

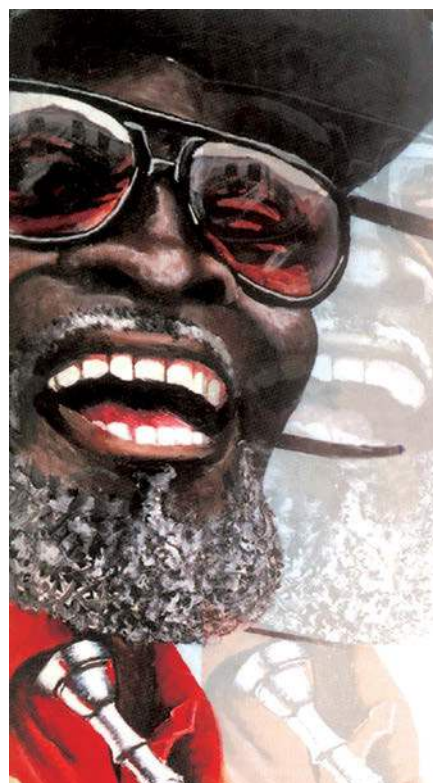


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English Alive 50

fifty years of writing by South African high school students



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2005 Senzwa Gum, Pinelands High School



ENGLISH ALIVE 50

1967–2016

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* See end of anthology for later career in literary or related fields

† Had work published in *English Alive* in every year of their high school career

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Introduction

Poetry wrighting

I sat in English,
Manufacture a story, they said,
You've an hour, they said,
Can't, I said,
It's for marks, they said,
I did.

John Bradley, Westerford High School, 1983

Fortunately, it's not like that for all writers in high schools! If ever one needed evidence that young adults want to have their say and know exactly how to say it, this anthology is the answer: superb thinking and feeling and imagining, matched by enviable skill in writing in English.

The first thing to say is how extraordinary it is that a totally independent, unsubsidised journal devoted to high school writing should survive for 50 years, with not a single break in production.

In 1967, when Tim Peacock asked me, then a young teacher of four years' experience, to join him in this new venture of bringing together the fine writing of high school students, I would never have guessed that 50 years later I would be compiling this present anthology. I'm very glad that I am.

You will find your own way around the anthology. I would just like to point to two things.

The first is the astonishing overview it gives of what has been happening in and to South Africa over these 50 momentous years. As you read through students' pieces, you see them reacting to and reflecting their 'here and now'. They present to us a remarkable encapsulation of the 'zeitgeist', the spirit of the times, of this half-century of South Africa's history.

Second, it is fascinating to see how many *English Alive* contributors went on to become professional published writers of one sort or another, or excelled in some related field. These writers are marked with an asterisk (*) after their name, and you will find notes on their careers at the end of the anthology. My apologies to those I may have missed.

Please, enjoy. Be amazed. Be astonished. Be moved to tears, sometimes. Be proud of our young people.

RM, Cape Town, 2016

Thanks and acknowledgements

- First, and always, the students themselves, for producing the work that has sustained 50 editions (for some years, of 64 pages; for most years, of 80 pages). This anthology is a tribute to them, with only 220 writers representing all those who were published over the 50 years.
- The teachers of English, who encourage, inspire and cajole the students to write expressively and in their own individual style. Their link to *English Alive* is crucial, whether the schools submit students' work or students submit their own work independently.
- The editors who read all of those pieces and made the selections each year. Some had themselves been contributors to *English Alive* while at school (marked here with *). They are, in chronological order: Tim Peacock (founding editor, four editions); Robin Malan (founding editor, a total of 23 editions over the years); Robin Lee (founding editor, one edition); Ann Harries (two editions); Sharon Colback (one edition); David Craig (two editions); Tony Eaton (seven editions); Christine Tyler (one edition); D Blake & Peter Henshall (one edition); Michael King* (eight editions); Kathleen Heugh (two editions); June Sacks (one edition); Ken Barris (one edition); Tessa Fairbairn (one edition); Sarah Johnson/Rowan* (two editions); Megan Hall* (one edition).
- From 1995, a number of assistant editors have contributed many hours of reading and assessing: Jerome Damon, Nokuthula Mazibuko, Elaine Davie, Gcinaphi Dlamini, Sharon Sheldon and Robert van der Valk*, with, in 2016, Nicky Karstens and Sue Wigham.
- We acknowledge the business and administrative managers over the years, most notably Jack Kent, Ursula Barnett, Anita Kennet, and, at present, Robert van der Valk*.
- From 2000, *English Alive* has had the expert service of Jo-Anne Friedlander of User Friendly as typesetter and cover-designer of our annual anthologies.
- Marie Philip and the late David Philip have always been very supportive of *English Alive*. In 1987, the precursor to this present anthology was published by David Philip Publisher: *English Alive 1967–87: writing from senior schools in Southern Africa*, edited by Michael King*.
- *English Alive* has been helped over some difficult times by the J W Jagger Bequest, the Good Hope Bank, and, once, the SACEE Central Management Committee.
- The compiler's thanks go to the SACEE Western Cape branch, most notably its current chairperson Terrill Nicolay, the *English Alive* convener Anne Schlebusch, the treasurer Peter Nicolay, and committee member Roger Graham.

RM

1967

1967

A farmer contemplates death

Four score years long have been,
Four score years long have seen
The days, the months along.
Yes, for four score years along.

Four score years long have been
Part of the unchanging, changing years, fat and lean,
Part of the pattern of birth, copulation and death.‡
Yes, for four score years long.

April and May saw new-born life.
December snow uncover d strife.
But Nature stood unmoved eternally.
Yes, for four score years long.

But I depart this realm of unchanging, changing things.
Dust will come from innards, guts and strings,
And I will be part of the eternal farmyard dust.
Yes, for more score years long.

‡ cf. T S Eliot 'Sweeney Agonistes'

Jeremy Cronin, St Joseph's College, Rondebosch*

A sad and tired fire

A thin taut wire runs through the house in which I live;
and I must walk along it, holding my arms outstretched
to keep my balance. For if I fall, if the slightest fly
lights on me, and I stoop to brush it off and then try
to stand again, the wire will bend and snap. To be again
as I was before, I must knot the burning thread and make
it tighter still. Therefore it will break again.

The only way in which I can end the pattern of this life
would be to cut it off at either end. But even that would not suffice,
for where it was, a screaming violin would sound –
and that is just as difficult to walk along as wire.

So I will always step this way, along the stiff and tightened chord.
Unless I leave this place (perhaps I will return – but leave it now)
and let the tension slacken with one less weight on it.
But if and when I do return, will I find it as it was?
Or will that world, betrayed by one false foot that slipped,
based upon the ashes of my time, be a sad and tired fire?

David Lan, Westerford High School*

Regenerate not us, O Lord ...

Regenerate not us, O Lord, O no.
Regenerate yourself, take on new grasp;
For you have reared yourself as foe
To those who'd shelter in your clasp.
No grateful helots, those who grow
Cramped pins, in your protective hasp.

Encompassing Lord, must our ovation
Mean abject duty, servile fawning:
May not we question devastation
Which you permit; and earth-hell's yawning!
Lord, didst thou cause our life-starvation?
Lord, hast thou commanded the mourning?

Lord, it seems you misuse might:
Why sliver fingers spread for clue?
No sycophants we, but plunged in plight
Of search for concrete proof of you.
If, in searching for the truth, we blunder from the right,
Father, forgive us, for we know not what we do.

Jeff Peires, Herzlia High School*

How shall I tell?

How shall I tell of a confounded youth who saw not youth but a thousand
monsters of another time – the septic sores of a too-strange world – with
eyes unwidened to his fellows' joy; who built towers to the sky, which
crashed at the touch of a steel-cold thought; who saw not beauty where
other men walked, but the dull blankness of their animal minds; who saw
too much of that which was real, and could not live with what he saw?

How shall I tell of a fragrant youth who slept wrapt 'tween mountain and sea on a soft pillow of the sweetest grass, with the stars all above him and a girl by his side who smelled of the early morning and whose hair was as light as a silken cloud and whose breath was warm on his cheek? And of how, with time-greased hands, he reached out to hold the night forever – and found that it was gone?

How shall I tell of a thousand thoughts which bubbled and fumed in his pent mind with no outlet to anything other than a world of fantasy where none could go save he? And who shall know of loneliness as he who knew a thousand men?

How shall I tell of a child who wished never to be a man; who feared the passing of childhood as the murderer fears the rope; who would have no part of growing old with nothing to clutch – whether it be Christ or a teddy-bear; who was too clever to believe in God and too foolish to believe in himself?

How shall I tell of a choking joy which lifted him up to walk on the clouds; which ballooned his soul and possessed his mind; which had no face nor reason; which soon grew thin and faded away, for there was none with whom it might be shared?

How shall I tell of all these things? How shall I capture thoughts which race and fly too fast for any pen to frame? And who shall know of foolishness and love and hate and tears?

How then shall I tell of me?

Charles Rom, Cape Town High School*

Of cabbages and kings

The twin pistols gleamed and grew large in his imagination. He often sat in the dark of the cellar and dreamt of them. They were something like the ones he had seen in the shop, but not the same. They were clear in his mind; long-barrelled and sleek, fitting snugly into their dark leather holsters which rested low on his hips. The silent hours in the cellar had built them to perfection.

He didn't really want to approach his mother with his wish, but his endless babbling around the subject of the guns left no doubt in her mind as to his desire for them. He knew that she knew of this desire for he had endlessly contrived to let her become aware without speaking of them directly. To do this he felt would lower their value, and besides she spoke all the time of how little money there was, so that he was ashamed to ask her for something which she might dismiss as being an unnecessary silliness. That would hurt more than her refusal.

But now she had gone to visit Uncle Michael for a few days. She never returned empty-handed from Uncle Michael. This time he felt sure she would return with the guns. This time he knew he would get them. He twirled an imaginary six-shooter around his finger.

Finally, finally he watched her step from the train. He was silent on the way home except to try to sound her out occasionally. It seemed hours before they got to the house. And time lagged agonisingly onward as she bustled airily about repairing the damages of her absence. Every move towards her luggage made his heart jump.

Eventually she called him into her room where his brother and sister already stood. He thought the beating of his heart must be apparent to them all. Slowly his mother presented his brother with a pen and his sister with a new skirt which he pretended to admire as eagerly as they. Then she withdrew from a suitcase a brown paper package which she invited him to open.

Among the scattered mass of hastily ripped paper there lay two bright red pistols, each bearing the legend 'Made in Hong Kong' in large script on the butts. There was an equally red holster and gun-belt meanly held together with clips. Each gun had had bullets painted on to it in silver paint.

They were constructed of tin.

His heart pumped leadenly and his face grew red. His soul sagged as he looked at her smiling face. She had not understood and he could never explain. In a daze he kissed her, trying to find through the shock of his crumbled dreams some gesture of thanks equal to his earlier enthusiasm. Then, clutching what were now only toys, he fled from the room down, down out of the light to the cellar, as though pursued by a searing nakedness.

He sat a long while in the corner, the bitter gift before him. The fantasy had been destroyed and the old fairyland was beyond the iron gates of reality. Suddenly, like a driving piston, the tears distorted his face, and his body shook in the dark with a terrible loneliness.

Charles Rom, Cape Town High School*

City people

I saw an old man
in a worn suit
with a cross on the lapel –
sitting in a park,
waiting
for the end of the world.

I saw a woman
 who smelt rich,
 who talked without meaning,
 who went shopping every Wednesday.
 I saw a girl
 looking for truth,
 probing the cracks in the pavement.
 I saw a doctor
 who did not care.
 I saw a lawyer
 with cents for eyes.
 I saw a cruel man.
 I saw a kind man.
 And all these people
 meant something to somebody
 but where is my truth?
 what do I mean?

Elaine Unterhalter, Kingsmead College*

1968

So this is a hippy!

Here comes a breath of Hyde Park;
 The offspring of the marriage of True Minds and Progress,
 Two World Wars and a Labour Union.
 It wafts in, on a cloud of incense,
 Smiling benevolently,
 And caressing this smelly world with the eyes of a spaniel.
 Earthly ties consist of a dark, military jacket with bright brass buttons,
 A joyful little shirt, shabby trousers
 And travel-scuffed shoes.

It settles down and smokes its pipe,
 All by itself in a corner.
 A little wheat-sheaf girlfriend comes shyly in,
 And he immediately finds her a cushion
 And drops an innocent, husbandly sort of kiss on her cheek,
 His long black hair mingling with her fairness.

They don't speak, they aren't noisy.
 They just sit there together, aware but not disturbed
 By the glances of curiosity, distaste and surprise.
 In so doing, they have mastered something
 A number of prototype non-conformists have not yet discovered ...

... and I felt a ridiculous urge to go and give him a flower ...

Lynda Albertyn, Springfield Convent Senior School

Slum child

Hay, Hay on

Sunday

Let me lie too low
 across the trees

on, on the
 Monday

raked my teeth with the ten-ton-tooth-pick
 even though my daddie

died

off off
 Tuesday

Way walk with wHinnie the pooH

(He smelt)

Wednesday?
 Wednesday!

How I all liked Wednesday

Grandma let me bath

wash with water –

dish
 water.

Thursday

usually Thursday after Wednesday
 some kind of friends found a bottled wine
 (in a bottle, I suppose)

Wow

how we drank it

Oblivious of Oblivious Oblivion

Ow!

how we were sore when mama whipped us
 (red-zebra-striped-blue legs and black) pain cried
 till

Friday
 Friday,
 always Friday
 fish for food it's cheaper
 Ha-Ha! the richers
 laughed
 While poor poor Puss 'n Boots held his tortured nose,
 Saturday
 for Saturday
 try to scale football fences
 see a goal
 and chased home by the next
 to play in narrow wide-highed alleys
 with the broken ball
 Snot-face stole from Albie van Rosenzweig,
 the rich dirt-man's son,
 And Albie came and fetched it in his way,
 Hooray!
 But Bells back to Sunday,
 What is God?
 Don't ask me
 I'm mercy boy, the poor
 But that week was 19 starved years ago
 19 gaol sentences ago,
 Hard-nineteen-ships back.

T Buckland, Bishops (Diocesan College)

'Hello'

I looked at my black shoes. They were the ones Mummy had bought me for Christmas. I wiggled my toes and looked up out of the corner of my eye. I looked at my knees, they were white. Why were they white? I looked across the floor and I saw white shoes. I saw white socks and black knees. Why were they black? I saw a dress, a pretty, green dress with flowers. I had on a pretty, blue dress with spots. Both of our dresses were pretty. I kicked my foot on the ground, hard, until there was dust all about us. I looked at the white shoes, they were brown. I felt bad, so I looked up from the shoes to the black knees, to the green dress and then to a black neck. It must be nice to have at black neck. I saw white teeth the same as mine and then I saw a smile. A happy smile.

'Hello!'

Linda Caro, Waverley Girls' High School

Magnolia Clinic

On entering I threw my false voice
at you
and yours came back
across the sterilised distance.

Smothered in a world of white
you were connected
by means of a long plastic tube
to a hole in the wall
labelled 'Life'.

There were the usual questions
and your usual lies
and while mother continued
I turned to face the sets of eyes
watching the Englishman's son.
I greeted them: 'Hullo.'
Which was neither here nor there.

Through the window
there was a tree with leaves
and a bird,
and though late
traces of a long sun
unretreated among the park.

One day Father
I suppose I shall turn
from the window
and find you withdrawn
into your hole in the wall
and turn again
to discover the bird gone
and the sun retreated
and Mother and I shall leave
empty-lunged
walking
between shadow and shade
always.

Nigel Fogg, Graeme College*

That Wednesday morning

I looked past the big white pillow at the gentle furniture, pale and grey in the early light. Rolling on to my back, I stared at the off-white ceiling and remembered that I had to get out of the warm bed.

I awoke suddenly. Half past six, said the watch. I stretched my limbs and climbed out of bed. Outside it was a perfectly ordinary autumn day. I opened the bedroom door and went to the bathroom. I washed my face and drank some water.

Back in the bedroom, I sat down on the bed and put my socks on. They were dirty. I took them off and found another pair. I put these on. I took a clean shirt from the cupboard, kicking yesterday's into the corner. I found my grey flannels behind the bed and put them on. My shoes needed cleaning. I sat down on the bed and put them on. I forgot about the cleaning.

They were still sleeping. I went into the kitchen. In the bread bin I found a roll, so I toasted that and had some peanut butter and jam. I found some milk and had half a glass. The paper was on the back doorstep.

In the passage it was still dark. I opened their bedroom door.

He was lying on his back, fast asleep, and she, next to him, on her side. I threw the paper on to the bed and looked out through the window, seeing two dogs in the road. I turned and examined my tongue in the mirror of the dressing table.

The dog came into the room and jumped on to the bed, licking them all over their faces.

Yet he, pale and grey in the morning light, and she, next to him, on her side, did not wake.

Wilhelm L Hahn, Groote Schuur High School

The nightwatchman

In the greying swallow dusk on the closely cropped lawn, a young boy was refusing to come indoors. He obstinately lingered on the lawn, pulling at the grass. His clothes showed that he was not poor. His manner was that of one whose every command was obeyed, and who ignored every order. Behind him loomed the house where his parents lived, red-roofed, gabled, and opulent.

His mother again appealed to the boy to go in. 'It's long past your bedtime,' she said. She walked out to him. The boy got up as he saw her intention. He ran to the bottom of the garden, which faced out into the road. He turned round at the fence. He gazed triumphantly at the slow retreating figure of his mother. She had given up in despair.

He lounged on the fence, imitating the passing leather-jacketed motor-cyclists, who assume that a show of nonchalance and casualness is indicative of strength. He rejoiced in his triumph. He strutted round, so that the whole world could see that he had successfully defied his mother.

It was getting colder and darker. The boy, however, had to prove his point, and stay out in the cold. He turned his attention from the house to the road. He saw the strip of tar as a river, flowing endlessly. Being a child, he wanted to cross it. He stepped out through the gate into the road. His attention was caught. The nightwatchman of the road-building company had a fire that glittered.

Sitting sideways to catch the light, the man was reading a book. The glare of the fire only partly illuminated his head. He was wearing an old, torn and battered hat and a pair of worn overalls.

This made the boy frightened as he stood in front of the fire. The fight and the bravado drained out of him. He stood in awe of the man who did not look up at him. The fire in the grate sank – the flame subsided. In the darker light, the man assumed a more sinister attitude that really frightened the boy. He felt that in the flickering light, any number of shocks could be hiding. He asked the man if he might warm his hands. The watchman did not answer. The boy plucked up courage. He asked again, with more of the arrogance of the spoilt boy who lived up at the rich house than the scared and trembling boy who stood in the dark. This time the man looked up. He asked the boy, with his eyes, what he wanted. In the light, his face was like a tree-trunk, old and gnarled, betraying his years. He had a short wiry beard, badly cut. His nose, broken in a drunken fight, gave an unbalance to his face. The fire in his eyes was almost dead, but deep down, there was still a suggestion of smouldering coals. The boy was scared by the eyes. The face, seen for the first time, frightened the boy.

‘Could I warm my hands at the fire?’ He was now very afraid, but he could not leave. With a sort of a nod that does not encourage conversation, the nightwatchman returned to his reading.

A long silence followed. The boy tried to make conversation, but he could not start. He had to try, though.

‘What book are you reading?’

The head lifted slowly and asked its question again.

‘Who are you reading about?’

The man looked at the boy for a while. He moved his face and tried to smile. He did not often smile now. There was nothing much to smile about now. He had forgotten how to smile. His mouth twisted. His eyes turned up into a sneer. The boy gazed open-mouthed at the ugly facial contortions. He was too terrified to move. Then the old man got up from his seat. The boy imagined with fierce intensity that he heard every bone in the old man’s body creak.

The man opened his mouth to answer. There was a silence and then he closed it. He stepped nearer to the fire and, when he was next to the boy, he stopped. Slowly forming the word in his mouth, he said,
'God.'

The boy turned and fled into the protection of the night.

All through the night, he kept waking up to the sight of God standing in the Brazier of Hell, with a broken nose, a wiry beard, and torn and tattered overalls.

Michael A King, St Andrew's College, Grahamstown*

Our garden

Our world is budding like a flower:
A big, black, bloody mushroom.

I Malet-Warden, St Stithian's College

To Philip

It seems just yesterday
when skies were blue,
I held your hand;
we walked along the beach –
the wind was cool;
I felt your body close;
then side by side
we soaked ourselves in sun.
Now all is gone:
I sit and sweat in school.
I know that somewhere
You are sweating too, –
the difference is you have forgotten me
and oh, tall-Philip, how I think of you!

Elizabeth Spilhaus, Herschel Girls School

Extract from: Wandering thoughts of an unhappy minstrel

... prolonged childhood the CURSE of mankind when you had to clean your teeth twice a day and go to the w. every day and wash your hands with soap I'll see to the mouth it needs it. It also needs some dirt for the wash to come for without dirt there can be no cleanliness without cleanliness there

can be no dirt. Oh yeah? Puberty PUBERTY! My God you don't talk about that in this house go and wash your mouth out AT ONCE YOU ARE STILL A CHILD. But you're not of course – you've reached the stage in life where you have to find out about yourself from the other kids – not like childhood you've lost your innocence you see. Don't tell your parents that. They know you're still their dear sweet little damn child ignore the brat. MANHOOD! By this time you're meant to know all about yourself and why you work GO AND WASH YOUR MOUTH out but nobody told you you were meant to pick it all up yourself you mean that filthy little Jenny child told you or else it was conveniently forgotten like wayback when you were innocent mommy ah mommy I wanted green toothpaste was conveniently forgotten and they expect you to think of toothpaste now –? Oh no, now you've damn well got to look after yourself. And by this stage, MANHOOD – GOD, alREADY, it's time (you realise) for your parents to go and wash their mouths out ...

Peter Terry, St Andrew's College, Grahamstown*

1969

The angry oak

The angry oak with soured branches
 Pelts the earth with hard green seed,
 Whose shells compress the autumn brightness
 Dark and damp from root and weed.

The sky and ocean roar in turning,
 Wheeling wind and spinning tide
 Till, tumbling in a helpless cycle,
 Flesh and grain together ride.

But hurl aside the great grey boulders,
 Wrench apart the iron moraine
 Where ice has crawled and cracked in darkness,
 Free the force inside the brain

That surges, blinding, up, colossal:
 Now in crescent frame revealed,
 The shrivelled seed that vainly rattles,
 Always in the night's pod sealed.

Menán du Plessis, Sans Souci Girls' High School*

From us in Brakpan, South Africa – to a sister and daughter in London

I

Dear Ruth
You are distant

in turbulent, living London
where you have to stay –
one must live in surroundings
akin to one's soul,

and your soul –
thoughts, emotions
conscience –
is alive and vital,
we know.

Distant from us
who, too, have chosen surroundings

to suit our souls
which are much changed

here
in South Africa.

II

Yes, dear Ruth
no more
will you find us
active and concerned,

No.
You will find us
sitting

in the stagnant silence
of cool summer evenings

in this unbelievable silence,
staring vacantly across
the empty, moonlit park.

We must
have a silence about us
to compensate
this silence within us.

Quietly do we watch
the silent moon, afloat
above this unmoving pond.

We must
have a silence about us
to compensate
the silence within us.

There is no sound
over the grass,
there is no call
within us.

We wait only
for the clock's solemn strike
to shudder in the air,

that we may go,
to necessary, noiseless sleep.

We must
we must
have a silence about us
to compensate
the silence within us.

III

Our silence
will grow,
it will grow

till one morning
dear Ruth
waking from dreamless sleep
we will discover

that morning
is as quiet as night,
that its voice is gone,
that no thing speaks:
no bird
no leaf,

that we will
never hear a cry again.

And we will understand
that at last
we have strangled our souls –

to death
so smiling faintly
we will step out
among the scattered
broken leaves –
to join

the living-dead
in South Africa's warm, bright
sun.

Jeremy Gordin, Damelin College, Johannesburg*

Afternoon

Having
from your window
watched the city
curl itself toward the sea
all afternoon beside you,
now my fingers stretch to find you
and though I feel you
just beyond their tips
they close
enclosing nothingness and air.
Now I would be deep
in the warmth of your memory
smiling unexpectedly
as your laughter wakened in me,

had we
inside a sound that rippled through
an afternoon that thinned around us
been
all afternoon
alone.

David Lan, Westerford High School*

God

I

In a chapel, dialling God; but I am dissatisfied.
Could you be classified in the directory under 'Emergencies', or
classified business adverts of innumerable yellow pages?
His ethereal voice, like the whisper of static, comes through –
long-distance.

'You are dirty, like a Hindu in the Ganges.
Your mind must be purged, washed and boiled in Chlorax.'

(I shy away from this short-back-and-sides of my brain.)

II

'God, you're A.W.O.L., deserting those who trust you;
leaving doubts, like the pin-pricks of four nails in hands and feet.
Most of the world rejects you, like an antibody fighting the germ of
truth.

'Your subscribers have become too familiar with your dialling tone:
Church has made it too easy to become a Christian!
It was a *privilege* – for those who earned it.
Not any calling voice.'

(The dwarf receiver in my inner ear shouts: 'Blasphemy!')

III

Preachers tell me from the pulpit:
BE GOOD; BE NICE; BE CHASTE; BE HUMBLE; BE
VIRTUOUS;
(even be a bloody fool and be a Coristian,
but *above all* be a Christian).

The taste of preaching lingers in my mouth like stale soap.
The verb to BE; leaving out the HOW? ...
The basic WHY?
Irony drowns in the Ave Maria. I tell off sermons like the beads of
my rosary.
How to be a Christian in 10 easy lessons entitled:
'They laughed when I talked back to Pontius Pilate.'

(My scepticism is cold with sorrow:
Here is Heaven, but not the means to get there.)

IV

The flock of sheep go up to eat.
Are we dragged back 2000 years to such primitive, superstitious
rites – like heathens?
Are we come to this: to look back to ignorance for inspiration?

The answer lies much deeper than this. 5000 years produced only a
philosophy, while we are static with our verb 'to be':
BE-ing is believing?

(Man cannot race on faith alone:
He needs the means to gain the end.)

V

Is it a myth? What is that innate evil that consumes us?
Are the Gods and Satans of this world mere attempts to exteriorise
that innate evil?

Pressed for time, cramped by the inadequacy of my unwilling brain
that can grasp just one point ...
but grabs ineffectually at all and loses most ...
I cannot suggest a solution.
Words dry like phlegm.

To those who are disquieted,
apply yourselves.
Maybe death will bring the answers.
Let us think and wonder.

(We are about to drown in a sea of illogic.)

G E S Lishman, St Andrew's College, Grahamstown

Persuasion

(adapted from the French of Raymond Queneau)

If you believe
if you believe
girl little girl
that it's going it's
going it's going to
last for ever the
time the time of
the time of love
what a mistake you're
making little girl
little girl what a
mistake you're making

If you think little
one if you think
that your rosy
cheeks your tender
waist your painted
nails your nymph's
thigh and your dainty
foot if you think
little one that it's
going going to last
for ever what a
mistake you're making
little girl little
girl what a
mistake you're making

The fine day the
happy holiday soon
pass: suns and stars
trace round a circle
but you my little
one you go straight
towards something
you don't see.

Most cunningly near
 draw the rapid
 wrinkle heavy fat triple
 chin slack muscle
 come gather gather
 the roses the roses
 the roses of life
 and may their
 petals be the calm
 sea of every joy
 come gather gather
 if you don't
 do it what a
 mistake you're making
 little girl little
 girl – what a
 mistake you're making!

Kelwyn Sole, King Edward VII School*

Tribute to a boy

It had been a hard day.
 Up and down the toiling busy streets –
 The heat of the day –
 The growl of the engine –
 The incessant noise of the bell.
 He moved his clammy hands on the wheel.

A small boy,
 Returning from an afternoon in town,
 Clambered on to this vehicle of adventure
 And hurried up the aisle to meet the driver.

'Hi!'
 The driver turned round, a scowl on his weary face.
 He saw the young face turned up to him,
 The eager eyes sparkling with excitement,
 And a smile crept over his face.
 'Hi!'

Michael Strauss, Grey High School, Port Elizabeth

i can't ever forget

i can't ever forget
the time
when, as a child,
i was assured;
the time
when, in my heart,
i felt secure.
and now,
as one who has not forgotten,
i stand,
often alone,
i stand
undecided.
yet, deeper, far beneath,
i feel a further me:
a someone.
and in myself
i seek my reassurance;
the reassurance
i cannot reach.
i may be happy,
yet sadness is my watchword.
there is a better kind
and in my mind
i am the image
of that me.
there is no regret.
no grudge.
still there is a something,
far away,
i cannot reach.
i cannot reach
myself.

Robert van der Valk, Cape Town High School*

1970

When someone once said

When someone once said
 that the world was fine,
 so fine,
 did he see lonely raindrops
 through sticky teardrops
 on misty windows?
 Did he smell yesterday's nappies
 and last night's whisky
 in every day's shadows?
 Did he see young dead bodies
 in their own black blood
 for their own good land?

He saw
 the sun on the sea,
 and little red beetles
 in long yellow grass.

Andre Eva Bosch, Rob Ferreira High School*

Flautist

A member of the orchestra, he's old
 Now, with speckled hair, and speckled head, and
 He hides in his suit like a violin
 In a viola case. He's always there.
 He must have had dreams when he was a child:

Music sweet as the pith in a crushed reed;
 Mercury; silver birds in a forest.

When he looks at the stars, perhaps he sees
 His music spilt in the palm of the night.

Menán du Plessis, Sans Souci Girls' High School*

1970

busstop

i saw a nice boy
with long sideburns
and short hair and a blue suit.
he stood in front of me in the bus queue.

when the bus came
he stood back
to let me climb into the bus in front of him.

i turned to thank him
he gave me a radiant smile
it warmed my heart and made my day beautiful.

and then (wrapt in a haze of rosy dreams)
i tripped
and fell into the bus
flat on my stupid face.

Michele Freind, Cape Town High School

That's because I've gone

If, one day,
You should peep down
The dark passage of your past
And can't find me
In any corner,
That's because I've left.

And if, in
Your 'Echo Park',
You can't hear me,
That's because I've gone.

If you can't see me
Sitting next to you
In that street
Where you've got your
Little black hand
Held out before you,
That's because

I've run from that street,
Put a tie in my collar,
And found that land
We'd talked about.

If you can't find me,
Back there,
To give me my bit
Of that stolen loaf,
Or to give me a taste
Of the flat Coke you've got,
That's because I've got my own.

And when you turn in the narrow corridor,
To go back to your creeping,
Your begging,
And wonder why I'm not there,
That's because
I've found a broader one.

And if, one day,
You should sit in your street again,
And I walk past,
With my tie,
Hold out your hand
And beg.

Lynette Liebenberg, Witbank High School

the burglar

he came stealthily ...
but i heard him.
they were asleep,
both of them.
and i thought ...
'Why is he trying to get in?'
i've been trying seven years
to get out.

Trevor Lubbe, Lansdowne High School

1971

Sergeant Musgrave's Dance

Sergeant Musgrave's Dance is just a way of showing
your loyalty to your country
a sort of celebration
to say how happy you are to be killing for your Fatherland
to be allowed to represent the forces of good
(rumours have it that their captives are torn apart or buried alive
and some particularly terrible guards have been known
to eat the flesh of living prisoners: you will duly
be shown photographs – slightly re-touched for clarity).

An experienced instructor will teach you
the finer points of the Dance:
such as how long the grenade should be held in the hand
and which way the barrel faces
it is inconceivable (even accidentally)
that you cause your own death or that of any of the faithful.

Many of the previous refinements have been removed to suit our times
and to enable greater mobility of the dancers –
four-wheel drive
six-ton trucks
will carry your packs to the front line
where the enemy will occasionally refuse to co-operate –
although by the Law of Averages every one in two battles
will be won
by our forces.

Adequate, fresh clothing may not always be available
and during the winter months
it may be necessary for this to be supplemented
by a certain amount of stamping and rubbing:
variations include a slight twitching of the feet
which then stops –
under such circumstances you are advised to keep your head
well down.

Graeme Bloch, Westerford High School*

Thoughts on service

There was, I saw,
crisp sand and clear waves
breaking gently for miles,
and, collecting my thoughts,
slowly I walked along

pensively.

Out from over the waves
came a white gull
and settled squatly on the sand.

There was no noise,
just the gentle murmuring of the surf,
and this was peace
so unaffected, so simple –
the waves, the unseen sea creatures –
so vital that it was Life.
I looked across the open sand,
the waves, the sea,
and saw freedom there too.

The gull looked up querulously
in the absurd, lopsided way
that only a gull can perfect,
and waddled away as I slowly approached.
Looking at him, I wondered
if all my learning could profit him
(if he wanted to understand –
if he could understand).
I wondered what he could teach me.
The gull looked over his shoulder at me,
frowned, waddled on ungraciously,
and frowned again –
a sort of birdly game.
Without thinking, I stamped my foot,
and with undignified cawking
the bird rose into the air.

Immediately I forgave him his earthbound ungainliness.
High he soared, lazily hanging in the air,
leaning against a breath of wind,
floating easily,
so confident, so supremely, unquestionably certain
in things I could not be sure of,
things I might not have for long,
things I might deprive others of.

I ask God:
Must I learn now
to Kill?

I R Duncan-Brown, St Andrew's College, Grahamstown

signs of the times

come closer – we
destitute of light
seeking a way out
for our absurd desires
through love and hate
mingled with fear and turbulence
like a looming eagle
descending like a swift current
it's beginning to dawn
on me: now
from morning till night
we toil.
ever in hot haste
losing life; at random
if the worst comes to the worst
we never square our conscience
into habits it grows
(casually)
being immaterial to us.

Achmed Kariem, Bonteheuwel High School

Christians?

Holy 'Christian' people
Praying in a church,
Just like gaudy parrots
Sitting on a perch.

Sitting in church
(Some even sleep),
Re-promising with vigour
Vows they never keep.

Love one another,
Why, certainly they might
Love their brother,
If his skin is white.

Susan Rosenberg, Girls' High School, Pietermaritzburg

1972

The apple

From the remoteness of the cool rock-shouldered mountain path, Kimani could see Mombasa, a vast metropolis stretching out on the flaxen plain. The opal-glazed sky fell into a cloud-laddered valley underlined by an intangible blue stripe – the sea.

Kimani listened to the remoteness of the mountain and the staccato slapping of his ill-fitting shoes on the moss-streaked rock-face. Mombasa meant work for him, an eight-year-old vagrant. His parents were dead: his father buried in a rockfall, his mother murdered.

It took him three hours of growing blisters on feet to reach the vast city. Most of the time he was alone with only the cloud-scarfed mountain as company.

However, when he reached the fabled city he was seized in a crowd of smelly unfriendly Indians, breathing profanity and garlic. As the sun thinned into darkness, the crowd that compelled his feet, with crude shoves and jolts, seemed also to thin.

Alone and bewildered once more, Kimani was aware only of the filth of civilisation in this city. Pungent smell of ill-cooked food, dead rats and the ever-present stench of urine stifled his trembling form. He walked the street for an hour or more, eventually curling up like a rain-soaked cat in the gutter.

Babbling voices of morning shattered his dreams with an ear-splitting cacophony. He was immediately aware of his naked feet. Someone had stolen his shoes while he slept.

Stiffly he rose and, before he could prevent it, he was hustled back into the impatient stream. After a few minutes the crowd seemed to slow like clotting paint, and when Kimani could push through the legs, he saw the Indian Market – a show of sprawled stalls spilling over with produce.

At one moment he was aware only of the dank cabbage odour that found its path into every corner. Then, as if drifting into the brink of a dream, he was enveloped by a crisp, sweet scent with the remoteness of a summer morning after rain.

His eyes roved the creaking wooden carts and simultaneously he became conscious of a pyramid of strange yellow fruits piled into a rickshaw. Almost respectfully he ran his clammy fingers over one, watching in fascination as the sheen dulled with streaky prints. He picked up a small fruit and put his lips to it. How like his mother's cheeks when he had been young.

His mother! Eyes swimming with tears, he clutched the apple and ran until, stumbling, he lurched forward. He fell, grazing his cheek. Where was his mother to catch him? Only now did the reality of his loss strike him.

For a long time Kimani followed the road until it thinned into a gravel path. The roar of surf bruised his ears, and excitedly he pushed through the tussocks, until he could see the sea.

The vast and incredible ocean lay ahead of him, cradling the rock-faces, and pummelling the earth with waves. Blissfully Kimani curled his toes daringly over the cliff-edge and let the spray whip his face.

Gradually his fingers loosened round the apple. Before he knew it, the fruit had slipped. Clutching desperately at the air, Kimani tried to catch the apple. It plummeted into the waves. Kimani screamed, 'Mother, Mother.'

Eyes swollen with sea salt, Kimani watched the wind-whipped waves, searching for the apple. Without warning, the wind reared wildly and lashed Kimani forward. He clutched at the grass; screaming and beating the rock-face for a hold ...

Two tides later they found Kimani, his body water-sodden and bruised. A yellow glossy fruit lay at his feet, rolling on the sand ...

Gerald Kraak, Northcliff High School*

Sea-facing room

From your pretty, lace-framed window
you could see the shrimp-pink shy petunia
and the picture-postcard sea.

Inside, the smell of creeping death
exuded from the bottle-cluttered table
by the bedside;
sheets clung fever-clammy
to your frail arms
dearest aunt.

I entered, silent, took your hand,
you did not speak: I could not whisper.

But when at last I turned to leave,
the gentle rain descended on
deserted streets. All was still.
Without intent,
I let your hand slip;
it fell, cold and motionless.

Two silent aunts sat aside
sketched in dim shades of repressive grey.
I turned, leaving unsaid
all I came to say.

Three old people
cast up on the shores of life
while death, goat-footed,
trips before your faces with his pipe
playing reedy melodies to taunt your tears:
leering with his satyr's face
before his caprice
ends.

Michael D Lindemann†, Northcliff High School

There were riots here once

There were riots here once;
the ground shuddered
beneath furious feet.
Singing sirens
split the night,
and searchlights gripped
sweating faces
and chanting mouths.

There were riots here once,
but now weeds sprawl
where men once sprawled
with bloodied faces.
All passions die
or are suppressed,
and the bloodstains
have been covered up
with pleasant greenery
and government reports
issued in the public interest.

There were riots here once,
but it was found convenient
to move
the former residents of the area
to a new
township.

