

Beyond Bounds

by Lisa Combrinck

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in Creative Writing
in the Department of English

University of Cape Town
September 1998

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must thank the CSD for providing me with funding to complete the masters degree and Vista University, my employer, for paying a portion of the study fees.

I am grateful to my supervisor, Professor Geoffrey Haresnape, for being kind and extremely patient and the most perceptive poetry editor and advisor I have ever met. He criticised my work in the politest possible way, even when his remarks were hard-hitting and led to extensive writing and re-writing on my part.

I must also thank my parents for supporting my work in countless ways and for believing in my abilities. The biggest thanks goes to my son, Kae, for having to spend so much time without mummy around.

Lastly, I want to thank my close friends both in Cape Town and in Pretoria for encouraging me in the writing of poetry. Even when the history of this land and what it demands of all who live in it seem to pull me in other directions, they wanted me to write and to create - for they know what the Romans knew so long ago about this continent - *Ex Africa semper aliquid novi* - that from Africa there will always be something new.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page no:
1 Beyond Bounds: a collecton of poetry	4
2 Postscript: a meditation on poetry, nation and time	77

Beyond Bounds

a collection of poetry

Contents

	Page number
Prologue/Epilogue	8
Spreading out	9
Prayer	10
Birth of a poem	11
The Journey	12
Concerning the subject matter of this poetry	13
To the reader	14
My love for you	15
Night	16
The rose	17
The recovery	17
The sun and the moon	18
The problem with words	19
Words	19
Some lines that inspire me	20
Concerning diseases of the blood	21
Love letters	22
Long-distance love	24
Out of touch, out of time	25
Inscape	27
Recess	28
When at last we love	29
Sometimes I want to open so wide	30
What will you want when you walk into my womb	31
Changing places	32
September nights	32
In the moonlight	33
The tip of your tongue	34
My hands pattern your body	35
Hands	36
Hairpoem	37
The parting	39
Will you who were once all to me become only a memory?	40
Love undone	41
Betrayal	42
The woman is too heavy for the poem	43
Such talk	45
Menstruating at full moon	46
Masturbation	47

The penis	48
A woman's words	49
Every act of sex	50
Five Ghazals	51
Manifesto	56
On reading Marechera's Mindblast	58
Love song for Dambudzo Marechera	59
Sculpted love	62
Beating the drum	63
Skinderbek city	64
Missing you	66
Letters from Cape Town	67
The naming journey	69
For my firstborn	71
Residue	73
Epilogue/Prologue	75

When History sleeps, it speaks in dreams: on the brow of
the sleeping people, the poem is a constellation of blood.
When History wakes, image becomes deed, the poem is
achieved: poetry goes into action.

Deserve your dream.

Octavio Paz
"Toward the poem"

He could not know my thoughts,
but between us,

the shuttle sped,
passed back,

the invisible web
bound us

H.D.
"RAF"

The woman is too heavy for the poem, she is a swollenness, a foot,
an arm, gone asleep, grown absurd and out of bounds.
Rooted to memory like a wedge in a block of wood; she takes the
pressure of her thought but cannot resist it.

Adrienne Rich
"Shooting Script"

Prologue / Epilogue

Like a slug, leaving a trail of mucus behind, I leave this long secretion of words. Stained pages, soiled underwear, spilled dreams. Life is not beautiful. It is the accumulation of scars, the imposition of cuts, the kniving of the womb, the stabbing of the soul, and the mind learning to lie and to live with the lies of its own making.

Somewhere in this struggle, there appear glimpses of consummated desire, but they remain tiny, miniscule chinks of light viewed from the bottom of the prison cell.

Break open the bars. Walk in my womb. Bathe yourself in the presence of these words, the soapsuds of now. The lather of this page. But do not grow drunk. Do not water the future with these words. These words are too acidic, too acerbic, too alcoholic. They will burn and scar the future, rip and strip the body of its skin. Rather wipe out the residue that remains around this bowl. Douse the lava. Pull out the plug on these words. Let them seep down to the bottom of the drain. Let only echoes remain of the words whispering, gurgling into the underworld. Black-out everything. The dregs of my cup must not remain. No future must carve its route from these words. Every utterance must have its deathbed. And the dying must be able to choose whether their last words should be forgotten and die with them or whether they should be remembered and abused. I choose the former, euthanasia for the author, and plead with the reader not to be an informer, not to use these words for future seductions, mindless mutations of life.

Now drive carefully. You have been forewarned. This is a cul-de-sac. Any attempts to press forward will be made in vain. Do not jump over the precipice of reality. You will find yourself back in the black hole of my womb. Frozen in time. Spiralling towards your end. In infinite cycles of erection and ejaculation. Pleasure which suddenly sours. The unending pain of permanent orgasm. Without pauses. Without breathing spaces. You do not have the stamina for this journey. Let me not whet your appetite for this kind of death. Do not lose your wits. Turn your back on this book. Go now. Before its brutal teeth make their presence felt. Run now. Every word is beyond repair. A song gone wrong. Every word is simply a swipe at your freedom, a fatal bite that sharpens your skin to the permanent perversions inherent in words. While I persist in playing pussy and pissing on the future. While I stroke your skin and suck the gaping hole in your soul. Escape now when you have the chance. Pull your naked self from under the covers of this book. Dress yourself in your own dreams, untouched by my hands. Forget the magnetic pull on your body parts, the throbbing longing in your loins. Walk away from this whoring of words, this story that is diseased in its spine. In the decalcifying of its bones. The petrifying of desire. The putrefying of privacy. This story that gets a kick out of selling itself, out of ripping its own knickers. This story that lingers interminably like stretch marks. Leave now. Wean yourself off these words. Weave your own song and go with the flow. Cleanse the world with your warm words.

Let the future find its own form from your stream.

Spreading out

I am numb. He says I am numb with desire. He believes what he says. I am hungry but I cannot eat. He says that it is not food that I seek. This too he believes. I am numb from the aftermarks of too much pain, the aftermath of too many submissions, too few gains.

Maybe I am like the moon. Numb and cold. But unfortunately inherently seductive. Always beautiful, wounded yet beautiful. Always screwed senseless by the sun. We are too dumb to understand that our suffering makes us seductive, alluringly beautiful. No-one sees beauty in strength. It is our capacity for suffering that damns us. Our faces that remain mute, white-powdered masks, hiding our wrinkled wombs that have been pulled this way and that, torn apart, misshapened, anaesthetised.

No-one sees beauty in the brownness of my skin, the wanton wildness of my curly black hair. They see what they want to see. And their vision damns me. I am desperately chipping away the mask which they made for me. This is what the story is about. Freedom that comes from complete nakedness, when one has been clothed in shrouds for so long.

Prayer

undress
my dreams

strip
my skin

bless
my blood

swim
within

suck
my bones

sap
my soul

blow
my brains

to grow
like an echoing rainbow

Birth of a poem

When the fires were still smouldering,
the casspirs patrolling,
the mourners going home,
the drone of a helicopter
returning to base,

I returned to my smoke-filled room
and picked up a poem I had written earlier:

then in its wee beginning,
wet from the womb,
filmy and membranous
like the caul
of a new-born child;
Promethean,
tadpole in a pond;

now buried in ash and dust,
red-hot poem
fertilized with mud
of the singeing African earth.

And despite my attempts at dusting and dampening,
not all the dusting in the world
could purify this page,
contaminated with the fires
of everyday life.

The journey

My love
you have lost your way

put your finger deep within me
return to the source
and confirm your route

the spoors of the struggle
are difficult to identify
and dangerous to follow

do not be afraid
do not fear defeat

we have opened the road for you
petal after petal lies strewn along the route
like unfurling red flags flying freely

I feel your eager prints on my body
moistening the present
mapping out the future

my love
reach out into the darkness

trace the origin of the sweet scent of desire
feel that freedom begins like a fire
flowing and filling the passages of power

Concerning the subject matter of this poetry

It so happens that I'm tired of being simply a person
in the political melting pot.

I'm weary of weaving words
into another torn, tattered tapestry of the times
we live in. The tedium of producing political patches,
the piecemeal records of events,
impoverishing our political struggle
by aborting all talk of sex.

It so happens that I want to be a woman undeniably
who writes erotic love poetry.

I declare emphatically for you and all the world to see
that I shall sing openly and honestly of sexual love.

Write about the love of a woman
for a man

Through the lips of a woman
and not through a man.

Finally, if nothing else:
to let the poem throb furiously
with an urgent, persistent femininity.

To the reader

Why should a woman not write erotic love poems?
It is true that most of my poems are about the struggle:
shaping words into the stones we throw at the oppressor,
shaping words into the slogans we shout,
shaping words into salve-covered swabs to heal our wounds,
shaping words into spears with which to forge ahead.

But these cold stones, these slogans of struggle,
these wounds, these spears cannot be free
until they come to terms with femininity
and feel the freedom of love.

No one is in love with the struggle.
We fight for the rights of people
to have land and love. We lose our lives
to liberate those we love.

In this struggle, let us leave some space
for people in love, love's bleeding lips, a blushing face.

And allow this woman the right unconditionally
to write lines and lines of erotic love poetry.

My love for you

My love for you
must shine in primary colours,
fill the biggest banners
and the smallest squares with colour.

My love for you
clads the world
in new clothing, bright colours,
precious metals, rich harvests.

My love for you
is dressed like a festival
with a ferris-wheel and swings.

I dress the world up in our love,
although there is nothing between us
except the nakedness of two bodies
on one blanket on one bed,
souls stripped, bare.

Night

the darkness deepens
draws silently near

the stare of an eye
the tip of a spear

lips gather round
sip the sweet fleshiness

a mouth
sucks a swelling breast

in a night of unrest
desire undressed.

The rose

Poor rose
much abused

your lips
rouged

your blush
bloodshot

your brooding petals
deny your desires

flee from the beating wings
of the bee

finally freely unfold
to meet the weeping warmth

the plunge
before the peace

the rude awakening
before the deep dreaminess of sleep.

The recovery

in the clear light
uncovering the clam

we shall comfort you
and sing a cradle song

make new myths about you
restore the flower
for the future

revolutionize
the stainless redness of the rose

The sun and the moon

The sun and the moon were in love. Their relationship was doomed from the start. The sun could only make love by day. The moon could only make love by night. Things became worse. The moon brooded luminously and became frail and thin. The sun became sad and wept away his shine. Until finally they agreed to defy the day and the night. They agreed to meet at dawn for the making of love.

But their moment of madness lengthened. Hours passed and the sun and the moon remained coupled. The planets spiralled suicidally in the heavens. Worlds were lost in the great immensity and galaxies collided with each other in the chaos.

This brings to mind a love that once leapt from the skies, lingered awhile, and was then irretrievably lost.

The problem with words

The problem with words
is that they weaken us,
for they imprison our love
like print on a page.

The problem with words
is that alone they are meaningless.

Words should be wooed to action.

When I whisper words to you:
only if the sounds finger your skin,
only if they stir your spirit deep within,
only then are they true.

Words

I want my words
to be simple
like bread
like water
like love

but the bread
becomes green with mould
the water
dark and stagnant
and love
loses its lustre.

Some lines that inspire me

Some lines that inspire me
in the dead of night
never live to see
the light of day.

Love that is strong
in the darkest of times
fails to endure
the bright summer rays.

My words that once could woo and sing
are now abandoned adverts in a derelict studio,
a closed-down museum of inconsequential lives,
the mummified ruins of blighted desire.

Concerning diseases of the blood

They say that we have loved too much,
we who have not loved.

Herpes, blisters, warts, discharge - everything
intensely venereal, insistently sexual - destroys us.

But the syphilitic scars can heal,
the sores can disappear.

The woman whose tubes are blocked
can survive reasonably, although the absence
of birth is also a kind of dying.

Wombs become tombs.
Penises are diseased.
We walk around as lethal as nuclear warheads.

Love like an ulcer grows.

Lovers beware of a tear
or a lesion on the skin
where the slow-growing poison settles in.

Death is less than a stone's-throw,
merely a sperm-flow away.

Love letters

1

I shall miss your spirit.
Distance like a drug disturbs
the steady rhythms of our dialogue.

You slip away as snug as a suitcase
while I grow thin and limbless like an airstrip.

But my sadness becomes solidarity
and I wish you handfuls of happiness on your trip:

May your heart bloom like a flower
and your eyes ripen like fire.

My soul will be in exile
until your return.

But time passes quickly on this earth
which is our womb.

2

The sky is a blinding humid blue.
The rays of lights are sharp like splinters of glass.

Late summer remains centre-stage,
shouting outdated spitfire slogans.

While autumn smiles shyly from the shadows,
a reluctant angel with clipped wings.

The months shuffle in slow motion.
The hours are long and desolate.

When will we lay down our armour of pens?
When will mail boxes become mere monuments of distance?

Why do we hide our words in sealed official envelopes
and conceal our dreams in fine print on folded sheets?

Why do we seek stamps of approval
when the only seal needed is a kiss?

When will this dialogue dissolve
into a matted mass of mute desire?

Long-distance love

Long distance love
is an electric current
perpetually pregnant
with explosive desire.

We spend our days
flicking the sparks off our skin
awe-struck at the burn marks on our bodies.

Sparks fly like ash
splutter like sperm.

Love's blades sprout
like grass in sand.

Walk with me across this land.
Our soles are hardened by love.

Out of touch, out of time

*'This line has been disconnected...
No more information is available'*

Recorded message

Distance blinds and blurs our minds
slowly erodes the woven thread that binds us

the fine silken filament linking us
lies frayed on the ground
battered like a trampled spider web.

I want to save this web
to plait the past, present and future, piece by piece.

My fingers touch the tattered sheet
wade through the sticky softness of shreds of web.

I have no mind for fixing things:
I cannot remember the sequence that first drew us together.

I am no historian.
I am not interested in the past.

I am no torturer.
My lines are not designed to shock.

I am no housewife.
I don't want to make a clean sweep.

I am no electrician, no engineer,
only a woman with clumsy fingers and no head for figures.

