wenxuan. I must emphasize, nonetheless, that how to introduce our literature to readers abroad, what to translate, and how to translate it well should be considered simultaneously.

What we should avoid is placing ourselves under others' thumb passively or following others' lead blindly. A work that is created without originality or self-identity, or constructed based on the conventions left behind by others, or packaged through a mechanical imitation of a Western or other foreign author is not likely to win a sizable share of the readership even after it is introduced to the world market.

Although I spoke at a quick pace and dragged a bit too long, I could tell from the look on Mo Yan's face that he had heard everything I said.

At this moment, Mr. Ge Fei stood up and asked me for a business card. I picked up the last piece of my card from a pile of bills and handed it over to him.

"What a rich guy!" Mo Yan teased me while looking at the pile of bills in my hand.

Having no business card left for Mo Yan, I took out a pen, jotted down my name and cell phone number on a piece of notepaper from the hotel, and presented it to him respectfully. Mo Yan took it over and pressed it evenly on the table. Then, he folded it once carefully and ripped it into two pieces. After putting the half with my name and phone number into his document bag, he borrowed my pen to write down his name and cell phone number quickly on the other half. He folded it again before handing it over to me. I took it over immediately with both of my hands and dropped it into my document bag.

"Mo Yan's phone number!" I thought. "I got it, finally."

No sooner had I spilled out my last word than Mo Yan finished all the food on his plate. Rising up, he cupped one hand in the other toward me and nodded toward everyone. Then, he and GeFei disappeared together around the corner of the dining hall.

TOKA MOSHESH

South Africa

Toka Moshesh has been a professional graphic designer, copywriter, and editor for the last decade. He is a devoted husband and father, and a committed older brother. Part of his responsibilities includes being a part-time caregiver to his brother living with disability. He is an active member of his church locally and regionally, spending most of his efforts in child ministry (ages 4 to 16), administration, and media. His hobbies include DIY, anime, and music.

My Brother's Keeper

"Mr Moshesh, I'm worried." The nurse's furrowed brow is a cause for concern. Whenever she takes time to pull me aside, there's usually some underlying health scare we have to discuss.

The last time we spoke in such hushed tones, he'd fallen from bed after taking a shower. His femur was fractured very close to the pelvis. The injury required surgery. He was in pain each time we sat him up, helped him stand, turned him on his side, and every time he accidentally leaned to his right.

My brother needed round-the-clock care due to severe injuries sustained in a car accident. The most impactful was brain trauma. It resulted in memory loss, lack of coherent thought, and poor concentration. There was a time we thought it would be permanent. But we sit in his living room, 11 years later, discussing the growing extent of his injuries.

His brain trauma would creep in unexpectedly. We'd all be deep in conversation and he would remark that we should tell Mommy. "She died in the accident," I'd remind him. He would sometimes forget his place in time, as if he lived in his memories. If we talk about driving by Edenvale, he would ask if we are dropping him off at his high school boarding house. He didn't forget that he has already matriculated.

No.

He fully inhabits the moment, as if he's travelled back in time and is stuck in the past.

The moment he realises his error is heartbreaking. A keen disappointment flushes over his face and, for a second, his demeanour is sad. He looks defeated by his condition. A second later, he's forgotten the mishap and laughs along whatever line of conversation we pick to distract him.

Living with this version of my brother taxes my soul. I love him.. But this is not who I grew up with

My parents wanted to instill sibling pride in us from a young age. In July of 2000, they took a picture of us. Shortly after, they had it printed with a large caption: "I'M MY BROTHERS KEEPER".

People do that. They take pictures, videos, and voice recordings of moments in their lives. I rarely used to; I felt that experiences are meant to be lived and remembered.

I used to hate when people whip out their phones to photograph a meal. I never understood why people stand in the middle of a street posing and strutting simply to capture it for later. It just seemed to me like they were mining social (crypto)currency.