Anthony Shaw, Michaelhouse

Sweet sad illusion

I am not the silhouette against your hackneyed sunset
The wind does not whisper about me in the trees
You do not see my reflection in running rivers
And my laughter is no tinkling fairy tale
 so when you rub your frosted window
 you see no perfect profile
 only the back of my bent head
 and when you tap I turn slowly
 because I know you are there
 and that you will smile
 not knowing
and you might see that when I smile
 it is slow and half and sardonic
but my eyes you do not see
because you think that they are
 downcast
 you laugh excitedly
and your eager breath mists the window
 once more

and as I disappear I shake my head
 and turn to go
 and if you look
you do not find my footprints in
the sand
 only a sweet faded flower
 from my hair
and at your touch
 the petals fall
 one by one to the ground
each lovely image
 each sad illusion
 sinks away into the sand
 and
 is gone
And if you wish to pick a
 new fresh flower
you will have to live through
 the tired uncertain dawn
that is me
 I am sorry
that this cannot also
 be beautiful

Clare Stopford, St Dominic's Priory, Port Elizabeth*

1973

Come, come along with me

Come,
 come along with me
 to see the blue
 droughtless world
 of happiness.

Come,
 let's stroll along
 the sandy shore
 and pick up the
 lovely-looking pebbles.

Come
along with me
to see the seagulls
fluttering and singing
across the blue waters.

Come,
and let's run
hand in hand
along the tufty
paths of the
lovers' park.

Come,
come along with me
to build those
sandcastles along
the sea shore.

Come
along with me,
let's swim and
bathe in the deep sea,
and leave our sorrows
in the blue sea.

Nkathazo Kamnyayiza, International Correspondence School, Cape Town

How now, brown cow?

How now, brown cow?
Cow?
Hardly a calf.
struggling to find footing on the steel-tempered floor
searching for grass among the steel-tempered railings
How long has it been
since you left your mother in Hout Bay?
How long will it be
till you feel your Maker in Maitland‡?
How now, brown cow?

‡The abattoir is in Maitland.

Mike Kantey, South African College High School*

Mapuza – the police

In the still night,
 as a cat whines in the darkness,
a shadow lurks
 – mapuza,
and the people crouch
 in clenched fists
 of black terror.

A N Swanson, Bishops (Diocesan College)

1974

Apocalypse

I chanced upon a marketplace
that had never been before,
where a great many people stood
and listened.
For a man was speaking in a tongue
that all men knew –
of wars and glory, nations and nobleness;
and the people listened,
so many people –
every creed and race was there, every kind of man,
even a farmer with a stupid donkey:
a donkey with long stupid ears,
grinning stupidly.
But while I watched the forward-pressing crowd,
watched their anxious faces craning,
craning to catch the speaker's flowing words,
the stupid grinning donkey turned to me ...
and winked.

K Duncan, Selborne College

John's brown body

It is six a.m. in Galeshewe. Dark shapes are hurrying in the dawn-dust of the narrow streets. All the Emilys are drawing back the faded curtains that Madam gave them. All the Johns are putting on their overalls and their faces

for the city. Third-hand cars, bicycles and dirty blue buses turn without thought on to the wide tarred road.

An African hops energetically from the bus and walks purposefully towards a shiny clean Shell garage. He is thirty-five and has worked for Mr Reg Sutton for ten years now. He was young and irresponsible when he first started working there, and often his eyes were red and staring, his mouth ready to utter what no man with a brown body should utter.

But now he has settled down and he wipes the glass of the petrol pump vigorously, whistling hard. He thinks that it is good to work at seven in the morning before it gets too hot. But he also thinks of the middle of June when he does not whistle.

And here comes his friend and fellow-worker. He has a second-hand car, a fat jolly wife and a face black as night. They share a joke in the sharp light of morning and their laughter cracks the skies and rolls on the pavement. The laughter rises unfettered from their stomachs; this is their cry of freedom. They remain unrobbed of their sense of humour and are envied their simplicity of pleasure.

The laughter dies in his friend's eyes and his own become veiled like the lion's. Veiled eyes, but aware, as their first customers silently drive into the garage. Ah, what do they see in his brown face – servility, contempt or hatred?

The white faces behind steering wheels in leather covers see nothing. They see nothing because they do not look. They see nothing because their eyes are glued to the moving numbers in the glass face. They will not be swindled out of a few bob by a brown body in a blue overall.

They do not see in his eyes the love he has for his wife and four young children. Two of them, both boys, go to school, and can read better than he can. And his little girl, she is three, and still wobbles on her feet. Because of her turned-in foot she fell yesterday and knocked out one of her white pearlteeth. She did not cry; she is used to falling now, and her father has taught her to laugh at her hurt.

They do not see in his eyes the worried look of a sportsman as he contemplates the possible outcome of the soccer match at the weekend. He plays goalie for the Railway Swallows and they will be playing a league match on Saturday. The problem is how to outwit the opposing team's centre-forward. He has a kick like a bullet – straight and hard.

Many things they do not see in his eyes.

'Fill her up, John.'

'Hey, John, some stickers for the children!'

'Here's a tip. Go and buy yourself a beer, John.'

'How's about some service, John?'

Always they call him John. Don't they know that his name, by christening, is Matthew?

Arlene Jukes, Kimberley Girls' High School

In black and white

He walked into the shop before me.
But the assistant asked me what I wanted.
I stood aside for him
until he had bought his goods
and gone out again.
After I had been served,
I went out.
He was there too
and stole my wallet out of my hand.
Before I knew what had happened, he had gone.
But another in the street
with blood on his forehead
appeared from the crowd,
and with boiling blood
I barged past him, and
knocked him over.
Yet he ran after me,
and, catching me up,
called out, 'Baas.'
I looked around
and he,
with dripping blood,
pressed the wallet into my hand,
and disappeared into the crowd.
Before I knew what had happened, he had gone.

N Sinclair Thomson, Selborne College

Weapon

Club.
A million years later:
H Bomb.
In between,
Pikes
Guns
Machine guns
Gas
All to kill
People we do not know

For reasons we do not know
But they cheer so nicely
When they send us away.

E Watson, Christian Brothers' College, Boksburg

1975

My dive

The flat-bottomed boat echoes the lapping
of the waves.

The sea, a brilliant blue, broken only
by the occasional white horse.

The soft feel of the enclosing wet-suit,
The smell of sweat that comes through,
once fully zipped up.

The loss of hearing when slipping on
the hood.

The face turning red with exertion,
struggling with a sixteen-pound belt
and the heavy harness of the cylinder
full of life.

Then a split second of space
before entering the water,
The metallic rasp of the valve,
The exhaust bubbles racing each
other to the top, expanding as they go.

The crawl of the water into the suit,
up the legs, forcing the air-
bubble up your back
and out at the neck.

The hands turning whiter, like
dancing ghosts.

The bulbous eyes inside the mask
saying what the tongue cannot.

The hand signs, used between divers,
each one an important message.

A silver carpet parting for you,
then closing up.

The sway of soft sea-weed
to music heard only by the plants.

The flash of a camera,
recording a sight never to be seen again.
The resting on the seabed,
a vast stretch of rippled sand.
Divers bouncing, playing like astronauts,
but in two worlds, so far apart.
Hand-feeding the large fish,
timid yet unafraid.
The slow rise to the surface,
breaking it and seeing the world still there.

Michael Annett, Lansdowne High School

Away from the rain

We tuck our newspapers
Under our raincoats
Away from the rain
As we run to our cars,
While others tuck their babes
Under their breasts
Away from the rain
That runs in their houses.

Ronald H Louw, Grey High School, Port Elizabeth

School uniform

Since days of ancient cuneiform,
When men have worn a uniform
It's meant a sad conformity
In individuality.

The schools we have are rigid,
The winter skirts are frigid,
And with all our regularity
We lose our personality.

Are you a repetition
Like subtraction or addition?
Just a large facsimile
Of scruffy Tom and Emily?

Uniforms should soon have vanished,
And ties and bashers all be banished,
And jeans and T-shirts take their place –
We'll look the same in any case!

Julia Martin, Epworth Girls' High School*

If I owned the sun

If I owned the sun that shines in the sky,
And all the people needed it or else they'd die,
And you said, 'Can I have your light?'
I'd say, 'All right.'

If I owned the moon and the stars and the sea,
The earth, the planets and the whole galaxy,
And you said, 'Can I have that too?'
I'd give that to you.

If I owned Howard Hughes and Mao Tse-Tung
And Jenner and Einstein and Wakeman and Jung,
And you said, 'Can I have everyone?'
I'd say, 'Done.'

I'd give you the earth, the moon and the sun,
I'd give you the people like Jenner and Jung,
I'd give you the stars and I'd give you the sea,
But if I had you, I'd keep you for me!

Stuart Stromin, Northcliff High School*

joy

hitch-hiking
60 miles on a map.
country to city
scenery pretty.

and you may ask me, 'How's life?'
and I'll tell you that I saw a field of happy sunflowers, free,
looking at the sun,
except for one,
which was smiling at me.

Stuart Stromin, Northcliff High School*

1976

Fido

What they did when they heard
 their dog meow
 was rip his mask off, to discover
 that he was a cat – they still call him Fido
 but things aren't the same.
 How can you do this to us
 they screamed.
 You wrapped a collar round my neck
 Fido answered
 You taught me to beg and carry newspapers
 and fetch sticks
 but I am a cat, not a dog.
 Don't give us that
 they said.
 You will stay a dog
 They locked him in his kennel, put a different
 collar on him each day –
 made catnip illegal, force-fed him,
 crammed food down his throat,
 looked at each other and
 nodded their heads and said
 look how kind we are to Fido –
 see how we feed him on what's good
 for him and
 see how ungrateful he is –
 see how he struggles as we feed him nice things
 to eat. Fido isn't a nice dog.
 And so they treated Fido and argued over
 what to do with him –
 but they were secretly afraid
 of Fido
 although they wouldn't admit
 to anyone, not even
 to themselves
 that they were. They wondered
 if they themselves had
 masks on, so they grabbed
 their faces and pulled.

Their faces came off
and they all rushed
to the mirror to see
what was there, but
they could see nothing because
their mirrors were too old
and cracked.
So they pretended that nothing
had happened
and anyway, they didn't really want
to see themselves.
They locked up a few people whose mirrors were
clean and called these people all
sorts of names.

One day they will grow old
and feeble,
and Fido will be strong; he will tear off
his dog costume
and his coat of many collars
and break down his kennel
and scratch their eyes out, like a cat.
And he will, too.

Robin Auld, Fish Hoek High School*

Solomon

I stood reverently at the doorway, the red dust tickling my nostrils, and watched as the pall-bearers wound their way through thorn bushes, their burden strapped across the top of a bicycle.

In its wake came a sea of uncles, aunts and cousins, followed by those who regarded funerals with the same respect as the local Galeshewe soccer matches. In the distance the pealing of bells mingled with the murmurs of the mourners.

I cleared my throat and turned to the old man sitting at the edge of the red-polished stoep. I was not quite sure what I was going to say to him, but it had certainly puzzled me when I had heard that Solomon had refused to attend his daughter's funeral. He showed no signs of distress.

'Solomon, are you perhaps feeling too ill to attend the funeral?' I ventured cautiously.

He turned round and gave me a toothy grin.

‘No, Father, I am feeling very well!’ he said, rather emphatically. ‘I prefer not to enter a church, that is all.’

‘I am afraid I do not understand, Solomon.’ My frown deepened as I waited for his answer.

‘It is a long story ...’ he said, uncertain of what I might be thinking of him and his notions.

I indicated that I wished him to continue.

‘Hearing the bell just now took me back many years to the Church of the Annunciation in the small township of Blanco. I can still hear the priest lashing the buttocks of the young truants who stayed away from Mass, because they had no decent clothes. We were poor those days, Father, but when Father O’Leary said Mass, every villager discarded his tatters and put on his Sunday best. Yes, we were taught always to enter the Temple of God properly dressed in starched shirts and blue serge.’

He chuckled and added thoughtfully, ‘No wonder Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden; they must have mislaid their Sunday best, and figs were not in season then!’

He paused for effect.

I gave him a clerical smile.

‘Father O’Leary instructed us not to slaughter the black ox for our ancestors or to wear hides to cover ourselves. Instead he taught us how to chop and pluck a turkey, because all civilised people did that. He told us that people who wear skins are barbarians and those who smear their faces with ochre are savages!’

He turned his head swiftly and spat his accumulated bitterness and disgust on to the ground.

‘I heeded his advice. I exchanged all my skins for the gaudiest Carnaby Street gear you ever saw. I wiped the ochre from my wife’s face and gave her Helena Rubinstein’s cosmetics. Then we left the village and went to the city, where all the civilised people go, but there we were turned away.’

His face twisted in a grimace, his fingers fiddling with the grey hairs on his chin.

‘Sometimes I long to go back to where I come from, Father. Just the other day I heard young Father Gabriel telling his fellow priests that the sermons have been in vain and that “these people are reverting to barbarism!”’ He reflected on this for a few moments and a sadness crept into his eyes. He stared up at me, pleadingly. ‘That may be true, Father, but what am I expected to do when there is “No Admittance” for me in the strip joints that proliferate in the “Red light” districts of your civilised cities? Why you don’t chastise these people is a mystery to me, Father. What happened to the canes we were lashed with?’

He stopped for breath, then whispered slowly and distinctly, ‘Father, why don’t you give these godless creatures a hiding they will never forget?’

I remained silent, concentrating on the small cracks in the stoep
surrounding my well-polished black shoes.

Solomon smiled, pleased at my embarrassment.

We shook hands and I took my leave down the winding path to the
church, suffering from mental indigestion.

Elizabeth Boucher, Kimberley Girls' High School

The case for murder

The scythe arcs, whistling
and detaches
separates
the
blade
of grass.
murder?
no. necessity.
the dart spills, soaring
and thuds.
the cow
topples
on
to
my
plate.
murder?
no. necessity.
the gun shudders, smoking
and screams
like
the man
convulsing.
necessity?
no. murder.

Shaun Johnson, Hyde Park High School*

Caring

i don't care if you break my back
(i said to my orthopaedic surgeon)
i don't care if you squeeze my heart out
(i said to my cardiac specialist)

i don't care if you pluck my brains off
(i said to my neuro-surgeon)
i don't care if you make the noose knot tight
(i said to my hangman)

then
i kicked him in the back
spat on his heart
hammered a nail into his head
and let him swing.

Stuart Stromin, Northcliff High School*

1977

Love

I don't think my brothers love me;
Little brothers seldom do.
But then again maturity
May bring a change or two.

I'm sure my mother loves me,
At least more oft than not.
We have our ups and downs, of course,
But that's a daughter's lot.

I know my daddy loves me;
I'm the apple of his eye,
I'm nice to him; he's nice to me
And calls me 'Sugar Pie'.

I love an awful lot of folk,
Young, old and in between.
The in-between ones are the best
Tall, dark and seventeen.

Beryl Gendall, Eveline High School, Bulawayo

1977

'Meet my folks'

'Please come in, and meet my folks.'
He smiles –
Mother is watering the roses
(we do have a gardener!)
'I'm just finished,'
but the ground is still caked hard and dry.
She is dressed in her best –
For the occasion.

'Do come inside.'
Father enters
Grinning broadly,
'I've just – er – mended the vacuum,' –
We don't have a vacuum!
He is wearing a suit –
For the occasion.

'Please sit down';
He seats himself –
in a straight-backed chair,
a vase of roses on his left
(His old, worn, 'comfy' chair has gone)
For the occasion.

A high-pitched giggle from behind the door,
a row of grinning faces –
'Susan's boyfriend!'
The neighbourhood kids have gathered –
For the occasion.

John happens to be passing through,
On his way out.
'I'm off on my bike!'
A smug grin –
He doesn't have a bike!
He is dressed in a black leather jacket
(His friend Jack's!)
For the occasion.

Mother enters,
Carrying a tray of cakes –
(Specially from the bakery)
For the occasion.

She sits,
Crosses her legs.
'Well,' she says –
'What a surprise!'

Debbie Lansdown, Northcliff High School

To some guy somewhere

I have no self-respect
Anymore.
You took it
in your gentle lying hands
and hold it
 tauntingly
For all to see.

Humiliation cuts deep
Deep cuts scar
and the hurt
 of the cut
scarred my memory
into tight
 twisted
Hate.

And I,
 naïve, believed
I hated you
until it ebbed
away
and I am left
with a stain
of bitter shame.

Kate Philip, Herschel Girls School

Untitled

Soweto
is a word in a blustering headline,
heard vaguely on the morning news.
Soweto is another world.

Our world is one of
rugby and
eccentric schoolmasters.

We complain bitterly of
hair regulations
and
no pudding on Sundays.
Our talk is of
girls
and how the hell
they can select Snyman
and
how amusing it is
that Mark is going out with Judy.

In Soweto
Bullets tear flesh and smash bone
and the flaring fires of discontent
stain the sky.
But Soweto is a long way away.

Matthew Walton, St Andrew's College, Grahamstown

1978

Listening to 'While my guitar gently weeps'

Sitting in a haze of drug-dazed music,
Watching the lazy sunbeams stagger past
Crying buttery tears
The drunken sun
Has seeped into the dusty cracks of my mind.

Somewhere an electric guitar is wailing gently
Scooping up and down in champagne bubbles of sound.
I can almost see
The sun wavering on the frets,
Dribbling down into the gravel-golden chords.

Waves are pulsating through the mist in my head,
Breaking into wheat-coloured surf behind my eyes

The sun is licking
The borders of infinity
Like a fat marmalade cat with a liquid-gold tongue.

Drums are dropping nuggets into the sun's smile
Chewing-gum strands of notes are tangled in the light –
I'm flying high
On an intoxicating dream.
Some time, long, long ago, I think I got lost.

Helen Moffett, Hottentots-Holland High School*

A turning point

The dove soared towards the branch. A brain stimulus flicked up a secondary feather on the wing and the path of the flight swung directly in line with the branch. The dove alighted on the branch, the sun warming his back. He started to preen himself.

Far below a boy of about nine, barefoot and in shorts, squinted along a barrel. Shuffling his feet, he positioned himself better. His hand curled around the wooden butt; the index finger stretched out and tightened on the trigger. The finger squeezed.

The pellet hit the dove's head, spreading as the lead penetrated. The head fell. Wings closed, the dove tumbled out of the tree until the body struck the earth.

The boy ran and looked at the bundle of feathers that twitched on the ground. He bent down and felt the body. It was still warm. Where the pellet had entered, the dark blood soaked the ruffle of feathers. He pulled his hand away. It had a smear of blood upon it. He climbed into the cellar and picked up a spade. When he was finished he walked inside and washed the blood off.

That small boy was me a few years ago. With a single squeeze of the finger I had wiped out a whole life, a whole collection of memories. I had stopped two miracles: the brain and the heart.

Mark Shepherd, King Edward VII School

1979

Can you relate to lentils?

My analyst says that the thing is to work within an organic framework. I mean like lentil loaf and yoghurt. Like, plastic food, you know, it's poison.

He feels, you know, that you are what you eat and what we all want to be is, like, organic and really together.

Sylvia and Brian are really getting it together. You know they had a 'trial separation' and now they are into open marriage. Well, anyway, Joan was at their second wedding and she told me all about it. They had it on top of a hill with a few close friends and some of Brian's business associates. They got an old farmer to marry them. They recited from the Koran and some Spanish poetry, you know. Joan says Sylvia was wearing a kaftan that her hairdresser Georg lent her. That man dresses divinely.

Hey, if you ever want to get into some really organic food, go to Marcie's. Marcia Stallis just opened it, it's just opened, it's right at the end of Sunset Boulevard. Marcia's food has always been amazing but otherwise I don't think that she's really such a together person. My analyst feels that if she and Adam had just got into free-association more often, it wouldn't have happened.

You don't know what happened! Darling, where have you BEEN? Well, you knew they were having trouble relating to their kids? So, they got into a fight about it and Adam moved out. Now he's living with a 19-year-old agriculturalist. This kid made him take up jogging and tennis and he went vegi.

That's why Marcia learnt to cook organic food. Adam wouldn't come and visit the kids if there was meat in the house.

Before you go, one more thing and don't let this go any further ... They say that Rex and Dina are getting into PAIN. You know about their Czechoslovakian yoga teacher – well, I've often heard that she's a kinky dame and now apparently Rex has been seen in saddlery shops (and I know he doesn't ride) and Dina has been wearing DARK GLASSES! I've always felt that that sort of thing goes against everything ORGANIC. Thank God my Jamie isn't like that! You know, although we don't believe in permanent commitment, we really have a meaningful relationship.

Well, right now I must go and relate to the kids and some of my potplants for a while. My analyst feels that if we could all just COMMUNICATE a little more, everything would be so much more together.

I'll see you on Friday and bring some unsalted sunflower seeds with you, you know how we feel about salt ...

Laura Menachemson, Hyde Park High School

Fifteen

When I was five I always thought
ten more years and I'll be
fifteen.

The perfect age when you
 go out with boys,
 The perfect age when you
 can wear make-up,
 The perfect age when you
 can stay out till twelve or even one,
 The perfect age when you
 have lots of books to carry home from school,
 The perfect age when you
 can kiss – properly
 and even swear!
 It seemed all a dream and adventure.
 But now that I'm fifteen I wish I were
 five again.
 The innocent age when you're
 not heartbroken and confused over boys,
 The innocent age when you
 don't get pimples and spots,
 The innocent age when you're
 not blown up about being in late,
 The innocent age when you
 don't have so much work to do,
 The innocent age when you
 aren't teased about the way you kiss.
 But, I wonder, being twenty-one must be . . .

Miranda Rajah, Waterford Kamhlaba United World College

1980

To tell a story

Old man Schoeman sat in his old Postmaster's house in front of a large window, dragging on his pipe and spitting tobacco into the smouldering left-overs of his fire. He sat, mostly quietly, thinking of his life. A life which, according to the Bible's three score and ten years' limit, was, like the fire, at its end.

He thought of his story-telling. Old man Schoeman was a very good story-teller, mainly for two reasons. One was that he was naturally good at telling stories, and the other was that he had seen and loved so much of life. Wherever he went, things would happen, and he would watch, taking in all that happened.

Just as he finished this chain of thought, a knock at his door ended the day's deep-thinking session, and awakened the old man to the real world, of which he was still a part. As he moved to the door, a small spark popped from the fire, causing a cloud of ash to form – there was still a little fire left.

At the door was Michael Davidson, one of the few teenaged boys left in the Kloof. All the others had gone to boarding school near Durban. Michael was different, though, and content to stay in the still wild Kloof area.

'Come in, my son, come in,' gruffed old man Schoeman. He was not used to having visitors, especially young ones, unless they came for a story-tell. 'What do you want then, Michael, m'boy? Do you need me for anything, or are you here just to give me a message?' asked the old man.

Michael was tempted to lie and say that yes, he'd been sent to give a message, but that, somehow, he'd forgotten it. He hardly knew the old man, and was feeling very uneasy, especially because of the purpose of his visit. He felt hot, but decided to carry out his plan.

'Yes, sir, there is something I need you for, but, I, I ...' – he tried to slow down – 'I don't know if you'll want to at all,' he finally said.

The old man saw the boy's fear and apprehension, and beckoned him to come in, sit down and feel at home. 'Sorry the fire's nearly out,' he said. 'I know it's not very polite to have a guest in a cold house. ... Well, what is it, then,' he said, himself sitting down, 'do you need something that I have?'

'In a way, yes, sir, I do.' He stopped; he still felt very uneasy. He saw the old man looking, and decided that he'd better hurry, so as not to annoy him. But he still stumbled over his words.

'Well, sir, what I'd like you to do, is ... is to teach me how to tell stories. Like you do, so that everyone is as involved as they get at the bioscope.'

The old man felt a glow inside. People had always loved his stories, he knew, but no one had ever asked to become an apprentice. He took a couple of small logs and poked them into the fire. A few flames began to burn the wood, and grew. No, the fire was not out yet.

'Well, the first thing you'd better do is learn how to speak properly. You've been mumbling and stuttering like you're frozen. Anyway, why are you so interested in story-telling, huh?'

And so on they talked, the boy explaining how he loved the Kloof and its naturalness, and old-fashionedness, but mainly how he loved the outdoors, especially the trees. And he explained how story-telling, especially stories about the old wars and way of life, was part of the Kloof, something that should never disappear from the woods.

They talked for hours, and by the end the boy had lost any feeling of anxiety, and actually felt good with the old man. As Michael was leaving, the old man said, 'There's nothing I can teach you; I can only make you realise the world, and how things work. I can, and must, let you find the true spirit of the Kloof – the old Kloof from where all the stories come. In the end,

I can tell you stories which you can tell later. But you'll never be able to tell the stories the way I do until you've discovered.'

The boy left, puzzled, and the old man stepped back indoors, realising that he'd been a bit too sentimental in his last 'speech'. But, since he'd said it, he may as well leave it.

So, from that day a friendship formed between the boy and the old man. Every time the two went on a walk old man Schoeman would tell the boy a new story, but often interrupted to show the boy an interesting plant, or to point out some scampering animal as it fled.

One day the two went fishing in a small river that cut through the hills. The old man and the boy fished throughout the morning, and kept only enough fish for lunch. They filleted them and roasted them over a small fire. They drank the river water, too – the whole meal was supplied by the river.

As Michael sat near the fire warming his hands and tidying up the small mess they had made, the old man walked over to a large rock, and sat down to rest and warm himself in the sun. He began another story, but soon dozed off. Michael didn't mind, and carried on tidying up, and then went on a short stroll. He returned shortly, finding his way back by following the old man's snoring. He then too sat down, and dozed off.

When he woke up the old man was still leaning against the rock sleeping. He turned to him and began to shake him. His head just slumped to one side, and his mouth fell open. He was dead. Michael had no problem in seeing that.

The watering of his eyes from the fire became real tears as he slowly picked up the old man, holding him over one shoulder.

He carried him the whole way, silently, and, when he reached his house, set the old man down in his chair. He then built up the fire, which had died while they were out.

He reported the death to the police and the area's only doctor. The old man was pronounced dead and removed. A funeral would be held on the next Sunday.

That night Michael stayed in old man Schoeman's house. He had no reason to, except that he wanted to be as near to his friend as possible. He was thinking over the happy days that he'd had with the old man, and each memory led to another.

On the Sunday *he*, not the schoolmaster who was Schoeman's oldest friend, was asked to speak at the old man's funeral. The whole population of the Kloof turned up to see old man Schoeman for the last time, and to silently thank him for the many pleasant times he had given them.

Then it came time for Michael to speak. He began slowly and as calmly as possible. But as he spoke of the old man tears shone in his eyes, and his voice gurgled at times. He told of how he had gone to the old man and asked for help, how they had become friends. He talked on, about their walks and

picnics, about how the old man was part of the Kloof. Part of every tree, every bush, every mushroom.

And then he told of their last fishing trip, and how they had had a 'last lunch' together. How the old man dozed off, and how his snoring helped Michael locate the camp. Then he told, very slowly, how the old man had dozed into death.

And, as he finished, he looked up. In front of him stood the Kloof's whole population, listening, intent and silent. Just as they had listened to the old man, they listened to Michael now. He had told his first story.

Andy Foose, Waterford Kamhlaba United World College

1981

Futura

They lie around like so many corpses, motionless in contoured body-holders. The occasional flick of a limp wrist displays some apathetic life in a painted metacarpus. An orange-haired head rolls sluggishly.

The softly psychedelic lights embedded in the ceiling, their light fighting its way through a miasma of twisting, perfumed smoke, turn and converge on a circular platform in the centre of the room. A voice, never heard, but always understood, announces: '*Futura. The Amazing Dancing Woman of the Future.*'

A languid ripple courses through the sybarites. Numbed fingers fumble to re-light golden joints in ivory holders. Purple lips part sensuously, as if to taste a forthcoming presence. Reptilian eyes swing slowly to the circle.

And then, suddenly, she is there – clad only in a tight, sequined leotard, her body twisting, forcing itself into suggestive positions, re-forming into tortuous postures explosively erotic enough to jar the jaded minds looking on, even for an instant, from the blur of absconding life.

Each blasé eye sees her differently. Each invests her with a separate reality. To some she is a multi-legged monster, a titillating scare; to others, a lascivious machine of exotic fantasy.

Then, all too soon, she is finished, with a final thrust of her tightly-enclosed pelvis. The acolytes' bodies curl and give her groans of obeisance. For a moment they flicker heavily-bedecked eyelids in homage, then settle back into semi-conscious fecklessness.

And the manager smiles from his observation booth, to see the haggard wretch who stumbles from the circle.

Shaun de Waal, Hyde Park High School*

Sixteen in South Africa

The *Natal Mercury* lies sprawled on Mom and Dad's bed
I glance at the captions, one or two articles
This is the news!

'Good relations 'coz Reagan's Republican,
Taiwan's going to make us great,
Constellation of states will work out fine
And the Blacks are content with the cactus,
President's council is people's council.'

No mention of nomination. Though.
I'm meant to swallow it all
As if I'm not fed enough on diluted dash
But, I am only sixteen in South Africa
Sixteen, sexless, stupid, sweet.

No questions, no answers, no dumb commitment
Like being tied up eternally with unbreakable chains
Can't move my hands or they'll be cut off
Can't move my feet or they'll be trod on
Can't open my mouth 'coz it's gagged with too little education
Can't do a damn thing
Sixteen, sexless, stupid, sweet.

I scratch my head, I scratch my nose
Write something so someone can say 'pretty'
Wear clothes so someone can say 'cute'.
I'm fed up! Fed up!
My body is but a bundle of beastly beauty
Like a porcelain bowl, candle holder,
It moves according to somebody else's direction
It gets filled with somebody else's food
And the only light it bears is the flicker of maternal, paternal affection.

I'm on the shelf, dresser, dining-room table
On exhibition
Sixteen, sexless, sickeningly sweet
In South Africa.

Heather Robertson, Parkhill High School*

1982

The pub

The pub was made of dark wood and thick beams. Varnished barstools stood beneath faded pictures of army officers, and above where the huge German barman stood, hung an old, yet well-oiled Mauser. All this in a town with an unpronounceable name; standing in the powder-heated land of Namibia.

Amazing to me is how true South African incidents can happen in a land which has already had independence and elections (free and fair) for almost a year now.

Laughing heartily to themselves, they finished off their draught beer and ordered another round. Their brown long shorts and long rugby socks (Tukkies) were covered in filth and mud from the land and farms where they had all been working in the morning. But at one o'clock, when the sun was at its harshest, they routinely stopped work and migrated to the city centre for refreshment.

No wonder South West Africa is still an A-class mandate. All the farm-owners stop work at one o'clock, so you can imagine what the blacks get up to all afternoon! The League of Nations' Mandates Commission had better watch that agriculture is being developed to its full potential.

The German barman, leaning against the bar counter, began lazily to crush a fine column of ants one at a time with a matchstick as they reached his glass of brandy. Seeing the line almost destroyed and in disarray, he contemptuously turned away from them, no longer interested. He decided to polish his beer mugs instead.

'Give them a little,' my father always said, 'and then they will take everything.' Perhaps that's why my mother left him, he didn't give her anything.

Four hours of drinking had passed and our group of friends had moved to one of the tables in the bar. One of their number, a small thin farmer who had never quite made a success of farming, called over the black waiter who was immaculately dressed in white.

'Can I help you, Sir?' he asked.

'Is jy SWAPO?' asked the farmer.

The group burst out in hysterical laughter. The waiter, ruffled and hurt, tried to remain calm.

'Of course I'm not, Sir,' replied the waiter.

'Ja? Maar jy lyk soos SWAPO!' cried the farmer, grinning.

The group stood up and staggered out of the bar. The waiter, smiling to himself, turned and moved silently off.

The ants were falling into the brandy and swarming all over the bar counter.

Craig Barnard, King Edward VII School

Moment of truth

Peter Sands looked gloomily at the forms in his hand. 'You are cordially invited to come and get killed,' he mused, and tossed the papers on to the table. In January he would be in Elandsfontein, wherever that was, at the beginning of his national service stint. They couldn't make him do it.

There was no way they could force him to kill poor people who were fighting for a cause they believed in. Now that he thought of it, he wondered if their cause wasn't quite right. What kind of government forces young men to kill each other? And so he decided: Peter James Sands was going to join the ranks of the conscientious objectors.

The train journey had been long and dull. After a ride in the army truck to the military complex, he and the others were yelled at and shoved in the general direction of the barracks. Peter Sands didn't like this kind of treatment, but he was intimidated by the angry officer and the obedient attitude of his friends, and he did as he was told. When evening came and the new recruits were sent to bed, he mused over what had made him come; they would have arrested him if he hadn't. Should he object to what he had to do? Not yet, there would be time for that later. He had no grounds to complain conscientiously during basics.

During the course of the next few weeks, he became far more used to obeying orders. He no longer resented being told to march, stand on his head or to carry logs around the parade ground. He began to respond to commands automatically, almost without thinking, and the iron-hard discipline was drilled into him day by day. After nine weeks of intensive training he could crawl under barbed wire, throw a hand grenade, swing from trees with ropes, and throw himself flat at a single command and shoot a hole through a target.

It was now time to move to the second part of his training, intensive instruction in guerrilla tactics and bush warfare. Again he contemplated making some objection, or just telling them that he wasn't going to kill anyone, but he didn't consider it of much importance at this stage. He was vaguely conscious of having lost some of his identity, of being more of a war machine than a human being, but he shrugged it off and decided that, as he wasn't going to see any terrorists or 'freedom fighters' as he had previously called them, there wasn't much point in worrying about it just yet.

At 10h00, on 15 April, 1981, Rifleman Peter James Sands departed for Katimo Mulilo in the Caprivi Strip. He was remotely aware that he wouldn't take much pride in having exterminated a terrorist. But what a man has to do must be done, and for the safety of the State it was essential that this unpleasant task had to be carried out.

A few weeks later an army helicopter reported a small contingent of terrorists just inside the SWA/Angola border. Troops were despatched to

seek out and destroy the potentially dangerous force. Among them was Rifleman Sands. The group travelled as far as possible by Jeep, and then proceeded further on foot. Trackers located the fresh tracks left by five enemy, and, in compliance with standard bush tactics, an ambush was laid in dense bush for the coming foe.

The perfectly disciplined men waited patiently for two hours. Then the sounds of a stealthily approaching party alerted the watchful security force. They waited until the five blacks were almost upon them, and then opened fire with short bursts of rapid fire. Peter Sands saw horror in the eyes of the man as he pulled the trigger of his semi-automatic rifle. The man's body jerked like a comical puppet before dropping to the sand. Peter ran up and bent over the mutilated flesh. Shuffled images of former ideas cascaded through his mind. He stared in confusion, and shook his head to clear away the fog. He saw a dead man whom he had murdered, and a sob choked in his throat and his chest heaved. He turned away in confused disbelief and disgust. His emotions moved from despair, to anger, to grief, and all the time unfixed images whirled through his mind. He sought something firm to cling on to, anything strong, established, respected.

And then his buddies were patting him on the back, and cheering him and congratulating him, and he turned and saw a dead terrorist, whom he had killed, and his heart filled with pride, and that night Rifleman Peter James Sands was toasted in the mess as Terrorist Killer and Communist Exterminator.

David Montgomery, Bishops (Diocesan College)

Discrimination

You drew the
clear
precise line between the witch and the fairy
categorising and labelling my dreams

But I'm recognising the grey
between the black and white
on the chessboard
of my life
and it's my move now.

Ronel Slabbert, Diocesan School for Girls, Grahamstown

1983

His coy mistress replies

Consider now, my love, the rose
 Whose beauty slowly richer grows.
 The tender bud so tight and pale
 Who shyly opens out her veil
 To blush beneath the sun's warm gaze
 And, nurtured by the dew of days,
 Will raise her head in regal pride
 And spread her crimson Cape so wide
 That when her velvet petals part,
 Unhurried, she'll reveal her heart.
 But the rose who opens ere her time,
 Who flaunts the beauty of her prime,
 Will quickly ripen and, soon old,
 Her heart will blacken, burnt and cold.
 Her petals brown and curled and dry
 Will swiftly fall and she will die.
 So be content to wait for me
 For we are young and should be free
 From fear of death and need for haste.
 Be patient, for we must not waste
 Our love's slow blooming, sweet and pure,
 For so our joy will long endure.
 And should our lot so curtail'd be
 That, ere the time has come, must we
 Lie pure in bare and chilly tomb,
 Remember death is but the womb
 From which we'll come, unspoiled and white,
 To find a new, deserv'd delight.
 A space unfettered by the earth,
 A globe of endless, boundless girth,
 Of distances so great that time
 Will creep and stumble, left behind.
 Then coyness shall I cast away
 Where time's clipped pinions have to stay,
 And we shall wander, eagle-free,
 And soar and swoop and love with glee.
 For then we'll be forever one
 Beneath our own unmoving sun.

Catherine Bellina, Collegiate High School for Girls

A woman's place

We had been swimming naked in the sheltered pool right at the northern end of the gully. In glorious abandon, we had thrown off our clothes and plunged into the icy stillness, shattering the glassy surface with our small brown bodies and splashing up shreds of glittering water. Yelling and shouting, we swam right to the bottom and became evil crocodiles preying on fish before our breath ran out and we shot upwards again.

Afterwards we lay in the sun, the five of us indistinguishable with our short hair and strong arms and fast legs. Adam and Joe tried to bully us because they were eight and we were all only six but there were three of us so we won that skirmish. Soon after this satisfactory diversion, Mr Lemmins, Adam's father, offered to take us fishing. Eagerly we piled into the back of his car and were taken to the trout pools, dressed in our shorts only because of the heat. I managed to catch three small fish of unknown origin and Adam and Joe each caught a trout but they were helped by Adam's father. We pooled our catch and I gloated over my three, looking to my brother for his opinion.

'Quite good,' said Joe, grinning.

'For a girl,' said Adam.

There was a short silence. Mr Lemmins stared at me, and, suddenly terrified, I stared back. His mouth dropped open and he said, or rather whispered, 'You are a girl?'

I nodded. He was furious. He made me wear his jersey and all the way home in the car he shouted at me for being an 'indecent little girl' and how ashamed I should feel in front of the boys.

Trembling in his unbearably hot jersey, I huddled against Joe. All the boys stared silently out of the window.

I never understood his anger then. But my mother did and she was angry with him.

Kathleen Dey, Kingsmead College*

Lizard

He lay dazzled,
Trying to watch the birds,
But blinded by the sun.

Nguni Muchaka, Prince Edward School, Harare

That ... love issue

Commitment.