Shapeless, mindless, wireless, loveless,
my madness makes me imagine that only I
can breathe life into this box of wires;

the intricate circuitry overwhelms me
resembles a thin, flaky film of spilled sperm:
transparent, tangible, yet incomprehensible.

I cannot repair the rusted seed of my friendship.
I cannot mend the broken membrane of my womb.
I cannot wash away these stained lines.

Yet I still dream I hear your voice
calling my name from afar,

speaking through a beam of summer light.
Maybe when the sun rises
and the grass gleams with dew

our tenuous thread will shine
light up like tinsel the lifeline that binds me to you.

Will you then hear me calling you
through these disconnected lines

through these broken wires
through these doused fires

the lonely song of my lyre.

Inscape

The coast is clear.
You and I walk along the quiet beach.

Our feet dip into the sea,
a baptism of love.

You call my name,
but I do not answer.

You pick up shells, white and pink,
and blue stones.

You place them in my hands,
then you close my fingers one by one around them.

I fear our love.
I fear the shells in my hands will fall.

Then a quick breeze darts across the sky
blows through my body.

The shells fall
from my hands.

Flashes of white and pink
light up the entire sky.

Blue smoke rises.
We lie down in our blood.

I feel the flames singeing my skin.
My body trembles without end.

You cover my body with yours
to calm me, to hide me from the fires.

I fear the crowds will rush and surround us.
They will find us crouched in an inseparable embrace.

I shut my eyes tight.
Maybe this will make the trembling stop.

A moonwoman cradled by the setting sun,
will wake when the tide comes in,
breaking like waves on the shore's cratered skin.

Recess

I hold out my cupped hands. In them you place
a sprinkling of sea sand, a gesture of love.

The fine sand like ancient parchment disintegrates
and is blow away by the wind.

Always - I say to you - my love for you refuses
to be interred with the earth.

Instead it spreads upwards to the sky.
You nod your head and smile

and embrace me momentarily,
leaving traces of sand on my body.

I eagerly read the fine print,
the indentations of sand and salt,

before they permeate the intricate trail
to the secret inlet of my heart.

When at last we love

When at last we love
all words will fall away

like blank sheets
we shall meet

create a new world
invent the first day

like children we shall scrawl
give birth to wondrous words

scratch and etch our skin dreams
pattern our new page of life.

Sometimes I want to open so wide

Sometimes I want to open so wide
that you can hide inside me

away from the spies
of the night.

Sleep, sleep, my baby,
your soul is safe inside me

although your body
has taken flight.

What will you want when you dip into my womb

What will you want
when you dip into my womb

peer through the shattered window of my soul
gaze at the lonely spirit imprisoned there

will you join this wanderer in self-imposed exile
transform her shrine into a life cell

dare you hold her wan hands
stare into her wistful eyes

embrace her
in one brief dance of desire?

Changing places

You leave one city for another.
We do strange things for desire.
Bodies contort in inflated shapes.
Voices gruff and shrill cut through thick air.
Our hearts beat like cowhide drums,
bursting the seams of our skins.

And the city becomes incidental,
small like a slit, an incision
in which we unbutton each other,
a loophole in which we live,
stitching our wounds,
embroidering our dreams.

September nights

September nights are intensely cold.
Spring is simply the coming season
stripped of past illusions.
When did we become unbelievers in dreams?

I want to unwind my taut soul.
I want my limbs to ease towards the sun.
Where is the bread to warm my belly?
Where is the water to cleanse my womb?

Break the unleavened bread.
Pour your rain down my shrivelled breasts.
Make my body breathe again
and bulge and swell.

Let's live together in a dark room made for nights:
only the changing shapes of our bodies
can create vast sheets of summer colours,
instant snapshots of infinite light.

In the moonlight

As I came in the moonlight
- not once but twice -
I saw your ribs
suddenly stand out of your skin
and glow in the dark
like the long strands
of a string instrument.

And I thought that if I
ran my fingers down your chest
and plucked the strings
we could make exquisite music.

Instead I chose to dance on your taut frame;
my curling lips clicking and singing
and sucking the sap of your bone,
slowly honing into the song of your soul,
that bluesong redsong rosesong
that bursts its whiteness into my womb.

The tip of your tongue

The tip of your tongue
licks the sole of my foot

Nipples are known to be nicer,
even lips are more responsive to tongue tips,

But you choose the sole of my foot
and your tongue tap dances across its rough surface

watering the cracked skin
washing away the dirt of the day.

My feet leap up into the air
like stems discovering the sun

while you enjoy them deftly one by one
like a delicacy, an appetitif of desire.

You hold a foot in each hand
while I watch in amazement from below

stunned by this single truth:
that love stirs in small, simple places.

Here in the tiny minute
it takes to traverse the sole of my foot
I am infinitely struck
by the tenderness of your tongue
infinitely wiser to the workings of love.

The trail engraved on my foot
in the dark of night
is a painting on a rock
and the night
that made this love
is a temple of desire.

My hands pattern your body

My hands pattern your body.

My left hand draws a winding river down your chest
with a brushstroke rounded like the loops and dips of eternal time.

I invent new paradigms of pleasure
in this decaying world of fractured skulls and fallen dreams.

You wet each ear in acts of baptism (drowning outside corruption).
Your tongue tiptoes across each contour of my cheek
until your mouth meets mine.

This is an act of tenderness, an inscription of innocence
which I defile by placing my right hand inside your pants
fingering the tuft of desirous hair above your buttocks
and rubbing my right hand against your penis.

Do you forgive me for this act of cowardice
this refusal to celebrate simple sensuality
its crude substitute being the carnal abuse of your body?

Hands

I want to give you everything I have to give:
first take my hands, small like a child's,
with nails bitten right down to the skin,
nails pink and shiny but without half moons,
and fingers slender and serene but without golden rings.

Take them. Both of them. I want to give you everything.
My palms which are both soft and callused,
like this life of joy and pain.

Take my scars.
On my right hand you will find a scar
from a moment in my former married life where one late afternoon
I burned myself while ironing (my mind as always must have been elsewhere in
another space and time). The iron was hot and I can still feel the sting of pain,
but even then I knew so little about ironing but dreamt so much about love.

On my right hand you will see yet another mark of the past:
this one comes from my school days where one morning I injured myself
while opening unaware the broken school gate.

So many marks of carelessness.
How little I have learned. Everything
still slips out of my hands:
glass jugs and cups and loves.

Yes, these are my hands. Hands that have loved and lost.
Hands that have shaken with fear in nights of death.
Hands that have also learnt to be unwavering in the middle of a storm.
Hands that peel and cook and boil. Clumsy hands.
Moonless nails. Ringless fingers. Accept them all.

For with these hands I shall run my fingers down your face
softly slowly very deliberately as if I have all the time in the world.
The kisses of my fingers will greet you.
My fingertips like fish mouths will whisper my love.
My nails will grow tongues that scream and ululate my desires.

You will learn that the best way to know me
is to slip unseen into my embrace
and to enter unheard my dreams.
You will learn that the best way to know me
is to permeate my hands.

Hair poem

"Oh lovely, oh lethal entanglements. In such a world to be true."

Raymond Carver

(Your voice some months back on your cell phone was speaking to me from the city centre - do you remember - There are certain words I now recall. You were tired you said of emotional entanglements. You wanted to come home and someone to be there. Your voice was small, sad, tense. Then you approached a hill and the line broke up. As much as I tried to get us reconnected, I was too late, for you had retreated. My words had already failed me as they usually do...)

1.

I am observing the cutting of your hair.
The sound of the scissors opening and shutting in the wind.
The sharpness of the scissors and the quick snips of Glodina as she cuts.
The clipping of hair. The snicking of scissors. Time ticking, taking us all away.
These bits of hair are so eager to be snatched by the wind:
this tiny ringlet is past love that is lost, this one is the love-longed-for but left behind,
this is the tempestuous one driven to desertion. These are the hairs of unbelonging.
These are the hairs that never return.

2.

After love-making we get dressed and you joke in passing pointing down below:
"If your boy saw your hair, how would you explain it to him?"
I decline a reply. You already have an answer:
"Tell him it is something he can hold on to if he falls."
This is tough hair you are talking about. The tough hair of motherhood
that protects him and will hold him up. Yours to love, but his to hold.

3.

We have suffered too much from entanglements.
Because the hair that is tough and the hair that is cut
are not enough to heal us.
Let us braid our beings together. You will be one piece
and I will be the other. The rest we will shape together.
We'll brush and comb and make a middle path.
We'll make one ribboned fish plait or multitudes beaded in parallel lines.
Let us cultivate hair which glistens in the moonlight and is lustrous in the sun,
hair that smells of rain and sweat, hair that is oiled and perfumed with our love.

4.

This hair grows thick and strong.
Time thickens and unfolds.

For this we are responsible.

This obstinate hair with a life of its own,
like a dream that grows towards eternity,

a love that slips willingly

out of its curls
out of our hands.

The parting

We knew we had to part,
but our bodies betrayed us both.
The more distant and dialectical our discourse,
the closer our half-touches, hand-holding,
the birth of a new and delicate tenderness,
clinging to tendrils, tentatively claiming
and reclaiming a lost love.

Your words of daring desperation:
“Tell me you love me.” My reply
in confirmation - was it the truth
or an appropriate lie -
the literacy of our lives
or the baselessness of our love.

We wanted the theory to fail.
We yearned for our bodies' mutual betrayal
of all theory, and the quick, easy retreat
into momentary lapses of lust.

Will you who were once all to me

Will you who were once all to me
become only a memory

like the dew on the grass
describes what was once a dawn

like the plaster on my heart
where there was once a love-charm

like the crosses on a page
where there was once a poem?

Will you who were once all to me
change from now to then, from this to that?

Will my body like a fast car leaving your home
be remembered as a spirit leaving a tomb?

Love undone

1

The love that sprang between us
made so many things:

It made lines that were long and lingered in the soul,
letters that were unfolding forever.

It wooed our words
and warmed my womb for your seed.

It gave us the courage to survive and breathe
fearlessly, conscious of our collective strength.

2

Now we smother each other
with sheets from our shared bed.

Now the bed of love unmakes itself,
oblivious of its occupants.

And this love that made so many things
sickens and shivers and writhes

from an unknown illness,
that defies all attempts at diagnosis.

Betrayal

Betrayal is the hardest bone to chew.
Cold and fleshless, it eats the insides,

corrodes the soul,
burns holes in the being,

lays down sharp slabs of stone,
insidious growths that stab and hack the heart.

The iron(ic) taste of blood
is the only memory of love left in the mouth.

Faithfulness is a ruptured vessel
staggering with sunken eyes through life's drunkenness,

growing slowly accustomed to the daily drudgery
of corruption and decay, the lethal routine

that dampens all anger,
deadens everything,

helping to pass painlessly
the punctured spasms of time.

Time itself has no memory.
It folds the past effortlessly.

Potently
injects forgetfulness.

The woman is too heavy for the poem

the woman sits astride the page,
she does not need her hands at all:
her mere presence stirs the poem
she is the lolly at the end of the stick,
the ice maiden dressed in red,
more like a drag queen than a woman,
more like a pen than a poet,
arousing rather than writing the poem.

more like a wizard breathing magic into a wand,
more like a witchdoctor throwing the bones,
more like a warrior sharpening a weapon,
the poet is painfully aware that the poem can kill her.

The journey is always a dangerous one,
(her lips and legs brush the barrel of the gun)
(she is always tempted to taste the poisonous tip of the spear)
desire always threatens to destroy her:
but this *is* what she needs to write,
needs like a sudden leap into a strange city street,
the inexplicable need to be lost,
to linger in the maze a little,
to be hopelessly lost long enough
so that the poem can find her.

always at this moment
her lips are pallid blue and pinched
and within an instant
they redden thicken
and unfold
producing the first flow of words
alive with soft, liquid sounds
that greet and lilt
and seem about to sing,

but in her haste to bring forth these words
in her strange quest for newness
the penetration becomes too painfully deep
and she has to start breathing again
quick short gasps of air
before the poem is under control
before the rhythm returns
even now the danger is not over
this is when she wants to steer the words

to lure them and destroy them
to give birth
to new wor(l)ds void of power
but this is when her guilt returns
must she whip and beat these words
must she make them bleed for their seeds
so that her blood can be born and flow freely
so that her words find new meaning.

Now the poem sickens and shrinks considerably
now the poet becomes unbalanced and almost falls
now the woman is too heavy for the poem
she is swollen with her own thoughts
stretched to the limits of her own desires
she has forgotten the poem
which smothers under her
unable to move or shout
drooping and waning
fearing death.

It is now that the woman weakens
always unselfishly she surrenders
to the poem
she spreads her legs
breathes into its blue lungs
kisses and caresses it
nurses it back to health
until it has a life of its own
that in turn threatens to harm her,
in this moment of terror
between birth and death
the poem finally comes
into being,
like an unexpected knock at the door
it disturbs the silence
the poem enters the world
spurts its caseous song
and the poet
now sapped of energy
now no longer a poet
curls up her legs
casts the poem aside like a stranger
and sinks into a deep, dreamless sleep.

Such talk

The full-lipped thickness of the moon
explains our madness

the frenzied energies
that engulf us both

consume us
in collapsing conversations

disparate syllables folding
falling spiralling
into our stripped selves

cyclic discoveries
of inner freedom

- not freedom bought or sought -
but conceived from twin wombs
brimful with words,

defying with fury
the unfulfilled world.

Menstruating at full moon

The full moon rises above the water mark,
taking her solitary, solid shape up in the sky.

Her position is still unchallenged.
The stars step aside in respect and fear:

they are too scared
to outshine her.

She smiles, showing a perfect set of teeth,
like a precious string of pearls.

She is triumphant once more,
her monthly hunger-lust for blood duly satisfied.

She is beautiful. All body. A perfect ten.
But empty-headed like the space inside a zero.

She is resplendent in white, a fine, striking figure.
Her belly is always flat.

Masturbation

Masturbation is not for those
who sleep with meaningless ease at night.

Masturbation is the obsession
of insomniacs and single men,
lonely women who are not left satisfied,
while their post-coital lovers are seized by a deep sleep.

Masturbation is not for the faint-hearted,
not for those who fear the inner compulsions
and hungers of their own bodies.