And then I lost my brother. The one I've known since I was two years old. The one who shared the most precious moments with me since I was two years old. All I had left of him were pictures, videos, and voice recordings. He died in the same accident as my mother. But someone else emerged from the wreckage.

Since he can't recall these events, and no one else (alive) was there, I am the only one with a connection to that imprint of his soul. The memories I have remain relics of who he once was, severed from the person he has become. Horcruxes offer the fantasy that what has been severed can one day be made whole again. But there is no grand design to reunite the pieces and restore his former glory. I must sit with the reality that my brother is forever fragmented.

The problem is only one part of the equation. The solution has been so much more interesting. What does it mean to love someone who doesn't remember the life they had with you? How do you dignify their forgetting?

Even in the first few weeks following the accident, when my brother awoke from his coma, he recognised me as his brother. I was his only sibling for a decade before our sister joined the brotherhood. Our mom and dad were just that: our parents. And -

now they are both gone. I am the only anchor for my brother's former persona. I think he sensed that back then. In his eyes, it would fall to me to shepherd him toward the scattered pieces of himself.

He scowled at my girlfriend. My relationship with her competed with my loyalty to him. He was threatened by it. He grunted and hissed at her every time she would visit the Rehabilitation Hospital with me. He couldn't speak yet, so he communicated through primitive, guttural expressions.

That post-coma, pre-recovery person was also my brother. A different brother whose sheer force of will upended the most critical medical speculation about his prognosis. His doctor said he would be a vegetable for the rest of his life; my brother chose otherwise.

My brother moved to the USA after matriculating from high school. He wanted to play professional sports and model. Even when his soccer trials didn't go as planned, he continued to hit the gym, do modelling gigs, and study. He wanted to build his body, mind, and reputation.

He exercised that same conviction in therapy. He hated being written off by someone who had no investment in his future. That doctor was wrong. His physio and occupational therapists were incredibly impressed with his strength of character. His resolve was evident in every set, every lift, every gesture.

My brother, now, is more timid and a lot less motivated during therapy sessions. His mouth runs a mile before his foot takes a step. He charms his therapists with the gift of the gab, eating away at the few precious minutes we can schedule with these specialist appointments.

My brother, now, is hopelessly reliant on a caregiver for everything he needs to do. I've often found myself having to do the job when his caregivers are on leave. Stepping into the role of full-time carer is taxing. It's not about the long hours, per se. It's about always being on-call. When he needs something, you provide it, no matter how inconvenient. You cannot knock-off or sign out.

My brother, now, is fully dependent. I once left the house to run an errand. Even with five other people in the house, he slipped out of his wheelchair trying to go somewhere. I arrived five minutes after my wife had brought him supper. He lay, stomach down, on the floor. No one in the house had the strength to pick him up, anyway, so he would lay there until I returned. He didn't call for help. He resigned himself to staring at the floor for five minutes, waiting for help.

I call each of these versions "my brother." They are all authentically him, and yet they are so unlike one another. These pieces, these horcruxes, form a whole. They aren't like pieces of a mosaic, or layers in a painting. They're more like drafts for an artwork. Each is a part of the development of the final piece, but they live apart and will never be combined into one whole.

One sketch might capture his likeness, while another is a light study. Another draft might try to resolve the composition, yet another examines technique. No one else (alive) has seen every season in my brother's life. I'm the key, the spell, that binds these horcruxes to his soul.

There's still a lot of his life left to live so I've resolved to loosen the parameters that define "my brother". I accept the person in front of me as my brother, regardless of the form he takes. I don't know if the future holds progress towards independence or regression towards palliative care. But I collect these horcruxes and hold them in view. I cannot seamlessly merge them into a coherent whole; I continue to learn to accept the pieces as complete elements in their own right.

So, at least I know my brother's not a Dark Lord, nor does he wish to be. He has no ultimate plan. There is no grand conspiracy working in the shadows. There is no return to his former glory. We accept that his future persona is a mystery we unfold each day, like a painting that paints itself.