Well, why not? I mean, I like you.

But please don't ask me to say –

I love you!

I couldn't bear it,

to insult you like that, you know.

Although I suppose one could say

I am affected by you,

concerned for you, and

not slightly disturbed by your presence

(and, at times, too, the lack of it).

And, you know, this is all

suddenly becoming very confusing to me now.

So, would you understand

what I meant if I said –

'I don't know

what to say!'

you know.

Margot Pienaar, Pretoria High School for Girls

Tuesday morning in the city

I'm becoming used to it at last. Curious glances and inquisitive eyes do not penetrate as deeply as before. And she still walks on unknowingly. Blue-eyed, golden-haired WASP, so *very* white.

A little smile as we cross the street, uncertainty and unfamiliarity masking any of her other emotions. Fat woman pushing pram stops and stares at the spectacle. I grin happily at her – strange masochism. It's getting dangerous now – dangerous because I'm beginning to enjoy it. Warm sunlight highlighting blonde hair down Smith Street. Turn left and into West. Stops to look at ridiculously expensive Parisian finery in store-window.

'Ridiculously expensive,' she murmurs.

She goes into the store. I wait. Down West again. White shoppers on white bench waiting for white bus. White glances – black grin.

Police van ... sudden disappearance of black grin. Walk past it separately? No. Sunlight on number-plate, SAP 123456. Sunlight on gold SAP lettering, six feet off the ground. Warm smile from blue eyes, weak grin from me. Almost past. Screaming heartbeat gradually reduced to monotony. Breathing rate slowing. I swallow dryness from my throat.

‘Stop.’

Cadbury wrapper in corner of crack on pavement. Blue eyes look back inquiringly. Mine don’t.

‘Come here.’

Two White, one Black. Six feet times three equals eighteen feet. Five feet six times one equals five feet six. Remain aloof. Pretend to be foreign? No.

Boycotting school, molesting a white woman, immorality ... Waterford Kamhlaba United World College, Swaziland. Equal rights, no consideration to colour or creed. ANC training? No. Walking, not molesting. Friend, not victim. Conversation, not copulation.

‘Lies.’

Boycotting school, molesting woman, immorality ... into the van for a search.

‘You can’t do that ... you can’t ... hasn’t done anything ...’

Indignant protests. Ignore them. Forget it, blue eyes, this is Oom Piet, not good ol’ Uncle Sam. Hands, still calm and steady on the white doors, bring me into the dark interior. White wire-mesh on windows. Corrugated metal floor. Five feet six standing uncomfortably. Six feet two doubled over. Questions. Stay calm.

Friend, American. Not boycotting school, on holiday. Turn out pockets. Remain aloof. Calm, reassuring voice murmurs answers from constricted throat in English accent, recently developed. Afraid I left my Molotov Cocktail at home today, Sergeant.

Sprawled on floor. Pain ... blood ... a taste of salt ... split lip. Ornate ring on third finger of his right hand. A slap then, not a fist ... even more humiliating. Tear forming in left corner of eye. Self-pity welling up in left corner of heart. Both brushed aside impatiently, ashamedly. Thank God he was so awkwardly placed. Count your blessings. Pick yourself up. Sorry I was cheeky, baas. Combination of fury and humiliation, and fear building up. Suppress it. Infamous weak grin exposing gashed – no, torn lip, and bloodstained teeth. Red blood on white Renaissance shirt, R12,99. Must be my Communist inclinations. SABC NEWS:

‘A total onslaught was mounted today on Pillay’s Communist inclinations. Some of his Red fervour was lost.’

Commercial break.

‘New two-fisted PUNCH will make your white shirt with bloodstains absolutely, totally, PURE WHITE. We cannot guarantee that for your skin, however.’

Thank you, Esmé.
 'Reference book, I.D.!'
 Don't carry one. Brown Black, not Black Black. Black boots glower at me. Corrugated metal floor presses into soles of trainers.
 'Out.'
 Over and out. Make for door, dripping blood on corrugated metal floor.
 'Stop.'
 Freeze.
 'Wipe up your blood.'
 On hands and knees, white handkerchief moistened with pink saliva swabbing corrugated metal floor. I look up at last.
 Contemptuous eyes.
 'Out.'
 Out ... over?
 Glowering black boot on left corner of buttocks aids exit. Ultimate indignity. Sprawling on hard, blue-grey tar. Smells warm. Tastes warm. Sunlight glints maliciously off store windows.
 Pick yourself up.
 Sorry baas, thank you baas.
 Gold hair, white face – blue eyes wide with ... contempt? No, shock. Sunlight glints maliciously off curious glances and inquisitive stares. Amused eyes, excited eyes, sympathetic eyes, frightened eyes, sardonic eyes ... white youth, black leather jacket, about my age. Derision. You asked for it, pal. You got it.
 Nice chick, though.
 Casually I take out my handkerchief. Use the side without snot or tears or blood to wipe face, rub ineffectually at shirt. Shock un-freezing in her eyes. Replaced by ... contempt?
 No, concern.
 'You all right?'
 Sure.

Dan Pillay, Waterford Kamhlaba United World College*

1984

Empty chair

It's been painted yellow and one of the legs creaks a bit, but its magic is still there. It is the only part of the empty white kitchen that holds her memory and when I see the old chair huddled against the warmth of the stove I can smell the interior of a grass hut again and feel that she is here again.

Every afternoon I – a scruffy young boy – would come wandering home from school, socks down, dragging my satchel in the dust behind. I would come moaning into the kitchen about how nasty teachers were and what a horrific amount of homework there was. Then she would, as she had since my early cradle days, hoist me on to her aproned lap and there, next to the bubbling stove, I would sit for hours gazing into her big, glowing, black face. The dreary kitchen would slowly be woven into a web of myths and fantasies.

On the chair we would float in the rain god's black cloud back to his Butterworth home. (Meanwhile our host on top of the fridge would click and jabber from a rusty, old portable radio.) She would spin stories about my family and ancestors – much to my mother's displeasure – turning my grandfather into a conservative crocodile and my step-uncle into a vagrant baboon that used to steal the neighbour's sheep. She would tell tales of how great grandmother Hyena used to dance to the mbira all day long until, at one September sunset, she turned into an aloe for no apparent reason; stories of how the children's clay oxen turned into grazing spirits at full moon; of the cunning old cobra that married the chief's beautiful daughter; and of how the whispering stream took its revenge on the water spirits. She talked of dry droughts and wet rains, of red dust sunrises, of witchdoctors' herbs, of assegais and honeycombs, of wide African plains and ... and so we sat whiling away my childhood (while our King William's Town host supplied the music).

In the corner, huddled next to the stove, stands the empty chair laden with memories. My nanny has long since gone, gone back to Butterworth on the rain god's black cloud.

Justin Fox, South African College High School*

African touchdown

As I sat in the familiar seats of the old Hawker Siddley 748 I smiled at the thought of being home in Zambia once more.

My three-month stay in England had been most enjoyable, especially all the luxuries and night life that many take for granted there. But even so I missed the outdoor life, and gloated over the hunting and fishing trips that awaited me.

The one-hour flight from Lusaka to Ndola dragged on, the only sound being that of the monotonous, droning engines.

But as we began to descend through the thick cloud cover, the landscape came into view. There was an immediate revival among the passengers (who were mainly tourists) as they broke into excited conversation, the British voices somewhat more reserved than the Americans'.

The contrast between their attitudes now and shortly after take-off from Lusaka airport amazed me. To think many of them were at one stage on the verge of refusing to fly in 'this tin can' and holding tightly to their seat armrests as the plane took off, amused me tremendously.

The nervous tension at the idea of dying in the African bush while on holiday had completely disappeared as the passengers observed everything below.

Ndola could be seen on the far horizon but no one was interested in that. As I peered out of a window through the rotating propellers, I saw the welcoming sight of the bush. Trees like giant mushrooms seemed to spread to eternity on all sides.

The only breaks in vegetation were the serpent-like rivers that twisted and turned through the never-ending vegetation, and the red dirt roads that only a knowing eye could spot with ease. On one such road I saw a vehicle, glistening in the sun, picking its way round pot-holes and fallen trees, and my blood began to tingle as I was again reminded of the bush trips I would be going on.

But as we came closer to the city the scenery began to change rapidly. The trees were fewer, the vegetation far less dense, and small villages, farms and army camps came into view.

Then we passed over the industrial area where thick columns of black smoke poured out of enormous chimneys, forming a mushroom cloud over the whole area as it mixed with the red dust that rose from open-cast mines. Heavy industrial machines, factories and mine workings shattered the expected ideas in the tourists' minds, and once again they lapsed into silence.

But the most moving experience occurred as we were coming in to land very low over the Chijubu compound. The thousands of shacks, made from any material available, varying from mud bricks to sticks and sacks, had an overwhelming effect on the unsuspecting tourists.

Their faces turned to disgust and horror as they watched the scarcely-clothed children running and waving to the plane, while everybody else went about their business, totally ignoring the plane above. It was as though there was an unbreakable dome of suppression, poverty and misery over the place that nobody on board the aircraft could even pretend to ignore.

This was the dark side of Africa that few really know of, or believe, until they see and experience it first-hand.

The silence lasted until we came to a standstill on the tarmac of Ndola airport. Then as familiar, friendly faces came into view, all broke out into excited conversation once more, forgetting their recent experience altogether.

They were now going to enjoy the bright side of Africa.

Faisal Kaka, St Martin's School

Thoughts on a broken angel

They left you where you had fallen
Face down in rain-wet earth.
Looking down at you, I felt an overwhelming sadness
And lifted you from where you lay,
Turning you over. A moment of pathos
To see the Grecian purity of your otherwise unmarred countenance
Streaked with grime,
Your robes also.
Nearby lay your wings, one intact, the other itself divided.
Near them lay your hand, still clutching
The blossom it had held for many years.
I placed it against the raw scar of the stump of your arm
And tried not to see you as once you had been, but
The setting sun created an aura about you
That transcended your sad condition, infusing it with pathetic dignity.
And I wept inside for the carelessness and
Lack of sensitivity in modern man
And for the accident that had knocked you
From the guardian position you had held since 1903.
On the pedestal, your foot remains,
And I wonder if Pauline senses the loss of your shielding wings.

Peter Wagenaar, Dale College

1985

Torn nets

Woodstock
platform in the rain
the wet belly of a
dead fish.
Carriages with full
catches of mortal men
plough into the water
and through the grey-brown
land of factories oozing
electric light.
Small men
buried in plastics
hurry in silo shadow.

Caterpillar concerto
 plunges into tunnelled
 subterranean sluice
 the universe
 becomes a fishtank
 humming bubbles
 and underwater light.
 Surfacing into a world
 dribbling refugees
 the mountain falls out of the cloud
 lava swamps suburbia
 and meets the rain
 hissing.

Peter Anderson, Bishops (Diocesan College)*

Abraham

On Sundays in summer we would go to 'Tennis' at Schoongezicht. To us at the ages of five, seven and nine, tennis was a treat of a large tea, long velvet lawns and the cows and the garden.

We would abandon our parents as soon as we could and run as fast and determined as little zephyrs to the side path that led to the dusty, gabled farm buildings with their dark, squarely-cut thatch and to the slave-bell that I longed to ring but was warned not to touch. Every Sunday, without fail, we would climb panting up the steep hill, eagerly straining to see the cows and although we did see them so regularly it was like entering into an unknown place when we went into the shed. The cows would stand in the gloom, their heads down, shuffling slightly and, after hesitating for a tiny second, we would follow Beth up the dusty aisles as she read out the names of the cows.

'Polka, Betsy, Annabel, Hilda ...' and then we would see Abraham.

'Hello, Abraham,' we would cry and he would chuckle a low 'Ewe,' as he carried the buckets, slopping slightly up the steps.

The cows forgotten, we would follow him up the steps to the dairy.

'Abraham, Abraham, tell us about the calves,' Beth implored.

Abraham chuckled and started to tell us the well-known stories in his dusky-throated chuckle that seemed as mysterious and friendly as the unexplored shadows under the thatched eaves. He seemed to belong to the cowshed, with his low murmuring voice, his dark, shiny skin and his serenity.

We would sit for what seemed an age on the steps in the musty, queer-smelling gloom, listening, and then Beth would give a signal by jumping up, her fair curls bobbing, shouting, 'It's tea-time.'

Suddenly remembering the tea, the lawn and the other world outside, we would jump up with wide eyes and exclamations of, 'Tea!' Then, running as hard as we could, partly in eagerness for the sweet scones and partly so as not to be left behind, we would depart, shouting farewells behind us. We all loved Abraham.

Later as we grew up, we stopped going to tennis regularly. Our parents still went but I was becoming burdened, as I thought in Std Five, with large amounts of homework and we had such a lot to do. Then after half a year in England and a dusty but busy summer, Alison and I went out for a ride on Schoongezicht.

The vines were already reddening and it looked as if a gold and orange veil had been carelessly cast over the countryside. The air was pure and crisp and as we rode we sometimes breathed smoke.

We rode up the valley to the vineyards and as we passed the laden vines and the bending grape-pickers I was filled with that glorious feeling of contentment and peace. All that could be heard was the crunch of the horses' hooves and the occasional shout that drifted to our ears. I saw a black man toiling up the hill, his basket on his shoulder and I watched him curiously as he came until I recognised him to be Abraham. He looked up to greet us and his eyes widened as he saw who we were. I felt myself reddening.

'Hello, Abraham,' Alison and I both said.

'Ewe,' he chuckled, smiling at us as he stopped.

'We haven't seen you for a long time,' I ventured, looking down from the horse.

'No, I work now with grapes.' His pronunciation of the word 'grapes' sounded strange – almost comical. There was silence.

'Anyway, goodbye,' I said, and we moved down the hill.

'Goodbye,' he said, touching his head in greeting and went his way too. I looked back and saw him tipping his basket of grapes on to the enormous pile already in the lorry and my mind was filled with memories of a cowshed, stories and of another world.

Marion Edmunds, Herschel Girls School*

Visions – black, white and technicolour

The crowd jeered
As solitary green and brown dappled figures
Scuttled back to the safety
Of the Buffels.

Darkness closed in as
 The concrete rain of bricks, bottles, stones
 Began yet again,
 And the system's bully-boys
 Rechecked their tear-gas, rubber-bullets and
 The other accoutrements of their trade.
 The squad opened their ranks to receive
 Another victim,
 Blood slithering from his mouth
 And staining the pretty little badges of democracy
 On his lapel.
 Tit for tat ...
 Or is that merely more dissident propaganda?
 The canisters flew through space
 Trailing white vapour as they burst among
 The larva-mass of humanity.
 But where once chaos would have instituted itself,
 Anger won through,
 And the crowd advanced.
 For these few whites
 Armageddon was early.
 Later, Mr De Morgan would reassure his viewers,
 After having first recounted the latest constitutional news
 And the birth of a two-headed calf:
 'Police report the situation to be under control
 And the mood is now quiet in the areas of unrest.'

Donald Ferguson, Bryanston High School

Outcry

I feel like a slave,
 Imprisoned in my youth.
 Caged in this vultured society,
 Drowning in a sea of misunderstandings.
 My only consolation is the anchor of my dreams,
 In the sea of tomorrow.

Misbahnur Haffjee, Parkhill Senior Secondary School

School of thought

Editorial for school newspaper

November sees the final weeks of school and the inhabitants of Girls' High relieved at the prospect of holidays. The whole year we have grumbled, counted days and 'been burdened' by homework, tests and the very attendance of school and now is the time to rest. But we do not pause to consider our contemporaries of different races with no school to attend, no teachers to teach them and no expansion of knowledge.

These are the black students in Sharpeville, Soweto and other black townships which are experiencing unrest. The black students have demanded that certain reforms be brought about in their schools. They are demanding Student Representative Councils instead of prefects, who have become the 'bully boys' of the headmaster and staff. They are reacting, also, to the abuse of Corporal Punishment in their schools and are demanding that pupils considered 'too old' to attend school be re-admitted. These are simple demands, things we get without even asking – and they are damned for having revolted. They are told that they deserve to have their schools closed. But no one should be denied the opportunity of education. It takes only a few bold instigators, threats and the creation of panic and a whole school is swept along in the wave of revolt. They call it Peer Group Pressure. I call it fear.

The words democracy and freedom are music to any impressionable teenager's ears. And so began a series of violence, protests and riots, leading to the closing of all schools, and classes being temporarily suspended until the end of the year. And all in the name of 'democracy'.

To consider the realities is frightening; they are our age; a school-going age, and the doors of education are slammed shut. Perhaps to reflect a little on this fact is to realise how close we are to taking everything for granted. We are used to our green dresses, our green blackboards and our green jealousy of those already out of school, and not to have them is simply unthinkable.

But what if one day these things weren't there? We say we would be over the moon, our life's dream fulfilled. But it took only a few words from a father of one of those education-less children to convince me of the agony and frustration resulting from the unrest and closing of schools. He arrived in the form of a visiting teacher from Atteridgeville who came to Girls' High to experience school as we have it while his was closed. In our English class he told us of how his daughter in Std 6 sits at home, wanting to attend school, but cannot. He told of the students loitering in the streets, of the idleness and pain. And it is without these things that we live.

Perhaps it is time that we realise that school as we have it is completely without hardship. School as they have it is a raw piece of life.

Deborah Klein, Pretoria High School for Girls

D Malapane, Naledi Secondary School, Diepkloof

1986

Poke the mud to knowledge
With a stick, draw in the wide-shadow eyes.

Scrape a pebble of its dignity
carve at the blackness of a rock
 in your desperation
 Scream
at the cliff cliff
 cliff
Only to have that dark face turned from you
And stare past you.

Though Time chisels at the mute crag
and its ash drifts
and is dispersed across the land;
Still these things will be remembered.

 deep scratches in the mind.

Cathy Boshoff, Pretoria High School for Girls

I'm just Sheena

In two days I encountered more racialism than I had ever encountered as an 18-year-old in South Africa. It's not – I've not been protected – you see, no 'non-white' is protected – I've perhaps been too naïve – I let those barriers down (which all 'non-whites' build), and thus made myself susceptible to criticism for being what I am – No – for being what 'They' say I am. 'Coloured' – Kleurling, 'non-white'.

I've found out that Waterford is not 'it'. Waterford is how things should be – but aren't. WK has let me believe that I'm Sheena – just Sheena, with no labels attached. But two days in a place called Simunye in Swaziland showed me that things are not quite what I envisaged.

Simunye has a large white ex-patriate community who live a life quite independent of the Swazis around them and centred on the almost exclusively white country club.

I've been going down there for over a year – I've got what 'They' call a 'white' boyfriend – and I thought that, after a year, the people (and lots of them are white but not South African), their 'Club', would cease to see me as something to gasp at, that the 'novelty' would wear off. It didn't. And won't. I'll never be accepted as Sheena, and my boyfriend will always have to be faced with 'How can you go out with a Coloured girl ...? Is that the same Coloured girl ...?' It hurts – hurts more than being thrown off the beach in Durban or not being able to go with your friends to a 'mixed' Disco in Joburg. It hurts more because I can't see a way out. My way out, I thought, was being 'accepted' by them all. Give me my South Africa, my

Cape Town – there I was prepared – there I built a wall that I was damn sure no one would break down – there I could take the harsh, cold criticisms – here I can't – can't – because here my defences weren't up – I didn't expect it to come from where it did – and that criticism hit out at the very core of me – making me believe for a time that I was second-hand, dirty and 'not quite right'. Sheena is OK – would have been better if she had been 'white,' though. That's what 'They' say. But I'm proud to be my parents' daughter, proud that my Dad has said 'You're Sheena' – 'They' say – your Birth Certificate and Identity Book say – that you're a 'Coloured' – and I was brought up with those beliefs. And that is how I'll raise my children. 'Stop being hysterical, stop living in your dream world.' My 'dream world' is how things should be. I'm not going to let my beliefs and upbringing go by the wayside just not to 'rock the boat'.

'They' say they don't see colour. 'They' say and believe that these insensitive comments can be wiped or blinked away. 'They' will have to learn that you can take the other person for what he is, that 'to hell with' what generations of people have labelled him – they will accept him because of the person he is.

We're not fighting the Casspirs, the armoured vehicles, the police, shooting. We're fighting a belief. I wish it were just Casspirs and guns, 'cause I don't know where to go from here. 'They' seem to be too many, and all the eradication of blind prejudice is going to take years to occur (if it ever does). But things have to change – I'll try to do my bit by saying that you take me as I am – no strings attached – I'm Sheena.

Sheena (Siona) O'Connell, Waterford Kamhlaba United World College*

The plane

From the sand we saw the plane
Hesitate, hang half-surprised,
Then slip and slowly grow a flame.
It tumbled from the trap of clouds
And running down the steep blue slope
It drew a single string of smoke
To where it laid its burning sides
And crumpled on the sea.

We watched it sink, then turned away
And went back home across the sand,
Each unspeaking and alone
Thinking of the sudden space
Left open in the sky, now filled

With birds; we wondered if the gulls had felt
 And understood the death; if they
 Had dimly recognised the fall,
 The white wings torn away.

Henrietta Rose-Innes†, Westerford High School*

Mbuso

The first time I climbed into the Hot Springs bus I felt sick. I had dreaded the coming of this day for two weeks. Ever since they had come around with the list and asked me to do Hot Springs 'duty' I had dreaded it. The one holding out the list and the pen knew. I knew. We all knew what Hot Springs was. Giving in to the pressure that accompanies such lists I had signed my name. Now, the bus wound its way down the hill of Waterford and through the streets of Mbabane, to the government hospital. It turned through the gates and across the dry, dusty gravel lot, towards one of the dirty white cement buildings. I tried to imagine sick people living inside with only the barely translucent pane glass windows to tell them the sun was shining outside. In front of this particular building was the huge coal furnace. Just seeing it made me feel the dry heat and black dust.

And then from the space between the furnace and the building came some of the children. A motley bunch, some obviously severely retarded, others holding crutches, still others sitting or crawling because that was all their deformed bodies allowed them to do. Actually a good number of them had no obvious deformities; they had simply been abandoned by their parents. I didn't notice them on my first day. All the children in their faded brown and white striped smocks were jumping, and I do mean jumping, for joy as the bus pulled up alongside them.

Those more experienced welcomed them into the world of brightly coloured plastic water-toys with open arms and what I assumed to be false smiles. How could anybody smile sincerely when faced with such misery? The children were not filthy but they were certainly not clean by my standards, so I sat as far away from them as I could. The smell of unwashed hands and the strong soap used to wash their smocks soon filled the bus. The fact that one of the children was a burn victim was, I realised later, the main reason I kept my distance. Most of the children sat up on the back seat of the bus, laughing and chattering eagerly. Although I strongly doubt I was aware of it on my maiden voyage, I later noticed that once the bus was away from the hospital the laughter and chattering stopped. I found it abnormal for kids their age to resist playing the usual, adult-irritating games that I used to play every time I travelled by bus. It finally hit me that they were all too busy looking out the windows at the world to play games. A bus, for me,

was like a temporary prison where laughter and jokes provided us enough entertainment to last the trip. For these little children this was one of their few moments of freedom; a time to look at life outside.

So, the children's eyes drank up what they could as our bus made its way along the tortuous roads of Swaziland, down into the Ezulweni Valley; 'The Valley of Heaven'. This valley is a tourist area where a casino, some hotels and a spa attract an assortment of South African visitors from Johannesburg and towns close to Swaziland. An arrangement had been made with the management of the spa so the hospital kids could go swimming in the hot spring-fed pool there every Wednesday afternoon.

The looks on some of the sun-bathers' faces as we walked towards the pool can be easily imagined. As we undressed the children and helped them into their swimming trunks I could see a white woman telling her son to get out of the pool.

I immediately picked a 'normal' child from the group and went into the pool with him. I didn't think I could bear touching one of the badly deformed ones. I towed him around the pool for an hour and then we got out, got dressed and it was over. I didn't get out of the bus when we arrived back at the hospital but sat and watched as they disappeared back into the space between the furnace and the dirty white building, some being carried by students and teachers.

I returned to the school feeling depressed; certainly not spiritually enlightened. What was the point in taking those poor children away from that hell once a week only to show them what they were missing and then bring them back 'home' for another week of hell?

When my name turned up again for Hot Springs duty I felt even worse than I had the first time. My only consolation was that perhaps my stomach would be stronger this time. Others had told me that you get used to it after a while. They were right. The smell that filled the bus and the sight of a child with scar tissue all over her body did not bother me as much as they had the first time. Still, I sat a safe distance away from the children. The routine was the same. We went to the hot springs, had our swim, and returned to the hospital.

Something different happened this time, though. I was the last to get on to the bus when we were through at the hot springs and there were no empty seats left – except one. Having no choice in the matter I sat down beside a little boy. He looked to be about five years old (he was really eleven) and I had caught a glimpse of the baseball-sized lump just above his tailbone when we were dressing the children. The lump was where his spine had been cruelly twisted out as he slept in his mother's womb. He couldn't walk. His feet and legs were rendered almost useless by the twist in his spine. The seat was made for only one person so, although I didn't really want to, I put my arm around him. He obviously knew a little English because his tiny

hands held on to mine and he said, 'That's fine.' Suddenly this little boy was no longer a monster; he was just a little boy. Though the realisation may sound ridiculous, it was a realisation of massive proportions. Everything fell into place then. I truly enjoyed the ride back to the hospital. Later on I noticed a wet spot on the side of my sweater. Mbuso had peed on me.

That day I decided that I would be going to the Hot Springs every week from then on. The decision to do so was spontaneous and I knew deep down that it was a decision I would come to regret. But I looked at it as a job that had to be done. Those children needed to see a recognisable face each week or the service would be a failure. What they needed was a little love and attention, not just a dip in the pool. They were not stupid. They knew a sincere smile from a false one and if I didn't get to know them, mine would always be false.

Well, the weeks went by and I soon discovered that my great self-sacrificing mission to bring a little light into the lives of these children was not in the least self-sacrificing. I was now one of the people getting off the bus to greet the children with open arms and what I now knew to be a real smile. Instead of dreading the approach of Wednesday afternoons, I looked forward to them. I actually felt proud walking towards the pool with these children. They had all gone through so much and yet they still smiled and laughed; they still found something good in life. I doubt I could do half as much were I suddenly put in their situation. And I envied them.

One day as the bus made its usual journey down the valley I noticed a clump of dirt on one of Mbuso's toes. (Since I had decided to do Hot Springs on a regular basis I had sat with him and his friends at the back of the bus.) I tried to brush it off with my hand and I recoiled in disgust as I realised the dirt was dried blood. Further inspection showed that Mbuso's toe was almost completely severed; hanging on a thread of skin. Being the sort of person who runs for a bandage for even the smallest cut, I was frantic. Mbuso was, as usual, looking out the bus window so he didn't notice my inspection of his foot. He obviously wasn't in any great pain so I assumed his spinal deformity must have left him with very little, if any, feeling in his feet. The circulation was probably very poor and when combined with the constant scraping and dragging caused by Mbuso's crawling about all the time, the toe had simply started to fall off. I felt more than a little squeamish for the duration of the swim, as did the others who had seen the toe, no doubt. When we arrived back at the hospital I quickly carried Mbuso into Ward 8 – the sick children's ward. The place smelled of urine and some sort of strong antiseptic. Through windows along the hallway I could see sick children and some mothers either caring for their ailing children or catching some sleep on blankets on the floor beside their children's beds. At the end of the hallway was a room where the orphaned kids ate. This room was a little cheerier with colourful paintings and things

on the walls. These had been given to the hospital by the junior students at Waterford.

We sat the children down at the long tables. At each place was a dish of what looked like mashed potatoes covered in a weak gravy – it didn't smell like mashed potatoes, though. As the children started stuffing the food into their mouths with their fingers I called one of the nurses over and excitedly showed her Mbuso's damaged toe. I certainly wasn't expecting what happened next. At first it filled me with anger but then the anger was replaced by an understanding of the situation that was both horrible and beautiful. You see, the nurse didn't rush up and examine the toe, calling frantically for a doctor. She didn't even seem surprised. She stood where she was and shook her head. I assumed she couldn't have heard me correctly so I lifted Mbuso's leg up, exposed his damaged foot and pointed to the toe. The nurse spoke in siSwati to Mbuso and although I couldn't understand a word, I knew from her tone of voice what she was saying. She was scolding Mbuso! Not in a nasty or unfriendly way, but still scolding! I looked with horror at Mbuso expecting to see a perfect vision of 'The poor orphan boy', terribly crushed by the punishment he didn't deserve! Instead he was trying to hide his foot from view and smiling mischievously, knowing he had done something wrong. The nurse continued scolding him and I could hear the word 'Waterford' pop up a few times. Then I realised what she was saying. She was asking Mbuso why he hadn't told anybody his toe was falling off so he could get it fixed and not scare the poor Waterford students!

As I walked away from Ward 8 my mind was spinning. Visions of the absolute panic and chaos that would have surrounded the loss of one of my toes when I was his age went reeling through my head. The horrified look on my mother's face as they wheeled me through the doors marked 'EMERGENCY' at the hospital! The period of mourning after the doctors had to amputate! The psychotherapy preparing me for life without a baby toe! The physiotherapy! The special shoes! The sympathy from all quarters!

Mbuso wouldn't get any of that. They would just clip off his toe and send him on his merry way, back to Ward 8. And not because they were cruel, but because that was the best thing to do. The toe would fall off eventually anyway, with all the abuse it took. Mbuso wouldn't need the extra care I would need in such a situation and I envied him for it. We came from two completely different worlds, Mbuso and I. Mine was the First and his was the Third. For that Mbuso would pay.

Oh, the injustice of it all! But, where exactly is the injustice? Had Mbuso been born in a primitive Swazi village several hundred years ago, he would have died soon after birth because of his deformities – nature's way of taking care of the weak. Well, now, in a modern society we have a more 'civilised' method of taking care of the weak. If they happen to live in a first-world country they receive extra medical attention and are, with a few

exceptions, taken care of; even then life can be quite rough for the mentally and physically disabled. If they live in a third-world country and have no money ... Mbuso.

What is the solution? I hardly think that we can simply decide to kill off all the babies who aren't 'perfect'. But if we are to call ourselves truly civilised, then we should at least live up to our words. Let's not grant a disabled child life only to shove him into a corner and forget him. In a country like Swaziland where some parents simply cannot afford to care for a seriously injured or handicapped child there should at least be facilities to take proper care of him. Not Ward 8.

Of course, many excuses can be made. Swaziland is not a rich country. There are many other people who are suffering too. But every time the Hot Springs bus winds down the road from the hospital I see the O.K. Plaza with its decorative inner courtyard spotted with trees and stone benches! I see an eighty-thousand Rand bus terminal under construction about one hundred metres away from the less eye-pleasing but perfectly functional old one! I see the Ezulweni Valley with its luxury resorts and casinos; a vacation spot for people from, of all places, South Africa! 'O, but all of these things help the economy of Swaziland.' Well, what about the children in Ward 8? Why do they receive none of this wealth? It would take so little to make the lives of these children bearable! Mbuso had a colostomy done but the hospital can't afford colostomy bags so right now, right this very minute, a hole in his side leaks shit into a cloth around his waist! Excuses? No, injustice!

It is a cliché we have all heard so many times we assume it can't be true. But I'm afraid I must use it because, as I have discovered, it is true. The whole experience has changed me deep inside.

Some people say it is better to give than to receive. Well, before I met Mbuso I disagreed with them. Now, after the experience I have just briefly described, I still disagree with them; but in a different way. From an outsider's point of view, what we do with the children of Ward 8 may seem like a service, but to those of us who do it, it is a gift – an opportunity to see something in life few will ever see.

Stephen B Walker, Waterford Kamhlaba United World College*

1987

I have fears

I am an African boy who has lived in a multiracial school for nearly seven years now; therefore I have grown up and lived among white people; therefore I have more white friends than I have black friends.

I am a boarder and only go home on weekends and my home is in a township called Nyanga.

The country in which we live has a radical racial policy called 'apartheid' and this policy is greatly opposed by some people and hated by us black people. As a result there are sometimes consumer boycotts in which all black people refuse to buy from white-owned businesses. Sometimes this anti-apartheid feeling gets so great that white-owned vehicles are stoned and from this maybe the Army and Police are called in to suppress the riot. Within the black community there are people who are believed to be spying for the Police and in most cases if these people are discovered they are burnt alive or brutally killed.

In our country there is also conscription whereby all white boys have to go to the Army to do military training and it is mostly these boys who are ordered to go to the townships. Now the biggest thing which I fear is if one of my old school friends were to be in a Casspir patrolling the location and he was to see me standing in a mass meeting among other people in the township; now my biggest fear is that I know that my old friend would shout my name out in order to get my attention and be all friendly towards me. I would not know what to do in this situation; because the other black people would probably think I was spying since I was well known by the Police, and they would want to kill me on the spot.

On the other hand I would also be scared and confused if they were by some chance to get hold of him standing on his own guarding something in the township while the other Police had gone, and tell me to kill him while he was begging for mercy: in this situation I would not know what to do because if I killed him I would feel guilty for the rest of my life. But, if I did not kill him, the other black people would probably accuse me of being a traitor and they would probably want to kill me.

The other thing which I fear greatly is what would happen to me and my other black friends here at school if the 'comrades' in the townships had to take serious steps about our attending school while the other black pupils in the townships were boycotting school. This is why sometimes all of us black pupils in the school go home when we get the news that there will be a raid in the townships by the 'comrades' to find out exactly who is attending school and who isn't.

My other fear and probably everyone else's fear is that of wanting to know what will eventually happen to South Africa, whether the end will be worse than at present or whether the country will follow Marxist principles or not; but, whatever happens to this country, I hope it will be to the good of all people who live in it so that all the races in the country can live in peace and harmony.

G Madikiza, Bishops (Diocesan College)

Jerry's Café

Jerry's Café is the only shop open at four in the morning in Cape Town. It is a contrary place: when Cape Town trundles in its trains and cars and settles into sleep, Jerry's blinks awake. It drifts unconnected in a vague sea of alleyways; it is always round a different corner, next to a different deserted shop from the one you remember, but it doesn't move – it is fixed, stationary while the rest of the world drifts around it in dark, wandering dreams.

It naturally attracts the four o'clock people, the loose lonely drifters who stumble through other people's sleep lit by their own fierce electric days. Finding themselves spinning loose in the small hours, they gravitate to Jerry's hard cube of light. Caught out of control in time and place, they meet and make connections in a sudden powerful trust before dispersing again into the limbo of the night.

The rain shook the windows like wet grey gravel. In the corner, a boy sat softly burning holes in the air with his cigarette. I was at the next table, drinking coffee and studying the shadows that felt his nose, his chin, and his eye-sockets. His face angled its collection of shadows towards me.

'Can I use your ashtray?' He tapped the crumbling head of his cigarette into the ashtray, and then pulled himself after it into the seat opposite me. We looked at each other. He was young – seventeen or so, and he had rain on his hair and eyelashes.

'My name's Daniel.'

I hesitated. 'Ann,' I said, smiling.

'I hope you don't mind my sitting here. It gets sort of lonely in the corner.'

'I don't mind.' We paused. He was watching me with an indecisive half-smile on his face, as if he wanted to say something. 'If you're lonely, why don't you go home?'

'I can't go home.'

'Why not?' It was a game, a play. I fed him lines, the ones he was waiting for.

'The last time I was home was a year ago.' Again, I felt him watching me, hesitating, considering possibilities. He seemed to make a decision. 'You see, I've been on the mountain.'

'The mountain?' I asked, playing along.

'Yes, I ran away from home. I found a cave up in the hills – near a river. I took some blankets and stuff up – it's quite comfortable.'

'But what do you live on?'

'Um, I fish. Yes, there's fish in the river. Also I eat plants and mushrooms and things. And I catch birds.'

Yes, I could picture him, crouched in a palace of leaves, listening wide-eyed to the sounds in the forest and the stirrings in the water,

feeling his sustenance all around him. He was listening now, the sound of the rain heavy against the sides of the mountain filling his head. What a performance!

‘Why aren’t you up there now?’

‘It’s raining – and dark. I come down for cigarettes and matches – also, you miss other people. I come down mainly at night – steal rides on the late trains, sneak into the clubs – and come to Jerry’s. Just to watch the people. I was watching you when you came in.’

My cue. ‘I also come here to watch the people. This is how I spend most of my weekends – just walking around, talking to people.’ I felt myself hesitating as Daniel had done, teetering. ‘Actually, I’m writing a book of short stories – all about Cape Town people.’

‘Am I going to be in it?’

‘Oh, definitely!’ We smiled in mutual appreciation of each other’s performance. I was watching hands – hard fingers, nails chipped and rough. His hair was longish, his clothes old and rumpled. Suddenly, for the first time, I thought, ‘What if it’s true? What if he’s telling the truth, spilling his life to a chance acquaintance, trusting me to understand?’ Guiltily, I searched him again, exploring eyes, mouth, cheeks, chin. An actor’s face? A runaway’s? I tried to test him.

‘Um, look – actually my name’s not ...’ He looked at me, shook his head.

‘No, don’t,’ he said.

I understood. What did it matter? What difference did it make, if we lied or told the truth? At four in the morning, you are not accountable for what you say. You are not who you are in the daytime. At that moment, in Jerry’s Café, we were who we were, and nothing else – no other time, no other place existed. For that half-hour, he was Daniel and I was truly Ann. We smiled at each other again, but now it was a different sharing, a better understanding.

‘I must go now,’ he said.

‘Well, I hope you make it back all right.’

‘Thanks – and good luck with your book.’

‘Goodbye, Daniel.’

‘Goodbye.’

He turned and walked out into the rainy throat of the night. Ten minutes later, Jerry’s closed and a dozen Picassos, murderers, poets and prophets were washed away into the dark. Walking home, the rain washed away who I thought I was. Lost between Jerry’s Café and dawn, I was nobody, or anybody.

But maybe I’m lying. Maybe I’ve never been to Jerry’s Café, maybe I never met a Daniel. But does it matter? This is a small-hours story, written in the separate reality of my desk-lamp’s light while the rest of the world rolls and ticks in sleep. With any luck, you are reading this alone

in a four-o'clock world; and, maybe, our small-hours thoughts will touch,
briefly engage, and briefly, you will believe.