Orgasm is achieved by sleight of hand:
one hand can make magic, can make the earth move
and the senses sing, ablaze with their own burning tongues of desire.

Masturbation is a single candle,
an inkling of lamplight
that warms a darkened room,
a glimpse of spread hair and flesh
matted and meshed into one,
or a climber reaching the summit alone.

Masturbation is often misunderstood,
but could be described as an addiction
that is best left untreated.
A healthy life-long pre-occupation like exercise or taking a bath.

Above all, masturbation is a monologue,
a soliloquy to the self,
the realisation that self-love
can in itself be a successful end
a splendid, violent spectacle of starbursts or a soft crooning swoon
like the slow, compelling start of a swansong.

The penis

The penis is not a plaything.
It may resemble a toy or a pet
and you can stroke it, rub it or even bend it a bit.

You can slip it into your mouth like a hard-boiled sweet
lick it with every flick of your tongue like ice cream
or suck it like succulent fruit.

You can slide it between your breasts and milk it like a baby
or use the cheeks of your buttocks
like comforting cushions to caress it.

Your locks of hair can brush it
and wipe it when it hisses,
wretches or spits.

Then too you can grip it with your thighs
to tame its uncontrollable convulsions and fits,
you can tighten your lips and use your muscles and hips
as whips to steer it and slow it down
until it comes round to your rhythm.

There is a great deal you can do with a penis.

A Woman's Words

I have become too easy for them:
the men who no longer call me.

Women have become too easy for men,
men who no longer bother and beg at our doorsteps
with knives and roses and brute strength.

They think they know the trampled path to our wombs.
Blindfolded, they believe their hands can make maps of our bodies.

They are confident. They know the way.
They boast: they have set the forest on fire,
they have felt the flames,
they have tasted the burning flesh,
uprooted strands of tangled hair,
hacked their way into the wild.

When they thought they had travelled deeper
than anyone had been before,
they left, dressed and departed,
never to be seen again.

We bled then.
Many times we bled.

Many times we were left for dead.

How coldly we opened our wombs,
expecting nothing in return.

Yet the pounding of our hearts
is more powerful than their thrusts,
their frantic fits, stops and starts.

The pounding of our hearts is endless.

The centre of our wombs is boundless.
A universe that breathes freely
and gives birth on its own.

A world that works perfectly,
throbs efficiently, if only
it had been left alone.

Every act of sex

Every act of sex
is not an act of love.

For the sex to be good
it better not be about love.

Every time a man leaves me
I find another stretch mark on my body.

Another scar, a wound,
a speck of infected, striated flesh.

I see shadows round my eyes
and shaded patches on my skin.

Lips that are flaccid and pallid
from too many forced entrances,
too many quick exits, too many tongues of false fire.

The mind is better at faking forgetfulness.
Words can suture slashes in the soul,
but the skin is always suffering.

I have seen too many places,
weathered too many men:

love at best is an abrasion,
at worst a laceration.

I grow weather-beaten and weary of these wounds,
these scrapes, grazes and incisions.

I want to find a short cut across this life
step safely over the burning butt-ends
pass by the broken bottles in tact
dodge the random bullets

and some day declare defiantly
that every line out of step with its time
is an act of affirmation, an attempt at living to the full
despite these lacerations that cut and scythe
this scrap heap that is life.

Five ghazals

1

We are beyond Molly Bloom.
We are beyond redemption.

Sperm that is soft and salty in the mouth
becomes sharp and bitter as it bites the throat.

Men may be different in some ways,
but all sperm tastes the same.

Orion's belt, a star-studded whip,
flogs the bony sky.

My eyes are simply skewered slits
blinded by lust and celestial brightness.

The eye of the penis is always round and howling
ever eager for release from its hydrocephalic head.

The red cherries on your plate
are both intensely sour and deeply sweet.

No-one at the café knows why we speak so much and eat so little,
nor why every satisfying sex act is recalled as a small miracle.

The sea is so dark at night and the rocks seem so sharp,
but we rush to the water with brave hearts and bare feet.

The stars are breathless and do not sing.
My mouth waters even in my dreams.

2

We cross borders and cannot rest.
Our desire to resist drives us to these lengths.

A body beckons without knowing it.
A mind reeks of sex despite the integrity of its intentions.

Freedom's fist comes first as a flag thrusting itself into the sky,
then grows a stem heading surely towards the sun.

This script never needed words or print or paint to exist.
The old slogans say that love persists like a pulsar echoing across the Milky Way.

The stage is set, the actors are in their costumes, clearing their voices in the wings.
They are bored stiff with this life of bit parts and butt-ends.

My womb is wakeful like an ever vigilant eye,
an open wound ready to infest, a time bomb waiting to explode.

The baked cheesecake on my plate is immensely sad and streaked with red.
The flabby folds of an old woman want to be young.

My belly is simply a flat sack of dry leaves,
a rattle bag of gravelly stones raked from rainless land.

In the cafe tonight with slow deliberate sips I eye rows of shining glasses.
Paper umbrellas and red cherries leer invitingly at me.

My lips part widening in a smile, ticking like a clock.
I speak incessantly and irrepressible rhythms bubble out.

In my dreams we curl into each other like sheets of paper folding in fire.
Smelling of incense, intumescent, we burn up willingly as one.

Your fingerprints on my body will grow faint and fade without trace.
Midnight rain falls like fine print without touching my scorched skin, my uplifted face.

3

A man knocks at my door after midnight,
his clothes reeking of confrontations and wine and smoke.

Later when he is undressed and his bare chest is pressed against me,
I smell only the clean aroma of soap, pure like pre-pubescence.

When you touch my hair in a moment of love-making,
is this simply foreplay or do you love my hair the way all my lovers do?

The condoms in your jacket pocket remain sealed in foil packets.
Is this evidence of failed consummation or a wilful act of procreation?

You have nothing to fear my love, except that
the unborn child in my womb may not be yours at all.

With meticulous precision, we do not plan our destinations,
but we plot our downfalls.

Years of cautious cowardice are the bars of a cell.
Freedom is always a risk, an opening gaping wide and unknown like eternity.

When you read these lines from long-distance, you will be fascinated, my love.
But you are neither voyeur nor observer.

You stand with your foot in the doorway,
peering in at your other life, your other wife.

4

On a winter afternoon we order thick, beef soup with croutons.
The soup arrives in bowls, which are dirty and brown.

It looks like live creatures drowning in brown mud,
but it sure smells like heaven above.

Conversation at the cafe is lewd and the laughter is edgy
like warm hands rubbing themselves together trying so hard to be warm.

On the TV tonight learned councillors in white coats and presenters in power suits
speak about problems related to sex.

How can I trust them when in their discussions
the men are always far too big and the women infinitely small?

Performance anxiety is an invention of the modern imagination,
trapped in urban tenements, behind automated gates and high brick walls.

The people dream of heroes and heroines
parading their parts on big screens in small rooms.

Meanwhile children lie awake masturbating in the dark,
hiding behind thick sheets, afraid of the bogeyman who never comes.

But they have nowhere to hide and nothing to fear.
Like God, the bogeyman is everywhere.

An inner compulsion drives me to love and be loved,
to be taken by the tide or for blindfolded rides in fast cars driven by mindless men.

When my thighs loosen their grasp,
my lips tighten their grip.

Knee-deep in sinking sand, we make love.
The seagulls wink knowingly swallowing the scene.

Neither History nor God is against us.
Only Time betrays and divides us.

We clutch each other all night too afraid to let go.
These scraps of eternity are all we can cling to, all we dare to know.

Manifesto

1

The sight of my legs remaining spread on the bed after sex surprises you,
unmans you momentarily. In your unease you are aroused all over again.

Is my womb too small to hold so much sperm
since it gluts and floods my legs?

2

Life is not about love-making. It is the politics of people scarred
lined-up separated by gunpoint mumbling stammering stoning their discontent.

The youth wild-eyed with visions of freedom, the old blinded by time,
weighed down by so much suffering, weeping years of yellow tears

that fall thick like phlegm,
and do not moisten the parched earth, the cracked skin.

3

Still I want the reassuring warmth of your smile,
the clarity of your eyes.

Still I want this journey to be a simple one into each other and even beyond
into other places undreamt of homes havens imagined but unmade.

4

Not the fumbling the futile search for inner peace
but the outer embrace the outstretched hand

the gesture of your body the firmness of your voice
stepping out of silence out of the stranglehold of memory.

5

The confidence of conversation the certainty of action.
The birth of this simple human fulfilment.

This is the peace we seek. These are the marks we need.
The manifestos that make us who we are.

On reading Marechera's Mindblast

"There is this deep notion in me that the essence of femaleness is an inbuilt vulnerability that is quite wide-open to everything under the sun."

D. Marechera

I am female.
I am - as you say -
inherently vulnerable.

I write with wide-open legs
waiting for the sun
to pounce
and fuck me furiously.

Yet I feel nothing.
I am frigidly cold.
I am violently numb.

Only this desire to write
turns me on.

My lines stir you.
My images grip you.
My words like walls
of steel and stone

trap you
engulf you
in my irredeemably
feminine silence.

We women
shall be misers
of male misery.

We'll hoard desire
drown and smother
your diseased guns
with our abundant blood

expose your sad
awkward adolescence

your incapacity
to be inherently vulnerable,
inherently humane.

Love song for Dambudzo Marechera

*"I live like a folded newspaper
Abandoned on the front lawn of a deserted dream."*

D. Marechera

1.

I search for one line
that will not backfire
blow up in our faces.
I search for one line
that will not destroy us
one line that cannot retaliate
become the rope that hangs us.

Your lines
are lifelines
but easily curved
into the ominous noose
the tightening hangman's rope
or the electric current
that burns holes in our souls
kills in split seconds.

Do our umbilical cords have to strangle us?
Do we have to die to live?

The seconds of eternity are numbered.
We grow old.
The world is unreal.
The word is real.
Our words are not our first.
The next word may be the last.

Oh Dambudzo
I am tired of ritual suicides

I am sick of the human blood
bursting from our pens,
the diseased redness
of our raped thighs.

I grow weary of wounds
sustained in dreams.

So much is to be done.

Let me pick up
your spoors of words
trace the trail of your blood

touch your dreads
with wonder and with love

weave my hands through your hair
finger the flesh wounds on your face

kiss your parched lips
sooth your scalded hands

Let me hold you
and with these words
give myself to you.

2.

We have slept in unknown streets,
bedded diseased strangers on creased sheets,
retreated to park benches and rented back-rooms,
built bonfires of our bony souls to keep warm.

We have drowned ourselves in drink,
swallowed blister-packs of pills,
lived on butt-ends,
slept on book-ends.

Somehow, we survive.
Terminally ill, we sleepwalk
this dream world.

In the rooms the bureaucrats remain unchanged
fiddling with their fax machines.

In the streets, the people are oblivious,
scavenging dumps and dirt bins for basic nutrients
and scraps of metal with which to build shelters.

Let us join them.
We shall build big houses for people
and plant tall trees for shade and sheer beauty
and cultivate gardens of flowering shrubs
in which children can play
and design secluded spots
in which couples can love
with dignity out of sight.

Brick by brick,
word by word,
with stones and shrubs,
we shall love again.

Let us ban one-night stands
and make the moments of eternity last longer.
Let us pursue our search for love,
elusive, eternal love.

Meaning will no longer mangle us,
images no longer sicken and shred us.

We shall fashion the future with our own hands.
But let us tread cautiously:

Neither Hamlet nor Ophelia,
neither Luxemburg nor Guevara

We were never meant to be
like them, nor will we try.

The dream is ruthless
and in the dream we die.

3.

We grow old.
We grow old.
The newspapers we must unfold
set free our deserted dreams
disperse and spill our seeds
on this scorched land.

We grow cold.
Beyond love, beyond death,
we lie stretched out underground.
Above our bodies
the earth's wounds close
the skin heals and grows

and our dream seeds sprout and sing.

Sculpted love

(for Camille Claudel)

Blot out the starlight.
Extinguish the fires.
Draw the curtains.
Bolt the door.

Break open the baked mould.
Cut loose our sculpted selves,
cast in the same clay,
grafted into one.

Shapes of a momentary embrace
Soulful limbs stretching towards the sun

Living on the edge of forever

engrossed in our craft
engulfed by love.

Beating the drum

Do words die?
Are letters dead,

conversations unconsummated,
talks disrupted and dismissed,
dialogues severed,

love left dismembered
its throat cut?

Are scrolls rolled up,
poems unsaid,

centuries of papyrus unread,
left to decay and rot?

In this silence
void of words
sapped of love,

still I beat
beat my drum.

Skinderbek city

This is a city of one-way streets and cul-de-sacs.
Only the very brave dare ever venture out.

This city *skinders* its own secretions,
its salty masala of sea and se(a)men.

Its foul, fishy discharge reeks of all ships
that docked in this city on one-night stands,

all sailors who ever spread-eagled their dreams
with strangers and settled here.

###

The mountain is a stripper
eager to discard her white lace dress

to show her hairy brown legs
and display her shapely behind.

The wind is the greatest whore of them all
howling down alleys and backstreets

in search of skirts to lift
and backs to whip

Burg Street, Buitenkant, Long, Loop ...
streets whose very names take you on forbidden journeys

into the diseased past
the inflamed future.

###

This is not a place where you live for long.
It is a port through which you pass

an orifice
from which you emerge

knived and scarred
with the bite marks of birth

before you leave
in search of other cities, other gold.

###

And those who remain
become enslaved to the city

the seagulls carry their spirits away
and they die slowly in their sleep

with sand in their breath
and salt in their bones.

###

Missing you

The invisible god exhales.
The mountain mists up.

Moist air mouths its watery secrets
in drunken whispers deep inside your ear.

The wind is wild like an anarchist.
But the city stands its ground.

Eager lovers and holiday makers crowded in cafes
drown their hunger in conversation & white wine.

The aroma of grilled kingklip & curried calamari
mingle with garlic breath & sweat & smoke.

Outside unseen shiny curls of stretch marks
vanish from the sky skin.

A fine powder blows through the sky
& settles in sand dunes near the shore.