Also, I encourage people to take photos now. I still cringe when people manufacture scenes purely for the camera. But I now appreciate photos because I carry one such horcrux with me.

Our family celebrated my brother's birthday at a restaurant. Seated across from us, my mother raised her phone and snapped a picture of the two of us together. That is the last normal moment we captured together. The next morning, he barely survived in the same car accident where she died.

Substantial is one of my favourite artists. I enjoy his anime-inspired lyricism and his work with legendary DJ Nujabes. He raps, "life has turned your iPhone to a mobile mausoleum, or an Android filled with memories of human beings." Pictures and videos are some of the only ways to capture a human's soul after their life on earth has expired. These horcruxes carry memories that will fade with time.

Each horcrux I have reminds me of the fragility of life. These horcruxes represent mortality: mine and his.

Make horcruxes.

When your soul is withering away, a horcrux may be your last hope. And, really, hope is all we have.

REVIEW



The Half-Life of Identity

*How Film Dao Preserves the
Diasporic Soul Through Invented
Kinship*

YAO PENGYU

China

With a limited schedule and the dizzying expanse of my first Berlinale this February, choosing what to watch felt less like curation than triage. I found myself turning to the sterile grid of a Google Doc just to visually organize my own instincts—grading films based on a few lines of synopsis, judging destinies by a single teaser still. In that clinical digital space, only one title from the Main Competition managed to command my full attention: a must-see.

Dao.

The title itself invokes one of the most enduring concepts in classical Chinese philosophy (Daoism/The Way), yet the image attached to it seemed to pull in an entirely different direction: two young Africans, Bonnie-and-Clyde-esque, caught mid-flight. The synopsis deepened the intrigue rather than resolving it: actors and non-actors brought together to become relatives, gathering to celebrate a wedding in Paris while commemorating the death of a patriarch in Guinea-Bissau.

A vessel of identities. A vessel of movement. An artificial family assembled through directorial arrangement and suspended between continents. As someone who has never known the displacement of migration—belonging instead to a mainstream ethnicity—my fascination with the diaspora has always been one of distance. I came to Dao as an observer of an experience I do not share, yet the film allowed me to engage with the

diasporic soul not through voyeurism, but through an encounter with an unfamiliar cinematic cosmos.

The film itself begins with a definition:

“DAO is a perpetual and circular movement which flows in everything and unites the world.” The statement functions simultaneously as philosophy, narrative blueprint, and warning. For nearly three hours, Alain Gomis follows that circular movement wherever it leads: across oceans, generations, languages, ceremonies, memories, and performances.

The result is a sprawling family saga that continually dissolves the boundaries between documentary realism and fictional storytelling, pushing cinematic boundaries while remaining deeply grounded in lived experience.

At first glance, *Dao* appears to belong to a familiar lineage of immigrant cinema, it concerns displacement, belonging, and the uneasy relationship between homeland and adopted home. Yet Gomis is less interested in the psychological drama of migration than in the cultural mechanisms that allow a dispersed community to endure.

The film's most radical gesture arrives almost immediately. Before Gloria, Nour, or any member of the extended family fully emerge as characters, we witness the making of the family itself. Actors and non-actors participate in casting sessions. They are not coached so much as invited. "What would you like to play in this film?" asks the off screen filmmaker. Relatives are chosen. Relationships are assigned. A family is constructed, almost in live streaming mode.

Yet something unusual occurs -- the more artificial the family appears, the more authentic it becomes.

The conventional diasporic narrative assumes that identity survives through bloodline, genealogy, or inherited memory. *Dao* proposes something else. In a world shaped by migration, colonial history, and geographical separation, identity can no longer reside securely within territory or ancestry alone. It must migrate into performance.

The actors become vessels.

The family becomes a vessel.

Identity survives by inhabiting an invented structure.