Henrietta Rose-Innes†, Westerford High School*

1988

Homecoming

Boetie's got a landmine in his head
don't be afraid; the neighbours needn't know
he'll smile and nod and answer
with accepted stock replies
take grateful praise in courteous stride
but if they should go too carelessly
on his uncharted ground
and tread too hard on that uncertain core
then, perhaps, they might find
the congenial soil abrupted
and Boetie will remember that
the border's never very far away

Richard Leibbrandt, D F Malan High School

Feeling rejected

Far from my family and loved ones
Far from my own people who understand me.
There are so many people around me
But still I feel lonely.

Everybody is concerned about himself,
And has no time for me.
I don't feel part of this insincerely
Happy atmosphere.

Across the city my own people are suffering,
There are children going crazy
Because of lack of food.
All they need is just a crumb of bread.

Here I sit spending hundreds of Rands
On unnecessary complicated food,
Spending thousands of Rands
On indigestible complicated education.
Which I keep on telling myself
Is the best thing for me.

Sitting in my tiny, cramped cubicle
I find myself wishing to be somewhere else.
Somewhere, where I won't feel guilty.

Aziwe Magida, Herschel Girls School

Humanity

The wall was white, welcoming, cool
In the shade.
I lean against it and wait.
Waiting – just resting for a moment.
A ragged cigarette rolls slowly to the tip of my sparkling new shoe.

Someone has dropped their cigarette?
I bend, pick it up, pass it to the old beggar.
My good deed for the day!
I smile indulgently at him through the oppressive heat.

He moves closer
Warm alcoholic fumes waft around me
Envelop and suffocate me.
'Ek is Josef,' he breathes,
Even closer!
He teeters slightly
Drunk!

'Please go away!
Talk to someone else!'
'My naam is Josef, wat is ...?'
'Leave me alone, okay!'
'Wat is jou naam, meisie?'

I step away out of the cool shade
Away from my once-friendly wall.

I walk across the warm tar,
Stand safely, securely, next to a policeman.
The beggar won't bother me now!

I look at him across the steamy tar.
He looks back at me.

Julie van Rijswijk, Herschel Girls School

1989

Poem

I want each poem
to be an experience.
Mantra emulatory,
its sound should be
a cleansing shower
to the brain, should wash
the mind with river water,
for repentance,
the sea's sweet salt tide
for growth and intuition.
Its sound should shimmer
around the brain, sinking in
the sound and tide,
the ebb and flow,
the water of it.
Not memorising poems
no,
but repeating the sounds
of the thoughts
so that the poem becomes
a part of the person,
finds its rock to shelter behind
in the brain,
its nook to rest in
and fan the overheated soul.
The flow of a poem
should lift the mind
out of the head,

o to let the sea,
 eternal water, rush in,
 sink its fang fingers
 coolly into the brain.
 The poem is no longer
 separate
 but a part to be recalled
 at leisure,
 when needed,
 like the usefulness
 of the tongue
 or the little finger;
 it is a necessity
 to know at least
 the body of one poem intimately,
 to feel its body
 lonely in the night,
 to wash in its tears,
 and dance in its laughter
 and it will swim
 in the inner lakes
 of the mind, and the rivers
 will feed the clear water
 with a cool breeze.

Megan Hall, Westerford High School*

So much of South Africa

It was one of the numerous beauty competitions which shopping centres love to stage: Miss Menlyn. I was alone, huddled in the crowd, trying to see between the heads of tall men and past the sides of fat women.

The girls were beautiful: tall and graceful; all different, very different, but each quite stunning in her own way; knowing smiles on their lips, perhaps knowing how lovely they were.

Then a young black girl stepped out. She was not quite as tall as the others; petite and very thin. Her features were clearly defined and her curly hair hung long. Admiring glances followed her down the ramp and then I heard a woman saying to her friend, 'Die meidjie is mooi, nè!'

'Meid.' So much summed up in that one word, so much said about an attitude, a belief, a way of life, a policy of a country.

And though the woman had only spoken well of the girl, my heart broke, because her words had said so much more of how she saw the girl and what

she thought of her. Now, for balance, I try to find a contrast, a happening or scene which shows the opposite, which speaks of love and understanding and indifference towards the colour of a skin. Why do I find it so hard? Surely I must have stored somewhere in my memory a scene like this.

Ah, yes! I remember one. It's not quite as dramatic as I would have liked, but it moved me.

We were sitting on the hostel patio drinking tea. It was very casual, cups without saucers, and we lay about on the grass and the steps, laughing and chatting. The black worker came to clean up and take the cups back to the kitchen. He moved quietly, almost unnoticed in his khaki pants and shirt. We would probably have ignored him, but Lucy saw him, and, recognising him, because she knew him (he cleaned each afternoon), she called out, 'Hello, Shortie! How are you?' He smiled and returned the greeting.

How can I describe her tone? There was no hint of pity or false liberalism in her greeting, certainly no hint of mockery or superiority. Her greeting had such equality and yet I want to say it had no equality, because to say it had equality would mean it was different, stood out, but it was so normal, so ordinary, so natural.

Natalie Lynch, Pretoria High School for Girls

Perfect moment

Somewhere along the road between beginning and ending, there is a perfect moment for every living soul. My perfect moment came when I was eight years old. I woke one night to find moonlight flooding my room. It was a soundless night. The air was soft and heavy with the fragrance of pear blossoms and honeysuckle.

I crept out of bed and tiptoed softly out of the house. As I closed the door behind me, I saw my mother sitting on the porch steps. She looked up, smiled and drew me down beside her, her arm around me. The whole countryside was hushed, no lights burned in any house. The moonlight was so bright we could see the dark outline of the woods in the distance. Our dog came across the lawn and stretched himself out contentedly, his head on mother's lap. For a long while all three of us were perfectly still.

We knew that in the dark woods there were movements and sounds among the animals – the rabbits and squirrels. In the shadowy garden and in the fields, plants were growing.

Very soon the blossoms on the fruit trees would lose their petals in a pink-and-white snowfall, and in their place the young fruit would appear. The wild-plum thicket would be filled with plums, round and glowing like tiny lanterns, made sweet by the sun and cool by the rain. Melons would soon dot the trailing vines where now the squash-like blooms

were replenishing their nectar in preparation for the onrush of bees in the morning.

In all this great brooding silence that seemed so infinite, the miracle of life was going on unseen and unheard, governed and held within the omnipotent yet gentle hand of the Creator.

An eight-year-old does not analyse her thoughts; she may not even be aware that she is surrounded by infinity. But she sees a star impaled on the branch of a cedar tree, and knows pure ecstasy. She hears a mockingbird sing in the moonlight, and is filled with speechless joy. She feels her mother's arms around her, and knows complete security.

The surging, sweeping process of life, the moving of worlds and the flowing of tides may be incomprehensible to her but she may nevertheless be strangely aware that she has had a glimpse through an open door, and has experienced a perfect moment filled with serenity and promise.

Sunita Ramjee, Himalaya Secondary School

Stopping on the way

Every holiday, they take this route
over the pass and down to the flatter land.
The road holds back a sea:
the hills lift and let lie their flotsam sheep
and solitary people on the verge
seem stranded on the islands of their own footprints –
miraculous journey, dry-wheeled across the bay of grass,
safely through currents and dangerous undertows
of soil that seeps away from them, inland.

Once, just once, they stopped the car
to stretch their legs at the side of the road.
Someone reached down and pulled a blade of grass,
like a bather testing the water before a dive,
then let it fall again on the dry tar.
They stood for a while, looking out at the veld,
until they remembered the time, the maps, the road ahead,
and someone coughed, and they turned to leave.
(Driving away, they didn't look behind
to see that last wave breaking in the wind
and folding through the grass, away from them.)

Henrietta Rose-Innes†, Westerford High School*

1990

1990

Intruders

Who's that man entering my land?
Who's that man entering without knocking?
Who's that man calling me a stranger in my land?

They came like demons entering hell,
Like a swarm of locusts feeding on field
Bringing poverty to the paradise valley.

They are the white egrets feeding on black cows
Bringing hatred and poverty to black ravens
Leaving a big wound which cannot be healed.

Benedict Khumalo, Inkamana High School

Tomorrow

Wait!
Wait till tomorrow
Wait till infinity.

Walking aimlessly down the streets
With my stomach filled with emptiness
Clusters of flies around my mouth.

Yesterday was commandant: pass and special
Today is foreman: work and sweat
Tomorrow bugger off! no money
The city fathers don't like me.

Wait!
Wait till tomorrow
Wait till infinity.

Tomorrow a bus can run me over
Illness can drive me through
Baas can give me the last blessing
Umlungu may lay me to rest.

Wait!
Wait till tomorrow
Wait till infinity.

When is the end of this litany?
Who gets fat on promises?
Wait,
Wait till tomorrow
Wait till infinity.

Mxolisi Nkosi, Michaelhouse

This is South Africa

A hoepoe's brief call
of morning ecstasy
echoes in orchestra with the stretching zebra
and the yawning owl.
This is life
it is harmonious
This is South Africa.

A breaker
exhausted from its ocean journey
collapses around the fisherman's feet
as he casts into an orange sun.
This is life
it is harmonious
This is South Africa.

Wattle leaves shiver in the wind
at the loss of their friend, the sun,
and evening settles
in the vast empire of the Soutpansberg.
This is life
it is harmonious
This is South Africa

A deathly silence in a detention cell
A black head split open, bleeding red blood

The killer,
the convenience of an open window;
a discarded bar of soap.
This was life
This too is South Africa.

Andrew Parker, King Edward VII School

The farrowing of the pig

The day was fine and warm. Little puffs of cloud-ships sailed benignly in the blue yonder, their white sails filled with the wind that pushed them across the sky-waves. I was seated on a bale of straw in our barn, plaiting pieces into a yellow rope. It was a rare lazy day, and even the hens scratched without any real enthusiasm.

A shadow blocked the sunlight that streamed through the open door. Adam, who worked for my parents on our farm, spoke without preamble: *Your pig's about to farrow.*

I scrambled to my feet and followed him to the sty. From inside the roomy wooden shelter, my pig snorted softly. I laid my hands on her distended stomach, feeling the unborn life giving determined kicks to the light pressure. I soothed the bristly-smooth side.

Okay, fellas, just a short while now.

It's her first litter. They'll be ages yet. Just wait, Adam said, easing himself into a comfortable position.

We waited until mid-afternoon, idly chatting about pigs and piglets.

You must be careful when a pig farrows, because if you don't get the piglet away fast after birthing, its mother could roll on it. I've seen many fine piglets lost that way. And as soon as they're born, you should cut their teeth, he nodded towards a pair of sharp, scissor-like clippers.

Why? I asked.

Why? Because when they suckle, those teeth can tear the teat. Rip it to shreds. And once they're older, those teeth grow into wicked tusks capable of tearing a man's gut out. Especially when that man is holding a bucket of food in his hand!

As he finished talking, the gilt gave a loud grunt. Out slid her first piglet. Adam caught it with ease, breaking the umbilical cord as he did so. It was a little boar that displayed none of the weakness and ugliness of an infant human. Blue eyes fully open and angered, it kicked out and squealed in Adam's arms, its shrill screams causing the mother to give short, anxious grunts from deep in her throat.

The boar increased his wild thrashings, and Adam had some difficulty in doing the necessary. Then he was set down at his mother's side, where

he rooted greedily. He suckled until replete, then staggered into a deep pile of straw.

A half-hour passed slowly, the daylight closing from the shores of our town, the red-washed blue going unnoticed as we waited for the arrival of the second piglet. I felt a knot of worry string up my stomach, and the furrows in Adam's brow indicated that he, too, felt worried.

Another fifteen minutes. If no more are born, we'll know for sure that they are dead. She'll have more. She's a fine brood, he reassured me.

I felt the gilt's side once more. The movements were sluggish at best, and in my heart I knew that Adam was right.

We sat in silence, thinking dismal thoughts as the darkness washed over us. I felt as though I were drowning in an oily sea as despair choked the flower of my hope like a coiling vine.

Beside me, Adam stiffened. My hope's bloom strove towards the light. My eyes strained as I sought to see what had happened. Adam held an over-large piglet in his hands, and even in the dark, I could tell that it was dead.

After that, there was a solemn procession as unbreathing piglets marched slowly from the womb. Five more boars, and three small gilts. I felt withered inside.

Once the afterbirth and tiny dead were buried beneath the dark, fertile earth, we walked to my home in silence. Halfway there I turned to face the sky. Through the black, starry, moon-filled night air, I heard the delighted grunts as the new mother found her baby amid the straw.

Caryl Perfect, Collegiate High School for Girls

1991

Going to the shop with everything

Down a normal man-made street

Going to the shop

– walking.

With trousers made by tired women and pockets on my shirt

I was walking to the shop

– barefoot –

to buy a packet of chips – flings –

a cooldrink – iron brew

a chocolate – sevens

a pen for school – parker

I wanted these

Walking barefoot to the shop
 and I was on my stomach
 With trousers made by tired women and pockets on my shirt
 And bare feet bleeding on a large obstructing rock.
 Down a horrible man-made street
 Coming from the shop
 – running.
 With trousers made by tired women and pockets on my shirt
 I was running home
 – barefoot –
 to clean the blood from my feet
 To tell someone that I had returned with nothing I wanted.

Vaneshran Arumugam, Uthongathi School*

The chessboard

To Lucy
 my caramel-coloured companion
 Let's play a game of chess.
 Which colour would you like to be?
 I'll blow out the candle, then we can both be black.
 Yes, it was dark then,
 you remember, the day he asked us if we were sisters.
 It seemed comical at the time.
 Comical to have to walk on a chessboard?
 I have to walk on the white squares,
 you on the black.
 Can we still keep in stride?
 We'll walk on a zig-zag.
 You know, against the grain.
 One of us must go backwards, but we'll get there in the end ...
 Even if it is slower.
 When we do,
 the coronation will be grand.
 You and I will go anywhere we wish.
 We'll take a short-cut,
 right back,
 straight across,
 both forward,
 and we'll live in each other's castles.

Su-Lin Stuart, Camps Bay High School

1992

Mother Nature

She steps out of the shower
 glistening with the freshness of the fallen rain.
 Innocent in her unashamed nakedness
 she stands before her Son.

Her hair hangs long
 as the tail of the widow bird,
 Her skin gleaming with the soft sheen
 of the otter's coat.

The rounded hills of her breasts
 that nurtured him in his infancy
 Rise above the broad plain of her stomach,
 marred only by the highway scar across it.

The black tangle of valley forest
 from whence he once came
 Nestles between the protective
 buttresses of her hips

And the rivulets trickle freely
 down to the ocean pools at her feet.
 Her Son, civilised Man,
 is no longer a part of her mothering care.

Her soft fawn eyes widen and cloud,
 but she can make no sound, as
 He shoves her up against the wall
 and violates her.

Mark Hewat, Michaelhouse

Circus

From the grey cloud marquee,
 The spotlight shone down upon the Clown
 As He looked out over the flocks of dumb faces.
 They all waited, breath bated
 For His performance to start.

Obeying the Ringmaster, He started his show;
His legerdemain astounding the crowds,
He conjured, quite easily, red wine out of water,
And before their very eyes the dead man He roused.

His harlequin lipstick, so beautiful, just smiled,
But the thorns pricked His eyes
And He cried.

Atholl Murray, Sandringham High School

A different perspective

Jewel-bedecked socialite on a shopping spree:
First stop: 'Fur Fantasy'.
'Madame, can I show you what we have in stock;
anything in particular you were thinking of?
Ma'am, we have the finest with regards to fur,
gassed, strangled, suffocated animals that were.
Madame, pray, can we close this deal,
by offering you a bludgeoned baby seal?

Bronwyn Puttock, Northlands Girls' High School

Sea fever

Waves slap gently at the sides
Of my bugwarm cabin:
I can feel them outside.

I trespass on this unbounded plot;
And those baleen-hardened trespassers
That went before, trespassed on others:
And so it goes on:
For something as big as the sea
Cannot belong to the flotsam on its surface:
No, but with the patience of a billion years
The waves pull, pull, pull at temporary things
At harbour walls and bob
The transitory fibreglass hulls.

A consciousness moves the waves.

I can feel them outside
They will always be here:
Periwinkles stick glutinously
Inside my cranium,
And in there, something dark moves
A wet tendril of seaweed.

Gerhardt Will, Bishops (Diocesan College)

1993

Haiku

Salt on Red
The cause and result mingle together
Bowed figures pray

Rosamund Kendal, Rustenburg High School for Girls*

The home front

I listened to the phone ring ten times, the receiver clenched firmly against my ear to prevent my hand from shaking, before tentatively murmuring, 'He's not there.' Even my constrained voice exhibited some nervous inflections. Across the room my mother, standing cross-armed, exuded her violent disapproval.

'Try again. He must be there.' When she spoke in that virulent tone of voice I could feel myself cringe. Obediently I dialled a second time.

While the phone reverberated another ten times I remembered how my mother had been in one of her ecstatically 'good' moods that morning when my father turned up uninvited at our house. Saturdays and Friday evenings were usually set aside exclusively for his secretary, so this was obviously seen as a personal victory.

From the upstairs balcony I saw my slim mother teeter out, smiling vivaciously, in high heels and black leather mini-skirt. I couldn't bear to watch, though, and soon lost myself in complicated three-dimensional trigonometry: the perfect form of escapism.

About half an hour later I heard a timid knock on my bedroom door. Glancing up, I looked into my mother's frighteningly haggard face, mascara

trickling down it in long black streams. Instantly I assumed he had delivered a summons for the divorce, or come with a buyer for our house ...

‘The gardener,’ my mother sobbed, ‘He’s ...’

Apparently, my father had brought a gardener, too – to fix up the garden before the house went on show, I supposed. Concentrating on looking compassionate, but still sincere, I urged my mother on.

‘He’s Bettina’s.’

‘His secretary’s? He’s brought her gardener to work here?’ Seeing my mother’s humiliated expression I needed nothing more to affirm this bizarre fact. I left her hunched over and crying on the edge of my bed and strode outside, slamming the massive oak front door with excessive force.

Hearing the door thud, my father glanced up, alarmed, but seeing me, waved. Standing there was another man pruning the roses. I recall noticing how incredibly sunken my father’s pallid cheeks had become, how ridiculous he looked in his Reeboks and ‘trendy’ denim jeans. Even his chest hairs were greying now.

‘What kind of a jerk brings his mistress’s gardener to work in his family’s garden?’ I started shouting. ‘How dare you! Just take your stuff and him and go. Now!’

In the throes of affronted indignation my father retorted about ingratitude and disrespect, his features convoluting in rage, but I just hurtled inside, slamming the door again.

From my bedroom at the other end of the house my mother came whisking past in her stockings and with a streaky face. Just in time to see my father’s BMW turn the corner of the drive and disappear behind the pine trees.

‘What happened? Where’s he going?’ my mother panicked.

I tried to reassure her that he had gone and taken the gardener with him, and told her not to worry.

Without warning, my mother slammed her fist against the yellowwood hall table, almost knocking her favourite China vase down. ‘You idiot! You little meddling twit!’ she shrieked. Not sure how to interpret this outburst, but anticipating what might follow, I backed away slightly. ‘Can’t you ever do anything right? I kill myself trying to put this family back together again, but you seem bent on destroying it. Why must you drive him away? Does it please you to see me like this?’

Forced to gaze into her maddened green eyes, I struggled to find an appropriate response. ‘I thought I was helping ...’

‘Oh, really?’ Sarcasm flowed with mellifluous ease. ‘Well, you just pick up that phone and apologise. Right now.’

Under her malevolent green glare my quivering hands fumbled out my father’s number. I was too agitated for tears.

For the third time I let the phone ring ten times and almost put the receiver down when an irritable voice snapped, ‘Hello?’

'Hello, Daddy. It's me. I just phoned to say I'm sorry about what I said.' At the other end of the line my father uttered an 'Oh' before lapsing into silence, obviously sulking.

'And for being rude. And selfish,' my mother hissed.

'Yes.' Now I was crying. 'And I'm sorry I was so rude and selfish,' I sniffed. A longer silence; then another 'Oh'.

Wrenching the phone from me, my mother resumed the conversation. 'Richard? Hi, Cindy here ... Ja, I don't know why she behaved like that ... Yes ... must be – the teenage years ... Coming back? Now? Fine, ja ... uh-huh ... uh-huh ... Okay ... Fine. Bye.' Triumphant my mother replaced the receiver and hurried across to her bedroom to redo her make-up and change into another alluring outfit.

I was banished to my room for the afternoon, which I lived vicariously – three millennia in the future – with the aid of an anthology of feminist science-fiction. From approximately two light years away I glimpsed down at my father kissing my mother. Suddenly rain started pelting them both. While my exultant mother blew kisses after her soon-to-be ex-husband, my father accelerated down the drive with a testosterone roar.

Penelope Rose, Westerford High School

1994

1994

The new South Africa

My Merc 500SL engine muted.

Cause: carburettor collapse.

Place: South Western Townships;
SOWETO.

Three black men approach
like rebels with a cause.

I (crouch) and [hide]. Why?
Scared.

Closer. They knock on the window;
hope it's bulletproof!

'Singanisiza na?' – a black voice;
meaning?

I ignore. They proceed – peacefully?
Yes. They fix my car – I, amazed.

They seek no reward, yet, only ...
Friendship.

Peace? Trust?
So many questions to be answered.
I am anxious for our Country.
Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika.

Simon Bothner, Michaelhouse

Reflections in a mirror

Let us begin with an end. The curtain descends on the final act. The omniscient, omnipresent critic is undecided.

Swop scenes to the dressing-room. Only the protagonist is left. He is sitting at the table. The salt has been spilt. The bare lightbulbs surrounding the mirror frighten him. They expose every contour, every line, every wrinkle. In this reality there are no shadows, no softenings. He takes the greasepaint, and begins to wipe his makeup off. Slowly. Methodically. He is making black streaks on his white skin. (Please remember that this play is in technicolour.) What would Romeo say? 'Thus with a kiss I die'? Leaning forward, he bends to kiss his image. But the image makes no such move. Its face begins to crumple and tears start coursing down its rouged cheeks – Picasso's clown is crying. In the midst of this tragedy there is mockery. Notice how we have separated ourselves from reality – the face, the man, the image (the trinity) has lost its identity.

He thinks of the actors in the last few scenes. He remembers Jesus on the cross, crooked. With splinters in his hands he danced through the hourglass. He quotes, 'Marry, this be the most lamentable tale.' His tongue is thick and dry, and the words stumble out.

He feels a savage anger building, slowly, irrevocably. I didn't want to eat it, she had sobbed. He had wanted to comfort her then, but she had been responsible for so much pain. Perfect innocence still hovered around her. A suggestion of self-expression in her colourless eyes.

He remembers his mother. Her sweet face, her gentle hands. The pure love he feels for her. He tries to harness that love and transfer it to his art. With sudden fury, he sweeps his hands across the table and sends the objects crashing to the floor. 'I'm an actor, not a man!' he screams. Cut! And print. Now replay in slow motion the breaking of the glass that held the powder. Let Brownian Motion commence among the particles. Similar to the day God flung the stars into the universe. The actor's immense anger is dying. He sits alone, rejected, alien against the wall.

God is still. He is quietly evaluating the final act, spanning Two World Wars, millions dead, and no original thought. Standing with one foot

balanced precariously over the edge. He clutches desperately to his sanity.
It is time for the Actor and the Director to meet.

The actor is ready to come out now. He pauses to drink some water.
It tastes like wine. Perhaps he has made it so.

Nadia Davids, St Cyprian's School*

Our country is not at war

Our country is not at war.
But in the streets
The people run.
Stones are thrown.
Here come the yellow vans,
And armoured cars.
Men, dressed in brown,
Use gas and guns.
The crowd disperses.

Our country is not at war.
But on the news
Every night,
It's the same story:
'Twenty killed in Soweto.
Fifteen died in Edendale.'
And in the paper it says,
'More than one thousand killed in violence
so far this year. Over two hundred
policemen died in the line of duty.'

We smile,
And hold our heads high.
Everything is fine.
No, our country is not at war.

Deborah Haines, St Anne's Diocesan College

Toyi-toyi

Darkness –
Gaining strength, coming nearer
Voices – chanting as rhythmic
Feet – marching

Gaining strength, coming nearer
Faces – angry and protesting
Bodies – glistening with sweat
Gaining strength, coming nearer
Sing! Shout! Call!
Swearing through the night!
Over and over again
And again over again.
Blinding piercing light
sweeps the thronging
exposes the bodies
then –
as hail pummels the ground
as rain showers the sky –
the bullets pour over them!
Pain screaming through the night!
Over and over again
And again over again

Noluthando Makhunga, St Anne's Diocesan College

1995

Chasing the wind

From the very day I saw you
I knew it to be
That you and me
Would live to chase the wind.

Together now and for ever more
We make a pledge
And run the edge
While we try to chase the wind.

Climbing up, ever higher now
I see the place
As I behold your face
We live to chase the wind.

I'll stand the time, all alone
To face them all

I'm prepared to fall
So we can live to chase the wind.

I see it now, soaring into the sky
The silver dove
A testament of love
I want to chase the wind.

Let me run, across the clouds
To live and be me
I want to fly free
To try and chase the wind.

Never more shall I be
To something chained
And living stained
I want to chase the wind.

So now I flee, up and away
Time to go
I will not slow
I'm going to chase the wind.

Ian Coleshaw, South African College High School

The letter

To our much appreciated domestic helper –
This is just to apologise for those years when
we called you our (excuse me) black servant;
when we did always feel it wrong to pay you
the recommended (minimum) wage and
to house you in those conditions – which were good,
considering what we had seen on TV about the townships.

We would like you to know that we feel guilty about
our previous government's policy and that we
always campaigned against it –
voting for liberals at every opportunity.
We never did expect you to adhere to our culture
but we always tried to help you to understand
(i-Maria, the Medem she want you to plize
do for her the iyoning-wek) the humble beauty of
our colonial-oppressor's language.

We were so glad when we gave you that half-holiday
so that you could come and vote with us;
I even found myself humming our
New National Anthem, which, as I always
tell my friends, has such a beautiful tune.

We are delighted now that we are finally allowed to
talk to you like an adult and equal, and that our new
government does not tell us those very-bad things
about the people who happen to have a darker pigment
in the very outer layers of the skin on their faces.
And who ever imagined that it could become
acceptable and even so fashionable to discuss one another's
cultures? Like we did on that day when I had tea with you
in the kitchen, and you fascinated me
by explaining all the problems
which domestic helpers have when their
children (like yours, you said)
are living in a faraway township.

Anyway, that's about all
that I really wanted to say –
and I do feel so much better for
having said it – except that if
you ever need to tell me about
the bad things which you have done,
I can promise that if you write it down like this,
I will be prepared to read it.

Matthew Dalby, St John's College

You weren't there

You weren't there
the day I fell
in the school playground –
my cries shattering the quiet of the sterile corridors.

You weren't there
to wipe away the stains of failure
when I swam my first race –
and lost.

You weren't there
to pick up the shattered pieces of my heart
the night he phoned
and said it was all over.

You weren't there
the day my dreams came true.
I came home
to a lonely emptiness.

You weren't there
to pick me up from school
to plant a caring kiss on my troubled brow
to speak mother/daughter things – Trivialities –
Yet not so trivial.
You weren't there –
Ever.

And soon
I'll be gone –
like a warm breath
on a cold Highveld morning.

Forever.

Mother.

Carolyn Esser, Kingsmead College*

Black barbie doll

I'm tired of you calling me a black barbie doll
because most of my friends are white and I get good marks
and because I talk 'proper' (whatever that means).
This is me, this is how I want to be.
Nobody is going to squeeze me into a box labelled
black or white. Okay?

Nomfundo Khabela, Epworth High School

Madiba

Not a superstar, actor or model
Not a face to 'launch a thousand ships'
No starched collars, ties or jackets
Not afraid of eating boerewors and chips

Not a man who kills what's in his way
Not with the same ambition as those
No, their ambition equals hate
Not hate, or pride; letting us get close

A man who lived for the people of his land
A man whose final hour is his best
A man whose hopes and dreams are now fulfilled
A rising star (old) – better than the rest

Karen Schlebusch, Westerford High School*

Why is happiness always yesterday?

I look through the window
of lost time
Look over my yesterdays
and all the times we had
all the love we shared
and lost.
I look back and ask
Happiness is not today
Why is happiness always yesterday?
You said you would never leave
You'd go anywhere
And you'd always be by my side
But you left.
I ask the same question
Why is happiness always yesterday?
I ask
I cry
I scream
I plead
And still I get no answer.
Why is happiness always yesterday?

Katlego Setshogoe, St Martin's School

Lemon-tree lesson

We were the same height and probably the same age. The only differences were that she was black and asking for money. I told her that I had no money, but then, with the same pleading eyes, she asked me if she could pick some of the lemons from the lemon tree in our backyard.

I was quite surprised, wondering why she wanted lemons, but went to open the heavy security gate. She picked up the half-rotten lemons from the ground. I stopped her and told her to pick ripe lemons from the tree. She smiled at me and explained in a mixture of Xhosa and English that her uncle is a Rasta and needs lemon juice for his hair. For a moment we were just two teenage girls standing under a lemon tree smiling at each other.

And then her bag was full and we walked in silence towards the security gate which I unlocked.

She thanked me and walked away and I wondered if she had picked enough lemons.

Aletta Muller, Durbanville High School

I wish I could sing

I wish I could sing
With a voice so
Powerful and moving.
I wish I had a wonderful voice
To thank the people who have made me grow.
I wish I could sing to
All women who have done or said
Something worthwhile.
I wish I had a voice inspiring enough
To change people and things around me.
I dream of a day when my voice will change
My neighbourhood.
I shall stand on the roof of our small house and
Sing and sing –
Changing the dull neighbourhood into a vibrant place.
I wish I could sing to the hopeless
And give them hope of a better future.
I wish I could sing to the dying
And make them healthy and strong again.
I wish I could sing to the hungry
And fill them with nourishment.
I wish I could sing to my brothers

Who have lost themselves and their cultures
And change them into pillars of
Our troubled society.
I wish I could sing to my immoral society ...
Oh, I wish I could sing!

Mbali Sibisi, Waverley Girls' High School

Early-morning Clifton

The start to a much longer story

The start to a magical Clifton day ... it was approximately 9:15 am at 13 Victoria Road, Clifton. The neighbourhood was beginning to awake to the buzz of kugels, bagels, garden-boys and (as Clifton beach is too great a place to keep a secret) blacks, more commonly referred to in the area as 'schwarzes' (a Yiddish term, little-known to outsiders, symbolising Jewish racial tolerance the world over).

The sky was flawless and the sea was as quiet as the Sunday-morning shift at Romeo's Escort Club, situated a little down the road, just beyond Three Anchor Bay. (At this point, I narrowly escape digressing into the sordid activities of one of Sea Point's last thriving industries.) Moving on ...

The emerald sea, the Pep-blue sky and the sun-bleached sands were all visible from Fannie Edelstein's sun-drenched, off-white master bedroom. For the moment, it seemed as though there were no blacks on the beach – just people. All that was interrupting her idyllic view of 1984-style white utopia was Mildred the domestic, hanging precariously off the opposite side of the master bedroom's balcony railing (the dangerous side) with her unoccupied hand clutching a Windolene bottle and an old *Jewish Chronicle* ... Saturday morning was window day and the sliding windows in Fannie's bedroom were filthy – 'You can't even see throo them!' Fannie always used to say.

Fannie had been a widow for thirteen years and was content with herself and her lot. She was fifty-six – young in Clifton terms. Fannie kept herself busy. When she wasn't shopping for 'necessities' at the Camps Bay Pick 'n Pay Pantry, she could be spotted at the Sea Point branch of Peach, chatting to one of the 'nice coloured girls' behind the counter, or trying on something 'special' to wear at a 'private' party at 'her own address' with a 'limited' guest list. Fannie had few friends outside of the Camps Bay Seniors' Bridge Club and the Marais Road Synagogue's Sisterhood movement. So Fannie would dress up for herself and spend a quiet evening in front of the mirror – alone.

When she wasn't at 'the Pantry' or at Peach, she devoted most of her time to the love of her life, Louis the poodle, more commonly referred to by the male members of the bridge club as 'that randy little rat' – Fannie couldn't bear to neuter him, he was the male figure around the house.

Fannie used to relish going shopping at the Pantry, especially on her big 'stocking-up' days (she was one of the major culprits behind the 1994 pre-election baked-beans and toilet-paper shortage). On Friday morning she could be spotted hobbling down the aisles with a basket in one hand and her cellular in the other, taking shopping orders from Mildred – 'It's amaazing wot niew teknologie can doo. Ar doan't knoaw haow Ar evva lived withaout it,' Fannie always used to say.

Middy came and the heat set in and it was time for Fannie to surface from her nest above the beach. She descended in the lift, towards Victoria Road street level. As she exited the lift she was nearly knocked off her feet by Philemon, a four-or-five-year-old black street urchin who had been 'taken in' by old Mrs Greenblatt from across the road in Nautilus – 'Stupid bluddy kaff ... Oh! Zelda Greenblatt, Ar didn' see yoo there beharnd young Fillimin.'

It was very fashionable to take young children off the streets and feed and clothe and school them. It proved an endless source of amusement for ageing kugels whose families had 'packed for Perth' or 'trekked to Toronto', leaving them with no grandchildren to dote on. But Fannie didn't need an orphan, she had Louis. 'It's orl very well jus' taking them iin, but wot hapins when thay staart getting oalder? Ar doan't wont a bluddy pyoobesint klonkie on mar hands when Ar'm seventy – it'll rob me blind!' Fannie always used to say.

She walked on further up Victoria Road, towards the Pantry, until a cluster of bicycles came into view. There were five of them; one in the centre of the cluster; two on either side; one in front; and one behind. And they were all 'schwarzes', and they were monopolising the pavement. But then as they began to come into focus she noticed a familiar black face (one that didn't look like 'all the other blacks'). It was the President in his bicycle cavalcade. He was smiling ... as usual.

Unable to control her excitement, she reacted in a most distressingly uncouth fit of choking. The whole episode was terribly embarrassing for Fannie, as her mouth was quite full of phlegm at the time.

Nobody expected it. She was talking to Zelda about the shortage of Estee Lauder products at Stutties. Then it came on. Her face screwed up (as if she had just discovered that Mildred had broken something), her glossy, pink-chartreuse lips quivered for a split moment ... And then all hell broke loose. The whole of Victoria Road and environs were immediately alerted to Fannie's choking by the most devastating cough-cum-lurching sound. A mound of mutilated phlegm hurtled from Fannie's mouth, across the bicycade, and found a temporary home on the surface of the President's Ray Bans.

'Omargord! Zelda, it's him! It's Nelsin!' she exclaimed after she had recovered.

She ran in front of the bicycade, shrieking, 'Madiba! Madiba! It's me, Fannie Edelstein, who wroat yoo orll thoase letters ... Pleez stop.'

They had already stopped. Madiba was still smiling.

‘Mar Gard! Ar’ve been waiting orll mar larf for thus moament – Yoo knoaw Ar’ve orlways been part of thu Struggle in mar oawn luttle way – Ar’ve always considered marself as a daughter of Africa – Yoo knoaw, being a Jew and orll ...’

Madiba just smiled, once a messianic liberator, now too tired to do anything else.

Robert Silke, South African College High School*

1996

Only this nail

When I feel this nail in my hand,
And when I press the point against my wrist
I begin to understand.
No, in fact, at last
I begin to believe.

The nail’s hardness, sharpness, nailness
Means more to me
Than a silly sermon on
God the Fantastic Entity.

It has not been confused by some parson’s
Imaginings of his own understanding,
Nor even bent to reflect his
Own face, so that his God’s is blurred.

If I press it really hard against my skin
I will bleed, just as he bled.
And if I were nailed to a cross with these nails,
I would die, as he died.

He was something one could see and touch,
He was a reality.
It does not take a sermon or a chapel even
To understand.

Only this nail.

Andrew Auld, St John’s College

Wha' da mess

Die Whites, they don't understand ons se taal. Dey sees it as funny, of being under dem, but we da Gam an' dat's us. We can't hyelp it. It's part of us.

Da Cape Coloured is a unique breed of peoples – living a de-fe-rent lifestyl an' having a 'unusul' kulcher. We came from two types of peoples – so a mixcher of both. Ons se ou, ou-toppies was mos white an' black, sien djy! Over da years we were born, a concockshin of both – djy kan ma 'half-breed' sê. Ja, dis waar! An' now we stuck in da middel; not white an' not black. My skin is too dark to be white an my hair too straight to be black. Nou wat moet ek doen! Ons is hier alleen. We stranded.

With Apartheid ons was ook innie middel – too uncivilised to be white and too light to be black. We got hyel from da both sides, ek sê! Dji kan ma sê dat Apartheid drove us together, no one else wanted us. Dat's why we got our own kulcher.

From being dis concockshin, our taal was also changed, because it had to suit us. Die taal is so bietjie gemeng – Afrikaans an' English. You check, we speak so because it is part of our past, and we can't deny our heritage, can you? An' also, dees English words are mos te laanie, an' dey don't discribe as good. In Gam taal der are two rules: djy moet jou woorde plat uitspreek an' you must not speak like a white, adder-wise da ouense make guy, it's just like dat – no questions asked.

Da Cape Coloured is ... hoe kan ek sê? ... diverse, ja ... is so diverse – hulle lieue in hul eie wêreld – der own kulcher. Ja, sure, you get upper-class an' laanie Gam (an' congrats to you!), maar der's no pretending you white, der's no chance of dat. You are what you are!

What makes us so de-fe-rent is da fact dat we don't care what adder people tienk – we don't reserve ourselves, adderwise we'd be caging our personalities. If you walk down a street, da funniest kar-ree-ters you find are all mos coloured – dey go on, performing, enjoying every minute of da attention.

Ja, djy kan sê dat ons 'attention-seekers' is, dis waar!

Whites look like Whites, Blacks look like Blacks, maar coloured – dey come in all variations. Dji kannie sê dat ons só of só lyk, want ons is almal verskillend. You get dark-skinned an' light-skinned Gam, Gam with kroes, straight and in-between hair, Gam dat look like Boesmans, Whities of Namaqualanders, and Gam with and without manners!

Om basic te wees, djy kan sê dat ons a 'mess' van peoples is.

Dominique Johnson, South African College High School

Pot poem

(Inspired by Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'
and Fazel Johennessé's 'The African Pot')

Ugly little pot
(who was meant to be a vase
for the dewdamp blossoms
from our garden)
you fit so snugly
in my tired hand.

But as you rest –
so lightly, so rollingly –
upon my hot skin
how I wish
that I had, once more,
to clutch you carefully
between both chubby palms.