In this white dust I breathe your being
& print your name

dressing your presence in swaddling clothes
the warm folds of my skin.

You are re-born in the hold of this dream
in a baptism of mist & wind & sea & sand.

Letters from Cape Town

1

I send this letter in littoral lines:

seaweed words which live like leaves
carelessly blown by the northwesterly wind.

I send you the patterned dance of gulls
sweeping across the sky.

I paint you a picture in watercolour
of shining rocks with green moss,

brushstrokes of bracken and trees
and the deep aroma of mountain leaves.

I sing a praise song to this city,
until its soul sings for you alone.

But beneath the wateriness of these words,
this city is a synthesis of smoke and shacks,

where restless spirits from the past
shout slogans to keep us back.

This is a city shattered by bomb-blasts,
and choking in blood,

soaked in the endless grey of sandy flats
and the sad bareness of stones.

September. The Cape rain continues unabated.
Even the air is cold and wet.

Winter will not die
and is revitalised in this rain.

On one day the sun shot fire from the sky,
but the next day's downpour drenched the town.

I lie on my bed
clinging close to the pillow

half-listening to the distinct drumming,
half-dreaming about the future summer.

Dialogue mingles with dreams.
The visceral meets the cerebral.

Thoughts of you intertwine
in the dark damp of the drizzle.

The naming journey

My journey has only just begun.

Through the rough roads of the city,
the pathways of the countryside.

I am only 'makoti'
the daughter-in-law
from afar

a stranger to these parts
to this bare landscape
to this hard earth and high air.

My ears are not attuned to the sounds I hear.
Everyone speaks in tongues I do not understand.
I know nothing of the talks,
the reasons behind the laughter.

I know only the warmth of smiles
and the gestures that accompany conversations.

I tread carefully on the cowdung floor of the shed.
I drink water with wonder from a calabash.

I stand on the stoep
and look down to where you point
at the dam below.

I look and want so much to understand
but cannot even begin to imagine
our children growing up in these parts.

I cannot see them swimming here
and playing on this hard, dry earth.
I see only blood-stained little knees,
body parts scraped and bruised by the hardness of everything.

Indeed this is a land of hard earth
and people who are as strong and old as stones
wis/zened by time and life.

I stand here
with your seed from the previous night
still planted in my womb
still uncertain of its destination.

No, I am not even a visitor here,
not yet makoti,
only a fumbling, stumbling stranger
to these parts.

I smile shyly at your grandmother.
I tell her about my life on the coast
how the weather changes three times a day
from sun to wind to rain.

I mean to say that I miss
the protective presence of mountains
and the sweet perfume of the sea air.

I miss hearing the gulls overhead
and breathing the heavy, wet air
that weighs me down but also wakes me.

I want to say that I come from a land of wind
and forests and fynbos and mountain daisies

where you can hide all your life
in the caves of the heart
where the sea swallows your soul
and you become at one with the rain.

This is what I should have said to your grandmother
when she instructed me to speak:

I am nothing
I am no-one
not even makoti
I am only a silent visitor
with an unpalatable tongue
ignorant of the speech of these parts.
I stutter and stammer
with smiling faltering syllables
in the only language I know.

Nkhono
I am only a stranger to these parts.

For my firstborn

Your birthright
is both the mantis and the moon

the leaves of the ma^unkwane
and the owl-eyes of the matjinelanes

the foul-mouthed south-easter
and the quite grace of rainflies.

Your will savour
both snoek and sosaties
boontjie kerrie and morogo
pap and bobotie

and your bowels will work better
because of these.

You inherit both the landscape of the south
with its pine forests, mountainous hugs, interminably wet winters,
an inexhaustible abundance of wind, sea and sand;

and the expanses of the north
with its endless stretches of hard earth,
dry air, sedimentary rocks and stony rivers.

History offers places for you to embrace:
before your ancestors were removed to the Cape Flats and Hammanskraal,
they lived in District Six and Walmannstal
- these too belong to you.

The stories of how molalatladi got its name,
how the rainbow got its colours and how rain is made,
are your to hear and retell.

You will speak in greeting:
Agee, lekae, Hello, Hoesit Broer,
and everyone wena will surely understand
Ndi'pilile 'nkosi.

And neither your father in the north
who is so entrenched in his duty
of digging the foundations for future generations

nor I your mother whose soul is always sad
and seeks the waters of the coast

as I absentmindedly step over the building bricks
to catch a glimpse of the intangible moon

can ever take any of these away from you.

This is your birthright, my son.

This poem is not a bandage.
It does not hide wounds.

It is not a rope.
It does not hang the reader.

This poem simply warms you to the future.
It is a blanket covering a back.

Your birthright is the backbone.

So clasp it with both hands,
and grip it with both thighs.

On the back
you ride, my son,
you ride.

Residue

1.

The words of the girl
become the wounds of the woman

Dreams become desire
and desire is doomed to die

Experience like an anaesthetic
dulls the delusion of love

In the tomb of the dead
a woman sweeps her blood

and a child dreams of a fire
that some day will survive

she stokes this nebulous dream
wood by wood word by word.

2.

Flames rage uncontrolled
fiery heat melts the core of the cave

sets ablaze a trail to the heartland
spreads spores of love

the inflammable woman flirts with fire
the shy one blushes at her blood

others alarmed send for the sea
and God unleashes the flood.

3.

In the cave of dying fires
a crying spirit douses the floor

at the point of desire
a writhing maiden shouts for more

she sits astride the cinders
dances rhythmically in the ruins of the pyre

rubbing her scorched skin
against the burnt-out wood.

Epilogue/Prologue

1/2

Suicide is beyond me, like smoking or drunkenness or addiction to drugs. Writing is my way of dying, my way of living. I cling to words for dear life or as a death wish. A reminder of mortality.

When the words become monotonous, the thoughts repetitive, then finally I will know that I am dead. Until that time, I continue digging my grave, constructing my gravestone, chiselling and engraving, searching for that elusive epitaph, the one line by which others may remember or forget.

2/1

This is not about letting love go. It is about letting love grow. Accepting the absence of loneliness. Liberating our selves from our separate bodies by allowing our bodies the freedom to think its fulfilment and our minds the right to lustfulness. This is about the body bulging like a brain, a bright vein in the forehead bursting its thoughts, blowing up its intellectual origins and the mind becoming flesh and thickening out. This is not about the act in itself, not about copious copulation. This is not the mating game replayed. This is not creation through engenderment. But it is a genesis. An instant genetic invention of hair that has a heart and a head that orgasms in the dark and shoots its intellectual intents into the worldly emptiness that embraces it, this barren womb, this dry pod which is the world surrounding us, wanting to swallow us, parasitically pulling us into its deadly web. But we shall not fall nor falter nor tumble down. This love grows stronger, these limbs longer, these winged feet dance and fly. Liberation does not arrive but is created. This is the metamorphosis of the soul. Allowing the body to go, to fly to the imagined heavens and the machinations of the gods. Sending the body on its mortal missions, the games of gods who are sad and seek glory in those other than themselves. We let them go. We liberate this love, giving into the body and giving up mental celibacy. Fearless and proud we are now naked and free again of the skin, the hair and the colour of the sun on the body, the sun that does not fall the same on me and you but sees us as different leaves yet from the same tree. This sun must go. We desire the dark and the rain. For in the dark we are all the same and the rain renews us immortally again and again, giving us this gift of permanent metamorphosis, changes beyond reason, beyond lethal realities. This transformative dark shapes our immortality. Bodies shoot like stars into the heavens above. But this aching, pulsing, dancing dark diminishes our necessary deaths. This dance transcends our ends. We twirl and swirl not drunkenly but with infinite clarity we see through the dark. We read the transparent blackness. We see and we read and because of this we are and always will be. Our minds laced in blackness, our hearts hanging out of our skin sleeves, our souls dangling like the untied straps of a suspender belt. Liberation is here and is night and is eternally darkening light. Thick fibres of rain, black ropes of hopes and expectations, slash and knife us and amidst the rain daggers, wounded mortally and bleeding to our deaths in

this mindlust the leaves of our love touch and brush and stroke our souls, reviving our spirit breaths and we breathe again and again for in breath there is life. In breath there is the seed, the drop, the cell of nebulous life. We gasp in wonder as the air dances around us, the dark rainbow spiralling, protracting its possibilities. We see the futures and the pasts and presences of love in all. Life is multiple and momentary and in these moments we touch eternity together, feeling the warm breaths against our soulskins, the moistures making and mending our fragilities. For in change there is strength but there is also always vulnerability. The tears of past identities not wanting this passing. Let me lick these tears away one by one. Let me taste the salt of your fears. Let me eat the feet of your retreat. Feed me with your uncertainties. There is no dying here, no passing on, no wanting out. There is change. There is travelling light. Lessening loads to be free to dance. This is no mourning song but a new morning of night. The dew is dark and shines in the moonlight. We must make haste and prepare for the rain because the rain is birth and rebirth. Open me up. Ripen me for this rain. I want to give birth to you and I want you to give birth to me. Enter my immortality and make it mine. Hush now this is our souls' song. Reverberating. Calling and recalling, but never repeating. Raise me from the dead. The hands of our souls stretch like stems into the circling skies. In this widening girth of space blackened with time we are married to this immortality, this search for a satiation to the yearnings of our bodies and the telling hungers of our minds.

POSTSCRIPT

A Meditation on Poetry, Nation and Time

**POSTSCRIPT:
A MEDITATION ON POETRY, NATION AND TIME**

Every work of art is the child of its time, often it is the mother of our emotions.
Vassily Kandinsky¹

If human beings forget poetry, they will forget themselves.
Octavio Paz²

1

The writer finds herself in the realities of a world. The writer loses herself in the confines of a time. What does it mean to be trapped by time or in time? When does time unfold? Writing traps itself in the limitations of a history or frees itself to the possibilities for change that exists within in a new historical moment. A journey from stasis to metamorphosis and back again.

The word "bounds" means boundaries, borders, barriers or chains. Long ago in China, women were forced to have bound feet - these tight cloths are also bounds. The apartheid system in South Africa imposed structures, walls, group areas that kept one person separated from another, discriminated on the basis of skin colour, gender and languages. Today legal apartheid is gone, but in the minds of people and in the lives of those who were impoverished by these 'bounds', these barriers remain. The world economy shows a great divide between rich and poor. There are nations that are impoverished and nations that are wealthy. The gap between the two grows bigger every day. This too is a 'bound.'

But what does it really mean to be 'beyond' these bounds? How can a nation free itself from all the bonds that enslave it to a world economy, the dictates of a seemingly unstoppable globalisation? How can one person free herself from all the psychic ties, mental chains, that keep every individual restricted, constricted, constrained? Can a woman be free in a world she has to share with men? Can an individual be free within a nation; can a nation be free within a world? So many questions. The poet does not try to answer them, but they crop up unexpectedly in her poem. When she least suspects it, she has already circled these questions, and the answers write themselves. As in any creative act, the answers give birth to themselves.

Ben Okri, says that: "Politics is the art of the possible; creativity is the art of the impossible".³ The title of the poetry collection, *Beyond Bounds*, suggests an outward movement from the possible to the impossible, means a way of making the impossible possible. One poem in the collection begins like this: "We cross borders and cannot rest. / Our desire to resist drives us to these lengths."⁴ To be 'beyond' all 'bounds' means that both writer and reader: "Break open the bars"⁵ and that artists must: "Break open the baked mould. / Cut loose our sculpted selves / cast from the same clay, / grafted into one" and that women too should free themselves even when and also because they still choose to remain "engrossed in our craft / engulfed by love."⁶ The word 'beyond' suggests a change of position, the revealing or constructing of a new location: "We are beyond Molly Bloom. / We are beyond redemption."⁷ To be 'beyond bounds' is to seek the "freedom that comes from complete nakedness, when one has been clothed in shrouds for so long."⁸

The Kabyle folksingers in Africa begin their tales by saying that every story should “unwind like a long thread” and Trinh T. Minh-ha says: “Each woman, like each people, has her own way of unrolling the ties that bind Every woman partakes in the chain of guardianship and of transmission - in other words, of creation.”⁹

A poetry collection such as *Beyond Bounds* is like this story. It is one woman’s way of unwinding a thread. The collection of poems is an open-ended chain, consisting of a series of intersecting circles - which are alike but not identical - so that the chain remains unconstituted as a finite whole (although every poem is a whole, so that the wholes accumulate, but do not necessarily become parts of a bigger whole), and appears to extend itself and reproduce through simple addition or replication into a meaningful infinitude, a time that is laden with potentiality or future possibilities.

The poems are inter-related and in dialogue. The utterances are interwoven and ambivalent. But these words, these utterances, these poems also untie themselves. The speakers of the poems undress themselves of everything that smothers and enslaves, for “In this chain and continuum, I am but one link. The story is me, neither me nor mine. It does not really belong to me, and while I feel greatly responsible for it, I also enjoy the irresponsibility of the pleasure obtained through the process of transferring.”¹⁰ To tie and untie and then to tie again means to “plait the past, present and future piece by piece”¹¹ and to tell a lover: “Let us braid our beings together. You will be one piece / and I will be the other. The rest we will shape together.”¹²

Time and space like poems and stories also unwind or remain entwined within a particular historical moment. This may mean that time and space are stories in themselves. But how do these ties of time and space influence the making and shaping of poems? How does time accentuate the ambivalence of a work of art and point to interwoven layers of meaning.

Every work of art has (and is) a worldview or *weltschaung*, a set of assumptions, ideological and unconscious, only partly known to the writer at the time of writing, but affecting not only the capacity of the speaking subject of the poem to act as agent, but also the time/space available to that subject. This worldview is written-in to the final product that we christen a completed poem or name as a literary construction, a work of art.

How do time and space influence the making of my collection of poems, *Beyond Bounds*? I pose this question, knowing full well that to answer it, means that I shall be placing myself in the rather awkward position of mediating between my own writing as a poet and a reading of my work as a critic or objective reader. In this way I straddle the border between the past time in which the text was composed and the future present time in which the text is to be received and read.