This logic extends throughout the film. Although Gloria and her daughter Nour occupy central positions, neither ultimately functions as the film's true protagonist. Again and again, Gomis privileges songs, dances, rituals, conversations, and communal gatherings over individual psychology. Stories emerge only to disappear. Conflicts flare and dissolve. Plot lines drift away unresolved.

Many critics have interpreted this looseness as a weakness. Yet the apparent messiness of *Dao* may in fact be its deepest philosophical commitment.

Diaspora itself is messy.

Families become scattered between continents. Languages multiply. Memory becomes fragmented. Documentary observation merges with staged performance. Past and present overlap. A conventional screenplay would attempt to assemble these fragments into a coherent whole. *Dao* refuses that repair. Its form embodies a community whose soul can no longer inhabit a single body.

The whole never arrives.

Only fragments circulate.

This circulation reaches its most powerful expression in the film's ceremonies. Much of *Dao* is devoted not to dramatic action but to collective acts of remembrance and celebration: wedding dances in Paris, funerary rituals in Guinea-Bissau, songs exchanged between generations, stories shared across tables. At one point, an actress asks whether the ceremonies being filmed will be real or simulated. When told they will indeed take place, she expresses relief, hoping they can be committed to film forever.

That brief moment quietly transforms the entire project.

The film ceases to be merely a representation of culture. It becomes an archive of it. The songs matter because they survive.

The dances matter because they survive.

The conversations matter because they survive.

A joke about colonization. A daughter's first visit to her mother's village. Women transforming washing tools into percussion instruments. Men carrying a mock coffin through which a spirit continues to speak. These moments are not simply scenes within a film. They are cultural fragments being preserved against disappearance.

Perhaps this is why one of the film's most astonishing sequences is a forty-five-minute long take that unfolds with extraordinary patience. In an era of accelerated editing and compressed attention spans, Gomis allows duration itself to become a form of preservation. The shot does not merely document a ceremony; it creates space for time, memory, and collective presence to accumulate. The viewer is not asked to consume culture but to dwell within it.

The wedding and funeral at the center of *Dao* are often described as opposing events: one celebrating beginnings, the other mourning endings. Yet the film repeatedly suggests that they are responding to the same rupture. The father's death structures everything. Diaspora structures everything. Colonial history structures everything. The newly assembled family does not replace what has been lost.

It exists because loss has already occurred.

In this sense, the film's title acquires another meaning. Identity in *Dao* exists in a state of perpetual circulation. Never fully intact. Never fully absent. Like memory, it survives in fragments. Like a half-life, it remains active long after its original source has disappeared.

By blurring fact and fiction across continents, by weaving documentary realism into fictional storytelling, and by grounding formal experimentation in lived experience, Gomis creates a cinema of transmission rather than representation. The soul of the community does not survive as an inherited essence. It survives through vessels: rituals, songs, performances, ceremonies, conversations, and ultimately the film itself.

Dao suggests that diaspora's greatest achievement is not the preservation of identity in its original form. It is the invention of new forms capable of carrying its fragments forward.

Not whole. Not intact. But alive.

CHARMAINE GRANT

Canada

Ekphrastic Horcrux

Key Terms:

Ekphrastic writing (or ekphrasis) is the imaginative translation of a visual art piece into words. Originating as an ancient Greek rhetorical exercise, it involves a writer narrating, interpreting, or conversing with a painting, sculpture, or photograph. It turns visual art into a narrative muse.

Ekphrastic writing bridges the gap between what the artist left unsaid and what the writer imagines.

Horcrux: a dark object that holds a piece of a person's soul to tether them to immortal life.

Ekphrastic Horcrux: writing that serves to anchor the re-imagining of the continuity of life in a work of art through the writer's re-interpretation of this art work's backstory, hidden emotions, hidden conversations – thus, through a re-interpretation of the art work's immortal, creative soul.