How I wish
that I could, once more,
feel your substance,
slicksmooth
claysmooth:
and blissfully slimy
against my clenched, pushing fists.
That I could press my
tiny hands, fingers splayed
on the unwieldy lump
of mud
which was you
and feel the
glutinous giggle of your brownness
Squidge –
squidge
squidgingly oozingly –
between my fingers
your coolness and squelchiness –
sheer delight.

And how I wish
that I could smell, once more,
your smell;

the earthy essence
filling my nostrils with your
 heady scent,
the scent of eternal, boggy
 content.

I wish
I wish
that I could, once more,
 breathe your breath
 your claybreath –
 lifebreath –
and know that I breathe
 the breath of
 childhood
 and
 innocence
 again.

I'm sorry
I am
 sorry.
I did not mean
 to let you go
but I couldn't help it.
And when I did,
something inside me
 shattered
along with your
 dusty,
 exquisite
 self.

Sarah Johnson†, Rustenburg High School for Girls*

In memoriam

It's amazing how much they knew – of the ancient world and of ours. Those ancient Roman writers knew how to express themselves, and they know us. Catullus and Ovid know everything about love and ideas, Pliny can tell things factually and charmingly, and Cicero can lie and be believed. Those are the Roman gods, the immortal ones. The Romans are dead but they have survived all finality to expose all the talents and lovely flaws of the human being.

I was to meet Zoey at the dam – a beautiful ‘trespassers-will-be-prosecuted’, deep-green dam on the rise at the bottom of Table Mountain. There were various holes in the fence to get in the area, and a special sort of person knew to go there: a thinking person. The atmosphere encouraged that. I felt much removed from the ordered little world below; the rumbling of traffic in the bowl of life below was to me grumbling Vesuvius threatening to erupt.

Zoey, my ex-girlfriend, was on holiday from Pretoria, the evil city that had abducted her five months before and put an end to our romance. Now she was back but there was an awkward distance between us – I doubted she would arrive. I basked in the sun and swam in the mysterious water, there was a lot of semi-tame vegetation around the dam and a bit further the trees of Newlands forest planted there by the old colonialists. The tranquillity was disturbed by a party of factory workers having a picnic – at first it felt festive but they were a bit too drunk and getting hysterical. The screaming and shouting was turning to panic – I heard an Afrikaans word sounding like ‘drink’ – they were probably comparing alcohol tolerance. Then somebody approached me and pointed to the party: ‘Kyk daar! Iemand verdrink!’

I didn’t believe anyone was drowning – they were just drunk and confused. I made my way around the rocky edge of the dam to a growing crowd of curious, hesitant dam people. As I got there, a man in the dam was holding an unconscious woman. Another man started trying to resuscitate her, others shouted conflicting instructions at him. I was in a state of disbelief, and very aware of time slipping by. Her eyes were open, she had no pulse, and she had a beautiful calm expression on her face. She was dead but her elastic body seemed to respond, maybe resist their revival attempts.

Suddenly she let out a loud burp, and the dead muscles in her lungs coughed up water and mud and twigs and stones and blood. A frothy mulch gargled from her nose and ears and eyes. Her nipples were icy blue against her black skin, her tongue, swollen to double its previous size, hung out of her mouth like a fisherman’s record catch. She was definitely dead.

I turned to her friends and colleagues, one having just returned from calling an ambulance. Still drunk, confused and hysterical, they began to weep, a howling weep of the damned. The guilt they felt then was going to torment them forever – the guilt for not having swum harder, shouted louder, been more organised, run faster, been sober, loved her more, told her the truth, tolerated her shortcomings, and for not having relished every moment of her existence. Even I felt guilty for not having made a difference to whether she lived or died, and I hadn’t even looked at her when she was alive.

Zoey, a beautiful intelligent woman my age with a depth of character that was immortal, was unable to comfort me, or learn from my experience, or whatever it was that she used to do that would make me feel so content.

She had changed in our absence. Our love affair was dead but constantly in my memory.

Catullus stood at his brother's grave and cursed the untallied opportunities of the past. Catullus wrote this to deify his brother, and his brother, like Catullus, now lives forever, even though he will always be Catullus's brother. I want to deify the drowning woman, and Zoey, and myself, and all the experiences that are exclusively mine. With all the lessons I have learnt, an expert like me cannot die and be forgotten ...

I will push all the writings of dead parts of my life down the River Styx, coin-in-mouth, and my dream of living on forever will be dreamed again and again into an unfailing future.

Nicholas Spagnoletti, South African College High School*

Don't

Don't talk to me

because I listen.

Don't ask me to understand because

I knew what you meant long before
you knew what you were doing.

Don't ask me to stay

because I was never here.

Don't tell me to forgive you

because you taught me all I know,
and you never taught me that.

Don't ask me to turn away from
those that I love because then what
would I have left?

You left me long ago, I found myself
in others; I understood myself through
others and I learned to accept
myself by myself because you
refused.

Don't come back, I don't

want you, you're not welcome
anymore because you took the
welcome mat away.

Don't blame me, blame yourself.

Annabel van der Merwe, Rustenburg High School for Girls

To his university's Transformation Forum

(a parody of Andrew Marvell's 'To his Coy Mistress')

Snap out of your old time-warp now,
Chairperson. Stuff your holy cow!
You act like you've got endless power
And leisure for your ivory tower.
You think there's time to 'contemplate',
To 'ponder', 'muse' and still 'create'.
In Eurocentric play-play land
Perhaps there're guys who understand
And feel the kicks you get from 'thought'
And share the fancy toys you've bought
(Remember, we, the people, paid).
In cuckoo-land perhaps you 'grade'
And measure 'excellence' with marks,
Make clever putting-down remarks,
And fail the guys you choose to hate.
Y'want us to crawl and imitate?
Dream on! Your abstract arty stuff
– Elitist, but not good enough!

You must have heard the winds of change,
The people's will to re-arrange,
Correct the old Establishment
And threaten with abolishment
Exclusivist privilege.
You'd better learn our true knowledge
Read the people's writing on the wall
And face the music of one voice for all.
Your campus: quite a pleasant spot.
With thick, fresh tyre-smoke? Maybe not.

We're sure you'll all soon see the light
And give us all our natural right
To normal varsity education,
Diplomas with great implication.
You'll grant the things we want, we hope.
Forget those 'principles', don't mope
About your airy research stuff;
As you know well, we've had enough.
We trust you'll all concede with grace;

If not, there's only one more case:
You rightwing lib'rals won't give up?
We grassroots guys, we fuck you up.

Jan van Zyl Smit, Bishops (Diocesan College)*

1997

Ironing denims: an exercise in femaleness

'Please!'

He was on his knees, dripping wet, with a towel around his waist. I knew what was coming. He had a crumpled pair of jeans in one hand and a R2 coin in the other. His request was self-explanatory.

I sighed and took the jeans and left him with his pathetic R2 bribe. It wasn't that I felt sorry for him with his rapidly declining student bank account, I felt sorry for me. I was being manipulated into doing a chore he was perfectly able to do himself, simply because my oestrogen level exceeds his. By taking the money, I would become his servant, thus placing him in a position of authority over me. In my reasoning, being his sister, this would be an affront to my dignity. I tried to think of ironing his jeans as a favour from me, as a person, to him, as a person. I tried not to bring gender into the equation.

Perhaps it was PMS (the usual explanation for a change of temperament in females) or perhaps it was the crease in his jeans that I couldn't get out, but I suddenly became quite agitated by my brother's request. The point is, it was not one swallow in mid-winter; a flock of malignant magpies had arrived and multiplied and would continue to do so.

Men, I thought (being too agitated to guard against generalisations), see the world (with all its abundant women) as a place in which they will come and go, and use and waste as they see fit. Men – granted, some men – seem always to have to be the centre of control. They regard themselves as the power-base for all operations concerning or in any way affecting them. Women, on the other hand, see themselves as parts in a machine. A woman sees herself as someone who is dependent upon others, depended upon by others, and whose actions will affect others.

I wanted to propound my theory to my brother, who was now standing in the doorway, waiting for me to finish. I needed evidence, though, if I wanted to be taken seriously (something I fight myself not to put down to my gender).

The toys children play with gave me an idea. Boys are given cars, aeroplanes, Lego, trains, toy soldiers and the like. With these toys, the boy

is always the centre of control. Meanwhile, girls are given dolls and teddy bears. These are things we are expected to nurture and look after. When we are five years old, we are already being taught to be depended upon.

The question of non-sexist language suddenly came to mind. This 'new frontier' the world is presently warming up to, catching on to, has actually been around since Virginia Woolf. Literary theorists and feminists (also a popular derogatory term for females used by the 'Immensely Misguided') have been debating the question for decades. They have, in fact, got right down to the very structure of language and its sexist implications. This is all happening while the rest of the world is still deciding which pronouns girls like best. But why, I ask, with symbols of emotion commonly associated with females in my eyes, why are we so far behind?

Here we come back to Billy and his aeroplanes. Men, who have this obsession with being the power-base, control practically everything. In management positions in publishing companies, we see men. In the decision-making process in broadcasting companies, we see men. In the hierarchy of financial institutions, we see men. The reason we are so far behind is that our view of the world is controlled and interpreted for us by these men. We can hardly expect to move forward if it means a 'demotion' for the especially powerful and especially threatened New Aristocracy.

I would have gone on to consider the glass ceiling, the treatment of women in the workplace and the conditioning of the girl pupil, but, fortunately or unfortunately, I finished my little ironing chore before I got there.

'Here are your very Male jeans, Female-ironed. And don't you ask me to do your dirty work ever again!' I threw him his jeans and marched off indignantly.

'Women,' I heard him mutter.

Emma Attwell, Pretoria High School for Girls*

Little Black Riding Hood

Conversation between man and child

So little one. Why do you think I am a beast? Hmm ...

A killer, a murderer, a vampire?

You have claws, sir.

Claws? What jest, young child?

Old women in their smoky parlours,

Playing poker unbeknown to their husbands,

They with their arthritic joints, paralysed and unable to move,

They have claws.

So I ask you again:
Why do you think I am a fiend? a monster? a demon?
But you have fangs, sir!
I tire of this 'sir' business,
Formality is brashly overrated.
From now on, you will call me Quant. That is my name.
And about these ... fangs, as you call them,
They are naught but extensions of my teeth.
Little children like you, with a gap between pointed incisors,
You have fangs.
But Quant, sir, your laugh.
It's like a bad man's.
(Laughter – akin to cartoon villain)
That? 'Tis simply jest.
Like Charlie Chaplin,
American movies and those painful, oh so painful, sitcoms.
No have these things where I come from.
Mayhap, little one,
You can give me another reason why you call me monster.
Your eyes are glowing.
Contact lenses.
Your hair is so long.
I need to go to a barber.
Your shirt!
What about my shirt?
It has blood all over it.
Hmm ...
I guess you got me there.
A shame,
I was going to let you live.

Daliso Chaponda, Waterford Kamhlaba United World College*

Night swimming

The hot summer night's buzz
and the cool silver moon's flood
filled my soul
beside that midnight lake
on shores yellow and unperplexed
I stopped a while to undress
Ripples pulsed into darkness
as I crumpled the wet water's edge

Trapped in my cold and sparkling flesh
I heard my pulse and caught my breath
below the waves embraced by depth
my life seemed suddenly clear
and beamed soft with the pale moon's radiance
Then I surfaced for air

Tom Cox, St Stithian's College

Having come this far, there is no turning back

The dogs were gaining on me. I ran quicker, faster, but my efforts seemed useless. I felt their warm breath on my heels as they kept snapping at my legs, but luckily missing. I suddenly came to a fence and, with one great heave, I threw myself to the other side. I was safe – or was I?

6 pm Monday 13/05/1978

'And when you get to Sebokeng, you ask for Bra Vusi at the taxi rank. Everybody knows him. He's fat and drives a powder-blue Mitsubishi combi. Remember this – especially you, Thabang, as you are the leader – the code is: Lerumo le Wele (the Spear has fallen). He will know what to do,' said Mr Setuki as he bade us farewell. He had been our recruiting officer for six months now and had expertly taught us all we needed to know to be successful in our mission, which was to cross the border over to Botswana to join the ANC underground army, Umkhonto we Sizwe. As we boarded the train I felt scared. I was scared because I was in charge of the seven heartbeats sitting crumpled together in this small second-class compartment for Bantus. 'Bantus', together with 'you people', were the words that I hated with all my heart, especially when coming from the Black police officers trying to be white! I could stand 'kaffir' because I knew its direct meaning, which was non-believer in Islam, and also because I am a true communist and thus am an atheist, and, as one great communist leader once said, 'Religion is the opiate of the people.'

Mr Setuki had chosen me as the leader because of my 'bravery', 'fearlessness' and my 'astute' nature. I sit with my six comrades in this compartment and I feel fear, yet I cannot back out now, I owe my people this much. Our leader Rolihlahla said we, the Youth, should be the driving force of the Struggle. I heed his call. But I am only seventeen years old, shouldn't I be finishing my studies? This is what my mother asked, but I told her that 'uBaba Mandela ufuna amaJoni' (Mandela needs soldiers) and she sighed and tears rolled down her wrinkled face. I told her that, if we win the Struggle, she won't have to work for Baas Smit anymore and we won't

have to eat 'mathe a makgowa' (white man's spit) anymore. She sighed and said the Baas treated her right. She was not of my generation.

After falling with a heavy thud on the cold ground, I stood up and looked back. The night was very dark, except for the searchlights on the other side of the fence. My body relaxed for a while, but when I turned again to continue, I felt a cold steel rod against my ribs. The light from behind shone on his face and, momentarily, I caught a glimpse of his blue eyes.

'Bastard!' I yelled, but it was too late. I heard his evil laughter as I fell and felt my chest wet with blood. Like a sack of potatoes, at 17, I fell. Cut short. I had come this far, there could never have been any turning back.

12.30 pm Monday 13/05/1996

'He had given up his life for the Struggle ... he ... he ... he said to me that, that "uBaba Mandela ufuna amaJoni." He was to be in the army for Mandela. I don't know why he did not listen to me. He ... he said, he said he was going to Botswana with ... with his friends ... his comrades. Since then ... I, I have not heard a word from Thabang,' the old woman lamented her story to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearing in Johannesburg. As she sat down, a white general in the South African National Defence Force, uniformed, stood up. He then took a few steps forward, swore the oath and began his story. The old woman saw the striking blue eyes of the general and remembered her son's hatred for the 'devil with blue eyes'. With a morose expression on his face, General Pienaar told the story of how he shot a leader of six terrorists who had just crossed the border on this exact day in 1978 – this had earned him a medal in the army. He rounded off with a plea to the commissioners for amnesty and sat down, a sardonic smile sprawled across his face.

John Diseko, St Barnabas College

Science

One hundred percent.

ONE HUNDRED PERCENT!

Oh, wow! I thought I had done so badly.

Better check again ...

I pinch myself.

It's true!

But wait,

It's not.

It's not my test.

'Pass back to Kate,'
I command bitterly.
It wasn't mine,
I can't believe it.
I HATE Science.

This is mine.
Trust it to be last.
Check for curious bystanders.
Take a peek ...
One hundred percent.
ONE HUNDRED PERCENT!
Oh, wow! I thought I had done so badly.
Better check again ...
I pinch myself.
It's true!
It's mine!
I got one hundred percent!
I LOVE Science.

Jennifer Johnston, Kingsmead College

Goodbye

As we stood there motionless,
All I could do was stare back at her.
Thoughts were flashing through my mind,
Maybe a hug ...?
Maybe a kiss ...?
I advanced and saw the sparkle in her eyes.
I hugged,
I kissed,
And the emotion pierced me deep down.
As she turned around and left me,
I stood there watching until she had disappeared,
And all I could hear myself mumble softly
was the heart-breaking word: Goodbye.

Raymond Moleli, Riverside High School

Requiem for a young poet

Your womb was warm
and clean
and ready

it was there
that i first sapped the sweetness
of Your stomach's juices
and listened
with freshly-cartilaged ear
to the
dadoof dadoof
of my life pump
pump
pumping
the blood of my being
wholesome and pure
through the channels of my human
self

it occurred not once to my
caterpillar-small mind
as it grew
steadily
in the warmth of its
cushioned cocoon
that You may not want me
or love me
or welcome
my precious monotonous
dadoof
into Your own chamber
i simply expected ...

... and uttered in thoughts
Come World! Come Life!
give me your signal
to exit my sanctuary
my safe solo silent
Silence
(but for my insistent insomniac
dadoof dadoof

Oh! how i love its rhythmical energy
and constant recurrence)

Perhaps you did not realise
when you sent your jagged-toothed friend up
into my sanctuary
that his cutting cure
for insistent insomnia
would be painful
Unwelcome

i fear the Silence that comes with sleep

Samantha Solomons, Rustenburg High School for Girls

1998

Shakespeare on acid: a film review

Romeo + Juliet directed by Baz Luhrmann

Picture yourself somewhere between the Globe Theatre and the Rio Carnival, and you begin to feel the atmosphere created throughout this visual masterpiece. *Romeo + Juliet* bursts at the seams with colour, sound and vitality. If it were any larger, it would have to be shown in two theatres simultaneously. Prodigious acting, superb directing and a writer whom no one can fault all serve as a springboard which will no doubt catapult this movie firmly into classic status.

For the uninitiated, and those who flunked high school English, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is an idealised story about two teenaged lovers and their seemingly perfect love. Their love, however, operates within the context of bitter hatred between their two families. To cut this epic tale short, the two kids eventually kill themselves in tragically mistaken grief and bury their families' figurative hatchet alongside their pubescent bodies. (If you didn't already know that, everything is explained in a powerful prologue.)

The plot may sound simple enough, but add to the brew the role of destiny, the sharp contrasts of love and hate, and countless paradoxical references to evil breeding within a Christian façade, and this story becomes more tangled than a Rastafarian hairstyle. After all, it was constructed by the finest literary mind in history.

Literary buffs will be pleased to know that Shakespeare's original dialogue and all the traditions present during that period have remained untouched. I suppose if it ain't broke, don't fix it. Instead, the classical and traditional play has been rocketed through time, and is now set in a contemporary scene, in sweltering Miami Beach (filmed in Mexico City). This daunting task has been handled with resounding success by the highly talented director, Baz Luhrmann, who can only be described as the love-child of Leonardo da Vinci and Andy Warhol, conceived after a night of heavy substance abuse. The harmony he has created from the juxtaposition of such diverse time periods couldn't be regarded as anything less than brilliant.

Characters converse fluently in Elizabethan English coated with thick American accents, gunplay replaces swordplay, and the feud between the Capulet and Montague families takes the form of gang rivalry. 'Fair' Verona could not be further from the truth, as we experience 'Verona Beach' as a decaying American city riddled with violence, death and ironic Christian indices. A more perfect accompanying wardrobe or soundtrack could not be imagined.

Acting is of the highest calibre. Leonardo DiCaprio as Romeo re-establishes himself in my book as the finest actor of a generation. The relatively new Claire Danes gives a dazzling performance as the beautiful Juliet, and the two together create a unit that is vital to the movie. The supporting cast are all thoroughly convincing and their outstanding performances alone make the viewer seem almost fluent in Shakespearean English. Special mention ought to be given to John Leguizamo, who plays the sly Tybalt, Prince of Cats.

Although I give full credit to the innovative editing and camera techniques used by Luhrmann, I do sometimes find the use of 'slam-zooms' and 'whip-pans' slightly excessive in certain scenes. If I had one gripe about the movie, it was the feeble importing of certain comedic devices used in Luhrmann's previous hits, such as *Strictly Ballroom*, into the comparatively more serious scenes of *Romeo + Juliet*.

Other than that, I would have to dig fairly deep to find any further criticism.

Some people might find the archaic diction fairly hard to come to terms with at first, but, coupled with masses of hidden symbolism and other tiny nuances, the viewer is compelled to experience the movie again and again. With an open mind and an open eye, the appreciation of this timeless masterpiece will undoubtedly increase after every repetition.

The bottom line is that Luhrmann has taken Shakespeare's classic play and converted it into a tangible, comprehensible and magical exploration for the film-going masses. It is a fresh and sparkling experience, which should not be missed.

Anyone who does so deserves a swift slap in the face with a wet mackerel.

Dylan Culhane, St Stithian's College

Speeding 'fine'

The self-explanatory whine
Causes, upon the face of the speedster, a frown.
The motorcycle pulls alongside
And the electric window slides down ...

'Weet jy hoe vinnig jy't gery, meneer?'
'Solly, I'm nut undastandung.'
'Does you know how fast you was going, sir?'
'Oh, only aboat one-sixty I'm tinkung?'

A scratch of pen on paper.
'Okay, rejis strayshun?'
The roll of 'r's impatient, blunt.
'I wusn't going *dut* fast, pliz min!'

'That iz korrek, I iz a policeman.
Rejis strayshun, pleez.'
'BM 101K,' and a mumble,
'Da wife, she gonna be cheezed.'

Then the slow, delicate pronunciation,
'Beer em, een-oe-in-kar.
Reg, en what iz yor name?'
Pleading voice, 'Mr M T Singhk, suh.'

Silence tense, more scratching.
Cars whistle by on the nearby highway,
The victim watches them, sighing,
Wishing he could make a sudden getaway.

'Okay ... all raait, kan I see some ID?'
'Oh min, I wun't do eet agen, jus lemme go.'
'Thas just what the others all plea,
Now I want to see some ID, meneer, nou!'

Hesitantly, the precious information moves
From car window, to outstretched hand.
As he reads, with time it proves
This is no ordinary criminal man.

‘Hey, isn’t you the mayor or something?’
‘Uhm, dis isn’t going to court, issit?’
‘Yhell no! I didn’t know it waz you driving!’
‘Oh min! I guess dis means no tietket?’

Lee Pope-Ellis, Hilton College

When all is quiet and peace restored

When all is quiet and peace restored
Sun sinks to dusk, light beams flawed
With breeze-blown darkness that soils the glow
Bird subsides to feather – willow to tree, and peace, peace, ah slow

When all is quiet and peace restored
Day’s been long, energy gnawed
With work jest weariness bones are sore
Time to sit and think and rest and think – think now of what came before

When all is quiet and peace restored
Time’s been hard, yes, battle called
When games are played and pawns are shed
But now it’s victor in defeat; and losers must look ahead

When all is quiet and peace restored
Nature’s raft has now been shored
Man has stopped and rest ensues
Fighting’s end, he’s paid his dues

The world spins now as before
Round the sun for evermore
Love and faith lie both adored
When all is quiet and peace restored

Mikhael Subotzky, Westerford High School*

Sax

Serpentine
yet warm in rich reflected golds.
Different in different lights.

Twice curved and then bell-flared for power,
Heavy for the gruff husky low-lipped bite of blues,
Polished for the easy rolling sound of big-band swing,
Low notes of satin-velvet: lyrical and
Resonant.
Yet tinged with sorrow.
And aching, reaching high notes coloured with such
haunting
 lilting
 beauty.

Musing in the back of smoke-filled nightclubs,
(A partner to a steely, muted trumpet, a never-flustered
double bass and tinkling jazz piano)
or
Soaring solo over fluttering strings and woodwinds

And when it is dismembered to be put away,
Each piece cleaned and shined,
And the worn brown case clicks shut,
I return to the world
Refreshed, and wonder:

How would I live
without my
Music?

Hedley Twidle, Michaelhouse*

i want to kill time with you

i want to kill time
with you

i want to rearrange the months
get them all mixed up
and celebrate christmas in june
with you

i want to while away the hours
spending time beneath the sun
pretending we are children too
with you

i want to paint your name across the walls
play on the beach with tennis balls
eat ice creams alongside beaches and pools
i want to kill all my time with you

and once we've spent enough time
killing time,
perhaps we'll drift apart
like leaves on the curve of the wind.
but then,
time will manifest itself,
stay true in memories
dreams, fantasies,
in everyone who looks like you,
for time is eternity, innate,
time is a growth

then maybe we'll collide back together
restore our world from
stray wisps of almost forgotten stars
and once again
we'll work overtime
making more time
to spend time
killing time
with each other

Nicole Whitton, Wynberg Girls' High School

1999

Down the birth canal

Darkness.
Something pushing.
Something pulling.
A light!

Pallid walls. Cold. Fear.
Is this life?
I cry.

Karabo Bogoshi, St John's College

Toolbox

What if ...

I could write like a pair of pliers.

Not your usual image, is it?

I could bend ideas, shape thoughts, nipsnap off clean lengths of
inspiration.

Twist facts around themselves, delve long-nosed into fiction.

Or I could write like a blowtorch.

Not enough to get you fired up?

To cut through paradigms, heat arguments, bind together unbreakably
disjointed postulates. Burn into the minds of men the truths of the
written word. Fuel my burning desires ...

I wouldn't want to write like a hammer, bashing mindlessly at what I did
not understand, forcing ideas into already solid minds. I couldn't be a drill,
boring holes into which I had nothing to put.

What goes around comes around.

No, no tool will suffice for me to write with. Words must be light, and
light you cannot force. Light you must shape and guide.

I wish my writing to be like glass.

Clear, never clouded, only distorting enough to magnify. Always giving a
pure reflection. Glass that gives the twinkle to good wine.

Beautiful while simple.

Shapely but clear.

True.

Poetry ain't easy

But it's not as easy here
By the sea, and poetry ain't easy.
In a stuffy room with music it's easy.

Today the sea taught me a lesson I want to tell.
But in the presence of reality
I feel underqualified for this grand task:
To put the taste of the salt
And the sound of the wash
And the fiery Berg wind
And the scalding sea-sand
On to the paper.

Mind to the grindstone
Hand to the style guide
Pen to paper
Is not how it should be.

Instead I sprint across the beach
Which seems ignited by the sun,
Carries me to the closest lick of a wave
And lets me ice my feet.

Chris Honey, St John's College

At Cavendish

Listening to your hands, I noticed it –
a scar, small and gnarled,
below the joint in your right thumb.
You told me how, at seventeen,
fastening a final crate on your last night
in the town where you were born,
your knife slipped from the string you were cutting
and pierced the whiteness of that thumb.
And I had such a vision of you,
crouched in dark-eyed silence over that box. Hair
falling forward, your bent body
seeming oddly angular in the shadows. What was it
that made your hand slip? A sudden panic
of realisation, an instant of clarity

which triggered the reflex of some unfamiliar,
 fragile nerve? Or perhaps
 the cutting of that string was a betrayal
 so great that the very bones in your hand
 fought to deny it. Whatever
 it was, I think there must have been a
 stumbling, clumsy relief
 as the knife stabbed the hunch of your finger:
 a gratitude for the twisting pain, for the
 clatter of the knife on to the floor, for the
 momentarily-bewitching brightness of blood
 spilling its crimson shadow across that
 sweet, pale skin.
 Later that night, your knife slipped again,
 this time cutting
 into the ball of your thumb. You laughed
 as you told me – twice in the same night, the same hand,
 who manages to do that? But,
 smiling, I could only wonder how it was
 that all remaining of that night
 were those two patches of muted discord.
 That your dark-eyed silence
 was enough.

Sarah Johnson†, Rustenburg High School for Girls*

Psychology sux, OK?

Flat on my back
 (lying on a couch)
 letting him pick my mind apart
 'How do you feel?'
 and
 'How does that affect you?'
 Oh, that's just what I need.

Prescribe a few pills
 Play soothing music
 Pamper me softly
 Patronise
 Paranoia
 Pick me apart
 Mr Headshrinker

It's the bane of the century
Psychology rules
We analyse (hypothesise)
Think that hypnosis
will bring out the answer
Regress and regret
Blaming your parents
Misunderstood and despised

At the end of the session
my father's a monster
my sister's Attila
my mother's a bitch
and my friends drag me down
One hundred Rand later
I'm out of pocket (and out of my mind)
CURED

Natasha Joseph*, Herzlia High School

Telephone piece

Click.
Hi, is she there?
Hang on.
Mmm mmm mmm (*try to sound preoccupied*) Doo dee doo doo –
Hello?
Howzit? (*will she recognise me?*)
Hey! How're you?
Excellent. How's things? (*good start*)
Good, good. You?
Not bad. Been a while hey?
Too long. What you been up to?
The usual, y'know.
Me too.
So how's your mom? (*small talk*)
Okay.
Mmm ... (*think!*) That's good. (*harder, idiot!*)
So, how's everything?
Not too bad. (*didn't I just say that?*)
Mmm.
Ahem. (*tic toc*) Hey, your team did well on Sunday.
Ja, three nil.

You won't make the final, though. (*oh, nice one*)

Whatever.

Ja. (*now or never*) So what're you doing on Saturday?

Oh, just going out with a friend. (*blam blam blam*) And you?

No, I'm just gonna see a movie with someone. (*liar*)

Oh. Right. Well, see you around.

Ja. Keep well.

Click.

Bugger.

Richard Stacey, St John's College

2000

In everything

The sun was a hammer at sunset,
It struck the waves of Walker Bay
and turned them to beaten copper,
twisting from green to yellow to gold and back.

The clouds were guarding the horizon,
and the hammer wrought them also,
forged them from white hot matter,
let them cool to orange and further to dull red,
from there to the native grey.

The graceful working of God was there,
it was in the water dust of the clouds,
and it was in me,
it was in the threads of current that created the waves
in the eye which saw it,
in the mind which beheld it,
and in the tongue which told of it.

Jon Keevy, Bishops (Diocesan College)*

The millennium and beyond

Millennium's arriving

Proclaim the papers

(And the travel agents)

Get your millennium trip while it's still fresh

<The experts argue over when the day starts>

<Countries fight for tourists to arrive:>

AT THEIR COUNTRY; herald in the new millennium here, you son of a gun!

Anywhere else and it wouldn't be the same millennium

It wouldn't feel the same; it would taste, smell, sound and look different

And women rush to the International Date Line to be the first

To have a child.

What I would like to know is ...

WHO will be the first to conceive (and will THAT be televised?)

Who will be the first to get high on crack cocaine?

Who will be the first drunkard of the millennium?

(now that would be a pick-up line to beat)

Who will be the first suicide case? And the first murderer? [But let's not
restrict this to individual entries];

Which government will be the first to start a war?

Who will be the first corrupt politician of the century to be uncovered?

Who will be the first crackpot to exit his bunker and say

'We got it wrong AGAIN, but I'm sure Armageddon's around the
corner! Shouldn't be too long to wait now! Join now to
beat the third millennium rush!'

Who is going to be the first company accused of sexism, racism, eye-colour-
ism, good-manner-ism, non-employment-of-serial-killers-and-rapists-ism,
Catholic-ism, pr-ism, and overall prejudice against people who are lazy,
stupid, arrogant, drunk, twisted, dolt-like, clinically-insane twits!

*Do we really care?

It's not the end of the millennium until 2001

And because of a mistake made in the setting of our calendar

We are years behind (hello '03)

The millennium is simply a time described by some guy (now dead)

And has no actual significance, other significance

Other than the fact that the calendar which it appears on

Is the most used in the world

People will not stop pillaging, stealing, killing, working, saving, helping,
learning, living or supporting our sports teams

Just because some travel agent who needs money to send his kid to an
overseas university

Says that this is too big an opportunity to miss

Don't miss the opportunity

To learn about who you really are

Because it COULD be too late;

Maybe the world will end

But

It will have about as much to do with the Millennium

As we individuals have to do

With the Insane Behaviour and Actions

Of Those who don't give a damn

Those other people;

Nature doesn't give a damn about our little charade of time-classification

Maybe I'll be out in the fields, appreciating life, nature, and God

On the 1st of January, the year 2000

aka the 21st of Ramadhan, 1420, according to the Islamic calendar

aka the 14th of October, 5015, according to the Hindu calendar

aka the 243rd day of the 5170380924th year of the anniversary of the
creation of the earth

aka:

just another day

Jared Licina, Rondebosch Boys' High School

The betrayal

Friday is a good day. It is like the end of everything stressful, everything work-related, and Gugulethu back in those days was just the place to be on Fridays. A person did not even have to have anything planned for it to be interesting and exciting. It just was.

All of us were on summer holidays this particular Friday; my two young uncles, my big brother and I. This morning was the kind you look forward to at night, not cold at all, but not too hot either, just right for us boys to sprinkle each other with the hose-pipe while washing the combi, getting it ready for the day's taxi trips. We always took great pleasure in doing this and it made me feel older, for my uncles and brother were older than I was and they always talked of interesting things – about this girl and that, and a whole lot of other things. After washing the combi, my oldest uncle, who was eighteen, would take us for a spin in the combi around the school, which was in front of our house, claiming to be drying the car. We finally went into the house for breakfast.

Our room was outside; we had a big flat made out of corrugated iron. After breakfast we took turns in taking a bath. By twelve o'clock we had done everything we had been told to do. Now it was our time, at least my uncles' and my brother's time!

I was not old enough to do some of the things they did. They were not criminals, just involved in this political youth organisation and that.

I guess the big thing was that they were leaders in most of them. I admired and looked up to them. They let me sit in on their meetings sometimes when they were not talking about important plans. This Friday the meeting was going to be at our place and they had no choice but to let me sit in. I had ways of blackmailing them, besides I owned a quarter of the flat! I never understood why my mother was always worried when they had their meetings, until that Friday.

The meeting was ready to commence and all were present. It was just like in the movies: they had an agenda, somebody took the minutes, and they even had a language of their own (they used this when they did not want me to understand something). They called each other 'qabane', which means 'comrade' in English.

The atmosphere was serious and tense, and I was busy having a good time with the refreshments. In our flat we had a special rocking chair which they (my uncles and brother) used only when they had their meetings. Whoever sat on the chair had the floor. Of course, my uncles and brother had the floor most of the time. The meetings were generally long and sometimes not very interesting, but I stayed anyway because I wanted to be like my big brothers.

Sometime during the meeting one of the comrades asked to be excused; he said he had some plans that he had to attend to. Yes, he had plans all right, plans to destroy our Friday for the rest of our existence (or non-existence). A few minutes after the comrade had left, I felt a huge hand grab my neck, pushing me down to the ground, and its body thrown on top of me as if to protect me from something. The voice of the huge hand screamed, 'Get down – nazo zisiza!' (Here they come!) The sound of the machine guns deafened me a little. It was as if they were far away, but I could see the bodies falling in front of me. The room was just flooded with blood, black blood.

When I finally managed to remove the body of the huge hand, the cloud of tear gas had slightly faded. I whirled around: the rocking chair was still gently creaking, but now there was no one there ...

Onele Mfeketo, Pinelands High School*

Wanna buy a pair of Diesel jeans?

Americans! You've got to wonder about them at times. I'm aimlessly paging through an old issue of the glossy *Cosmo* magazine. The fashion pages have pictures shot on location in the East with the glamorous models posing seductively for the camera against the locals, clad in their worn, torn rags – a wonderful contrast to the Gucci designs. I continue to page through

these images, but stop momentarily to examine a Diesel advertisement. This trendy American clothing brand-name company has chosen to place a huge billboard advertisement in Korea, and has chosen to photograph a group of young and old citizens walking past beneath the billboard.

Now I ask you, did the advertising and marketing executives (sitting around a huge boardroom table sipping espresso in one of the skyscrapers of the Big Apple, let's say) really think that poverty-stricken Koreans such as the ones in the advert would by some chance be interested in purchasing a pair of Diesel jeans? They hardly pull through from day to day, why would they buy an item of clothing which rings in at the till at a cool, hard-to-earn R650?

I find such advertising to be ignorant and extremely insensitive. Korea, along with the neighbouring countries in these parts of Asia, has a history which, like ours, is characterised by pain and poverty. The years of war, dictatorship, communism and other destructive ideologies have left deep scars in these nations.

There is still economic distress, political discord and thus social instability. How ironic that this billboard has a slogan promising 'a better tomorrow' and that Diesel's slogan is 'For successful living'!

American clothing manufacturers should be the last to speak of such things. How do you give children in these parts of the world, with very inadequate education (if any at all), a bright future? Oh, yes, of course, by creating job opportunities. Not for their parents, silly, for the children themselves. By hiring cheap mass child labour in these countries, leisurewear can be produced by tiny hands toiling for up to eighteen hours a day on peanuts-wages.

The older generation had to leave subsistence farming in the countryside to seek work in the urban areas of their country and the younger generation, trapped in this cycle of hardship, follow suit. These brand-name companies deny having any involvement in child labour, but the Americans, being the money-driven nation that they are, are guilty in my eyes, despite having been proven not guilty by high-profile lawyers. Fashion is foreign in such rural countries – their concerns are simpler. The people there wear clothes to cover up, not to make a statement like their wealthier counterparts.

The Americans, in the quest to find new markets in Third World countries, should do a bit more research into the state of affairs in those countries. I wonder how much this group of people was paid to walk past beneath the billboard. Has it changed their lives? I don't think so, but at least both parties benefited: Diesel hauled in a couple of million dollars, and the advert extras probably had enough bread for the week.

Suddenly I'm put off fashion.

Mpho Mokgoatlheng, Greenside High School

2001

2001

Manifesto of an 18-year-old

I vow never to commit suicide, because that would be giving up.
 I vow only ever to have sex with someone that really cares for me, *if* it happens.
 I vow never to let people's perception of me inhibit the expression of who I really am.
 I vow never to be friends with someone who makes me feel inadequate.
 I vow to do what I really want, whether it is the norm or the exception.
 I vow never to take myself too seriously (what a laugh!) and never to lose my sense of humour.
 I vow to surround myself with people that have substance, rather than good PR.
 I vow never to be bothered if at some stage in my life (or for the whole of it) I am not 'normal' because normal simply equals average.
 I vow to be Me.

Rozanne Blaauw, Swellendam High School

Drunk

'A distended mass of malnutrition
 From centuries of inbreeding.
 The world is sick and bloated, friend,
 And on our sin it's feeding.
 I see how you walk past me
 With your sick, sarcastic smile.
 You will not be smiling
 When you're deep in Satan's bile.
 Come with me, my brothers,
 And we all can leave unharmed.
 Believe in me, my brothers,
 For I swear my life is charmed.
 Hear me out, you sceptics,
 Your sin will take you lower.
 You can all be saved, my friends.'

'For God's sake, shut up, Noah!'

Dave Bryant, Plumstead High School

How does it, K Watson?

Thoughts on an essay entitled 'Renewal' by Katherine Watson and published in the *St Martin's Chronicle* some ten years ago. The extract which inspired this poem is quoted below:

... an old, but friendly sound returned, as the large pellets of rain began to strike the tin roof covering my head. I breathed deeply, closing my eyes, filling my lungs with the smell of a highveld thunderstorm, and allowed the rain of Africa to cleanse my spirit.