This is a necessary negotiation between two roles and two times. It is an attempt on the part of the creator as 'mother' of a text to put a distance between herself and the work, to cut the umbilical cord, to wean and herself to be weaned off the text. For it is this

weaning process that provides the necessary breathing space in which I can observe how the text takes its place in a world (which makes it and that creates the necessary 'aesthetic distance' in which the writer, now alienated and dispossessed (stripped of her identity as mother and primary creator), can become voyeur and observer and a critic who examines the process of production so as to derive meanings that were never (fully nor originally) intended.

For these meanings may lead to the creation of new works, new poems, more capable of communicating with the world, more adept in exploiting the capacity of words to mean different things, with more developed means of expression and, overall, with a heightened will to endure.¹³ This critical distance does not take one away from the art, but brings one closer. One develops a more profound understanding of the function of art and the meaning of life. For since we are human/social beings who produce art, we are also observers in our own existence; and art, since it insinuates our presence in the world, provides us with our alibis in this life.

In showing the importance of the inner workings of time and space in shaping the poems, I am aware that these *inner* workings can only be fully grasped if they are simultaneously seen to be mediated from *without* by a social context and transposed as an inner necessity.

4

Volosinov says that the immediate social situation and the broader social milieu wholly determine - and determine from within, so to speak - the structure of an utterance.¹⁴

Each word, as we know, is a little arena for the clash and criss-crossing of differently oriented social accents. A word in the mouth of a particular individual person is a product of the living interaction of social forces. Thus, the psyche and ideology dialectically interpenetrate in the unitary and objective process of social intercourse.

Sergei Karcevskij says that a sign and its signification do not form a perfect fit and that “these potential signs must apply to a concrete reality that is constantly changing.”¹⁶

Signifier and / signified overflows the boundaries assigned to it by the other and this asymmetric dualism in the structure of the signs means that “the adequate position of the sign is continually displaced as a result of its adaptation to the exigencies of the concrete position.”¹⁷

Since the writer only ‘owns’ or possesses words at the moment of writing and not thereafter, the text itself (or the textual space - the space occupied by the text, the materiality of the text) is a shared territory between writer and reader which requires a mutual accountability (even between my ‘writing’ and ‘reading’ self). So the border I identified earlier between two times and two roles (the past time of composition and the present time of reception) is unclear; at best it should be seen as a broken line, which one crosses over all the time, re-thinking the past and re-inventing the future present.

5

Despite the finitude of any fixed spot or location - whether it be the finitude of a nation, a community, a gendered identity or the implied finitude of a borderline (which despite the possibilities for crossing over remains set limit, a specific vantage point) - despite

the fact that we are bound by a context, the possibilities within these 'confines' are boundless. The way we see time and space may limit our powers in understanding and changing the way we think about the world (or the text as a social event). But the idea of time and space as unwinding, intersecting or entwined and the idea that many times can work together harmoniously may create new spaces for free action and interaction.

Homi Bhabha says: "For it is by living on the borderline of history and language, on the limits of race and gender, that we are in a position to translate the differences between them into a kind of solidarity"¹⁸ This is not only about solidarity, but also about a struggle in which competing times fight for dominance or the right to co-existence, eliding with one another, so as to produce new possibilities for freedom (and new discourses) or retreat into the reified uncertainty of a status quo.

6

How can one describe the different concepts of time within one historical moment, times that shape the poems and give birth to them as they too give birth to themselves?

Julia Kristeva identifies three concepts of time: cyclical time (repetition), monumental time (eternity) - both of which view time from the point of view of motherhood and reproduction - and linear time (history and politics).¹⁹ She says that from the point of view of women (or from a new feminist perspective) what is needed is the interplay of all three times in the same space or historical moment. She calls for a new generation (a signifying space) that simultaneously embraces all three temporalities so that new spaces for individual self-expression are freed.

Homi Bhabha re-reads the nation in time. Frantz Fanon's "uncertain time of the people"²⁰ leads Bhabha to the idea of a "performative time" in the midst of a pedagogical time".²¹ Two times combine and the ambivalence that results, "a strange temporality of the repetition of the one in the other", can "inscribe a history of the people or become the gathering points of political solidarity."²²

Walter Benjamin recognises the "profound perplexity of the living"²³ in a "time filled by the presence of the now" and through this recognition, he rejects "homogenous, empty time (the 'eternal' image of the past) of historicism and its universal history."²⁴ Only the historical materialist "remains in control of his powers, man enough to blast open the continuum of history."²⁵

Like Benjamin, Fanon, Kristeva and Bhabha, all of us, who create, seek freedom from times which control and reify people (creating and imposing an homogenous space for the nation state). Even without knowing it, we are thinking all the time, of how to intervene.

7

Present time, linear time (history), cyclical and monumental time - which combine to speak about woman's time - intersect in a particular historical moment and are linked to the concept of space. Here in South Africa, in this nation state, which times work together in solidarity and which are at war against humanity? How does the artist of a nation relate the South African national context and the global reality to these other times which may transcend nation-ness? How does the writer position the creation of

a work of art into this complex temporality?

8

Present time for those of us living within this time is empty or frozen. Octavio Paz says: "Our present is a weightless thing; it floats along, it does not rise, it moves but makes no headway.... The past and future vanish and the present intensifies into a single instant: the three times are exhaled in one breath. The instant explodes and dissipates."²⁶

Walter Benjamin tells us: "Every morning brings us news of the globe and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. in other words, by now almost nothing benefits story-telling; almost everything befits information."²⁷ Ben Okri acknowledges:

We all feel that terrible pull sometimes. We are all being herded down, tricked along illusory highways which seem to lead nowhere: except only to the grave. Did we choose our roads? Did our roads choose us? did we arrive on them by proxy?..... Then we might begin to suspect that somewhere, somehow we took the wrong turning, went up the wrong road. We may now have travelled too far towards an undesired destination.... When did we take the wrong turning? What road were we travelling on in the first place?"²⁸

Here the thread no longer unwinds. We are caught in a knot that may not be of our own making. Or have we deliberately put barriers in our own paths or those of others?

It feels increasingly as if we are trapped or forcibly ensnared in the present, imprisoned by now. In the cities of the modern world, we go to gyms where we drive bicycles which are not going anywhere. We walk on treadmills which stand at one point. Young

children nurture cyberchildren called tomagodjis. We inhabit virtual villages on colour monitors and are meant to forget about those who still live in real ones. Time 'moves' so fast that it appears to be hurtling us to our very ends. This is the "pre-eminence of now"²⁹ and the "profound perplexity of the living," where everyone, even the writer, "is uncounselled and cannot counsel others."³⁰ In the metropolises, standing still, frozen and frantic in time and space, we place ourselves or allow ourselves to be placed at the mercy of a history that holds a gun to our heads.

Walter Benjamin sees the angel of history as a figure with staring eyes, open mouth, spread wings, his face turned towards the past which he sees as a single catastrophe; meanwhile the storm called progress is brewing and that propels him into the opposite direction, the future which awaits.³¹ If this angel has a voice, then, like Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, it mouths the words: "the horror."

Dambudzo Marechera laments: "I do not like this century or any other century past or present. I do not like living under the threat of an atom bomb or under the backside of a medieval god which amounts to the same thing."³² As for Nina Cassian, life is a tragic sentence and, we are given, each of us independently a life sentence.³³ Linearity in the form of history intervenes in the present as empty time, what Kristeva calls; 'time as departure, progression and arrival.' For Kristeva, quite literally, history is a sentence; "linear time is that of language considered as the enunciation of sentences (noun+verb; topic-comment, beginning-ending), and that this time rests on its own stumbling block, which is also the stumbling block of that enunciation-death."³⁴

In my poem "Prologue/Epilogue" the people of the present time are in a "black hole",

a world “frozen in time. Spiralling towards your end. in infinite cycles of erection and ejaculation. pleasure which suddenly sours. The unending pain of permanent orgasm. without pauses. Without breathing spaces.”³⁵ In this pacy present, we possess neither the past nor the future, only fleeting moments providing instant fulfilment and endless hunger.

Perhaps love alone can take us out of the stranglehold: “Let us ban one-night stands / and make the moments of eternity last longer. / Let us pursue our search for love, / elusive, eternal love./... We shall fashion the future with our own hands.”³⁶

We are asked to forget our pasts, to have no memory except of this moment as it is made and unmade. Meanwhile, “The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognised and is never seen again”; and “For every image of the past that is not recognised by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.”³⁷

9

New technologies, modern techniques of information, have revolutionised the way we think about time and the way we view the present. Throughout this century scientists have been pre-occupied with notions of time and space, but often the big question of what and why remains unanswered. Stephen Hawking asks: “What is it that breathes fire into equations and makes a universe for the model to describe.... Why does the universe go to all the bother of existing?”³⁸

Our concept of present time cannot answer this question. The Angel of History looking back at the past (while swept away by the future) would answer in a historicist fashion the way Carl Sagan does in his introduction to Hawking's history of time: this is "a universe with no edge in space, no beginning or end in time, and nothing for a Creator to do."³⁹ This is an answer in a world where the stage is already set; and the actors are simply "bored stiff with this life of bit parts and butt-ends."⁴⁰ Julia Kristeva speaks about "a civilization which, outside the stock exchange and wars, is bored to death."

41

The question remains whose interests does it serve that we view the present (or are forced to view the present) in such a way? Does the new technology or those who invent it not turn us into its mere tools rather than the other way round? Julia Kristeva asks:

is it not true that the contemporary media revolution, which is manifest in the storage and reproduction of information implies an idea of time as frozen or exploding according to the vagaries of demand, returning to its source but uncontrollable, utterly bypassing its subject and leaving only two preoccupations to those who approve of it: Who is to have power over the origin (the programming) and over the end(the use)?⁴²

For Benjamin the main threat in modern technology is "that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes"; the notion of present time as constituting historical progress through technological progress is a display of technocratic features encountered in Fascism.⁴³ The 'people' as a group (for Benjamin this is the working class) is corrupted into believing that it is "moving with the current" and to regard "technological developments as the fall of the stream with which it thought it was moving."⁴⁴ The people have to remember the past "at the moment of their action"⁴⁵ in order to explode the continuum of history. Present time is re-conceived as a performative space/time in

which the people make history and open up new horizons. For Ngugi wa Thiong'o, performative time happens in a performance space; and "the more open the performance space, the more it seems to terrify those in possession of repressive power."⁴⁶

Frantz Fanon says that the role of the artist or poet is to "join them [the people] in that fluctuating moment which they are just giving shape to" and to work and fight "with the same rhythm as the people to construct the future and to prepare the ground where vigorous shoots are already springing up."⁴⁷ The way in which Fanon describes the emergence of the people in time and his use of organic imagery (representing what some may call nature rather than culture, but not the mythical Africa often elsewhere described as a mother figure) suggests an overlapping with the cyclic time (of female subjectivity), "the cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature..."⁴⁸

In my poem, "The Journey" the struggle of a people in history or linear time is located 'within' the time/space of female subjectivity so that the speaking subject, the woman who gives voice to her body, while appearing to conform to a journey in linear time, is actually radically re-directing the journey through re-conceptualising the time of history and re-inventing the discourses of power and desire so that the loved one can "feel that freedom begins as a fire / flowing and filling the passages of power."⁴⁹ In the words of Fanon, it re-arranges time so that the "present is no longer turned in upon itself but spread out for all to see."⁵⁰

10

Present time as an empty time existing within linear time serves to limit the possibilities for individual self-expression or liberation. It induces conformity and even obedience and conjures a time/space for people not unlike the fictional world described by George Orwell in 1984. Present time as performative time frees individuals, and opens up new spaces for the imagination and real possibilities for the attainment of freedom. The Angel of History no longer stares helplessly at the chaos in the past but transforms it in secular style, for “When we have made an experience or chaos into a story we have transformed it, made sense of it, transmuted experience, domesticated the chaos.”⁵¹

11

A nation has its place within linear time. If linear time is history and politics, then an understanding of the nation - its origins, its future, its fate - is tied to the tides of history and to changing political dynamics. A nation has its place in the world. The politics of the world - who has power and who has not - means that more often than not economic globalisation rules and sets the pace of time.

Economic globalisation cultivates dependency so that the national economies of the world become indefinitely tied to and controlled by international markets and banks, the wealthy transnational and supra-national individuals and powers of the world. Globalisation promotes the massification of the people. Everyone becomes a consumer and, in this way, “buys into a fake worldliness and a false confidence, without ever becoming equal citizens of the world. The nation state is not possessed by those who

live in it, but is a shared territory between natives/citizens and global/international capitalists.

12

In present-day South Africa, four years into the life of this fledgling democracy, there is an obsession with the influence of world markets on the state/fate of the currency and the broader economy and the conditions of its labouring people. Recent rises in interest rates have sent shivers down the spines of economists, put fear and panic into those who do not understand the metalanguages of the economists and business classes, and caused the politicians to intervene and change the governor of the Reserve Bank, hoping in this way to boost the flagging Rand and restore confidence to concerned citizens. The international markets appear to be dominating the fate of our nation. But behind these markets and the figures, the graphs, the decimal points, there exist real people 'manning' the system, both those outside the borders of the nation state and those within and the awkward ones who seem to straddle quite clumsily (with one bulging pocket and one empty one) with one foot out and out foot in.

Those in power within the South African nation state came to political and executive power through the 1994 democratic elections. But very rapidly, these 'chosen' ones have become a new national elite that exercises political power without the will radically to change the economy so as to alleviate the hardships of the poor people (whose poverty was enforced by apartheid and segregationist policies under colonial rule).

We can compare the way in which members of the former oppressed group in South Africa, predominantly from the black majority, have exercised power, with the way in which women in Europe and the East, demanding equal political rights, became sucked into the very system they were trying to change and simply inserted into that linear history. For Kristeva says, "The assumptions by women of executive, industrial and cultural power has not, up to the present time, radically changed the nature of this power." and that "women promoted to decision-making positions suddenly obtain the economic as well as narcissistic advantages refused them for thousands of years and become the pillars of existing governments, guardians of the status quo, the most zealous protectors of the established order."⁵²

So in South Africa, those in power, even if genuinely wanting to transform this system, are caught in and become part of "the consolidation of conformism" for in a democratic society where brute force is not the norm in controlling people more sophisticated forms of control are required.⁵³ Noam Chomsky calls this "the manufacture of consent".⁵⁴ It is through internalised assumptions, the subtle promotion of conventional thoughts (thus undermining the possibilities of independent thought), and fixing the premises of discourse, that the elite manage to control public opinion and thought."⁵⁵ In South Africa this function is fulfilled by both the press - which after all has vested interests and is owned by big capital - and the public media of government and political parties which are inclined to utter partisan views.