Unknown photographer

Albumen print, c. 1890

Courtesy of the Caribbean Photo Archive

Dressed in their Sunday best, brim-hatted Jamaican women, men, and children stand under the island's non-visible sun. Colonized people form two diagonal lines that part down the middle, with no intersecting vertices; they, in fact, form the processional flanks of a Y-shaped wedding aisle.

The mouth of this aisle is approximately 20 cm wide. Here, five adulting females (three staggered one behind the other on the left diagonal and two on the right) have taken up their positions as heads of the processional, not to be outflanked by their black male counterparts. Compliantly, they have tucked in behind their female line captains to narrow out the diagonals of the aisle, which, at its tail end, reveals a gap 2.5 cm thick.

Having chosen to circumvent bridal tradition, most of the wedding's guests have (un)knowingly staged an act of coloured resistance by incorporating at least one item of white clothing in their attire. For two of the women, this translates into the wearing of a pared-down version of the infamous Marie Antoinette volumed gown adorned with shoulder ruffles. The other two females exhibit their petticoat skirts, pleats tidily in place. Everything has been made from the cotton fabric of slavery. For the men, buttoned-up white shirts and white pants make up part of the day's dress code. The other half of this code, as it applies to all the wedding guests, is marked by staple, colonial garments: khaki brown trousers, some being held up by suspenders; tan-coloured chemises; flower and stripe-patterned shirtwaist blouses tucked neatly into a skirt; suit jackets worn with or without triangular knotted ties; cinched waists held in by brown, white,

and gold sashes and in two instances reinforced by a fastened brooch. Cotton, like bondage, has an unrelenting grip.

All guests prepare for and await the coming of their bride: the freedom of emancipation. The sheer anticipation and importance of this bride induce the womenfolk to adopt a poised stance; they overlay their hands in front of them. Meanwhile, the men's posture combines different dexterity gestures; their hands are entirely dropped to their sides, perched on their hips, lazily crisscrossed, or pulling at their trousers.

Yet, the day's pomp and circumstance are completely lost upon the youngest of the wedding's female attendees – a precocious toddler standing within the mouth of the aisle closest to the left flank. She displays her bashfulness at the long-awaited coming of her freedom by completely averting her gaze. Demonstrating the flexibility of her youth, she twists both her head and upper body to look back at the discarded bowling pins at the end of the aisle. Until the call for emancipation, this gaming alley, suddenly turned bridal aisle, was her only laneway of freedom. Unlike her elders, whose gazes are directly fixed on the camera lens, this toddler has not become undone by a promised freedom that has yet to make itself visible and play with her.

The toddler's eye line pierces through the laneway passing under a misshapen archway made of tightly braided palm trees – a visual and symbolic reminder that emancipation is a tightly woven affair. She is looking for her playmate whom she locates atop the raised stage that appears at the end of the aisle. There, a boy approximately nine years of age grips the left arm of his father. He, too, is doubtful of the day's emancipatory promise. If the wake of freedom does not inspire bridal bliss amongst the most innocent of the soon-to-be emancipated, what, then, is freedom? Must we not become like little children to enter the kingdom of a free world?

*Proverbs 24:10**Peter Dean Rickards / The Afflicted Yard**Single-channel video (black-and-white, sound), 2008**Courtesy of the Estate of Peter Dean Rickards.*

A video screen opens, black background. Cue piano playing. Instrumental music in a flat key creates an eerily sounding lullaby. Enter first animation effect. Dissolve in: If you should falter in times of trouble, how fitting that the font colour for this text is white, thereby creating the perfect colonial contrast. These first eight words also appear centred, in Times New Roman typeface, approximately size 40. There is a 3-second delay. Repeat 'dissolve in' animation. how small is your strength? This future conditional phrase has continued on a new line which is indented slightly to the right of the word you with the previously mentioned font and size applications. Another 3-second delay. Dissolve in: Proverbs 24:10 The source for the biblical proverbial appears three lines down from the antecedent question, in a similar, but moderately smaller size Times New Roman font. The 'p' in Proverbs aligns vertically with the 'r' in your so that the citation of Christian wisdom literature shows up in a left-justified position. A quick flurry of piano keys punctuates and ends the blackness of the screen. Yet, Proverbs 24:10 lingers and carries over into a new black-and-white video frame. It does not disappear until the second shoulder-raised maneuver of a young, Jamaican dancehall artist.