How does the African rain
cleanse your spirit?
It wets me through to my skin
and leaves me cold
and unmoved
The highveld thunderstorm
smells of dust and dirt
dust and dirt
nothing more
Kay Watson
the African rain
feeds the food
which feeds the hungry
But it don't feed my soul
What's this Renewal you speak of?
How does it cleanse your spirit?

I too have 'breathed deeply'
– and yawned.

Jolene Cummings, St Martin's School

my crying butterfly

i held you in my hand today
you were quivering with fear,
afraid that i might hurt you;
all the while you were dying
and we both know
i would have been kind
to end your beautiful life
but you shaking,
expecting my other hand to crush you,

started shaking me;
 my trembling hand reached over
 to open the window
 letting the breeze pick you up
 and carry you away;
 i wept while watching
 every faltering beat of your wings
 bring you closer to the ground
 and somehow, i lay there
 dying next to you,
 my crying butterfly.

Alexander du Plessis, Paarl Boys' High School

Dumped

As I turned I felt my body moving backwards and the water falling away from beneath me. I felt the strength of that colossal wave overpower my limp body as I bounced around like a yo-yo on the finger of a giant. I was caught in the fury of Mother Nature.

I felt the skin on my nose and cheek being ripped away like old paint as I hit the rough, sandy bottom. I flipped, still holding on to my costume so as not to lose it, and carried on flipping until I was too dizzy to be able to count to ten. I felt like clothes in a washing machine, waiting to be hung out to dry. Mother Nature was doing her washing now and I urged her to stop. The air in my lungs had escaped in that school of bubbles racing around me. I went frantic. My chest and throat were calling for air and my body knew it had better reach that light soon or else it would definitely be going towards one later.

I tried everything. I swam left, I swam right, but I could not find the exit. My energy ran out from all the struggling and I lay there in the deep darkness of the ocean, hoping, praying. My prayers were answered and I was somehow spat out towards the sky.

I broke the surface, taking in air selfishly. Never had so little time seemed so long. As I swam back to shore, after regaining enough energy to do so, I said to myself, 'That's the last for today, but it was definitely the best.'

Keagan Georgiou, Pretoria Boys' High School

Shop

I had a little shop when I was younger
 Where I sold parts of my soul and heart
 Being on

SALE

They disappeared quickly.
Now my shop stands empty and I
Am impoverished –
Unable to sell what I don't have
Empty of attraction.

Could you spare some change?

Karen Jennings, Wynberg Girls' High School*

The cotton

One evening, I came across
the winter beauty of the Cape.

She came in the night,
like a thief, and shrouded
my world in a fluffy frosty
blanket of mist – sly Mother Nature.
As if walking through a field
of candyfloss, I was kept hidden
by the water smoke of earth.
It felt dense and buoyant.
I smelled it, I heard it roll off
the leaves and pitter-patter
to the soft earth.

And just as it appeared, it
thinned out and eventually
revealed the world again –
all wet and crispy.

Duane Jethro, Plumstead High School*

Love poem of a dumped jock

You tore my inner being apart,
When you told me to leave. You broke my ... ego.
When I was with you, there was no need to worry.
It's all my fault. I'm so very ... desperate.
You told me you loved me with all of your heart.
I said that I hoped that our ways never ... embarrass me.

How could you do this to me? You are all that I need.
 You killed all my hopes, you shattered my ... image.
 You know what they say about birds of a feather.
 Please won't you come back? I'll love you ... till you piss me off.

Jaco van der Merwe, Pretoria Boys' High School

'The world is charged with the grandeur of G-d'

– 'God's grandeur', Gerard Manley Hopkins

It was on my very first pilgrimage to Jerusalem when I experienced my first – and, to date, only – Divine revelation. This may sound strange, seeing that I am neither a biblical prophet nor an institutionalised madman, but I do believe with absolute conviction that that's precisely what my profound experience at the time was. My account is one of faith, which boasts no rationality or solid proof that my experience was what I shall describe it to be.

Sceptics and agnostics will denounce the entire episode, saying that it is complete nonsense and yet another example of the effect of Karl Marx's 'opiate of the masses'. They may believe that if they wish – it is their right to. However, I am convinced that my experience on the Temple Mount was one of pure spirituality.

Of all the holy sites in Israel, Jerusalem is undeniably my favourite. This is the city of David, and the city that surrounded the Temple. There is, alongside the Western Wall, a series of underground tunnels that were formed due to the destruction of the Second Temple and the structures built upon its rubble during the two thousand years following that event. Walking within those tunnels is fascinating, knowing that one is stepping alongside stones that once housed the holiest site on Earth.

At a point where a small cave appears, visitors are told that they are standing directly opposite, and extremely close to, what is called the 'Foundation Stone'. There is a *Midrash*, a Jewish legend, that G-d began his creation of the world from the stone on Mount Moriah where Abraham prepared to sacrifice Isaac. This stone is the self-same rock that now lies enveloped in the golden hue of Al-Aqsa, on the Temple Mount. This is the location where the Holy of Holies used to dwell during the time of both Temples. I was standing in the cave that is the closest location nowadays to what is most probably the very centre of the entire universe.

Most historians, regardless of their faith, hold that the Ark of the Covenant, which travelled with the Israelites through the Wilderness and safeguards the very same tablets that Moses brought down from Sinai, is buried somewhere beneath the Foundation Stone. Many sources say it was hidden there to escape the clutches of the Roman conquerors in 70 C.E.

Regardless of its reasons for being there, I was standing less than fifteen metres away from that awesome Ark. I recall reaching out my hand to touch the stones that barred my entrance to these holy articles, and feeling an enormous surge of energy running through my hand and then reverberating throughout the whole of my body.

Approximately eight months later, on thinking of this episode late at night, I promptly sat up in my bed and I muttered in exclamation – ironically enough – the name of the principal deity of Christianity into the surrounding darkness. I had realised only months later the awesomeness of my experience in the Western Wall Tunnels. I had been standing physically as close to G-d as I could ever hope to in this world. Such a revelation inspired and affirmed my belief in the Almighty and His master plan.

I still recall the experience when I am in prayer, and when I hear beautiful music; and I even recalled it while standing in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

Davin Widgerow, King David High School, Victory Park

2002

Words of silence

I looked at the scruffy child
 I couldn't help but notice his runny-nose,
 His mud-streaked face,
 His tattered shorts,
 His torn buttonless shirt,
 His dirty shoes with his big toes
 Peeking out at the world around them.

What struck me most about him were his eyes.
 They were green like those of a cat.
 However,
 They looked dumbly back at me.

His hands were held out to me
 Begging
 More like a prayer of help to me.
 I just looked at the black dirty bitten
 Nails.

He waited expectantly.
I knew he wanted money
But I didn't know what he would buy.

I showed him a picture of happy
Well-fed children.
I motioned for him to come with me.
I gave him a biscuit and held out my hand.
He suddenly ran away
But came back as quickly.

In his arms was an ancient Teddy-bear,
Thoroughly used.
His only possession.
He gave a yellow toothy grin,
His green eyes sparkled,
He clutched my hand.

Siphokazi Jonas, Queenstown Girls' High School*

What in God's name ...

(11 September 2001)

I blinked and missed it
Fortunately I could watch 21 000 replays instead of all my favourite TV shows
from every angle except inside the cockpit.

The fat politicians are using as many big words as possible,
(oh my God, Jim ... is he allowed to say that on air?)
and the upper class is renting out small backyard rooms for half price;
thank God for humanity.

The redneck white-trash hillbillies are crying:
'Go in there, grab the bastard and execute him on public television.'
The African American niggers are laying down their 9 mils for machine guns,
while the Native American Indians are crowding round the community black-
and-white TV to find out what the hell is going on.

Star-spangled bloodlust in the voice of the most powerful nation on earth
suddenly 'united' blindly in a thirst for revenge
makes the world ache for war.
'I mean, come on, it's been 50 years since we all had a good massacre.'

Rich white capitalist businessmen are sending their sons to the army,
while on the other side of the world proud mothers and fathers show off
photographs of their honourable, brave and extremely dead sons.
The Suicide Club look after the young wives and children who want to be just
like their fathers, in God's name.

Images of the aftermath flash behind
a smooth treble voice singing 'God bless America'.
I find the remote and return to my life.

Jaco van der Merwe, Pretoria Boys' High School

2003

John Lennon

Bodies pressed together,
jumping, swaying,
arms stretched up, lighters raised –
imagine all the people
reaching out to you.

Bang, crack,
thump as your body slumps down.
The sudden silence is deafening.
You look unnatural, lying in a crimson pool:
yesterday death seemed so far away.

Your face is comforting, at peace.
They may have said you're a dreamer,
but now memories linger in your songs.
All other artists come together
over you.

Jeffrey Dunlop-Jones, St Andrew's College, Grahamstown

Sonnet to a Sk8r Girl

She has a nose-ring, skateboard, baggy pants
And hair that is bright pink and navy blue.
Around her people crowd like busy ants.
Her friends are many and her worries few.

When she enters a park that's full of noise,
 There's silence – admiration in the air,
 As people watch her join the group of boys,
 Performing kick-flips, grinds, with grace and flair.
 But what is so amazing 'bout this girl?
 What makes her have a thrilling atmosphere?
 Her smile? Her eyes? Her board? Her hair that curls?
 It's personality! Not what she wears.
 She has an open mind and caring heart.
 Great qualities set Sk8r Girl apart.

Jonathan Hau-Yoon, St John's College

Good night, sweet prince

There's a new poster on the wall. Not surprising, really, they're always putting new posters up on the theatre wall. *Modus operandi* posters, too. The rather gaudy colouring reflects the bright lights as I enter, pushing the double swing doors aside. Immediately there is a bustle in the room as my presence is registered.

'Scrubbed up?' asks the sister-in-charge as she helps me into the elaborate headdress that is the surgical mask.

'Let's get this show rolling,' I reply as I adjust my surgical glasses, allowing my voice to carry.

Almost on cue, the double doors on the far side of the room swing open, orderlies bursting the wheeled bed into full view. I oversee the scrub nurse preparing my instruments as the anaesthetist goes through the pre-op formalities with the patient.

'Don't worry,' I hear him say to the lad who lies face down on the table, 'you're in the best hands possible.'

Right now the best hands are struggling into the unnatural but necessary latex gloves, to the enjoyment of those observing my antics, and I can't help thinking how the anaesthetist must enjoy his role: he merely makes small talk before silencing the naked patient, replacing his voice with the electronic beeps of life support. I watch the eyes of the boy jerk closed suddenly and almost unbelievably, as a nurse reads his details for those who need to know:

'Simon Yates, age nineteen, number three on the list, he's in for a spinal fusion.'

The boy is young, almost too young: he really shouldn't be where he is at all, I think, as I step under the bright lights.

The procedure continues under my careful lead, as it is a delicate one, requiring a master of his craft. Nevertheless, the operation-room bonhomie

and friendly banter continue as I supposedly work wonders with my hands. It is more experience than raw talent which allows me to pull off the operation so successfully. My dedicated support team keep spirits high as the operation draws to its inevitable close. The boy is just about ready to be sutured up as my supply of jokes dwindles. Perfect timing on my part. Then it happens.

All those around me know the game, know that it happens sooner or later, but the shock is still incredible and visible to all. I gently lift my scalpel from the throat of the cut and I cannot stop my hands from shaking. Beneath the glinting steel of the blade's edge ...

'My God, I've severed the spinal cord,' I manage to choke before collapsing. A voice comes through my head from nowhere, like some long-forgotten lecturer.

'With any neurological interference in this region, parasympathetic nervous support is no longer available and trauma will lead to death in most eventualities.'

The series of beeps which were the life rhythm of the theatre abruptly stop. A nurse screams in true theatrical fashion. I couldn't care. I start crying softly on the floor as my world goes dark. Then silence.

A single clap begins the roar of thunderous applause that follows. The lights flash back strong as ever. I stand up and face the audience, as the rest of the cast assembles in a line.

'You were fabulous,' I hear from the silly actress playing my scrub nurse, over the shouts of appreciation. Of course I was, I think, as I take the first bow. Now to get out of this ridiculous garb.

Mark Jelley, St John's College

Tow-truck scavengers

Hungry for a killing

They stalk

They prowl

Silently waiting

Waiting with an ever-watching eye

Cold as steel

They lie patiently

Waiting

At the first sound of anguish

From their victim

Writhing and

Twisted in pain
They close in for the kill

Then these hunters, scavengers of the road,
Heave their helpless prey into their iron jaws
And leave
Stealthily

Soon dust settles on the grime
Leaving the secrets of their crime
Undisturbed

Amy Little, Kingsmead College

Ordinary people

(1)

In the time of our fathers, the way that they grew up,
I thought, is different from the way we grow today.
Those were the times of the ordinary people.

(2)

They were trying to show that they were ordinary people.

(3)

Since we've been growing up in the time of laws,
where everything has its own rights, even an animal.
So that is what's made us what we are right now.
We are not the ordinary people.

(4)

What went wrong?
We don't know if democracy
builds the real nation
or destroys our nation:
let's watch.

(5)

Because the fathers of today are abusing,
are raping, their own children.
The man was dignified;
there were real ordinary people.

(6)

Even when someone was wrong
in the time of our fathers, the men sat down
and discussed their silly mistakes.
Those were the ordinary people.

(7)

Because if they have broken their rules
by their mouth,
they will fix them by their mouth too.
Those were the ordinary people.
Real men don't rape, don't abuse,
and real men don't betray each other.
Those were ordinary people.

Andisiwe Mgibantaka, Intlanganiso Senior Secondary School*

The screaming bush

Cicadas screamed. Burning with everything else, they screamed under an unrelenting sun. We burned, too, but didn't scream. Grassland stretched around us like a taut balloon, strained and uncomfortable. The bush was drier and scratched more than before under a huge and impersonal sky.

'Hmm, yes, these are all correct.' The man spoke without moving; he seeped moisture like a bottle of Coke left in the sun.

'Good, we all have our visas and the little one is on my wife's passport.'

'Yes.'

'Is there anything else we need?'

'No.'

The scene stuck like glue as the official gazed without interest or recognition at our small passport photos.

'Excuse me,' my mother asked, 'is there a toilet here?'

'Eh?'

'A toilet, toilet?'

'No.'

Here there was no surprise; the single prefabricated hut stood alone under its fig tree. Its only companion stretched from it in a rigid unrelenting line of wire: a small man-made border in the middle of Africa. A beetle crawled under it. It stopped nothing but our car and our four white faces.

'You have a cooler-box?' The impassive question.

'Yes, yes we do, here in the back,' my father said as he banged open the door and threw up a cloud of dust.

'You have any meat?' Slow and separated.

'We do, in fact, these steaks and some bacon here.' The words drop and settle with the dust.

'Ah, this is illegal.'

'This meat's from Johannesburg,' says my father. 'Here's the Woolworths sign, it's from a Johannesburg shop, it says Johannesburg.'

'No meat can be moved in a car here; there is salmonella.'

'But this is clean meat, it's not from here,' says my father, pointing at the ground in disbelief.

'Look.' The man's movements are slow as he hands a letter to my father. Dad turns round to us.

'Shit, this is crazy. It's a criminal offence to travel here with any amount of raw meat; there's a salmonella outbreak.'

Appalling African jails, the now oppressive sky and huge language barriers sink into mind. My mother's tense voice sounds.

'Can't he just take it away and let us move on?'

The official stands impervious, looking like a fig tree and not responding to the suggestion.

'Can we give it to you?' my father suggests.

'Mmm, do you have any road triangles?' The question slips out as he eases his shirt collar slightly.

'Road triangles?'

'Yes.'

'Well, no, I don't think we do, but there's no tar here and the car - '

'It is illegal to travel without them.'

'Sorry, but we have a red light and with so few - '

'Here, look.' He cuts off my father.

Another official letter appears, neatly and finally stamped, with worn edges.

'Ask him if there is a fine we can pay to sort it out?' My mother's hot and concerned voice.

The car's air-conditioning cooling fan whizzes on and half-drowns the sentence. It buzzes on the grass stalks jammed in the radiator grill.

My father swallows and tries another approach.

'What can we do about the meat and the triangles? Can we pay a fine or ...'

The sentence hangs with the hanging air.

'No, you can go now. This is just a warning.'

'Sorry, did you say this was just a warning?'

'Yes.'

'So we can go now?'

‘Yes.’ The official passes over our passports. ‘Drive carefully on the potholes.’

‘Yes. Thank you.’

My little sister waves through the dusty back window, relieved and excited to be moving again.

The man lifts his hand and watches us go.

He stood in the shade of his fig tree and swung the border gate closed. Then he walked to his chair, sat down and took out his pipe and matches. He settled back against the dark worn wood of his chair and looked outwards. The cicadas screamed.

Simon Pickering, St John's College

Untitled

It was one of those unbearably hot days, where the difference between morning and afternoon had become smudged and hazy in the heat. The veld was caught in that inescapable August month between winter and summer that was not quite yet spring, when luminous green leaves pricked through the stubs of branches like thin, tightly rolled cigarettes. The grass, still yellowed with winter, hummed and creaked with the turning of hot, rising breezes. Purple shadows seemed electric.

It was here that the girl lay. Her legs were brown and dry as crackling from the early summer sun, tight against the faded yellow pants. Her arms shaded her face, exposing the shadowy blue of armpits. Nobody was about. Most of the caravaners had sought the chlorine-seeped coolness of the indoor public swimming baths, or the cinema, if they could afford it. She did not doubt that most of the caravaners, like her father and younger brother, sneaked into some show halfway through. She imagined them folded into the cinema's darkness, where they would half-watch, half-sleep through the rest of the movie. The seats would be velvety and cold as moths, smelling of overly salted popcorn and old spilled Coca-Cola. She preferred the veld, even in this hellish heat, where she could watch the enormous, pressing space and empty silence.

The sky was almost white, and she watched it until she saw dust and sunlight pattern it. Running along most of the horizon were low brown bluffs. To visitors, it would seem that the caravan park had gathered like mercury in the centre of a vast, dust-panned bowl. In the west was the brilliant yellow of a mine dump, and a mineshaft that breathed hollowly over the distances like an old, sick beast. Somewhere behind the mine, in a narrow oak-lined street, she knew was the house she grew up in, with the brick-red stoep. Where she and her brother had fanned themselves

with banana leaves and eaten pale pink ice cream in this same sort of hot weather. That was before her father lost his job, and her mother had left them to move back in with her parents.

She wished her father would just leave the goddamned valley. It was as if he had run away from the town, from his previous job and from the small, claustrophobically empty brick house, fled halfway across the valley, and somewhere between there and here had lost the courage to go on. And so their caravan squatted, birdlike, among the rest of the caravans, seemingly ready to take flight at any second, but waiting, watching the small distant, hollowly breathing town on the horizon.

From here she saw the caravans as a passenger in a distant passing car might. They lay, hard and blindingly white, silent and shuttered as bleached bones. In the quiver of heat and light they almost resembled shells, minute as a pink thumbnail, dumb and empty as vowels.

And faintly, on the horizon, was the highway, drawn out like a hot, white wire against the brown mountains. One could follow the pulsing pinpricks of sun-reflected windshields along its length. Sometimes at night, or if one closed one's eyes, it sounded almost like a far-off, dislocated sea. In this afternoon heat, her thoughts seemed to soak away. She imagined a great sea flooding over the dry mountains, to suck away at the silted mine dump, the hard, grassed veld, and the caravans, that dry littering of marrow-sucked knuckles.

She rolled over on to her stomach and licked the dust from her lip. The rock was unbelievably warm. It seemed almost alive, like a hot, crouching beast under the broken thorn tree's shade. She pressed her ear against the rock and closed her eyes, imagining she could hear the swell of its warm lungs.

And there it was.

A slow, grinding inhalation that sounded almost like crumbling gravel. She waited for it to breathe out. Nothing. It was holding its breath. She lay, holding herself perfectly still, waiting. The brown veld halted. Even the hum of the yellow grass tussocks simmered to a silence. The warm noon breezes hung still and trembled. And then, somewhere far below to her right, a sharp, tiny car-hoot slit the air like grapeshot. And then again. The yellow grasses stirred themselves nervously. The afternoon air collapsed. She now realised the rock had not breathed, it had been the scraping of wheels as her father's car pulled into the parking lot. It was familiar to her. She should have recognised it. She looked up. The brown-red car was stopped next to the caravan, the driver's door opened out like a golden wing. Her father leant out against it, one arm shielding his face against the sun, the other waving itself in slow, broad parabolas in her direction. She pressed herself flatter against the rock's back and turned her face the other way. His distant voice sounded almost childlike. It called to her a few times. Her name

distorted into strange syllables by the thick settled air. She waited. A car door slammed. A while later, the caravan door creaked open and shut. A radio crackled into life.

The afternoon hummed and stirred as she lay, half-dreaming, on the rock beast's back. Eventually she stood up, stumbling, half-drunk from the legward drain of thick blood. She walked down the koppie in the hard light, towards the supper she would have to make, the silty conversation at the pale green linoleum table, and the still electric light that was too harsh for reading by.

Halfway there she stopped. Her head was watery with the afternoon heat. The petals of her brain folded open and closed in the breeze. She stood and watched the caravan. Her head pricked with the rush of new blood. She waited. And slowly, delicately, she turned and walked back out across the hard veld towards the low brown bluffs and the distantly rumbling highway spanned like a white wire across it. And soon the tiny figure in yellow was gone. The hot air suddenly crumpled and pressed down over the empty valley. The yellow grass shrieked and hummed in the late afternoon light.

Kelda van Heerden, Pretoria High School for Girls

On Kristallnacht (9 November 1938)

This sonnet was written in response to a photograph of charred prayer books from a synagogue burned during the Kristallnacht pogrom (in *The Illustrated History of the Jewish People*, ed. Nicholas de Lange. London: Aurum Press, 1997).

Out of the darkness tattered pages stare,
Charred and torn. The voice of prayer is still.
Rubble buries longing of the keen will
To bind a searching self to God in care.
Yet living legends stubbornly declare
That brutal blows of hatred merely kill
Flesh and parchment – holy words rise to fill
With fruitful faith the vacancy of air.
But who can now consent? Soon trains will roll
On rough rails of death, burning life to ash
In dull despair of anguished, lurid loss.
Yet from fire the fearless phoenix will toss
Pure plumes of transfiguring flame to flash
Fresh birth; so soars from dirt the fierce, freed soul.

Philip Williams, St John's College

2004

My year of baked beans

Everyone buys cans of peaches, tins of tuna, and lots and lots of baked beans, which they stack up high in the dark, precious corners of their cupboards.

'You don't know what will happen with this election thing going on now,' warns Auntie Dee, with her house smelling of cats and vanilla. 'When they get to vote, all hell will break loose – just you wait for the fighting.'

The war we all wait for never arrives. Election Day comes – with its excited black crosses in the 'right' blocks and expectant, nervous white people – and goes.

The canned food slowly gets eaten, or is given to the maid. I go to school for the first time with Miss Widdle ('The Piddle,' we chant rebelliously behind her back). My family never bought canned food. If it wasn't for Auntie Dee and her dark, precious corners I would be completely oblivious of the elections, at least until next term when Sipho is brought into our class.

Our fresh-scrubbed, all white-skinned class (save for one Chinese girl who doesn't speak English but only this high-pitched whine that I can't understand) is curious, astonished. Because something called the ANC now rules the country, it means the maids' children can come to school with us. The maid and her children are the only black people I know, and the gardener (who I am scared of), and the 'skollies' (the 'bergies' who I am fascinated by). Dylan talks about the 'skollies' all the time and, if anything goes wrong, or something gets stolen, or is maybe just lost, the 'skollies' are to blame. They are like fairies in my seven-year-old world, never actually been seen to steal, but we're all certain that they do. It's 'dood seker', ask any white person in Table View.

I was naïve in Sub A and easily swayed by the ideas of others. Sipho is different. The fact that he speaks English well adds to my amazement. I thought all black people shouted strange, loud clickings to other black people across the street. Miss Widdle ('The Piddle') didn't ask Sipho to read aloud in class much. He sat quietly and politely next to Dylan, and sat alone at break, or sometimes was accompanied by some of the coloured boys who were three years older than us.

The rule of the playground was a silent, unspoken one: speak to the black kid and become black yourself. You'd be an outcast for the rest of your life (or maybe just until you're a bit bigger, like Standard Four, when you get to write with blue, Bic, ball-point pens). This is why I sat with the other fresh-scrubbed, all white-skinned girls and never said a word to Sipho. In

2004

our class photo, he is squeezed on to the end, hardly noticeable, next to the class delinquent, Dylan, who strangled the hamster. I used to sit bound by child-rules (that are still the strongest binds I know) and wish that Sipho could have an ally.

I learned slowly in my reluctant, seven-year-old brain how cruel people can be. I wasn't brave enough to step across the soggy, moss-green rugby field to be Sipho's friend, and when one day he wasn't at school for register and never came back, I realised that I had lost my chance.

I really do wonder what happened to him. I cannot forget Sipho, with his lonely, very big, very black eyes. I think about him every time I hesitate about doing something even remotely risky. Now, I'm willing to take the risk and I realise that my every action affects those around me.

Kim Looringh van Beeck, Rustenburg High School for Girls

'No recess'

It's quiet in the classroom.

Students idle,
dusted books crouch on shelves while
pencils tiptoe across pages.
The teacher hides herself
in her work.

From the floor underneath the students' desks
shotguns sprout, pushing through the earth's surface
up into the students' bodies, where
the guns penetrate
like a branch of thorns nudging
past a delicate hymen.

Up into the flesh
the guns grow, becoming
(for the students)
a surrogate spine.

Cutting through the jaw,
a glinting double-barrel
protrudes,
unstained with blood;
smoke softly rising.

Now the teacher turns
from her work to look upon
(for the first time)
the silent massacre.

Sean MacGinty, Bishops (Diocesan College)

You and I

Hi, I'm White, but you're a Coloured.
Well then, we're buggered.
I can't date you; I've been too well bred,
With all the correct notions inside my head.
I am a child of the post-apartheid era
But I could never
Cross the racial divide,
Because people can't put their differences aside.
So please, don't look so sad,
It's not really that bad.
Just dream every night of me
Because that is all there'll ever be.

Lee-Ann Rhoodie, Fairbairn College

2005

After Eliot

I have seen the white ships fading, mile on mile
seen the white shores stolen with a smile
known the practised touch of hand on hand
known the little-death sound of a softly closing door
I have grasped at salvation and a straw
I know the subtlety of our betrayals.

I have hoped that something could eclipse
the small omissions falling from your lips.

And how should I account?
And how excuse?
How presume to use you as a muse?
My intentions and pretensions all amount
to less than I can lose.

I cannot say exactly what I mean.
Is it the redemption I cannot redress
which makes me so digress?

There will be time to tap-dance as I sort the post,
time to wash my wishes with the suds and dirty dishes.
I have raised my glass to toast
and swilled the lees, and seeing how they caught the light,
I could not bring myself to drink
nor throw them down the kitchen sink.

Perhaps we do not understand the consequence in hand;
there is no kindness in the quiet absolute.

Emma de Wet, Victoria Girls' High School

I have music in me

I have music in me!
Can't you hear the rhapsody slip from my lips?
I have a mouthpiece like a flute,
I spill polyphonic harmonies
That flow and fill out, like harp strings.
Beware not to be dazzled by my spell.

I have music in me!
Can't you see the scores in my head?
Rushin' through my network system,
Genius compositions!
Look into my eyes, you'll see
Each little twinkle is a vibrant masterpiece.

I have music in me!
Can't you feel da beat in my step?
My metered rhythm gives me life.
It is the core of my existence.
When I walk, I sway my body to it
Like grass dancing in the breeze.

I have music in me!
Can't you smell the exotic aromas radiating from my limbs?
Alluring and enticing like the legendary sirens.
A kaleidoscope of flavour!

Experience the strength of my soulful voice,
The words released sing volumes.

I have music in me!
Can't you taste the honey-sweet melodies?
Fruity and fresh, like a rainy summer
Smooth like chocolate!
Creamy dynamics vary my dynamic flavours
Oooo my music tastes so damn good it's not sane.

I have music in me!
Good, sensuous, absolute music,
Cantabile, legato, andante, allegro.
Music in its truest and greatest form.
I have music in me!
Can you sense it?

Siphokazi Kawa, St Cyprian's School

2006

The affair at Number 14

The gunshot was followed by the usual ceremony which accompanies such things. Every movement precise and measured and every moment, for the spectators, pure enjoyment.

The creak of our front gate, followed by eager footsteps as Mary makes her way up our garden path. Then, breathless and extremely excited, she beckons my mother to the front door:

'Quickly! Die Sexy Boys gaan vir Justice in sy moer gie!'

It was the scene Drakensberg Street had been waiting for their entire lives, or at least since Justice so arrogantly decided to rob one of the Sexy Boys' newest recruits two weeks ago. A dire mistake at the best of times, suicide at the worst.

My mother bullets from her chair as soon as the words are out of Mary's mouth, her knitting flying across the room to land with a soft thump on the ground. She immediately assumes authority, swift and sure, like an army general issuing orders.

'Martha, gaan maak vir oupa Braam wakker en sê hy moet uitkom. Fatima, maak jy al die vensters toe. Lily,' she gives me a thoughtful look, 'you come with me. And stay close.'

My mother always speaks to me in English. Not to say that I don't understand Afrikaans, but I suppose it's a kind of respect. No one in our

family ever made it past Std 5, and this achievement merits your being talked to in a dignified manner and what my mother believes to be a dignified tongue.

In a fluster of anticipation, the pair of us bundle outside. Mary is already at Number 54, informing everyone about the upcoming action.

It is a beautiful day in Cape Town, one of the hottest summers we've ever seen. There's a lazy atmosphere in the air, the kind I know from books to be days when you sit in a hammock with a piña colada. But there are no piña coladas in Bishop Lavis, and there are definitely no hammocks. Just the feel of looming drama and a few solitary figures in the street. One of these I recognise to be Justice Stemmert from Number 14. Everyone knows Justice Stemmert from Number 14.

We reach the gate, my mother and I, and I prop a crate against the vibracrete fence and peer over. My mother reaches the top easily, and her anxious eyes dart back and forth across the figures in the road. I watch Justice as he stands nervously, jumping from foot to foot. He could make a run for it, but even Justice Stemmert isn't that dumb. You can't run from the Sexy Boys unless you're Zola Budd and you've tied the lot of them to the fence.

So there he stands, Justice, probably wishing he was dead and obviously not enjoying himself. The occupants of Drakensberg Street, however, are.

There are hurried footsteps behind us, and I turn to see my sister Martha, eyes wide and hair flying about her face. And Fatima. Fatima isn't related to us, but she might as well be. They chatter exuberantly with each other in Afrikaans, craning their necks over the gate.

Oupa Braam is out, too, in another instant. His bed slippers flop over the grass into the garden path and his eyes are still swollen from sleep. But thoughts of sleep are long gone, floating above and beyond the cloudless sky to join the sea of blue above our heads. The smokkelhuis, closed for the occasion, is framed by drunks smelling of Cape Cellar Wine, jeering loudly.

And there we stand, our little family, surrounded by neighbours and babbling and the unnerving stench of inevitability.

Reginald is out first. A gangfight is like a symphony, and everything happens precisely as it should. His slow, arrogant frame ambles out of Number 26 Drakensberg Street and he poses, hands folded over chest, in that way gangsters have. Like he wants to attack, but is restraining himself until the right moment. The moment the conductor signals.

His body is tattooed with pictures in blue ink. He got his first one when he was nine. This I heard my mother discussing over the phone on one of those nights when I was supposed to be sleeping.

The rest of them quickly surround Justice. Poor Justice, who looks as if he is hopping on hot coals. They form a sort of semi-circle around him. We watch, transfixed.

‘Hier kom ’n ding ...’ Oupa Braam says out of the corner of his mouth. No one replies. We figured out his observation long ago.

We don’t do anything about it. Justice had it coming, that’s what most of the neighbours are whispering among themselves. He shouldn’t be stealing things that aren’t his, hurting people like he does. It can’t go on this way. He’s a petty thief stealing from his own for dagga money.

Everyone knows the truth – obviously. That even if they wanted to, they can’t stop Reginald and his crew. They control the streets, they control what happens here, and right now they control Justice.

It’s like the scene of a Western shootout. One of the members cracks his knuckles. All we need now is one of those rolling tumbleweeds to be carried by the light breeze. And maybe each one of the Boys could chew on a piece of hay.

‘You.’

The first note is played.

It is a command rather than a statement. ‘Look at me now, or I’ll kill you’ is what hides behind the single syllable. And everyone knows this, for eyes swerve towards Justice as he throws an anxious glance in Reginald’s direction.

An introductory phrase.

‘You have some nerve, coming into this street. You’re the guy who robbed Dixie the other day.’ Reginald’s voice is slow and measured. Four beats to a bar. There is no reply from Justice. I can see his chest moving up and down, faster and faster.

‘I hope you have something to say for yourself.’ Reginald’s voice is loud and gritty, like sandpaper on a rough surface. He scatters his words loosely, as if uttering them requires no effort at all and his tone cracks after every syllable; a pitch that can only be picked up within the brick-and-mortar confines of Pollsmoor.

‘Djy gat vrek, laaitie,’ another one of them informs Justice, as if he didn’t know that already. ‘We’re going to –’

Then, suddenly, sirens. Someone has called the cops, and the Boys’ calm exteriors are temporarily bristled. Blind panic.

‘Maak klaar die job of los hom uit,’ Dixie calls out, motioning to the crumbling victim. Indecision, for a moment, while their leader ponders. The composer lifts his baton. A deceptive resolution.

‘We can’t just leave it like this. He can’t think that this can happen every time without paying some price.’

‘Well, get it over with, then!’

I know what happens next even without watching. Predictability is a nasty thing. My face finds its way into the soft folds of my mother’s apron without prompting, smelling of masala and incense, and her strong hand keeps it there. I hear her sharp intake of breath. The shrill, staccato blast of

the gun echoes through the air and disturbs the hammock-piña-colada day. But there are no hammocks or piña coladas here. Just the thumping sound of heavy footsteps and screeching tyres, punctuated by a piercing scream.

A perfect cadence.

He lies there, motionless, and the scene is flooded by ambulances and blue men two minutes later. A pool of red blood has spread on to the tar and seeps slowly through the cracks.

And softly, quietly, Drakensberg Street makes its way back into their houses. And it is every man for himself.

Amy Jephta, Muizenberg High School*

2007

I am me

Who are you?

Yes, who are you to judge me?

Why do you look at me that way?

You think I don't hear the things that you say.

So don't stand there and pass judgement on me,

for who are you to determine my worth as a human being?

You do not hold me down like the leaves on the branches of a tree

Because I am rooted, I stand my own ground,

I make my own music, I have my own sound.

You *cannot* trap me.

Like a caterpillar in a cocoon, I can set myself free.

You will not, cannot, write the script of my life,

That is my decision, I hold the pen, I will decide.

Stop. Listen. This is my version.

I am not a car on display, meant to stand still.

I have an inner power, a greater will.

A willingness and a desire to take action.

I have a map, a plan, a target and a direction

to take me to my desired destination.

This car is moving and it's going far,
it's aiming for the moon and it's heading for the stars.

A fuel of hope that drives me
will be my key to reach my dream.

I will indicate where I go.
 I will decide how fast or how slow.
 I will not reverse or make any U-turns,
 for from a past mistake I will learn.
 Yes, I know the road ahead will be tough
 but this girl's made of very strong stuff.
 So, whatever challenges you throw back at me,
 I'll flick them off my shoulder and continue the path to my dream.
 With God as my Saviour and as my guide
 I know that through any storm I *will* survive.
 This is me, now you see.
 I am who I am, I'll be who I want to be.

L A Appel, Norman Henshilwood High School

Darkness and memory

It was two years ago, almost to the day. It looked as if I was going to be late for judo-squad training for the third time, and I was annoyed at the inordinate amount of time it took him to ready himself. I was sure that when I was five I was certainly punctual and considerate, let alone well-mannered and efficient. Yet I stood on the front porch expecting my mother to hurry me to the car, Bonga running behind her, loosing squeals of laughter. Now that I come to think of it, his laughter and his tears seemed similar to me – both seemed to come from the nadir of his soul and bubble up till there was no more space left in his scarred, little body – eyes welling up or mouth bursting, waiting, exploding with peals of laughter, tears trickling down his face, a stream which seemed to express what only he could show – grief or joy, so ultimate that it seemed to express how we all feel at those certain terrible moments in our lives when we are tasked with insurmountable burdens, decisions which seem to dictate our life's course. How was I to know that it was to be such a day?

Soon I heard my mother shouting his name, 'Bonga, Bonga, where are you? Come, Alexei has to go, and so do we ...' The lilt of her voice expressing my feelings towards that child, the unwelcome intrusion, he who somehow seemed to bring out the worst in me and yet captured me, held me with his playful glance, his innocent, unquestioning smile, the love of one who knew no worse, no better. More genuine emotion I have not known; only in those dark moments of my life have I seen it, not again, never.

He was nowhere to be found. Soon, that (seemingly) irrational woman, paranoid to the last, called me, commanded me, and I went, not without that minor resentment that one so often feels, the annoyance of it all – 'How dare she?', 'Stupid request.' Yet I followed, and went out; a

reluctant slave it seemed; into the garden. I still see the pool, shining blue, with the grass (how green it was) reflecting up; up into my eyes and the dazzling beauty only seen when what one had is gone – oh, how I wish I had it still!

A small shape, impossible for it to be him, no, it cannot, could not be him; disbelief – ‘No, you see, it’s just a pile of leaves at the bottom of the pool. I’m sure he’s hiding elsewhere ...’ A loud splash, fully clothed. It seemed to me, rash, unthinking and unsought, not something I would do. I see her, wading through the water, the look on her face – it seemed to say more than my words or reasoning could, yet I could be right – oh God, though I know not of you, let it be so. And he forsook me, as it seemed he had always done, and up she came, the water – more than a barrier, it seemed, it clawed, pushed at her face, she struggled through it – the small bundle in her hands. What did I hear? Was it the low moan she seemed to emit, a beacon in the water, showing me the way? My sister, oh, for all your faults, did you seem greater than me! My mother, a scream, a refusal, it couldn’t be so, much like I felt, only moments ago. Again it came, that nauseating feeling which touches the pit of your stomach and rises, like bile, into your mouth, and wants to rush, rush, out of your body, your very reaction betraying your instinct to deny, shy away from that which hurts more than life itself.