13

The new constitution of South Africa has all the necessary elements of nation-building

with its unity in diversity theme, its emphasis on common, national unity, a sense of national suffering and a shared programme of action. The new buzz words of this sloganeering have become the 'rainbow nation that must be consolidated and the 'reconciliation' which President Nelson Mandela speaks about at every available occasion.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission seems to be designed only for remembering (allowing victims and perpetrators of violence - in the case of the latter the foot soldiers not the men in suits who gave the orders for liquidation and extermination - to express that which they have repressed) and then forgetting the past (through forgiveness and then amnesty which attempts to wipe the slates clean), enforcing a national unity, containing the effects like a pressure cooker.

Likewise, the South African media (despite its exposes of corruption in government and business circles and its graphic stories of the daily horrors of the escalating crime in the country) plays its role in the massification of people.⁵⁶ The media - I suggest - fulfils a propaganda function in at least three related ways.

Firstly, it promotes the depersonalisation of the people by its emphasis on the anonymity of the people in the country in crime: it is not unusual to hear about the sheer numbers of rape statistics, victims of violence, 'the murder count', the 'death toll in the violence', the 'number of hijackings', the recurrent use of the term 'third force'. Very rarely, unless they are wealthy or of strategic importance, do we hear anything beyond the names of people and are they allowed to tell their own stories. Thus the people of the nation are not allowed to speak in each individual voice; each one has to

remain an unrecognised and unacknowledged part of a mass. When rapes become simply statistics, this also promotes the defeminisation of people - the poor women and children who have to bear the brunt of suffering and the burdens of a new nationhood, must do so silently, each on her/his own, without allowance for suffering. In my poem, "A Woman's Words" I write:

We bled then.
Many times we bled.

Many times we were left for dead.

How coldly we opened our wombs,
expecting nothing in return.⁵⁷

This depersonalisation of the people goes hand in hand with the personalising of the leaders of the nation, those men who are at helm of the nation state. President Nelson Mandela and the ex-Archbishop, Desmond Tutu, at present still Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, are presented to the public as affable, father figures, guiding the nation with their wisdom on reconciliation in the rainbow nation. Ours is a president who is shown playing with children, dancing with choirs as they sing to him, while the ex-archbishop is shown crying when victims tell their stories to the commission. These leaders are presented as overwhelmingly human, expressing emotions in the press, which ordinary people - it seems - are not seen capable of. The ordinary people, who are not, as I indicated earlier, individualised, but necessarily the same, are seen to be silent, suffering victims and the 'chosen' leaders are those seen to be speaking and praying. Thus, under these circumstances, the leaders become - to borrow a term from Kristeva - the "symbolic denominators" of a nation; these male leaders both 'personify' the people and are also meant to be seen as role models of

righteousness and reconciliation. The leaders stand in (not as substitutes - more like metonymy) and insinuate themselves in the place of the people.

But these processes of depersonalisation (with massification) and personalising are not enough to achieve the continued manufacture of consent in the South African nation state. A third process practised by mainly government agencies (but not overly criticised by the media) involves the subtle co-option of ordinary people in believing that government itself, the state machinery, is 'neutral', 'objective' technology working for the good of the people. The state apparatus is seen to be impersonal, 'manned' by mere technicians or implementers. Words and phrases suggesting a neutral distance such as 'line function' and 'service delivery' are used to indicate the impersonality of the task to be carried out, and recently the 'discourse' of the business world has been borrowed to describe the citizen here as a client in his/her relations with the civil service.

Only in cases of extreme corruption are we allowed to question the assumed impersonality of the state, yet it is in this 'performance space' (the one in which the actions all occur backstage or behind the scenes so to speak) where the real power lies and is entrenched by a bureaucracy: ⁵⁸

In the room the bureaucrats remain unchanged
fiddling with their fax machines.

In the streets, the people are oblivious,
scavenging dumps and dirt bins for basic nutrients

and scraps of metal with which to build shelters.
Let us join them.

The space/time of the nation in South Africa exists as a series of overlaps and entwined processes serving to undermine the role of the suffering people as active, creative individuals capable of independent thought and actions. Linear history becomes a long, long walk to a distant freedom, the goals of which can only be attained by collective patience and (seemingly infinite) fortitude, an endless, stoical endurance. Linear history is the temporality and the space where the leaders act on centre-stage, while the people are waiting in the wings for any eventuality (for better or for worse) at the mercy of those in power in 'their' nation state and the world.

Under these conditions, the artist has a difficult task: to break down the structures (psychic, linguistic, ideological) used to disempower people, to reveal the hidden assertions of power, to speak what has become the unspeakable, despite the existence of freedom of expression, to encourage those who have always been silent and those who have only recently fallen silent, to speak, to utter, to possess words and meaning, to celebrate their creativity and their humanity. For Ngugi wa Thiong'o says: "For even in a country where there are no military regimes, the vast majority can be described as being condemned to conditions of perpetual physical, social and psychic confinement."⁵⁹

In his book, *Hidden Agendas*, John Pilger, devotes a chapter to South Africa where he describes an area of the Eastern Cape used under apartheid rule as a dumping ground for people as one which is still without sanitation, without electricity, without telephones, without work. He compares these sub-human conditions with the situation

in Houghton, “the richest suburb of Johannesburg and one of the richest places on earth.”⁶⁰ Pilger argues that only on the surface “much has changed in South Africa,” for:

With their privileges overseen by the first black President and his party, the inequalities of the past are perpetuated under cover of political ‘reconciliation..... Behind the often theatrical facade of ‘reconciliation’ between oppressed and oppressor, the absolutions dispensed by Desmond Tutu and the deifying of Nelson Mandela, the aspirations of the people of Dimbaza have been ignored, along with those of the majority whose humanity and courage forced the pace of change and brought down apartheid.⁶¹

Political analyst, Joseph Diescho says:

Like most countries in the world, the new South African nation lacks a leadership with a deep insight into the human condition and a vision with which to mortgage a future for its people in accordance with goals higher than political expediency, material satisfaction and immediate gain. Reconciliation and ‘lack of bitterness’ are no substitute for vision - they are at best crisis- management mechanisms.... South Africa as a nation has still to fashion its own democratic culture...⁶²

A truly democratic culture can only come into being if ordinary people recognise these realities and if artists have the courage, the conviction and the vision to mould a new world, with voices expressing originality and asserting authenticity, even though they have been dispossessed of their own vantage points and the ground on which they stand has probably been mortgaged to pay the international debt.

In South Africa a lesson can be learnt from Nigeria where the military leadership killed the writer, Ken Saro-Wiwa, for speaking out against the state and the oil barons of the world. Ken Saro-Wiwa’s last words, his death-cry, before his execution, was: “Why are you people doing this to me? What sort of nation is this?”⁶³ South Africa, as I have stressed, is a democracy, yet why do I feel that the words of Ken Saro-Wiwa can be transposed to all those men, women and children still suffering in South Africa today,

those who are unemployed, malnourished, poverty-stricken, those who opt for abortions rather than bringing more hungry children into the world.

Indeed, the task of the artist or the writer in South Africa today is a difficult one, because it means revealing hopes which are dashed, expectations realised as unrealistic, ideals remaining theories shelved in libraries which are silent like cemeteries, lives which, despite the poet's attempts at raising them to higher levels, remain :“Stained pages, soiled underwear, spilled dreams” for “Life is not beautiful. It is the accumulation of scars, the imposition of cuts, the knifing of the womb, the stabbing of the soul, and the mind learning to lie and to live with the lies of its own making.” While “Somewhere in this struggle, there appear glimpses of consummated desire, they remain tiny, minuscule chinks of light viewed from the bottom of the prison cell.”⁶⁴

Albie Sachs says: “we don't know who we ourselves are. What does it mean to be South African? The artists, more than anyone, can help us discover ourselves.”⁶⁵ The answering of Albie Sachs's questions (or at least claiming a writer's right to answerability, an audience or additional speaker's right to reply), the transcending of writing literature or composing works of art which are more than mere documentaries means having to partially abandon linear history and to recognise that life cannot - must not be made to be - reduced to an historicist account, a mere “accumulation of scars”, the acceptance of “imposition of cuts” as if they were necessary series of (bloodied) events towards human progress.

The artist must recognise the complex, webbed entwining (and unexpected dividing) of time and space, and realise that one can only free one's self from these webs if one

can step one foot outside linear history so as to occupy a position without and within, so as to simultaneously embrace other times, other spaces, which are more suitable sites for freedom, 'creative spaces', sites of creation and creativity in a performative time in which anything is possible, everything is potential. Perhaps solutions can also be found in an alternative concept(ion) of time, in the time of woman and reproduction, a time which is simultaneously cyclic and eternal.

Here the Angel of History has no place, except as a ghost (a memory of the avengers, the blood-thirsty, the military, the colonisers); instead the woman takes centre-stage by outspeaking the centre (for not to speak is to completely relinquish power, not to speak is to die) and therefore attracts the spotlights to the periphery where she stands and asserts herself.

For here, the woman with her multiplicity of identities is: "a lolly at the end of a stick, / an ice maiden dressed in red, / more like a drag queen than a woman, / more like a pen than a poet, / arousing rather than writing the poem".⁶⁶

To acknowledge connected (seemingly separate yet more than metaphorically attached) identities contained within one historical moment (through another concept(ion) of time, one which not only intersects with the others, but intervenes and questions linear history) allows the writer to learn more about how to be free. Ben Okri, says that: "it is possible that a sense of beauty, of justice, of the inter-connectedness of all things, may yet save the human species from self-annihilation."⁶⁷

Woman's time means the freeing of potential. Woman's time can humanise history and give names (and bodies) to those faceless, forgotten anonymous souls struggling, despairing, yearning for recognition, refusing to accept a less-than-human status in a big, linear scheme, to those who still believe in the poet's dream that: "intrinsic to human nature is the desire to create under conditions of freedom and lack of constraint."⁶⁸

History is re-written; the nation is re-defined. Ben Okri says: "It should no longer be left to the contemporary victors to speak for human history. Whatever resilience has kept wounded people and devastated continents here, alive, can be transfigured, to make them strong, confident, and serene. They have to question everything in order to rebuild the future. They have to redream the world."⁶⁹

Thus the woman who has understood all the ways of the world, the character of a nation, should be in better position to speak not only for herself or about herself, but for all who have been sidelined and silenced and she speaks - the way Fanon would also wish her to speak - with the same rhythm of the people.

For those women who have also experienced colonial oppression, and who still resist, and for those who experience oppression three-fold what Trinh calls the "triple bind"⁷⁰ - as women, as exploited, as black in a racist world - the need to speak, to communicate is even more urgent. As I suggest in the aforementioned poem, "A woman's words" (on page 49 of the collection *Beyond Bounds*):

I grow weather-beaten and weary of these bruises,
these scrapes, grazes and incisions.

I want to find a short cut across this life
step safely over the burning butt-ends
pass by the broken bottles in tact
dodge the random bullets

and some day declare defiantly
that every line out of step with its time
is an act of affirmation, an attempt at living to the full
despite these lacerations that cut and scythe
this scrap heap that is life.

Helene Cixous, in discussing women's writing, declares, "Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies.... Woman must put herself into the text - as into the world and into history - by her own movement.... Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it." ⁷¹

In my poem, "Birth of a poem", the writing of the poem is compared with a woman giving birth in Africa. ⁷²While the writer tries to cleanse the page of these realities, the birth process continues and it seems as if the writing writes itself. Despite the ravages of war and history, the celebration of birth (and literary creation) continues, linking both reader and writer to other concept(ions) of time. The woman speaker in "In the moonlight" sees the male body not only as a source of physical pleasure but as one which has the capacity for creativity and should be played and play itself as if it were a musical instrument. ⁷³ In "The tip of your tongue" a tongue "tap dances across its [the foot's] rough surface / watering the cracked skin." ⁷⁴

The poet writes not only the female body but also the male's body: "The eye of the

penis is always round and howling / ever eager for release from its hydrocephalic head".⁷⁵ The penis is 'personified' and humanised; its and its functions are associated with the mind (and the man whose mind it is), and not reduced it to its mere physicality and thus impersonality.

For Helene Cixous, by writing, the woman "exposes herself. Really she makes what she thinks materialize carnally, she conveys meaning with her body. She *inscribes* what she is saying because she does not deny unconscious drives the unmanageable part they play in speech...Her discourse, even when "theoretical" or political, is never simple or linear or "objectivized," universalized; she involves her story in history."⁷⁶ In the poem "Spreading out" the woman speaker becomes conscious of her position in society as oppressed by men and as colonised. Like Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (who poses and addresses the question: what does a black man want?), she tries to answer the question what does a black women want. She suggests that by peeling off the layers of oppression (by coming to terms with history), "white-powdered masks, hiding our wrinkled wombs that have been pulled this way and that, torn apart, misshapened, anaesthetised", and revealing herself, she will attain the "freedom that comes from complete nakedness, when one has been clothed in shrouds for so long".⁷⁷

The woman who has experienced colonial oppression is against imperialism and the scorched earth policy of those who boast: "they have set the forest on fire, / they have felt the flames, / they have tasted the burning flesh, / uprooted strands of tangled hair, / hacked their way into the wild", but rather than being overcome by the colonisers, a time that transcends history - the cyclic time of "pounding" hearts and throbbing

wombs and the monumental time of a breathing universe - is invoked.⁷⁸

The idea of a South African nation in the form of the struggle against apartheid and for justice is often simultaneously invoked in the poems. But the writer is physically weary and intellectually bored with politics and history, tired of “weaving words into a another torn, tattered tapestry of the times / we live in. The tedium of producing political patches, / the piecemeal records of events”.⁷⁹ Rather the poet wishes to sing about herself, “to let the poem throb furiously / with an urgent persistent femininity” and to “feel the freedom of love”.