The artist in question gives his viewing audience an outdoor performance of his craft. This unfolds in the sanctity of a locally fenced-in schoolyard amongst the familiarity of fellow Jamaican brethren, away from the hungry, devouring eyes of white tourists, turned media terrorists. The unrelenting violence of snapping phone cameras, of colonial raids on unsuspecting African communities: herein, the common need to capture the public objectification of colonized black bodies. Yet, if the terroristic, seizure of African slaves – and its photographic afterlives –

had not been initiated, how could this gifted artist so limberly demonstrate his ability to evade captivity through freedom dance moves inherited from his ancestors? Can the

Door of No Return, of slavery's past not passed, be re-opened? If so, what non-settler tools might be used to preserve the interiority of the moves performed in this doorway? If not, are the fissures that allow for some light to pass through the door that ended free movement for Black diasporic people enough to eliminate the consumerism of blackness?

The answers to these questions emerge in the weather of Dean Rickard's videography. He has purposefully slowed down the artist's dancehall limbo to match the afflicted tempo of Nick Cave and Warren Ellis's "All Things Beautiful." This instrumental tune evolves to include violin playing, the strings of which are plucked from the numerous power lines bordering the yard's perimeter. Indeed, the dance of colonial evasion is a beautiful one. Much like the maneuvering of the young Jamaican on-screen dancer, so too did our black ancestors engage an intricate dance to escape their slavers: they shoulder rolled, shimmied their bodies, sidestepped, backstepped, circled, dirty wined, gave dem a run; snaked down to the ground without succumbing to gravity, and elongated their gait to escape colonial slavers. Never, did they falter in their determination to seek their freedom.

Rather they weathered the storm. The chains that once anchored the feet and hands of formerly enslaved Africans to the inclement atmospheric conditions of settler colonialism have been artfully repurposed in Rickards' dancehall video footage. Here, a second black male dancer is shown repeatedly swinging his chain-linked jewelry around his neck. He smiles. The coordinated balance it takes for him to stomp on the ground of empire while simultaneously suspending its chock hold illustrates the precarity of Black life and creates a counter-

gravitational pull to the weather of anti-blackness that slavery left in the wake of its door. Black countergravity mitigates the fall of black humanity within the Door of No Return.