I ran, as I was wont to do, and I knew not what and how and where and why, and he still answered me not. I glimpsed Nicolas, standing impassive, as he always seemed to do, the lack of emotion more telling than tears or laughter, sadder than I could possibly know. I picked up the receiver, the dial tone sounding, soothingly, calming. Then I pressed those loud, ugly keys, fingered a thousand times or more, 1 - 0 - 1 - 1 - 1. And I waited, and it seemed endless. Suddenly, it was broken by a voice, well-heeled? No, I heard the pleasant inflection, betraying her upbringing, Bellville, Parow – a nameless suburb, where she, it must have seemed, brought peace and, yet ... ‘Hello, Cape Town flying squad, how may I help you?’ A flying squad, how could that help me? ‘My brother, he’s fallen into the pool, I mean, no, my sister took him out, look, we need an ambulance, he can’t breathe.’ She was well trained, it seemed, knew exactly what to do – ‘Please calm down, sir, we shall send a squad car immediately. What is your address?’ ‘13 Langton Road’ (at least, it was then). ‘Thank you, sir. Now stay calm and instruct your sister ...’ – cut off, she was, the loud ringing of the alarm.

My sister, staggering in, grasping, groping blindly, as if darkness enveloped her, and perhaps it had and does, the button, ‘Emergency’ written on it and her. The phone rings. ‘Sentry Security, an Emergency Button was triggered, how may we help you?’ I repeat the same again; the same calm, reassuring words, ready to keep me lucid.

I hear the siren at the door, the blue flashing lights, they run through the house, lift his body, a doll more than anything else, his head bobbing, his spirit? They run back to the car, my mother squeezing in, needing more support than my brother, dead – no, it turned out not to be, yet to be as well, alive in a sense, more like that doll I saw, without speech or choice, merely being.

Perhaps I remember more from that day – is it my feeling of guilt, wondering if my indecision had spelt his fate? – but that is of no consequence now. He is gone, and, however much I may wish, I will not forget him. It seems I see him still, his few, select words ringing, in my ears (are they so?), and my grief which I choose so to suppress, leaps, and I see – the darkness, which I, nay, sought again.

Alexei du Bois, South African College High School

Between worlds

I was born >>SLAP, BANG<< in between two worlds: That of my mother's and father's. What is the sum of lily-white skin and black dreadlocks? Me! Zwelisha Sara Angelina Giampietri, the curly-haired daughter of two different people from two completely different worlds; and they've managed to create a halfway point, a pit-stop in their highway of life – in their worlds; and that's me.

'Each of us is as intimately attached to this beautiful country as the famous jacaranda trees of Pretoria and the mimosa trees of the bushveld.' This is how our great former-president Nelson Mandela described our Rainbow Nation; a nation that was once divided by colour but is now unified by it. The society in which we live today is so diverse and unique; and the term Rainbow Nation made up by Archbishop Desmond Tutu is a metaphor for the colourful future our country has.

Having a mixed-masala upbringing, I remember doing things like going to my father's gigs when I was still in my mother's arms. I would make friends with the other friendly jazz-club patrons, feeling so proud that Daddy was up on the stage – a place I have come to know well myself. As soon as I could walk myself to places, I made sure that I was always the first one up onstage after the concert, making myself very useful – trying to carry (and ultimately dropping) my dad's guitar or unplugging all the amplifiers ... a great help to the band.

My Italian great-grandparents only became aware of my existence when I was five years old, only a few years before they passed on. I would practise my ballet routines in their lounge to the accompaniment of Nonno's mandolin repertoire. Nonna would just smile and laugh; they didn't speak

much English and music was the language of our communication. Music became the medium of conciliation between Nonno and my father. Without saying a word to each other, they would play for hours – Nonno on his mandolin, my father on his guitar, learning the Italian folk tunes.

My parents call me their ‘golden child’. I’m coloured. However, as I’ve grown up, I have never considered myself as a member of a particular race; white, coloured, or black. I see myself as in between – I don’t like putting my identity in a category and admitting that, yes, I am coloured – I’m golden! I think being born into a society that was just beginning to change its levels of acceptance, being a baby in a mixed-race relationship in the early 1990s has almost toughened me and made me into the headstrong and determined person that I am today.

My parents did not have it easy when they got involved with each other. Having a family that does not support your decisions is hard. For a long time my mother was cut off from her family after she fell in love with Sazi Dlamini. It took years for them to accept him and even the baby they made together: me.

They stuck at it, though, and ultimately shone a colourful blazing path of example through the Dark Divide of the Whites and Blacks, past 1994, up until today.

Seventeen years ago, at a party in Overport, was the first time Cristina and Sazi met – through a mutual friend; a coloured. My mom was studying architecture with him at university. He and my dad lived in the ‘non-white’ university residences at the old army barracks in Wentworth.

‘Zweli, come sit here. No, not on the end, Angel, we want you in the middle, here, in between us. Don’t sulk; are you embarrassed?’ Dad with his bright African shirts and *mblaselos* (Maskandi pants) and Mom, glasses and small feet. They border a grumpy ‘golden’ teenager with a large brown afro. A conventional family portrait? My mom sometimes has to explain to strangers that I’m not her friend but her child. We all look completely unrelated to each other. Well, so do all the people living in South Africa; at a quick glance. However, if you look closely, you can see the similarities; eyes, lips, fingers and toes, hearts, mindset.

A completely new mindset is what we as a people have in common. One that’s filled with hope and ... colour.

My grandmother adores me now. She adores my Zulu father. She adores her daughter, my mom. Her entire world changed when Leonard Rosenberg hosted a party at his house in Overport in 1989. No one saw it coming, least of all the average Joe who was wandering our dying Apartheid-ridden streets. To be a colourless person in Apartheid would have been the answer to many prayers, prayers that asked for the freedom to love anyone, and to have the freedom to live with the person that you love. The black and white races were forced to become complementary ... these two shades are not even considered colours in art; it’s impossible for them to be complementary

if they aren't on the colour-wheel in the first place! Which means that, no matter how many times H F Verwoerd is turning in his grave, my parents were meant to create a new being to live in this world, a being who lives in between theirs, in our Rainbow Nation.

Zwelisha Giampietri, Durban Girls' High School

Jigsaw

Irene Mason stepped out of the still-warm water, reached for her towelling bathrobe and dabbed the remaining drops of water trickling down her body. She was thinking of him, but quite enjoyed the times when Derek had to stay out overnight on business: it gave her a chance to relax and not worry about dinner or domesticity. Turning off the bathroom light, she padded along the landing in her bare feet. She paused in the kitchen for a second, before deciding that a cool glass of Chardonnay was preferable to a cup of tea. With a large, full glass in hand, she sauntered into the lounge and reached for the TV remote. American rubbish and predictable make-over programmes were all that seemed to be on offer: they really weren't Irene's favourites at all.

She pressed the off button and sat in silence for a minute, wondering how she could kill the hours before it was time for bed. Three sips of wine later, she remembered the garage sale that she had visited several weekends before, where she had found a Tupperware tub filled with jigsaw pieces. The man behind the counter had assured her that all the pieces were there; only the box had been damaged. Irene loved her jigsaws, and one that presented the challenge of having had no picture to follow was like a packet of Smarties to a toddler. Gathering her pale pink robe about her, she went into the hallway and opened the cupboard under the stairs. There in an old plastic bag was the tub. She smiled to herself; she was going to enjoy this.

Settling herself before the coffee table in the lounge, she cleared a large area and tipped the pieces out. She had evolved a particular method: she sifted through the pile and located the four corner pieces, then scanned the rest for the straight edges. It was a failsafe way to start.

After twenty minutes Irene had the edges laid out before her and things were beginning to take shape, but there was a problem: the jigsaw appeared to be too large for the coffee table. Carefully she scooped up the already-joined sections and carried them to the dining room, where she placed them on the waxed table-top. Wine in hand and mind focused, she resumed her mammoth task with delight and excitement.

Seconds and minutes passed and gradually she could see little sections of the inner pattern. There was a colour match of some pale blue and a

warm brown, but a large section of the picture seemed to be made up of darkish blue and black, which was proving to be quite tricky.

After an hour she took a short break. Then, with her glass re-filled, she was back at the table. She stood back a little to try to get an overview of the slowly-forming picture. Something in the back of her mind told her that she recognised elements of it.

As the sun was gradually swallowed by the horizon, Irene Mason worked on, determined that this puzzle would not get the better of her. Darkness filled the garden but she hardly noticed. The sole focus of her attention was the pale blue section of the picture. A voice broke through her mind, hinting that the blue was the same as the colour of the curtains which hung loosely behind her. She paused, looked at the puzzle for a second, then turned to examine the curtains. It was! What a coincidence, Irene smiled, and, shrugging, drained the last of her second glass of Chardonnay and delved back into the puzzle.

Another half-hour passed; the blue sections seemed finished, so she attacked the deep, warm brown. It looked like polished wood, the same sort of polished wood that she now rested her hands upon. A feeling of uneasiness niggled at her spine and she paused. Surely it was just a coincidence. Another coincidence. Her mouth felt suddenly dry so she reached for the wine glass, bringing it to her lips only to find that it was empty. With her hand shaking slightly, she moved away from the table and went into the kitchen once again.

She let the cold-water tap run as she filled her glass and drained it in one smooth motion. Filling the glass once more, she made her way back to the dining room. She stood in the doorway and looked at the table. She lifted her glass once more and then suddenly froze. This was a picture or at least ... but how could that be! Derek had only recently finished decorating the dining room. No one had been here to take a picture of it.

She placed the glass on the sideboard and went back to the jigsaw. Working from the edges in, she quickly built up the image. She knew exactly what colours went where because she had chosen them herself two months before. Her heart was beginning to beat faster as she filled in the gaps, the curtains, the table, the plants on the sideboard, the picture on the far wall, everything exactly as it was!

Her hand went into the pile of pieces and, taking one, she looked at it, expecting to find more of the room's décor. She swallowed hard as she saw that the piece in her hand had a section of pink colouring, the same pink as her bathrobe. Sifting through the jumble she selected all the pink pieces and worked them into the picture. She knew what she would see, but it still came as a shock as she looked down to find herself bent over the table assembling the jigsaw.

Her heart now thumping in her chest, the pounding of the blood ringing in her ears, her hands seemed to work independently, snapping

up the remaining pieces of the picture. The rest of the table, even the half-empty glass of water on the sideboard was there in the picture. Incredible! The dark blue and black areas of the picture made up the night outside her patio windows. The last piece clicked into place and she stood wide-eyed, surveying the finished puzzle.

It was only after several seconds that she noticed a dark figure standing outside her patio window, its pale malevolent face watching her. The hair stood up on the back of her neck and she straightened at the sound of the patio doors slowly sliding open. She screamed ...

Errol Lai King, St John's College

2008

The future

As she disembarked, they handed her an oxygen pack. With practised dexterity she quickly manipulated it on to her back, and adjusted the mouthpiece. She breathed normally, and the sterilised taste of contained air filled her mouth, flooding into her deprived lungs.

As a little girl she had always had to concentrate on breathing in through the mouth and out through the nose when operating these oxygen tanks, and on several occasions she had been rushed to hospital because she had taken in contaminated air. Her lungs had been cleaned, and she had been given an anti-toxin. She had been lucky. Now, only a decade later, one heard of children who made that fatal mistake almost daily. In the cities chances were that one would die before one could get to a hospital.

They had said it would get better. It hadn't.

She left the airport building quickly. All around her people were leaving, things were shutting down. Officials busied themselves with ushering people out. Again, she had been lucky. She had been one of the last. She had been able to afford to return home. A month earlier, they had announced it. The fuel had finally run out. The last flight to London would leave from Washington. It was over. Airport companies and airlines all over the world had started disassembling and closing down. Images of gigantic mountains of blazing aeroplane skeletons dominated the news. Millions went jobless. Economies crashed.

But she was one of the lucky ones.

Above her, in the murky London sky, she could hear, if not see, the machines – the carbon dioxide extractors. They were everywhere now, except in the poorest areas, where people were dying by the minute. Every time her shoe clacked harshly on the grey concrete, someone somewhere

died. There were places which were completely deprived of oxygen, of water, of life. As if it were reading her mind, blackness overpowered her. She wobbled. She sighed, and steadied herself. Without panic she dragged herself to one of the booths lining the street. She quickly refilled her tank. On the wall in front of her that day's newspaper headlines blared:

LAST REFUGEES FLEE AFRICA
BRITISH TROOPS WITHDRAW
WHY WON'T IT RAIN?

As the oxygen flowed, and her breathing stabilised, a little girl stumbled into the booth, about to faint. She helped the child to the refill station. 'It's okay, little one. There is still some left.' She left the child to fill her own tank, and hurried away. In the deserted street, a single car drove slowly by. Only the rich could afford those now. Only the very rich.

In the distance she could see her destination, the Park. The green treetops contrasted starkly with the brown air, and the grey city. Those were some of the only trees left now.

At the gate, the uniformed official smiled and took her card. Next to the date he stamped it, and then frowned. 'I am sorry, ma'am, but you missed your visit to the Park yesterday.' His face was questioning.

'I did,' she said. 'I was in Washington. I didn't have time.'

'I am sorry, ma'am, but the visits are mandatory. I am afraid I am going to have to fine you.' He smiled apologetically, while he wrote out her ticket. 'Please pay within seven days.' He waved her through. 'Next!'

She walked into the glass-domed sanctuary. Most major cities had them, these relatively small Parks, where nature still survived, where every person was required to go every day. London had four of these pockets of distinctive paradise. She took the oxygen mask off, and took in the (almost) fresh air. It was so tranquil, so clean compared with the Outside. This was the only place where plants survived. This, and the Great Farm, which fed the world, or what was left of it.

In this place it was almost possible to forget, to push the ever-present regrets aside. The regrets which everyone had.

If only they had listened then. If only they had listened, she thought.

Beyers de Vos, Pretoria Boys' High School

Short story

Bob, his name was Bob; well, at least I think it was. He sat in the corner at the back of the classroom. Anyway, I heard he committed suicide last night.

What a shame.

Apparently in his note he wrote something about not belonging. How pathetic? I mean, please, I spoke to him once or twice. Well, personally, I think he did it for attention. I mean, really! Who would just commit suicide for such a ridiculous reason? Oh well, it's not really a loss to us. He never said much anyway. Did I tell you about that new anti-frizz shampoo? Gosh, girl, it works wonders!

Michelle Doyle, Clarendon High School for Girls

The audition

I'd barely opened my eyes before the realisation hit me: today was important. I slipped into my slippers and padded into the kitchen, straight for the coffee machine. Today was the day that I was to attend the most important audition I'd ever gone for. I'm an actress, you see, and this was the role I'd been waiting for since I was a little girl playing Mary in my very first play.

I'd been stressing about this audition for two months and had driven my friends practically around the bend with my constant fretting, not to mention Andrew, my significant other. He was always wonderfully supportive, but even he was slightly bemused by the extent of my anxiety regarding my upcoming audition. He skipped from 'Don't worry, Darling, it'll be just fine!' to 'Can we at least *try* to get through the next hour without worrying about it!' and back again with impressive agility.

I was brought back sharply when my doorbell rang. I panicked and spilt my coffee all over the kitchen floor. Had I lost track of time? Andrew read my open-book face the second I opened the door to him. Standing there looking rather sheepish, he was an hour-and-a-half early. I pondered throwing my coffee dregs at him as my heart-rate gradually returned to normal. Instead, I headed for a hot shower.

When I came out of the bathroom, somewhat calmer, I found Andrew sitting on my bed with a forlorn expression. It appeared as if all my fretting for the audition had stressed him out too. Trying to reassure him when I was approaching the nauseous stage of nervousness proved a tad difficult. I busied myself looking for the perfect outfit. Seventeen different combinations later, I had it: smart jeans, a white blouse, black coat and black high heels. Not too casual, not too dressed up.

I was so used to going to auditions alone that it was strange to have Andrew accompanying me this time. It was a fifteen-minute drive; not a word was said between us. We were both nervous. We pulled up to the venue: an old Victorian-style building. It was beautiful.

I'd never felt so intimidated. I'd heard awful rumours about these particular judges. I'd done my research and prepared, but I knew that

nothing would change their minds once they were made up. They would only choose the person who cracked the first audition. Initial impressions were everything to these judges.

Andrew held my hand for support as we walked towards my audition for the role of a lifetime. I took slow deep breaths and sensed Andrew doing the same. He rang the bell, looked down and mouthed 'good luck' to me. The door opened, and I knew instantly that I was face-to-face with the very judge who would prove hardest to impress.

When Andrew began to speak, it seemed to come from very far away. I struggled to regain my focus, and as my head cleared I heard him say, 'Mom, I'd like you to meet my fiancée, Rachel.'

The woman held out her hand to me: my audition had begun.

Sharon Green, Wynberg Girls' High School

Who am I?

I'm confused
My mother's Xhosa, my father's Sotho
I'm black, that's all I know
I speak both languages, but also English
'Who am I?' is the question I ask
I speak seSotho as if I am a Sotho leader
I speak isiXhosa as if it is my second language
Kasi taal is not that hard
Even my English sounds like my first language
'Who am I?' is the question I ask
I look at myself as well as my life
Where I am and where do I come from?
From *kasi* to *kasi*, suburb to suburb
But still a question stands in my head
'Who am I?' is the question I ask
I try to be ghetto; it doesn't work
I try to be sophisticated; it's even worse
But maybe who I am is not important
Just maybe 'Who do I want to be?' is the question I should ask.

Tshepo Mashigo, Northcliff High School

He can never know

I sit and wait for him, him with his tall well-built stature, perfectly structured face and beautiful hair. Him with his unassuming personality and alluring charm.

My best friend since we were 11, he'd never guess how I feel about him.
I wish I had the courage to tell him.

I see him in the distance; my heart starts to race, my palms sweat and
I eagerly await his arrival.

'Hey Boet!' he yells through the crowd, I walk up to him and we slap
palms. My name is Michael, his Byron. I am in love with him, but he can
never know.

Emma Mostert, Clarendon High School for Girls

Untitled

How could You?
Carrying me during my hardest of times,
leaving, as You had promised, only your footprints
in the sand.
Carrying me into the fires of hell,
How could You?

How could You?
Let me lie in pastures green,
filling my cup to the brim with joy
and I, not fearing the evil one,
sought
comfort in Your rod and staff.
Let me lie in pastures green
with him on top of me, forbidden fruits
bidden.
How could You?

How could You?
Eloi Eloi lama sabachtani?
When on a cross I was crucified
with only darkness, the temple curtain
tore in two. His hard nail digging
through my skin.
Eloi Eloi lama sabachtani?
My Lord! My Lord! Why have You forsaken me?
How could You?
When I needed You most.

Luwela Nodada, Victoria Girls' High School

Winter orphan

Tap tap tap on my steamed-up window
the scavenger on the roadside goes
rat-gnawed shirt and tattered shorts
not even a pair of socks to cover his bony feet
The window rolls down, spurred on by the pressing of a button
letting the winter's chill into the heated car

'Just a bit of silver or a blanket'
says the dark-skinned child from outside
'I'm not asking for much
just a new pair of shorts
just a shirt that covers my torso'

I look at the boy
snot-nosed missing teeth
and an elbow that sticks out sideways
Violently he shivers
and I shiver with him

The red becomes green
and the beep-beep of the car behind is audible
But I don't budge
I just sit and watch and pity the boy
knowing I have no spare change to give him

Suddenly
inspiration comes from nowhere
I take off my green collared shirt
and my blue denim jeans
and my warm woolly socks
and my fluffy grey scarf
and I hand them all over with hardly a thought

Andy Petersen, St John's College*

I hide

Out in public, here I am safer
And though others think I am free
I am permanently annexed
Because I hide

I hide behind a thick English accent, the luscious words rolling from my lips
I hide behind the high walls of a liberal English school
I hide behind the thick layers of my uniform
I hide behind my freedom-writing
I hide behind my black best friend
Behind *Molo-Mama-Kunjani-Ndiphilile-Ewe*.

I hide.
Because it is safer this way,
Because society blames me, despite my age,
Because I blame myself – why, I do not know –
Because even though my heritage does not make me guilty
I remain convicted.

Mariechen Puchert, Clarendon High School for Girl

2009

Lunchtime

I'm not such a complex person. It's just that I don't really appreciate company as much as other people do. So when I eat alone, it's not because I don't have any friends, but rather a personal preference. Mummy always told me not to talk while eating, anyway. Lasagne has always been a favourite of mine, but then again, ever since that first boarding-school meal reached my lips, flavour has become rather a foreign concept. In my first year at boarding school, I was blessed when, for my birthday, Mummy and Daddy came to take me home for the weekend. I so love family dinners, especially when lasagne is on the menu.

'What you up to there, Pippo?' Two boys sit down opposite me. They are the two thugs in my grade, who occasionally afford themselves the time to explain to me how introverted I am; in fewer syllables, of course.

'Hello there, Jeremy, Alexander,' I mumble, eyes fixated on a particularly lumpy spot of Béchamel sauce.

'I said what you up to!' Repetition: the first sign of a slow mind. I find it fascinating how people are willing to initiate a conversation, yet are incapable of fuelling it.

'I'm just eating, Jeremy,' I mumble, wondering whether he is just being annoying, or whether he literally cannot comprehend the art of mastication.

'I can see that, genius,' he laughs. 'Even when you're eating, you look like a nerd. Hey, where are your glasses, anyway?'

'Stop it!'

'What?'

'Stop annoying me.'

'Who?' Apparently this is hilarious. Every now and again I am forced into playing this infantile game of, quite literally, I'm-an-idiot.

'You. You are irritating me. Stop irritating me. Just go away, otherwise I'll ...'

Bad move.

'Otherwithe you'll what, pipthqueak?' lobs Alexander. It's typical. The side-kick, not intelligent enough to start any bullying of his own, always joins in the fun when the opportunity arises. His lisp is slightly jarring, emanating from the week-old bruise on his upper lip: apparently, Jeremy got angry and slammed his face into a tree. Friends forever.

'You're not going to call dear mummy, are you?' enquires Jeremy, with a convincing look of worry on his face. He can't hold it very long, though, and it turns, as if rehearsed, into a fit of forced laughter. In his mirth, he gawkily tilts his head back in a primitive fashion, and I notice a patch of slightly reddened skin next to his trachea. I never did understand the eroticism in sucking on another person's neck.

'Do you know what your *mummy* told me last night?' he blurts excitedly. 'She said to tell you not to phone her anymore, or to come home. She's getting tired of you, just like she got tired of your father. But I make her happy. At least that's what she whispered in my ear last night.'

At this, Alexander cackles horrendously as if his funny bone has been plucked from his body and is being aggressively used as a voodoo doll. I am intent on keeping my expression impassive. Silence is my last defence, because anything I say or do will be vilely twisted.

'Shut up!' I scream, breaching the security of my silence. 'Shut up, you stupid idiot!' My right hand has managed to clutch my bread-knife, which is now pointing directly between Jeremy's eyes. He slowly gets up and walks over to my side of the table. As my knife hand follows him, a savage grin creeps across one side of his face. He comes so close that the knife at the end of my outstretched hand makes a gentle indent on his neck, right where his love bite is beginning to pulse.

He says, absorbedly, 'I have news for you, you little shit. My pipes need cleaning, and just because dear old mummy is the town's most popular plumber does not mean that you get to call me names!'

This innuendo pushes me over the edge. Every muscle in my body screams. I arch my back as I jump from my chair.

'I ...'

My right hand extends above my head, the knife still dripping pieces of sticky mincemeat.

'... HATE ...'

As I look directly into Jeremy's eyes, I see them bulge, his pupils dilating in shock.

'... YOU!'

I feel the knife go in. Or at least, I feel what a knife sliding through living flesh might feel like. I remember when I was five, Daddy made me cut my steak into five equal pieces. It didn't really feel like that, but then again that was cooked meat. I glance around me. Alexander appears stuck in time, his mouth open in horror as he stares at my feet. I look down and see a boy with a knife in his neck.

A puddle of blood is already forming in consistent waves, made larger by each pulse of his dying heart. It reminds me of the sea, and how I used to wonder what causes there to be wave after wave upon the shore. As the blood reaches my toes, I step over the writhing body and head for the door. How strange it is that there is a boy with a knife in his neck. It disturbs me slightly, and I would lose my appetite, except I haven't eaten in ages. Lasagne would be nice.

Michael Alberti, St John's College

Immigrants

I saw you ...

They beat you
They dragged you
They mocked you
And then ...
They burned you

You cried
You flinched
You looked up
You saw me
And then ...
You smiled

Is all this because you're not like
Them
Daddy ... Tell me why?

I want to go home

Jessica Ilunga, Clarendon High School for Girls

Here

Here lies the infinity of an endless cosmos
And here Jesus wants me for a sunbeam
But here I weep in obscurity's arms
As there is no one here but me

Gilbert Mubangizi, Westville Boys' High School

Ballet

'Ballet?!
Ha ha? Ballet's for fairies
Jumping around with pixie arms.
You should try something real,
Like Hockey,
It's great, just you and the ball.'
Wow! That's phenomenal! You! And a ball!
It must be hard.
Try co-ordinating feet, legs, hands, heads, arms, backs, elbows, knees,
ankles, necks, stomachs, balance,
while smiling as you're jumping on your
Bloody toes!
Then we'll talk fairies.

Laurie Scarborough, Rustenburg High School for Girls

Young 'n' black

For I am young 'n' black
You look at me like that,
You think less of me
You think I don't care and you hate it,
But I do care

For I am young 'n' black
You have to compare me
To your son
Yes
In him you see great talent
Yet in me you see a waste of oxygen

You think I don't care and you hate it
But I do care

For I am young 'n' black
You think I have nothing to say
Well, you are wrong
Listen to me when I say I am an African child
And I will persevere
I am young and impulsive
In my impulsiveness, I am diligent
A winner, but not too bold
I am the youth

I am an African child
I bring to some hope for the future
I am young 'n' black
With great talent
A bright future ahead of me

You really think I don't care
I keep saying that I care
But I don't care what you think of me

I am tired of being speechless
Yet back in my throat grumble words
With the power to inspire many

Who said I couldn't talk?
Who said I couldn't think?
Who said I couldn't write?

I am tired of being silent
Yet deep in my mind
Burn thoughts of great inventions
Let me voice my mind.

Nkululeko Tsotetsi, Springs Boys' High School

2010

Appalled: a response to 'The Vulture and the Baby' (1994) by Kevin Carter

'I was appalled at what they were doing. I was appalled at what I was doing.'

Photojournalism exposes both the ugly and the virtuous side of human nature, in the photographers themselves and in their subject matter. Kevin Carter, a renowned South African photojournalist, knew this. His depiction of human beings at their most evil caused him to destroy himself. His 1994 photograph 'The Vulture and the Baby' is a testament to Carter's skill and his commitment to depicting the greatest suffering that humanity ever endures. It will not escape my mind. I want to reach into the photograph and scoop the famished toddler into my arms. I detest this photo, but it is most significant in my life, because of its universal relevance, emotional impact, and ability to scar my soul.

As a member of the Bang Bang Club, Kevin Carter dedicated his photographic career to covering both the brutality of apartheid and the tragedies of the whole African continent. His work took him to the village of Ayod in Sudan in the middle of a horrific war. There, after taking a break from photographing carnage, he heard a whimpering beyond a bush. What he found was a small, skeletal toddler, resting during a journey towards a feeding station. As Carter approached the toddler, a vulture landed on the scene. 'The Vulture and the Baby' is the product of these circumstances.

This photograph won Carter the prestigious Pulitzer Prize. It also caused him to commit suicide. He was commended for his effort, yet, at the same time, he was attacked for being 'just another vulture on the scene'. This photograph stabs at both my head and my heart. I am furious with Carter for not saving this desperate child, yet how can I guarantee that, in the same situation, I would obligingly rush to the child's aid? Rationality is unreliable in the presence of fear and shock.

The technical aspects of this photograph simply enhance its scarring effect on me. What initially strikes me is the extreme contrast between the lush vegetation in the background and the absolute desolation of the toddler's situation. I almost wish that she were an animal – at least then she would find nourishment in her surroundings. The distance between the child in the foreground and the vegetation in the background, however, renders this wish impossible.

The child wears nothing except an ivory necklace and bracelet, hanging around her skeletal neck and wrists respectively. To me, this is a painful symbol of the joys and naivety of childhood and of a mother's love. However, it is as if the jewellery forms a target for the vulture. His beak is

the same colour as the bracelet and the necklace, suggesting a cruel link between him, the predator, and his victim, the child.

Thus, her death is inevitable.

This photograph is unkind to my sensibility. Both the vulture and the child are hunched over and shockingly alike in skin tone and size. This suggests that they are in the same situation. Therefore, I am forced to question my initial desire to label the vulture as the savage, and the child as the victim. Surely these beings are simply both 'sourcing' nourishment? I am forced to question whether or not I would feel so passionately about this image were the child an animal instead. The child's ribs that protrude from her frame have an uncanny resemblance to the wings of the vulture. This suggests that both bird and mammal are victims of their respective circumstances. Why, then, do I not feel the urge to scoop up the vulture into my arms? I am prejudiced towards my own kind.

Within this controversial photograph lies a sad irony. In it, the spectator looks upon Carter himself, as the small child. In my opinion, the vulture symbolises all the suffering that will eventually claim his life. Of course, I am appalled at Carter – why did he not save the child? But I also thank him. Without this photograph, I would live a naïve existence, unaware of the brutal destructiveness of humanity. 'The Vulture and the Baby' has taught me that the world turns on itself.

I am appalled ...

Emma Boshoff, Roedean School

Phone call

She dialled the number,

With an aching heart.

Please ring ...

It was ringing.

Please pick up ... please ...

'Hello?'

'Hi, it's Lina. I –'

'Lina? Is something wrong?'

'No, I just –'

'Oh, all right, then. Look, Lina, I'm at work right now, so I'm busy. I'll phone when I can. Take care, then.'

Then the dial tone.

'I just wanted to say hi, Mom ...' she murmured,

Cold tears welling in her eyes,

Into the ear of the

Lifeless receiver.

Sinalo Dlang, Sinalo High School for Girls

Anonymous

You smell like navy blue
And stride in formal grace
You have pride spread across
Your shiny, shaven face
So you think you have the answers
Because you know the rhyme
And you think that you've succeeded
Because your money is measured in time
A domineering handshake
And your poker-playing eyes
Sitting smartly in a meeting
Smooth shirt, smooth shave, smooth lies
You think you've found where you belong
Because the statistics fit
Your glass is always half-full
From the office chair where you sit
You think you're perfectly balanced
Because your suit matches your tie
Equal amounts of salt and pepper
Carefully numbered, all in time
Held together with stickytape
From the dispenser on your desk
A life that sets an example
For the failing, unfortunate rest
And every emotion is filed
Alphabetically in a drawer
You think your conscience is clean
Because you don't ache for more
The perfect anonymous
With the calculating mind
You are the sliced bread of humanity
The flag of humankind
With a briefcase in your hand
And a neat family to boot
You stride through each success
In your matching tie and suit

Lara Evans, Cedar House School

Dear God

I wonder, sometimes, how you see the world. I wonder, perhaps, if omniscience rather detracts from the beauty of the world. If the instant knowledge of all the world's majesty might diminish the individual and lonely beauty of the iron sea, or the burning sky.

I suppose that you are able to comprehend it all; all the hurry and clutter of the world and all the silence and emptiness of foam on the sea. And no doubt you are able to understand it all at once, in one instant, and to feel the full effect of your whole creation in a blink of an eye, or, rather, in the brilliant flash of a darting sea-bird or the cry of a gull, or the last dying rays of the sun.

But I could not comprehend it, and for that I must thank you. Only you could understand that the best way to illustrate your beauty was in silence rather than noise, in the quiet murmur of the waves and the empty vastness of the sky.

Oliver February, Cedar House School

'Take me to the riot'

Take me there.

I want to see the smashing glass,
Posters being ripped off walls,
Pyres of words and clothes that used to be part of people's lives
Set alight.

I want to see them burn.

I want to see the anger, the screaming
Reflected outside of me.

I want to breathe in and taste the destruction,
Feel it pulsing through me.
Open my eyes and see the destruction.

Little room being torn apart,
Boxes kicked in,
Cans pulled off shelves and the clattering sound
As all the little pieces fall to the floor.
Little room being torn apart.
Someone's life being torn apart.
Someone's life being torn apart.

Grey dust hanging in the air
Running through the haze
Past burning, broken people,

Blindly following the screaming,
The shouting that leads us into the darkness.
We'll follow until we cannot walk anymore.
We want to rip this night apart.

No eyes on us tonight.
We are no one and we are everyone.
We are the wind.

All together we swarm through the city,
One writhing mass,
Devouring all in our path
With vicious jaws of rage,
Poisoning the walls
With our venomous words.

The cold splash of paint
Hardens on my skin
And I laugh
At the neon on my fingers.

We run through the city.
We own the night.
And we are alive.

Kate Pinchuck, Cedar House School

A little over-exaggerated

I HIT THE BIG TIME!

I made the cut! The show will be mine! I got the part!

Just wait and see. My name. Up in lights. You picture it?

I hit it big.

Okay ... I didn't really make it, but I did get a call-back! My future is pretty much set in stone by now.

Okay ... I didn't get a call-back, but I did get a call ... from the director! He said I have a provisional part.

Okay ... Those weren't his exact words, and technically it wasn't the director, but I did get that call!

Okay ... The call was for my mother, but I answered it and was told the good news – that I had a chance!

Okay ... The call was actually about an audition for the part, but I knew that I was half-way in!

Okay ... There wasn't a call, but I was sure to receive one! The application sounded legit.

Okay ... So I didn't apply ... I missed the submission date. A mistake anyone can make!

Okay ... I didn't make that mistake. I did hear about the movie, though!

Okay ... So there's no movie. Maybe I exaggerated a little ...

OKAY ... I exaggerated A LOT.

BUT I HIT THE BIG TIME ... These ideas in my mind just keep getting BIGGER!

Aliyah Rachel Rainer, Clarendon High School for Girls

How do you find me?

Now that I am not a child
And am gradually, one by one,
Stepping over the conventions that separated us
Teacher and pupil
Parent and daughter
How do you find me?

Now that I am a young woman,
Not a girl,
With opinions, values and beliefs of my own
Some of which you did not teach me
How do you find me?

Now that I can look you in the eye
Now that I can do what you can do
Now that the law says we are equal
What do you find in me?

Is it more or less, I wonder,
Than what you found in me before
When I was small and sweet and warm
Is it harder or gentler,
And can you respect it?
Is it all that you will ever find in me
Or will there come a day
When you will find something more?

Is it honourable?
Is it honest?
Is it something of which you can be proud?

Has my childhood been what you thought it would be?
Am I what you thought I'd be?

Now that I am here
How do you find me?

Caitlin Tonkin, Westerford High School

Layers of an onion

He has forgotten
himself
beneath the layers and layers and layers
of smiles
and layers
of bullshit that he's fallen into.
His cracked lips are peeling
from the constant
drinking, smoking and smiling
but the layers never peel.
His façade
holds fast
and not even he can
take off those masks.

Apparently water is pure,
so he should see perfection
in that reflection
distorted by the waves
but all he sees
is another
smile.

Xabiso Vili, Cedar House School

2011

Dogs of war

Akita vs Pappa Bites

Flaring its black nostrils, the Akita exhausts its last breath upon the stale
midnight breeze, soaking the back alley in a warm scent of fear and despair.

Its coat glimmers in the moonlight, bearing no prized badges – tainted war-scars of status. This mutt is inexperienced ... innocent. Pappa tightens his clasp around the Akita's tender throat. In pain the Akita howls and claws at Pappa's face, ripping the skin in search of his precious eyes. Like mechanisms in an intricate machine, the muscles compress, forcing the tendons into gear, locking his mandible shut. There is no escape from a Staffordshire bull-terrier hold, especially Pappa's. The Akita's hind legs stop stirring in the dirt and asphyxia sets in. This fight is over.

Pappa unwinds his jaws, heaving his berried canines from out the flesh. The carcass falls, hitting the ground with a thump. Where it falls it will remain. Transactions are made and the people disperse back through the canals of the town. This is the lucrative game they play, and, as in a game, we become the pawns – expendable. Win you live, lose you die. Taught to fight, born to kill – dogs of war.

Tearing through a sheet of old blood, Pappa unlocks his eyelids to a new day. He sloshes and stretches, riding his back on the concrete floor to get rid of the grime and flies pestering his sores. The flies are always an issue. He then limps over to the bowl, with his silver chain clanging behind him. Just enough to keep you alive, as well as your hunger-induced ferocity. The backyard is small, cluttered. Old chicken bones lie scattered. Patches of weed thrive between the damp cracks of the grubby concrete floor the dogs use to sleep on. Pappa gradually crawls back to his favourite spot against the slab wall. He presses his ear against a tiny crack in the concrete, listening to the outside world bustling by. He hears the sounds of the highway, the bustling people walking along the footpaths and the faint jingle of a million olive reeds tapping each other as an autumn breeze glides through the fields. Jugla toddles over Boere, a Boerboel, then perches beside Pappa to lick the blood off his face. Pappa continues to listen until the noise drones out all memory and thought, losing himself among the reeds.

Jugla vs Rottweiler

The Rottweilers are vicious, with jaws strong enough to rip limbs. But Jugla is a Chinese Shar-Pei, engineered with excess folds of skin to give the breed a fighting advantage. The Rottweiler struggles to get a grip on Jugla and slips to the ground. Immediately Jugla pounces, stretching his jaws as wide as they can go and snaps them closed around the Rottweiler's neck. The Rottweiler's neck is muscular; Jugla pushes down extra hard until his canines plough deep enough, and he begins to pull. The Rottweiler howls with pain and viciously claws at Jugla's body, ripping his abdomen and scrotum. Jugla continues his grip, dragging his teeth along the Rottweiler's neck until finally one of his teeth severs the mutt's jugular vein. The loss of blood, especially from the brain, is so great that one loses consciousness almost immediately. The Rottweiler drops dead.

Pappa takes his ear off the crack in the wall. He can't hear anything because Jugla is howling too loud. His wounds are bad. Pappa walks over to Jugla, cautioning him to stop making a noise. You must never make a noise, never reveal your weakness. Pappa lies over Jugla's face, trying to muzzle the cries.

Mastiff vs Boere

Where you fall, you will remain. Boere doesn't make it back.