A female leadership is suggested even to take men in the right direction. Here the journey itself ceases to be linear (and purely political) but is “flowing and filling the passages of power”.⁸⁰ But the woman in a colonised land knows that she and her sisters are not the only inhabitants who experience oppression.⁸¹ Because writing is by its very nature both subjectivity and communication, the experiences and ideas expressed by such women will have validity beyond the individual (without becoming blindly universal) and wider social meaning.⁸²

16

If indeed a nation has its place and this space exists inside linear time, and if a woman has her place and this place exist inside cyclic and monumental time, then where does the space/time exist for the women and people of a nation on which linearity was imposed in the form of colonisation, entrenched through colonialism and consolidated during the modern period through apartheid?

Even if the South African people have through their new nation state now freed themselves from the legal shackles of apartheid, until as a nation, a generation, they have found their own signifying desiring space, the nation remains like a 'bounded'⁸³ text, a monologue communicating neither with itself nor its people, but simply mimicking (like a parrot) the rest of the world.

From a historical materialist standpoint, the time of this nation is linear time and this history consists of narratives of plunder, conquest, colonialism, failed attempts at decolonisation, world capitalism, a journey leading to wealth for some and poverty for others. But those who have been conquered, colonised are taught to believe that this history is progress, that they too will some day (in this historicist account) prosper through industriousness and the advancement of technology and become like the first world.

But a historical materialist account of where a nation finds itself in the complexity of time and space is not enough to explain the way those within a conquered territory choose to fight or not to fight against such a system. It is not enough to examine why those in nations like South Africa (who have only recently and bravely freed themselves politically from decades of apartheid and centuries of colonialism) "have not as a people learnt to snatch historical confidence" from the successes of their struggles, but have chosen and still choose to see those who have achieved their wealth through exploitation and oppression (both within the geographic borders of their nation states and in the world beyond) as worthy role models, a "standard of aspiration"⁸⁴

Recent events in South Africa testify to this mimicry of America such as the obsession with interest rates (specifically the dollar-rand exchange rate which is often headline news in South Africa), the announcement of the new governor of the Reserve Bank, the progress of the South African football team in the 'world cup', the President's magnanimity at inviting American artists to his home (in the case of his birthday celebrations, ignoring the African artists and paying little attention to the South African ones), the Finance minister's attempts to woo World Bank representatives while abroad, and the way the discourse of development through technological advance seems to permeate many government policy documents and white papers.

But this is also a land where to understand the position of its men and women and the policies formulated by them, one has to examine the inferiority complexes, imposed 'neuroses' from the old South Africa, which still abound and extend themselves into the present in altered forms. One thinks, for example, of the sheer bravado of the laager mentality of those who had to endure international isolation as result of sanctions and the cultural boycott, others who never ceased to see themselves as belonging to another place and time and displaying what has been called in some political circles a settler mentality. One also thinks of the indoctrination of myths of white superiority (and also the implied virility of those who invade, colonise, penetrate and pacify the dark continent ⁸⁵) and of Verwoedian ideas of education that there is no room for black people beyond certain levels of labour. One thinks of the psychic and physical emasculation of black people in South Africa by tearing entire families and communities apart through forced removals and the migrant labour system and by

making black men work even under white women and thus undermining the patriarchal order which dominated in some South African societies prior to colonialism. Black women were placed at the bottom and were meant to be at the bottom of this hierarchy, oppressed by everyone.

If indeed an historical materialist approach is not enough to explain the present South African status quo, then perhaps Freudianism can. Indeed, South Africa, can be seen as - what I call - a castrated nation⁸⁶, experiencing penis envy, whose only obsessive desire is to be like the first world, and whose collective wet dream is that of being a little America in the next millennium.

If the presupposition for Freud's approach is the castration fantasy and penis envy, and these are what Kristeva calls, "logical necessities to be placed at the 'origins'" or "hypotheses, a priori suppositions intrinsic to the theory itself",⁸⁷ then by implication (or by extending the Freudian metaphor into present day relations between one nation and another) and some healthy speculation, the article of faith on which the new South Africa has been established⁸⁸ is the fantasy of colonial and postcolonial castration and its correlative, (envy of and) forever seeking to be like those who first took its/his/her freedom away.

The radical operation of castration thus becomes the foundations (or founding metaphor) on which the symbolic denominators are constituted. Those who accept these foundations as 'givens' attempt to gain power through these foundations and those who reject (or want to repress) these foundations tend to look to a distant pre-colonial and pre-historic past which they fool themselves into believing as still existing

intact and undefiled. Accepting or rejecting of the founding moment, blunts their abilities in exploring the potential for change that exists in any historical moment; they are either trapped by linear time or an imagined, mythical monumental time which they believe will assert itself into the future and be a return to cycles of time.

18

Is the nation simply an overdone narrative strategy, a symbol of the patriarchal order of conquer-or-be-conquered, consume-or-be-consumed, or does it really has some weight in a history book of the world, an intricate text made up of different times and spaces? Does working within a nation (and with a conceptual framework of a nation) offer some possibilities to change - for the better - the lives of the majority of those within it? Does working within a nation improve the lives of women?

Recent events in South Africa provides glimpses at answers to these questions. The appearance of Winnie Mandela - woman and leader - before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is one such event. Winnie Mandela (world-acclaimed as the long-suffering wife of then jailed Nelson Mandela, victim of the apartheid police and intelligence and hounded by them for decades and banished, also as a South African liberation fighter in her own right through her connections to the grassroots and community support) appeared before the commission to answer questions about her role in the holding of young students activists against their will and the death of one of them. Here it seemed as if the former victim was 'put on trial' for her role as victimiser. For a brief moment the tables were turned and South Africans and the world watched as Mrs. Mandela, in diamanté spectacles and with many gold rings on her fingers

(perhaps like a man with too many wives), skin slightly rouged (as if to suggest the slight hint of complicity) answered questions. Over and over again, when asked about her inflammatory statement that with boxes of matches the land would be liberated, she replied with a firm voice, as if mouthing a refrain : “ It was a description of the times”.

A description of the times, she said. In the complexity of the struggle waged for national liberation in South Africa entwined with the linearity of history, in the ambiguity of her position as woman (and therefore denied full freedom in the confines of linear history) and as a female leader of a nation, she was more accurate than even she suspected. For she had pointed to linear history as motivation and motive, as project and progress and as entrapment - because the times and how to describe and act within and inscribe these times had entwined and formed a noose in which she herself was caught and powerless and no longer a woman.

Had she been a male leader, she would have fared better and perhaps not even made to appear at the commission. What was expected of a man was what Winnie Mandela gave the world, strength, composure, firmness and seeming detachment. What was expected of a woman, even (and perhaps especially) a woman leader was tenderness, compassion, obvious vulnerability. No-one could quite forgive a woman for acting like a man; this was a sign of the times and the ambivalence of the truths of a nation. She had refused to be castrated and thus had to accept the consequences of her crime.

Women in their individual voices and as a new generation (accepting concepts of linear time and those connected with female subjectivity, namely cyclical time and monumental time) should advocate a third attitude: “the parallel existence of all three

in the same historical time, or even that they be interwoven together.”⁸⁹ For Kristeva, this would bring about the “demassification of difference” and the de-dramatisation of the fight between the sexes and the beginning of a new possibility for freedom for men and women.⁹⁰

In the South African context, this third attitude may not be enough. Winnie Mandela at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission gave one a glimpse of a South African nation in the throes of linear time. It is evidence of the difficulties that emerge when a body such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is given the tacit task of nation-building yet is devised as an ambiguous narrative strategy which through being true to its definition and functions (the Janus-face of truth and reconciliation when the very truths that may come out may not warrant reconciliation although revelations would depend on amnesty) can only reveal how much remains unsaid and untold, repressed and suppressed, and how ambivalent the truths are which are told.

How then can the writer assist in re-defining this nation and through the nation the world, for the poem, the work of art, is a worldly event? How can a writer interrogate all assumptions of worldliness and nationhood - not in order to overthrow these fundamentals - but to re-work them and re-define them?

For Trinh, the task is “unrolling the ties that bind” and overflowing “the boundaries of patriarchal time and truth.”⁹¹ Ben Okri asserts that: “A people are as healthy and confident as the stories they tell themselves. Sick storytellers can make their nations sick. And sick nations make for sick storytellers.” “Nations and peoples are largely the stories they feed themselves. If they tell themselves stories that are lies, they will suffer

the future consequences of those lies.” If they tell themselves stories that face their own truths, they will free their histories for future flowerings.”⁹² Frantz Fanon is more direct when he writes: “the native intellectual who wishes to create an authentic work of art must realize that the truths of a nation are in the first place its realities.”⁹³

19

In my collection, *Beyond Bounds*, there are poems which are directed more explicitly at the South African realities. “Skinderbek City” looks at the city of Cape Town through its history to the present, describing its landscape of mountain and sea in terms of its colonial history (and mocking the way in which it is marketed as tourist destination in the present time), where even the street names tell us about its origins: “Burg Street, Buitenkant, Long, Loop, / streets whose very names take you on a journey / into the diseased past / the inflamed future.”⁹⁴

The poem entitled “The naming journey” is the geographic, psychic and linguistic journey of a young woman, “the makoti” as she is known in the Sotho language to her new home and married life. Here cyclical time is also invoked, the tradition of the past is partly questioned, since the makoti, the daughter-in-law, who should traditionally be silent and submissive and dutiful, chooses to speak and to name and document her journey.⁹⁵

The poem “For my firstborn” is a poem about a South African experience of motherhood, with the child being addressed, and told to embrace all times and spaces, the world of (South) African story-telling which offers a new vocabulary and ways of

examining the world outside linear time. ⁹⁶ This poem points to a new world, an “opening of the future”⁹⁷ - a space in which the time of motherhood and history are reconciled and an African time projected as the time of a people as they experience reality, as they make history.

20

If form is the outer expression of inner content - as Kandinsky describes it to be - then how do the poems themselves through their forms break new ground / bounds?⁹⁸

In this collection, formal patterns can be identified. Some poems are written in couplets and others are written in prose format. Except for the poem “The Sun and the Moon” which tells a story, the prose poems such as “Prologue/Epilogue”, “Spreading Out” and “Epilogue/Prologue” are not conventional narratives (they may not be narratives at all depending on how one defines a narrative), but seem closer to the prosaic understanding of a stream-of-consciousness and a way to give voice to seemingly unconscious drives. It may sound strange, but often I think I use the prose form to break free ‘out of the bounds’ of poetry especially where the speaker of the poem is also asserting her freedom as woman and asserting a female subjectivity.

The poems which perhaps need formal commentary are the ghazals, because many of the concerns of the other poems are present in the ghazals in more complex and referential ways. ⁹⁹ The first ghazal consists of a succession of sometimes startling images, each one appearing to go deeper into an unknown, but remaining somehow mysterious. The first is a journey into a feminine unconscious, but after every couplet,

there is a breathing space, in which information is held back and partly repressed or in which the reader is asked to digest the words before proceeding to the next phase. Molly Bloom of James Joyce's *Ulysses* is mentioned at the outset, but the speaker wants to go beyond the feminine creation of a male author, to 'take back' Molly Bloom, transcend her limitations (as woman character in the novel and as male fantasy) and create a new space requiring new demands.¹⁰⁰

In the second ghazal, the images accumulate, as if they are adding up to something, but they remain fragments which are wholes, instead of parts of a whole. The speaker searches for images that can stand alone, be strong enough to evoke eternity by celebrating their status as living or infinitely alive and be capable of withstanding the ravages of industrial and cyber time.¹⁰¹ The second ghazal links up with other poems in this collection and is engaged in a dialogue with all the others. The theme of moving beyond existing boundaries which is mentioned in the first couplet and the focus on the body in the second couplet is evident in many other poems. The third couplet is reminiscent of "The journey" and "Epilogue/Prologue" which it perhaps contradicts; here the trappings of nationalism are transformed into an organic life. The third couplet mocks and yet also re-asserts love as a motivational factor in life, as that which can save humanity. Throughout this poem, as in so many others, the images themselves suggests texts and refer indirectly to the written word and its role: "old slogans", "like sheets of paper", "fingerprints", "without trace" and "fine print" can be linked by the reader to form another textual meaning. The wakeful womb which in some ways stands in opposition (or as a binary) to the "eye of the penis" (in the first ghazal) may represent a monumental time or a new time in which women may after centuries of

oppression (and repression) awake violently like a time bomb. The images suggest both the urgency of the demands of the present time and an instantaneous existence, but also the yearning for a more meaningful, all-embracing future.

If there is a unifying factor in the ghazals, it is the ethical questions they poses indirectly. If indeed the ghazals do in asserting a female subjectivity cross certain bounds, then the question of ethics must be addressed. Lines like “Men may be different in some ways, / but all sperm tastes the same”, “A body beckons without knowing it. / A mind reeks of sex despite the integrity of its intentions”, “Is this simply foreplay or do you love my hair the way all my other lovers do”, “You stand with your foot in the doorway, / peering in at your other life, your other wife.” and “You have nothing to fear my love, except that / the unborn child in my womb may not be yours at all” question existing morality or are parodies of the risk-taking actions and conversations in the real world in which the old beliefs are steadily being undermined and falling apart.

Kristeva poses a question at the end of her essay “Woman’s Time”: “Are women subject to ethics? If not to the ethics defined by classical philosophy ... are women not already participating in the rapid dismantling that our age is experiencing at various levels (from war to drugs to artificial insemination) and which poses the *demand* for a new ethics?”¹⁰² In my collection of poems, her question remains unanswered, for the ghazals are open-ended - leaving the reader to make up his/her mind about questions of morality.