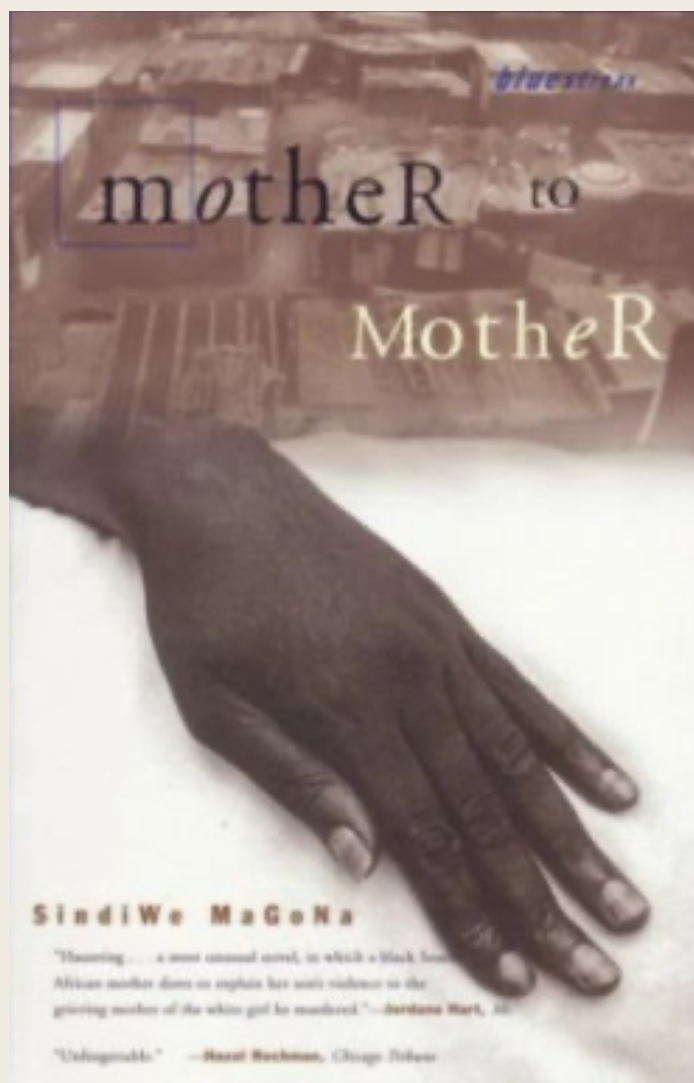
This second dancer closes out his performance with a spinning leg twist that sees him yield back into an upright position just as quickly as he went down to complete his low center of gravity twist-out. The blackness of the screen returns. On it, we read, The Rickards. Bros. The Afflicted Yard. <http://www.afflictedyard.com>. The author and gallery source for the dancehall footage have been printed on three separate lines in the

lines in the same Times New Roman font (with similar script sizes and alignment applications that were previously mentioned) as the opening video credits. Recalling the proverbial question in these credits:

If you should falter in times of trouble,

how small is your strength?

As small as the movement of an afflicted foot trying to fit its way through the fissure of the Door.



VUYISWA NODADA

Mother to Mother

by Sindiwe Magona, Book Review

Mother to Mother by Sindiwe Magona evokes fierce emotions encapsulated in one word – inimba. This book resurrects fractures of our South African history. It was published by David Philip, 1998, in Cape Town, also the setting. It stems from a reaction to true life's events. In an amazing yet disturbing way, the writer created a story steeped in callousness alongside ubuntu. Mutually exclusive concepts. I applaud Magona's ability for creating a whole narrative with contexts at loggerheads. The reader encounters Mandisa, the protagonist, through whose speech and thoughts we see her world.

Values and norms such as ubuntu and inimba influence how Mandisa interacts with the hostile world of her oppressors. Even though not explicitly expressed, hired Black mothers extend the same care to white children whose mothers are their oppressors, which is true to the nature of inimba: "All our mothers, who had been there every afternoon to welcome us when we returned from school, were no longer there. They were working in white women's homes" (Magona, p.67). However, the white mothers are generalized to counteract with callousness, as sampled in this excerpt:

Someone would come back from work fuming: amaBhulu azizinja, because of some unfairness they believed had been meted out to them that day. A slap. A kick. Deduction from wages [...] So, yes, our children grew up in our homes, where we called white people dogs as a matter of idiom...Based on bitter experience (Magona, p.75).

This book portrays a city plagued with contradictions. Sello Duiker also portrays this vividly in his book *Thirteen Cents*. Duiker uses the beauty of Cape Town as a background while his story foregrounds atrocities shown through the lives of drug dealers and paedophiles. For instance, in this scene he juxtaposes the opulent V&A Waterfront with sexual exploitation: “He takes me in his family minibus to a dark beach near the V&A Waterfront...he takes me like a beast. I bite the seat in front of me while he grunts and moans” (Duiker, p.37). Similarly, I marvel at how Magona synthesizes the grotesque and beautiful to create this outstanding narrative. In *Mother to Mother* the manicured gardens and opulent living in the suburbs are juxtaposed to the neglect in townships (p. 203).