I began this essay with an epigraph in which Kandinsky says: "Every work of art is the child of its time, often it is the mother of our emotions." I end this essay now as I began. For poems are shaped and fed by present realities, by history, by the nation and its relation to the world. For poems, like nations, write themselves as they too are written. For poems like mothers give birth to themselves, even when they too are born. The poet/creator experiences the pains of labour. Bodily feelings drive the poet. Feelings of nation-ness, emotions of motherhood, sentiments of worldliness 'move' the poet to connect with lofty, monumental time and common, simple mothering, and not only to connect, but to seek beyond. But in moving beyond existing 'bounds', the poet invents others. Borderlines are always being chalked in, even as others are being erased. The poetic journey continues to unfold.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Bhabha, Homi K., "DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation" in ed. Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1990).
2. Benjamin, Walter "The Storyteller" and "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in ed. Hannah Arendt, *Illuminations* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970).
3. Cassian, Nina, *Life Sentence*, (London: Anvil Press, 1990).
4. Chomsky, Noam in ed. Otero, C.P., *Language and Politics*, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1988).
5. Cixous, Helen, "Sorties" in Helen Cixous and Catherine Clement, *The Newly Born Woman*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
6. Cixous, Helen "The Laugh of the Medusa" in Mary Eagleton, *Feminist Literary Theory: a reader*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell Books).
7. Combrinck, Lisa "(Dis)empowering the wor(l)d: a study of language, politics and power in South Africa with special reference to the Langtag reports" presented at the conference, "National Identity and Democracy", Mayibuye Centre, University of Western Cape, March 1997.
8. Diescho, Joseph *The Limits of Foreign Policy Making in South Africa*, (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 1996).
9. Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969).
10. Herman, Edward S. and Chomsky, Noam, *Manufacturing Consent*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).
11. Hawking, Stephen W., *A Brief History of Time*, (London: Transworld Publishers, 1988).
12. Kandinsky, Vassily, "On the Spiritual in Art" in ed. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo, *Complete Writings on Art, Volume 1*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1982).
13. Karcevskij, Sergei, "The Asymmetric Dualism of the sign" in ed. Peter Steiner *The Prague School*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982).
14. Kristeva, Julia, "Word, dialogue and novel" in ed. Roudiez, Leon S., *Desire in Language*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).
15. Kristeva, Julia in ed. Moi, Toril, *The Kristeva Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).
16. Marechera, Dambudzo, "The African's writer's experience of European Literature", in Flora Veit-Wild, *Dambudzo Marechera: A Source Book on his Life and Work*, (London: Hans Zell, 1992).
17. Okri, Ben, *A Way of Being Free*, (London: Phoenix House, 1997).
18. Paz, Octavio, *The Other Voice*, (San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991).
19. Pilger, John, *Hidden Agendas*, (London: Vintage, 1988).
20. Sachs, Albie, "Afterword: the taste of an avocado pear" in ed. de Kok, Ingrid and Press, Karen, *Spring is Rebellious*, (Cape Town: Buchu Books, 1990)
21. wa Thiong'o, Ngugi, *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1998).
22. Volosinov, Valentin, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: 1973)

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Vassily Kandinsky, "On the Spiritual in Art" in ed. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo, *Complete Writings on Art, Volume 1*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), p. 127.
- ² Octavio Paz, *The Other Voice* (San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991), p. 160.
- ³ Ben Okri, *A Way of Being Free* (London: Phoenix House, 1997), p. 127.
- ⁴ See the manuscript *Beyond Bounds* of which this essay is an attachment. The second ghazal in *Beyond Bounds*, p. 52. All future references from this collection will be indicated simply by using the title of the poem, the title of the manuscript and the page number.
- ⁵ "Prologue/Epilogue", *Beyond Bounds*, p. 8. A German translation of an early version of this poem has been published.
- ⁶ "Sculpted love", *Beyond Bounds*, p. 62.
- ⁷ These lines are at the start of the first ghazal in the collection. p. 51. An early version of the first ghazal has been published.
- ⁸ "Spreading out", *Beyond Bounds*, p. 9.
- ⁹ Trinh T. Minh-ha *Woman, Native Other* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 149.
- ¹⁰ Trinh *Woman, Native Other*, p. 122.
- ¹¹ "Out of Touch, out of time" in *Beyond Bounds*, p. 25.
- ¹² "Hairpoem" in *Beyond Bounds*, p. 37.
- ¹³ The phrase "will to endure" is a borrowing from Octavio Paz. Paz says: "Form is made to last... always represents the will to endure. Time concentrated and transmuted." See *The Other Voice*, p. 116.
- ¹⁴ Valentin N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: 1973).
- ¹⁵ Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, p. 41
- ¹⁶ Sergei Karcevskij, "The Asymmetric Dualism of the sign" in ed. Peter Steiner, *The Prague School*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), p. 49.
- ¹⁷ Karcevskij, "The Asymmetric Dualism...", pp 53-54.
- ¹⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation" in ed. Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 320.
- ¹⁹ Julia Kristeva in ed. Toril Moi, *The Kristeva Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).
- ²⁰ Bhabha, "DissemiNation", p. 303. See also Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969).
- ²¹ Bhabha, "DissemiNation...", p. 305.
- ²² Bhabha "DissemiNation...", p. 307.
- ²³ Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller" in ed. Hannah Arendt, *Illuminations* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), p. 87.
- ²⁴ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations*, p. 263.
- ²⁵ Benjamin "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations*, p. 264.
- ²⁶ Paz, *The Other Voice*, p. 114.
- ²⁷ In *Illuminations*, p. 89.
- ²⁸ Okri, *A Way of Being Free*, p. 9.
- ²⁹ Paz, *The Other Voice*, p. 114.
- ³⁰ Benjamin, "The Storyteller" in *Illuminations*, p. 89.
- ³¹ See Benjamin, "Theses on History" in *Illuminations*, p. 259, where he bases his description of the angel on Paul Klee's painting entitled "Angelus Novus".
- ³² Dambudzo Marechera, "The African's writer's experience of European Literature", in Flora Veit-Wild, *Dambudzo Marechera: A Source Book on his Life and Work*, (London: Hans Zell, 1992), p.364.
- ³³ Nina Cassian, *Life Sentence* ed. William Jay Smith, (London: Anvil Press, 1990).
- ³⁴ Kristeva, "Woman's time" in *The Kristeva Reader*, p. 192.
- ³⁵ In *Beyond Bounds*, p. 8.
- ³⁶ In *Beyond Bounds*, p. 54.

- ³⁷ Benjamin, "Theses on the philosophy of history" in *Illuminations*, p. 257.
- ³⁸ Stephen W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, (London: Transworld Publishers, 1988), p. 174.
- ³⁹ Carl Sagan in *A Brief History of Time*, p. x. The full quote says: "Hawking is attempting, as he explicitly states, to understand the mind of God. And this makes all the more unexpected the conclusion of the effort, at least so far: a universe with no edge in space, no beginning or end in time, and nothing for a Creator to do."
- ⁴⁰ In *Beyond Bounds*, p. 52.
- ⁴¹ Kristeva, "Woman's time" in *The Kristeva Reader*, p. 193.
- ⁴² Kristeva, "Woman's time" in *The Kristeva Reader*, p. 192.
- ⁴³ Benjamin, "Theses on the philosophy of history" in *Illuminations*, p. 261.
- ⁴⁴ Benjamin, "Theses on the philosophy of history" in *Illuminations*, p. 260.
- ⁴⁵ Benjamin, "Theses on the philosophy of history" in *Illuminations*, p. 263.
- ⁴⁶ Ngugi wa Thiong'o *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1998), p. 63. See also p. 38 when he writes: "The war between art and the state is really a struggle between the power of performance in the arts and the performance of power by the state - in short enactments of power."
- ⁴⁷ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p.188.
- ⁴⁸ Kristeva, "Woman's time" in *The Kristeva Reader*, p. 191.
- ⁴⁹ In *Beyond Bounds*, p. 12.
- It should also be noted that only one loved one is addressed, so that there is no danger of homogenising 'the people' or a people; the individual lover is allowed a new, free space, while the pronoun "we" when it is used perhaps signifies a new female space which Kristeva identifies.
- ⁵⁰ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 194.
- ⁵¹ Okri, *A Way of Being Free*, p. 113.
- ⁵² Kristeva, "Woman's time" in *The Kristeva Reader*, p. 201.
- ⁵³ See Kristeva, "Woman's time" in *The Kristeva Reader*, pp. 201-203.
- ⁵⁴ Noam Chomsky borrows this term from Walter Lippman. See Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), p. xii.
- ⁵⁵ This is comment from my paper "(Dis)empowering the wor(l)d: a study of language, politics and power in South Africa with special reference to the Langtag reports" presented at the conference, "National Identity and Democracy", Mayibuye Centre, University of Western Cape, March 1997, p.8.
- ⁵⁶ While my observations here are based on my own experience of living in South Africa and reading the daily and weekly newspapers and watching television, rather than careful, critical study of these media, I believe that my views, while at this stage speculative, are certainly not unfounded nor far-fetched.
- ⁵⁷ In *Beyond Bounds*, p. 49.
- ⁵⁸ "Lovesong for Dambudzo Marechera" in *Beyond Bounds*, p. 59.
- ⁵⁹ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams*, p. 60.
- ⁶⁰ See the chapter, "View from Dimbaza" in John Pilger, *Hidden Agendas*, (London: Vintage, 1988), p.
- ⁶¹ Pilger, *Hidden Agendas*, p.
- ⁶² Joseph Diescho *The Limits of Foreign Policy Making in South Africa*, (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 1996), p.21.
- ⁶³ Quoted in Wole Soyinka, *The Open Sore of a Continent*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). p.149.
- ⁶⁴ "Prologue/Epilogue" in *Beyond Bounds*, p. 8.
- ⁶⁵ Albie Sachs, "Afterword: The taste of an avocado pear" in ed. Ingrid de Kok and Karen Press, *Spring is Rebellious*, (Cape Town: Buchu Books, 1990), p. 146.
- ⁶⁶ "The woman is too heavy for the poem" in *Beyond Bounds*, p. 43.
- ⁶⁷ Okri, *A way of Being Free*, p. 132.
- ⁶⁸ Noam Chomsky in ed. C.P. Otero, *Language and Politics*, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1988), p.245.
- ⁶⁹ Okri, *A way of Being Free*, p. 132.
- ⁷⁰ Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other*, p. 6. Trinh also speaks about "she who 'happens to be' a (non-white), Third World Member, a woman and a writer".
- ⁷¹ Helene Cixous "The Laugh of the Medusa" in ed. Mary Eagleton, *Feminist Literary Theory: a reader*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 225-227.

- ⁷² In *Beyond Bounds*, p. 11. An early version of this poem has been published.
- ⁷³ In *Beyond Bounds*, p. 33.
- ⁷⁴ In *Beyond Bounds*, p. 34.
- ⁷⁵ See the first ghazal in *Beyond Bounds*, p. 51.
- ⁷⁶ Helen Cixous, "Sorties", p. 92 in Helen Cixous and Catherine Clement, *The Newly Born Woman*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 92.
- ⁷⁷ In *Beyond Bounds*, p. 9.
- ⁷⁸ In *Beyond Bounds*, p. 49.
- ⁷⁹ See "To the reader" and "Concerning the subject matter of this poetry" in *Beyond Bounds*, pp. 13-14.
- ⁸⁰ "The Journey" in *Beyond Bounds*, p. 12.
- ⁸¹ I realise that I use the word 'colonised' quite broadly to suggest both colonial and what some may call postcolonial oppression. Certainly I use the word, meaning that it should refer to the present moment and not only the past, which may be difficult to understand' but more often than not those who experience oppression in the Third World speak now about the 're-colonising' of their lands - an extension of colonialism rather than a different, new order.
- ⁸² Kristeva, in her discussion of Bakhtin, in "Word, Dialogue and Novel" says: "Bakhtinian dialogism identifies writing as both subjectivity and communication, or better, as intertextuality. Confronted with this dialogism, the notion of a 'person' subject of writing' becomes blurred, yielding to that of "ambivalence of writing." See Julia Kristeva in ed. Leon S. Roudiez, *Desire in Language*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 68.
- ⁸³ This is meant only as a play on the word 'bounds' and is not meant to refer to the 'bounded texts' studied by Kristeva, Bakhtin and others.
- ⁸⁴ Okri, *A Way of Being Free*, p. 129.
- ⁸⁵ See the note to Helen Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa" in Eagleton, *Feminist Literary Theory: a reader*, p. 227.
- ⁸⁶ My discussion here of Freud is cursory and based on Kristeva's reading of Freud. My thinking here is speculative and in no way intended as a serious, rigorous Freudian critique of the South African nation state. But these tentative ideas - I think - are worth expressing; diffident and cautious as they may be, they seem to be revealing something real about South Africa.
- ⁸⁷ Kristeva, "Woman's time", p. 198.
- ⁸⁸ This is despite the fact that prior to the elections in 1994 and even before the constitution was drawn up, other sources (or foundations) were suggested by those in the broader political movement.
- ⁸⁹ Toril Moi in *The Kristeva Reader*, introduction to "Woman's time", p. 188.
- ⁹⁰ Kristeva means that this should be based partly on an acceptance of difference as it exists and operates in personal and sexual identity. See Kristeva, "Woman's Time", p. 209.
- ⁹¹ Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other*, p. 149.
- ⁹² Okri, *A Way of Being Free*, pp. 110 -112.
- ⁹³ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 181.
- ⁹⁴ In *Beyond Bounds*, p. 64.
- ⁹⁵ In *Beyond Bounds*, p. 69. A version of this poem has appeared in a literary magazine.
- ⁹⁶ In *Beyond Bounds*, p. 71. A version of this poem has appeared in a literary magazine.
- ⁹⁷ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 187.
- ⁹⁸ Kandinsky, *Complete Writings on Art*.
- ⁹⁹ Note that these poems do not meet all the formal requirements for ghazals. I have only retained the couplet format and the play of meanings back and forth. Strictly-speaking the ghazal form should consist of a minimum of five couplets to a ghazal, each couplet being autonomous and independent of the others. The continuity and flow from the images and associations back and forth comprise the ghazal.
- ¹⁰⁰ In *Beyond Bounds*, p. 51.
- ¹⁰¹ In *Beyond Bounds*, p. 52.
- ¹⁰² Kristeva, "Woman's Time", p. 211.