Furthermore, the poignancy in this book is visceral. In my view it may be appropriate to characterize the book as *Pain to Pain* or *Womb to Womb*. Perhaps merely *Heart to Heart* or *Woman to Woman*. But the latter would be problematic precisely because that would be less nuanced. I believe the narrowing down of femininity to the level of motherhood heightens the narrative. In a way, the title seeks to usher the reader into the raw account of a mother’s pain that stems from the tragedies suffered by the fruit of their respective wombs.

Interestingly enough, the beginning of the narrative in chapter one does not usher the reader in. No. The first chapter does not have an introductory passage that eases the reader in slowly and gently. Instead, the very first sentence on page one: “My son killed your daughter” feels as if someone snuck up on you. You get thrown off balance akin to what Toni Morrison effects in *Beloved* (Morrison, p. XII). I find this writing brilliant in the sense that from the word go you get hooked. I love how the writer shows Mandisa’s inner struggle. She wobbles while seeking to address the white unnamed woman, whose unnamed daughter was brutally killed by her Black son.

In conclusion, the book left me feeling fulfilled because the ending, though horrific, is a safe landing: “My son, blind but sharpened arrow of the wrath of his race. Your daughter, the sacrifice of hers” (p. 210).

I recommend this book to readers who are curious about ubuntu against hatred at the dawn of freedom in South Africa. For the white victim had ubuntu, served in kindness until martyred. Lastly, this book gives inimba a mouth; the writer painstakingly paints pains in Mandisa’s body in premonition of her son’s tragedy. She gives those feelings a language. As a writer and student of inimba, I couldn’t have picked a better book.

APPENDIX

Adli Yacubi

Camissa: What the River Carries Beneath the City

Author's Note

I wrote this story in honour of a voice passed through many generations — from my mother, to her mother, and beyond. It weaves ancestral memory with imagination, drawing from the wisdom of our lands, our rivers, and our people. Gubi and Nori may be characters in legend, but they carry something real: the spirit of all those who walked before names, who travelled with seeds, and who listened deeply to the mountain's silence. I offer this story as a small act of remembering — a quiet prayer that memory may once again run like water beneath the city.

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Rithuli Orleyn

Epi(/socio/)genetic Horcruxes

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Charmaine Grant

Ekphrastic Horcrux

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Yao Pengyu

The Half-Life of Identity

1. Photo: Les Films du Worso
2. The Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale)
3. Alain Gomis' *Dao* (film)

Vuyiswa Nodada

Review

1. Magona, S. (1998). *Mother to Mother*. David Philip.
2. Duiker, K. S. (2000). *Thirteen Cents*. David Philip.
3. Morrison, T. (1987). *Beloved*. Alfred A. Knopf.

Zhenwu (Fred) Zhu

Mo Yan's Phone Number

1. The "Double Conferences" is a commonly used reference to the Conference of China Writers Association and the Conference of Chinese Federation of Literary and Art Circles, both of which usually are held during the same time period.

Patric Tariq Mellet

1.[Note: In September 1974, a 20 -year-old young man from Cape Town who was classified as "Other Coloured "committed suicide by throwing himself under a moving train after wanting to marry his 17-year-old girlfriend who was pregnant but they were told that it was unlawful for them to marry. This tragedy was a direct result of apartheid-era legislation – "The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 " that criminalised their relationship and blocked their future together . The "Population Registration Act of 1950" also meant the man would never have been able to legally claim his child as his own.

2. He left his girlfriend a suicide note and 30 Rand, requesting that she use the money to buy clothes for their unborn baby and to name the child after him if it was a boy. The girl's parents forced her to use that money for a clandestine abortion. Following the abortion, the girl also attempted suicide but survived. She told a journalist that she was unaware that she and her boyfriend were differently classified until the police informed her.]

3. [Note Citation: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/du-bois-review-social-science-research-on-race/article/miscegenation-madness/0AAEC54F8660E28291247683BFFF54F2>]

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