The yard is filled with the barks of new dogs, puppies. Another restock of inexpensive pawns to play their game. Pappa stares across the yard. Jugla is rotting. Boere's leash is still waiting on the ground for his return, just the way he left it. He looks down at his collar and snakes his eyes along the silver chain with the end bolted into the concrete floor, all the while wondering why. Suddenly a familiar jingle radiates from the tiny crack in the wall of bustling people, the highway and the tender rustle of olive reeds rattling as a warm autumn breeze passes. Pappa jolts up, scanning the slab wall. The backyard is small, cluttered. Dirty boxes and empty oil drums lie dumped against the high concrete wall. Pappa runs to the wall, leaping up the boxes and drums till he reaches as high up as he can go. There Pappa sits. He examines the slab wall. Even though he has scaled the drums to the summit, he still cannot see the other side. He looks back down at the backyard, at the puppies, the empty chained collar, and then at his own restraint. Then, like mechanisms in an intricate machine, his muscles compress, forcing the tendons into gear, blasting him up into the air. The puppies watch on as Pappa descends beyond the slab wall. His flaccid chain rattles as it follows him down until, suddenly, like a metal pole, the silver chain shoots straight, vibrating with tension. All is again silent.

Flaring his black nostrils, Pappa exhausts his last few breaths upon the warm autumn breeze. His coat, rugged in the twilight, displays horrid fighting scars for the world to see. This mutt is a veteran. The leather tightens its clasp around Pappa's tender throat. Like the hold of a Staffordshire bull terrier, there is no escape from it. Pappa's hind legs slowly stop kicking the air and asphyxia sets in. This fight is over.

A brave sacrifice. A desperate far cry for help.

Gregory Booysen, Westerford High School

The Interahamwe of Mbekweni

David Sentwali lit a match and held it to a paraffin lamp.

The little black and white TV blasted pictures and commentary of Spain vs the Netherlands. The World Cup final. The game was now deep into extra time, and David had wanted to see a goal for ages, preferably from Spain.

They were his favourite team after the African ones. It was such a pity the Rwandan national team hadn't made the cut.

'Iniesta takes the ball down, he shoots! It's in the bottom corner! Spain have surely won the World Cup!'

David leapt up, and almost banged his head on the roof of the shack. He pumped his fists with excitement, his face covered by a huge grin.

Suddenly there was a loud smashing noise on the corrugated iron door, and people were shouting. A face appeared at the window. The man's dark face showed rage in its purest form. 'Hey, *wena!* Get the fuck out of here, 'tsek!' he roared, his eyes red in the light of the lamp.

David froze, and felt his neck and shoulders become drenched in cold sweat.

The rusty old Toyota creaked up the road. David slowly unrolled the window, and peered out. There was a roadblock about twenty metres away, with FAR soldiers shining torches into the cars. David gripped the steering wheel, and edged forward. If he ran, they would know he was a Tutsi, and would kill him.

He was now in line with one of the soldiers.

The soldier thrust his torch into David's face. 'Papers!' he shouted, spraying spit into David's eyes. David raised a shaking hand and offered the soldier a crudely made counterfeit ID. The soldier glared from David's face, to the paper. His upper lip twitched and his jaw tightened, revealing the tendons in his neck.

'These are fake! Inyenzi! You Tutsi cockroach!'

David put his foot on the accelerator.

The level of noise outside the shack continued to rise, and David could hear the bangs on the doors of other shacks. People started chanting in Xhosa, which he didn't understand. The man at the window had gone, but David knew it wouldn't be long before he returned with more people, and weapons. He searched frantically around the shack, looking for anything to defend himself with. There was nothing.

He grabbed the only money he had, a R100 note from under his sleeping mat, and flung on his treasured AS Kigali team jersey. It was the only possession he had brought with him to South Africa.

Cautiously looking out of the window, David saw about fifty people scattered along the road in groups, pulling foreigners out of their shacks. All of them were armed with sticks, crowbars and knives. He recognised many of them, and wondered why they would do something like this.

He pushed open the door, and sprinted outside. A nearby group spotted him and immediately began to give chase. He could hear the shouts behind him: 'We'll get you, *amakwerekwere!* We'll get you all!'

The car skidded down the road, crashing into potholes and just managing to stay on all four wheels. A pick-up truck, much more suited to the terrain, was in hot pursuit. David hastily glanced in the rear-view mirror, sweat cascading from his temples into his lap. Three men bearing machetes stood on the back of the pick-up. They waved their weapons at him and yelled. David swung his eyes back to the road and felt as though he would vomit. The Interahamwe would kill him without a second thought, he knew.

He kept his foot flat on the accelerator, but what he saw in front of him made his stomach lurch and his heart quiver.

There was a large tree laid down in the middle of the road.

He slowly stopped his car; put his head on the steering wheel, and waited to die.

David hurtled between the shacks, trying his utmost to lose his assailants. His breath curled out in front of him, and dust from the gravel flew in all directions. He U-turned behind one of the shacks and kept sprinting.

Someone was nearby; he could hear the squeak of shoes very close to him.

A man appeared in front of David. They were in between a line of shacks, so David was cornered. As the man got closer, David recognised him to be Asanda, who ran a stall next to David's at the market. They had often debated the World Cup results.

David felt limp as Asanda took out a long blade and held it against his neck.

'Asanda,' David whispered, almost no sound coming from his mouth. 'Please don't kill me. Please.' He reached into his pocket, and pulled out the R100 note. Asanda stared blankly at David, his black eyes showing no emotion. He took the money, turned around, and strode away.

David heard the pick-up truck groan to a halt behind him. He heard the men jump off the back and make their way towards him.

David wept as a pair of hands pulled him out of the car; and shoved him, face-first into the gravel. Boots began raining down on the back of his head. One of the men turned him over and leant down, putting his face right against David's.

The smell of stale cigarettes wafted into David's nostrils.

'This is the end, you Tutsi piece of shit. Soon, our land will be cleansed of your filth.' He raised the machete.

'P-please,' stuttered David, dirty tears rolling down his face. 'I h-have money. Twenty thousand francs. In the back of the car.'

The man above David glanced at one of his friends. The man opened the back door of the Toyota, and nodded.

'I could take your money and kill you, anyway, inyenzi. But I'm a good man. It's your lucky day.'

The three men got back into the pick-up. It started. The man looked back.

'If I see you again, I'll cut off your head.'

The pick-up disappeared into the night.

David stumbled out of Mbekweni, and headed for the main road. He thought about his past. He felt tired, betrayed yet again.

Finally, reaching the main road, he sighed deeply. Then he looked up.

Standing a few metres in front of him was Asanda, together with four other men.

Asanda held a tyre, and a can of petrol.

Francis de Satgé, Westerford High School

Mrs van Tonder in her pink pantoffels ...

Mrs van Tonder in her pink pantoffels sucked on a cheap cigarette as she stood on the steps of her trailer, gazing at the neighbourhood on wheels. She tightened her gown and adjusted one of the many rollers that curled her hair in preparation for what she liked to call her 'chic' look. That's when she saw him.

It wasn't unexpected; she saw him every morning. But this morning, he was delectable. She waved shyly at her neighbour, Piet, and laughed coyly with an unsightly overbite.

Lifting his Sharks cap off his head, Piet smiled and nodded at her, proudly baring his gold tooth.

What a man! thought Mrs van Tonder. She admired his rugby-ball physique that filled his sleeveless T-shirt and she eyed his masculine dirty jeans. Before she knew it, the legs of his jeans were moving ... towards her!

He strolled over to her and held his hat under his chin shyly as he greeted her.

'Môre, Mevrou. I've seen you every morning and today ... I just wanted to say ...' He stood on his toes, puckering his lips in an unshaven face and eyes clamped shut like his trailer door at night.

Click-CLACK.

He felt the barrel of a shotgun cooling a circle through his old T-shirt on his spine.

'Meneer. Dis my vrou.'

Gladys Kisela, Rustenburg High School for Girls

Marvel at the immortality of my legacy

My name is given to me by destiny
My life is shaped by the hopes and dreams of my ancestors
by the great expectations of a father for his son
and I am personalised by the hard and tender love of my mother.

I am made with the heart of bravery
fused with sympathy
ingested with honesty
caged in loyalty
protected from brutality
adapted to reality
with a nature of peace and unity
my heart makes my name live for eternity.

Yes, I am made with the bone of a warrior
my existence resists all qualities of a failure.
I have created special moments and filled them with amazement.

While my enemies hate me
and my friends love me
all will marvel at the immortality of my legacy.

Emmanuel Letsoalo, Northcliff High School

Walking away

He's a boy: a sun-kissed, gold-haired, river-eyed Boer boy with a rumbling laugh and the voice of a rising sun. He's a boy with too much pain to take away but enough to shoulder, with eyes that speak of the thrill of a tackle and the hurt of broken promises. He's a boy with anger on his wrists and love in his heart. He is my boy, my inspiration.

The first day we met I felt it; the 'this-boy-is-going-to-change-your-life' feeling. We were at a Christian camp in the middle of the bush, hoping to get some kind of connection with God or our money back. There were about a hundred of us Son seekers and in the midst of the preliminary meet-and-greets I happened to come across this staunch slab of Afrikaans muscle who just screamed boerewors and rugby concussions. He had the feel of someone who was used to acting confidently and making people laugh, but the laugh on his lips wouldn't always reach his eyes. There was something sad, almost broken, about him. Like a clown with a painted tear – I couldn't quite tell why it was there, this sadness. It came and went, though, like a

shadow you see from the corner of your eye. It wasn't until he told me his story that I started to see how broken he was and just how strong.

He was a boy of sixteen with endless potential and seemingly every reason to be happy. Handsome, athletic, charming, funny and blessed with a beautiful voice, an affluent family and a large group of friends. A group of friends who couldn't understand why someone so financially secure, so talented, so seemingly perfect could be so sad. But the hole his estranged father left was too vacuous to fill. He tried to plug it with alcohol and cigarettes and drugs and girls who came and went, always leaving a scar when they did. Some days were good and some days were bad and some days he couldn't remember. And all the time that destructive comforter, self-loathing, left its signature on his arms. So much anger, so much pain and nowhere to put it but deep in a secret place he didn't even know was there until one day it spilled over and his mother was at the receiving end of its wrath, his hands tight around her neck.

She survived but he knew he no longer could. Not like this. He and his mother consulted a doctor who told him he had a mental imbalance, a type of schizophrenia. It was then he decided he had to take hold of the part of himself that was still his. And so, here he was, at camp, trying desperately to leave his past at the altar and to walk away from it into the hands of the Father who never left him.

He's a boy who's strong enough to walk away. He's a boy who gave me the strength to walk away, too, from a person I'd never wanted to be. He's a boy who opened my eyes and made me see. Made me see myself, made me see God and made me see how love really can change everything. He's a boy who fell apart in my arms and broke my heart so I could grow a new one – one that didn't need to pretend or be afraid. One that wasn't afraid to hurt. He's a boy that taught me to cry. He is my boy. My inspiration.

Kopano Maroga, Michaelhouse

A poem I am not allowed to write

or Burn these verses

Dear God,
All the instructions in the manual
Have recently been completed:

The legions of gluttons
Have been successfully removed
And incarcerated in deep-freezers
The prostitutes and the lecherous

Have been separately detained
 The Ocean waters are teeming
 With half-drowned adulterers
 (The tears they shed for their affairs
 Have made the seas one millimetre deeper)
 The pickpockets and the swindlers
 Have been locked in the subway tunnels
 (Without a single accordion player
 Whose melodies can keep them company)
 The idlers have been deported
 And sent to work in the factories
 (Production has decreased,
 But the problem will be rectified)
 The homosexual offenders
 Are beneath the soil of the flower-beds
 (No wonder the gardenia shrubs
 Are growing so well this year)
 Any acedia has been dealt with
 By swift and merciless execution

And the multitude of seven billion liars
 Were secured to seven billion stakes
 And seared with the flames of a raging fire
 Fed with pages of the tall tales they wrote.

The only predicament seems to be
 There's no one left

Trudie Spangenberg, Pretoria High School for Girls

Racial prejudice: alive and well in South Africa

'Racial prejudice is a judgement or an assumption made about a person because of their race, before one has acquired adequate knowledge to judge with absolute accuracy.'

I recently heard a rather disturbing story. Last year a Grade 1 teacher had a class with a diverse racial mix of children. She made a collage of men's faces. The men were from different ethnic backgrounds and, at the time the photos were taken, all between the ages of 21 and 60. The photos were all unsmiling candid shots. She asked the children to pick out the faces of the men most likely to be thieves, murderers, hijackers, paedophiles and rapists. Each and every single child identified the black and coloured men as the probable criminals, but not one white face was selected.

After the kids were done, the teacher showed them that they had just pointed out Archbishop Desmond Tutu as a rapist, Martin Luther King Jr as a thief and a coloured botany lecturer as a murderer. They were, however, correct about the coloured man who was convicted of molesting his three children every night for two years. They were also right not to choose Braam Malherbe, who ran the Great Wall of China to raise money for children born with cleft-lip and cleft-palate disfigurements. But they missed the white man who murdered his wife and two kids, and then committed suicide.

This teacher's lesson clearly demonstrates that there are good black and coloured people and bad black and coloured people. Just like there are good white people and bad white people.

The colour of your skin doesn't make you a good person or a bad person and it is shocking to discover that children are still taught (as young as 7 years old even) that black and coloured people are bad and dangerous.

Many parents try to justify why they teach their children to be wary of black and coloured people by saying that more crimes are committed by black and coloured people than by white. That may be true, but according to South Africa Demographics Profile 2010, 79% of the population is black, 8.9% is coloured and 9.6% white. That means that there are nine times as many black and coloured people in South Africa as white. Surely, then, it is not illogical to conclude that there will be a greater percentage of black and coloured criminals than white?

A black or coloured person's skin colour doesn't make them criminals by nature, just as white people aren't born saints, either. Racial prejudice is hurtful, wrong and damaging the citizens of our beautiful country. Children need to be taught that judging people based solely on their skin colour is unacceptable.

It is what you make of your life that makes you the person (good or bad) that you are – not the colour of your skin. Only once we, and the older generation especially, have realised this, can we truly begin to move forward and at last come to understand and accept one another.

Nicole Sykes, Christian Brothers' College St Johns (Parklands)

2012

I am me

Everyone has their history, their story: from the shop worker trying to make enough to get by, to the elderly bus driver successfully completing another schedule. With so many stories running, leaping, sliding and

generally coming into existence, mine does not seem significant at all. But the facts are these: it will be written and it will be read. If this was not reason enough for my story to be noticed, then many bookstores would soon find themselves out of business. So here it is and here I am, broken down into pen, ink and thought.

A physical description is always the best way to begin. I am a very tall and impossibly thin teenage boy with a weight so constant that entire pop-star careers have flown by without another kilogram to be seen. The rest of me is made up of both light and dark brown hair, eyes whose colour I cannot name (but have been complimented for), pale skin that could put the Cullens to shame, and, finally, limbs bonier than an elephant graveyard. Whether all of this constitutes an attractive appearance I can't say. However, several years of low self-esteem seem to be going against the hope that I am 'good-looking'. It is not up to me to decide my level of attractiveness, but up to the world – and I hope, dearly, that the world is in a good mood.

From physical to mental – this would seem the best route. Although the state of my mental stability may still be in question, I do know the odd thing or two about the deep crevices of my mind. The term 'moody' has been thrown around, although bi-polar is not a far jump. But, in general, I am cheery and often try to make others feel the same. My main talent seems to be making light of a serious situation. My main goal is to see that my friends are happy, even if this means ignoring my own 'issues'. I have also been described as 'totally random', a very accurate statement as I often have trouble keeping up with myself.

Now, to truly understand someone (whatever that may mean), you must have some idea of their past. Growing up with a brother six years older than me meant that either I learnt very quickly or faced ridicule and a dead arm. Also having a cousin who felt he was just as smart as any adult (being two whole years older than me) did not help the inferiority complex that had begun to take shape within my mind. But it would be grossly wrong of me to say that I had a bad childhood. My parents were always loving and caring, my cousin and I were always the best of friends for many years and I still managed to get along with my brother ... sometimes. At school I had wonderful friends, ignoring the kids who called me what was a popular insult at the time: 'gay'. (Which, in the end, turned out to be correct. So, go them!)

So that is it, and that is me. An impossibly thin and moody teenager with a great family and great friends. To see what all of this is going to turn into is going to be a fun ride, albeit stressful. But, as with many stories, the rough times only serve to make the rest that much better.

Tim Hardwick, Kloof High School

Burning ice

That day was the hottest we had had in months. The cattle flicked their tails, standing with their backs to the afternoon sun, calves lying underneath their mothers' bellies in a desperate attempt to escape the relentless heat. Even the flies seemed lazy, but I felt as cold as ice when my father walked out of that small, dark room with his face set, along with his will, and we left.

'De Kock!' came the hard, loud voice of my father's boss. 'Can I see you in my office!' His coarse, heavy accent rumbled through the hot air like the thunder that takes days to bring rain. It was not a question. Dad wiped his hands on an already dirty towel and closed the bonnet of the farm's old Land Cruiser. I looked down at my feet, carelessly stuffed into old takkies, resting on the cracked red ground. With Baas, no news meant you still had a job.

He ruffled my hair as he walked past and smiled sadly down at me.

'Go sit with Bhuti,' he said. 'They're building a box kite.'

I knew he did not want me to hear the torrent of verbal abuse that would emanate from Baas's office in less than ten minutes. I nodded and got up to leave, but as I looked back to see him walk into the snake pit, I saw a weakness, a helplessness, that I had never before seen in my father. He was strong, but Baas had a hold over him, something my mother had once said even she did not know about.

'Bhuti, kan ek saam met julle speel?' My Afrikaans had improved dramatically that holiday, ever since I had started going to work with my father. I enjoyed spending time with Bhuti and his two brothers. Things were never complicated with them, even though their lives were hard. Baas constantly accused them of stealing something, only to have Dad find it a day or two later. It was Dad who had convinced Baas to let Bhuti, Seun and Lo spend their holidays on the farm with their parents, and it was Dad who convinced him to keep Bhuti's parents as his employees.

'They are good people, Baas. They work hard for you!' he said to Baas.

'De Kock, they are dirty monkeys that only cost me more money!' Baas shouted back, but he let them stay on. My mom always said that, if it was not for my father, Baas would have fired them years ago.

By the time I saw my father emerge from the office, shoulders stooped, we had finished making the kite and we were attaching the strings so we could fly it. The afternoon wind had picked up and it seemed as if it would be enough.

Dad walked over to his old bakkie, climbed in and started the engine. I got up and dusted off my jeans, knowing that he would drive down to fetch me. I wondered why we were leaving so early, but, in my heart, I knew something had gone awfully wrong with Baas. I got into the car and waved goodbye to Bhuti out of the passenger window.

'What happened?' I asked him.

His forehead was creased like his shirts before Mom ironed them. 'He fired me. I told him that Bhuti's mom couldn't have stolen his money yesterday because she was in town buying his groceries. I told him he couldn't fire her for something she didn't do. "Where would they go?"' He sounded broken and tired. 'He fired me.'

I looked back. They had got the kite into the air and it was soaring high above little Lo's head. I saw their white teeth shining in their faces, and I saw Baas striding towards them. He took out his penknife and cut the string of the kite. It rose on the wind and flew away towards the river. Bhuti's head drooped on his chest and the dust obscured my view ...

Samantha Hayward, Herschel Girls School

TADA – Teenagers Against Daddy's Aspirations

The cardamom tea powder and mint aroma brewing on the stove engulfed our home in intangible warmth in the way that only a good cup of home-made Mummy's tea can do. The chitter-chatter chimed, alongside the hustle and bustle of any morning. Daddy crept into my room, gently to rouse his sleeping beauty from her not-so-eternal slumber.

But now it is eight and I'm just a little late. No tea ready and waiting for me, no freshly packed lunch, no hot toast just the perfect colour of brown that I favour, no ironed clothes, no housemaid to make my bed, or to wash the breakfast dishes. No nothing.

Somehow, freedom felt a little overpriced.

Meet me, Salma Khan – your not-so-average, anything-but-ordinary South African Indian girl. I can't cook, I can't clean and, most importantly, I am all alone in the Big Apple. When 'Earnest and Old' approached yours truly to offer a fully-paid opportunity of attending business school in New York City, with a guaranteed American job offer, I couldn't say no. No smart businesswoman would. Dad was a complete anti; Mum rather melodramatic (given her addiction to Indian soap operas). Let's not forget how every aunty, cousin, cousin's mother, brother and sister was ever ready to voice their opinions on my life choices. I think, as in every Indian home, my parents had the inherent desire to lock me up in their cage, let me fly to UKZN, where I would study medicine like the vast majority of the Indian minority, and then happily marry some rich man's son and have three cute little children.

I am sorry to say I never quite bought the 'All-Indian Dream'. So I packed my bags, and off I went with heartfelt goodbyes, leaving a world of comfort and unappreciated favours.

There are a few things that I have learnt from what my mother failed to mention, like washing powder being necessary to drive a washing machine. Or that two litres of milk curdles within five days when one lives alone. Or that one cloth is insufficient for its multiple uses, like drying dishes, cleaning stains, and – my personal favourite – wiping floors. Or that an iron has to be switched on for the creases actually to disappear. Oh, no, my mother never did quite equip me with the intricacies of making a house a home. Nor did she equip me with the recipes to satisfy my selective and somewhat lavish palate.

They say in New York you can survive on take-out for months. It's the truth. I survived a wholesome forty-one days, all delivered straight to my hips, free of charge. But eventually you do grow tired of your polystyrene crockery and you miss home food. Naturally, I phoned my mum to ensure my attempts tasted exquisite, like her own. I sat at my kitchen counter, a copy of *Indian Delights* open, a pen and paper at the ready.

'You put some cumin seeds and coriander in some oil and then add your onions and then add chilli powder with some salt,' Mummy said.

I was utterly lost.

What on earth is 'some'? (Is 'some': a handful, a teaspoon, a tablespoon, a pinch, a whole packet?)

'Just feel it, you'll know exactly how much to put in!' said my mother, exasperatedly.

So I felt it, and as Nike said, I just did it. Suffice to say I survived on take-out for forty-two days, instead.

In all honesty, I don't blame my mummy for my lack of culinary skills. I do, however, blame her for having spoilt me the way she did. She never did let on how difficult it was. Amid all the things my mother failed to mention, she cleverly hid her exhaustion and frustration behind a beautiful smile. What my mother didn't mention was her hard work and what I never mentioned was my gratitude.

Salma Khan, Durban Girls' College

A speech

One in every 17 000.

These to you may just be numbers, unimportant.

But to some people they mean everything.

To some people, these numbers mean wishing; wishing that they never existed and that people were judged by the content of their characters and deeds, and not how they look. Or that the world would go blind, so that we would start doing so.

To some people, these numbers mean working three times as hard as everyone else around them just to prove that they are worthy of something, because, if you are constantly doubted, you do just about anything to prove people wrong.

The numbers I am talking about may not make much sense to you right now, but to those people, it means knowing that the very community you were born into cannot and will not accept you, but deep down you know that you do not blame them, because you have not accepted yourself, either.

To those people, to me, these are not just numbers, they mean coming to terms with the fact that you will be faced with limitations and uncertainties every day. As a child, there were several activities that I would have loved to take part in and that my peers took for granted:

- swimming at Camps Bay beach in a tiny bikini on a hot summer's day
- riding a bicycle and letting the warm south-easter blow me away
- skipping with my friends on a hot afternoon and counting from one to a hundred
- being able to read a text from afar
- and wishing that my skin was golden brown like everyone else around me

But as I grew older, I came to realise that perhaps God had a different plan for me, different from, but as important as, everyone else's.

I realise that limitations, no matter how taxing they may seem, should never be used as an excuse to stop aiming for anything you wish to attain.

At this point in my life, I realise that I, too, have a place under the warm South African sun. I, too, will be part of my community to serve unconditionally. I, too, will be part of making my country a great success.

I am the one in every 17 000 children who was born with albinism. We are often faced with social and cultural challenges, even threats, as we are the source of ridicule, discrimination and violence.

Yes, I was born with it, but it does not define who I am or who I will become. It is not an extension of my personality, attributes, ambitions or any of my achievements.

I do not want pity from any of you. I just want to be acknowledged as a person.

Siposetu Mbuli, Cape Academy of Mathematics, Science and Technology

Untitled

I cursed my mother for having another stroke and making me travel all the way inland to see her. Long-distance bus tickets are expensive, and I couldn't sleep. Every time the bus halted, rows of fluorescent lights would flicker on along the aisle, illuminating the debris from my fellow passengers.

Someone's eyes would momentarily open, then close again. I would step into the cold air outside at every stop – usually some desolate petrol station – and curse my mother again for leaving me too little money to buy food. My empty stomach gurgled regret at having declined the chicken wing offered to me earlier from across the aisle. In my seat I alternated between watching the other passengers sleep, heads bent uncomfortably, and the passing silhouettes of bushes along the roadside, dimly lit by a sickle moon.

I hadn't seen my parents in over two years.

I recalled my father, with his glasses and sagging Levis, worn thin as a cobweb at the knees. The smell of vellum in his workroom, where he shaved and stretched calfskin for his drums. Shiny lacquer, chrome screws, the incessant tap-tap coming through the walls as my mother chopped vegetables vigorously, the combination of sounds resulting in a mad, hypnotic rhythm. My mother's devotion to food found its equal in my father's love of percussion instruments. As a result of her devotion my mother had grown fat – moving about the kitchen on her tiny feet like some vast spinning top, singing to the bread or tomatoes the way a mother would sing lullabies to an infant.

And I left with plenty of bitterness, hating my parents not for anything that they had done, but simply for who they were. I begrudged my mother her large softness and despondency, and my father his drum-loving.

These thoughts were what kept me awake on the bus. A feeling of anxiety. An intense desire not to get back on the bus when it stopped, countered by the distressing knowledge that I was trapped on this journey by my empty pockets, my empty stomach.

When I had spoken to my father on the telephone the previous day he had asked me in his little voice to call him if I arrived at the bus station early. Instead I sat on the cold tar with my rucksack of clothes and toiletries, watching the morning sun reflecting jewel-pink off the windows of office buildings, postponing the dreaded moment of meeting; the dull and awkward conversation we would have in the car.

My father's car pulled up shortly after the pink sky of morning had faded into blue. The size of his rust-stained Ford pickup made him look like a gnome, frowning through his spectacles in my direction. Slowly, I hoisted my rucksack over one shoulder and stood, hoping to avoid the topic of my desertion entirely.

He kept his eyes averted from my face as we drove towards the sprawling city's outer reaches, asking me how I was, then reverting to silence. My old house looked worse than I had pictured it in my anxious nightmares – a concrete abomination, plaster peeling, and brown from dust. When I opened the door, I almost expected to find my mother inside the kitchen, as she always had been during my childhood.

Instead, I was met by the unmistakable smell of cured skin, and the sight of numerous drums of various sizes hanging from cup-holders and stacked on shelves. Unopened tins of soup stood on the kitchen table.

‘Can I have some soup?’ I asked my father, examining the label of one tin.

‘They’re for your mother,’ he said, and, motioning towards the closed passageway door, he suggested that I go and see her.

I put the soup down, and apprehensively, feeling lightheaded with exhaustion and fear, I opened the door and crept down the shadowy passageway towards the room that my parents had once shared.

‘She probably won’t recognise you ...’ my father’s voice croaked down the passageway. I stepped inside.

The air inside smelled fetid and human. She lay on the bed, tucked in neatly, her skin looking like melted candle-wax. It spread in soft folds over her skeleton – it had not been given enough time to shrink in sync with the fat that it used to clothe.

‘Hi, Mom,’ I said, feeling disgusted by her appearance, and at the same time disgusted with myself for possessing so little humanity.

She gazed at me blankly, her mouth slightly open. I could hear my father pumping up the mattress which I was supposed to be sleeping on for the next few nights, as he had moved into my old room after my mother’s first stroke.

I wandered from one side of the room to the other, opening drawers and then closing them again, slipping valuable-looking things into my pockets and occasionally glancing at my mother, whose eyes were now closed.

I heard my father’s uneven footsteps in the passage, and sat down on the end of the bed.

‘She won’t talk to me,’ I whispered.

‘I doubt she can,’ my father said, his glasses shining in the dim light which filtered through the curtains. ‘She’s very close to the end now, the doctor said. That’s why I called you. Thought you might want to say your goodbyes ... you know.’

‘I’m very hungry,’ I said.

‘I’m afraid all there is is soup and instant coffee. We’ll have to drive back into town to get something nice for you.’

He stood up and left the room, indicating for me to follow him. I lingered, however, and crept towards my mother’s underwear drawer, where she kept her savings-purse. Throughout my childhood I had been familiar with that drawer, stealing coins whenever the occasion arose. This time, however, I emptied the purse out, and left the room, slipping a small wad of cash into my already-crammed pocket.

My father drove me to the supermarket in town, which was bustling with people at the entrance, and, handing me a note, he said, ‘Get something nice. I’ll wait in the car.’

I walked towards the huge doors of the supermarket and paused there for a second. None of the fretting and fear I had felt on the bus could have prepared me for the utter hopelessness which I had felt upon re-entering my childhood home, seeing my mother's body collapsed, crumpled like a dirty sheet, her eyes so full of nothing. I knew I couldn't stand to look at her again. Coward, I slipped behind a large woman with a trolley, out of my father's sight, and ran down the street in the direction of the bus station, the percussive beat of my footsteps pounding out a plea for forgiveness for my cruelty.

Marianne Thesen Law, Westerford High School

2013

2013

See me smile

She asks the class
What we did over the school holiday

In my mind I'm saying
I cried myself to sleep every night
I cut myself almost every day
I walked in the rain to hide my tears
I starved myself
I faked a smile every day
And I attempted to commit suicide

She gets to me and I say
I didn't do much
Because telling the truth
Would've shocked everyone
Because they always see me smile

Jabulile Majokweni, Springs Boys' High School

The survivor

As you raped me, were you proud?
Did you find something to brag about?
Did the weakness in me make you feel like you were worthy?
Was it your way of making me feel your hatred and anger?
If so, mission accomplished!

As you hurt me with your words and actions
 I cried for help,
 I begged for mercy,
 And that was exactly what you wanted.
 You think you've won,
 But you don't get to walk away with a smile!
 Instead, you've given in to your anger,
 Instead, you robbed yourself of respect and the ability to look in the mirror.
 Yes, you raped me.
 Yes, you harmed me.
 But I am not a rape victim nor are you a better person for hurting me.
 I am a survivor,
 I overcame your hatred
 With the love that I give and the love that I receive.

Tebogo Masetlana, Springs Girls' High School

I am who I am

For that I shall not be forgiven?
 For this inconvenience I shall not be accepted?
 For this mistake I shall not be understood?
 But
 For that reason I am who I am.

You see this dark caramel skin of mine; it's that of an African girl.
 You see this bushy, frenetic hair of mine; it's that of this pretty environment.
 You see this African poetry of mine; it's that of this soil's deepest secrets.

If you take my soul and break it in two, then straight is my hair.
 If you take this African secret from me, then straight is my hair.
 If you straighten this bushy, frenetic hair of mine, then take all that
 I have ever loved.

You think this is a game
 But to me it's the essence of my being
 You think hair is only ever accepted, beautiful and good-looking when straight
 But you forget your roots.
 You see life through that straight hair of yours,
 So let me see life through this African bush of mine.

All I ask is that you do not break my heart,
Do not rid it of its happiness,
Do not keep it from its roots,
Do not take away the only thing
That makes me feel part of my African land ...
Do not erase my African birthmark.

Do not, I beg,
Do not, I beg again,

Straighten my hair ...
Or if you do, then take my body
And break it into all the villages of my African land ...
For that ... I am who I am

Bonheur Nfurayase, Sans Souci Girls' High School

2014

No chicken's apology

I hate that thick silence after Pa storms out to the chickens. He looks calm when he is there, though, even when the hens keep running away from his knobbly knees. He just softly shuffles through the dust until he can grab one of the fat ones. It is usually Betsie. She is the fattest, and the slowest. Ordinarily she flaps like crazy for a second or two, until her survival instinct calms down and she realises that Pa just wants to talk. I have always wondered what they talk about.

However, today he does not have the energy to chase Betsie. He just goes to sit down on that rickety bench by the fence for a smoke. He probably spent the last bit of his energy smashing Ouma's vase in the kitchen before he stormed out. I can still hear Ma sobbing and sniffing and whining by the sink. I can feel that this one is different from the other fights. When I am involved, it is always worse. Oupa always used to say Oom Schalk Verwey is a 'hothead'. I mean, I know he is angry, but it was not necessary for him to pitch up here at six in the morning on a Sunday, threatening to blow my head off my shoulders with an air rifle.

In these situations, Ma always says, 'When your Pa is calm, he's a reasonable man, but when he's angry, he becomes like a mule.'

After some time had passed and the dust had settled a bit, I slowly trudged to where Pa is sitting, as the south-easter softly fidgets with my fringe. As I sit down next to him, the bench squeaks and leans slightly to my side.

'I'm sorry, Pa. The Lord made me this way.'

Pa just keeps quiet and carries on looking ahead of him. The leathery skin around his eyes bunches up to keep the sun out.

'Verwey told me we've got thirty days to get off his land,' says Pa softly.

'I'm sorry, Pa.'

'We've been here for three generations, my boy. Where do you think we're going to go? We're going to have to move out of the area! Tannie Teresa wouldn't even lend Ma some sugar because she says, "We don't tolerate moffies here in Langverwagt."'

I can feel how my tears are coming. I clench my jaw and bite my tongue.

'I hate myself Pa, I really do ... I just misunderstood. We became very close friends and he said he liked me and we were alone and I just misunderstood, Pa. I didn't even know he was Oom Schalk's grandson. I'm sorry, Pa. I was just being stupid.'

I can feel him softening as I talk. His face is still stone-cold, though.

'I don't want to be like this, Pa. I want to change.'

We sit in silence for a second or two and then Pa stands up and ruffles my hair and says with his smoker's croak, 'Love is an ugly thing, my boy. Don't blame yourself for it.'

Ben Albertyn, Parel Vallei High School

Paperback writer

My name is Christian Garcia. Many people dislike me – people I've never met. More still dismiss me, call me 'flat' and 'unimaginative'. Do they know me?

I was born a planned, only child, to Mr Alberto and Mrs Esmé Garcia (née Porter). I loved my parents, but may have wished for a bit more independence. Ironically, I got it. My parents both went à la Ramstein in a light aircraft accident before I had written my first poem, leaving me a large but inaccessible fortune, a three-storey Bordeaux chalet and a vague sense of relief that I wouldn't have to be the home-schooled superkid of their dreams. This view proved overly optimistic. I received tutelage in Latin, French, English and History from the first day of my resentful seventh year, courtesy of a painfully comprehensive will. In this way, I was never really able to escape the posthumous plans of my progenitors. They had, it seemed, spun a fatal web from the strands of my life, one as inexorable and cloying as destiny.

After an adolescence by turns compulsive and listless, I was shipped off to study at Oxford, where I completed my doctoral thesis on Mallarmé at the precocious age of 24. But all I saw was a sad, lonely émigré staring down the document at me. I became a published author. *The Telegraph* 'respected' me, *The Times* found me 'impressive'. I despised myself. I turned to my

lawyers. They robbed me. I turned to the Scriptures. They sent me away empty. I didn't want to be good; I wanted to be the best. I didn't want to be number 1001 in *1001 Authors You Must Read Before You Die*. And nothing galled me more than the lukewarm three-and-a-half star ratings.

I say all of this so that you might understand whence I came. For I was turning out to be just the 'respectable', 'impressive' young gentleman I had been created to be. So when I discovered, one idle day, the Harry Potter series, you might understand my reaction. And when the mother of all clichéd characters, the aged hippie whitebeard, said to me, 'Follow your passion', I cast aside my metaphorical nets and followed him.

Ninety-nine percent of literature is plagiarised. Mathematicians and scientists acknowledge the same phenomenon in their respective fields – why shouldn't we? One's only hope is to be so catholic in one's reading tastes that others don't notice one emulating plot and style so much. It was therefore partly protest action, partly intellectual relief that prompted me to become a prosaic prose proselyte.

And so, barely two months after an upswing in a certain dark romance genre, I disgusted the highbrow reader with the *Fatal Fixation* series. Then, when organised genocide of the youth was the order of the day, I wrote *Bloodbath*. All under an appropriately seductive pseudonym, of course. A pseudonym which was to be lampooned by *The Times* as 'laughably droll', and exalted by *The Telegraph* as 'the work of a lower-order mind'. I revelled in the reviews, revelled in the independence. And the royalties were the cherry on the top. Finally I felt myself.

People scorn me – yet enjoy me on their own. I've pimped out my mother tongue – and couldn't be happier.

Benedict Didcott-Marr, St John's College

Part-time visitor

As I walked along the jarring pavement, I realised how loud my earphones were. The beats of Hardwell faded into my head as I turned it down while shuffling along the bricks towards the door. The door was locked and I did not have a key. I knocked and waited. Nothing.

I phoned the home number but nobody answered and I ploughed through the bushes in front towards the living-room window. He was across the room, sitting in his usual chair and reading the paper. My grandfather was a familiar sight in his flannel shirt, chinos and red slippers.

I knocked on the window. He turned around, startled, and focused his eyes on me. I waved at him, but he just stared at me. I pointed towards the front door. His face seemed confused yet something made him get up and open the door for me.

'Namaste,' I greeted as we exchanged a loose handshake.

'Hello, how are you?'

I headed straight for the kitchen. Grandfather followed closely.

'Sanjay and Nirvana aren't at home. Do you want to wait for them?'

'Yeah, I'm sure they'll be here soon,' I said as I scavenged the cupboards for anything edible.

'Do you want something to eat? There's some leftover dhal in the fridge.'

'Okay, thanks!'

'Do you know Sanjay and Nirvana?' he asked quizzically.

I paused. Here we go. This was going to be one of those conversations. I should just say, 'Yes, I do know them.' But perhaps if I were more specific, something might jog his memory and we wouldn't have to go through the whole routine again.

I decided to give it a try and said, 'They are my parents.'

I'm not sure if it worked, but he acted as if I hadn't said a thing. 'Well, they went down to ...' He squinted his eyes as he tried to remember. 'You know, down Saint J Jo.'

'St John's?'

'Yes! That's the one. Who did you say you were again?'

I don't think he had any idea that my parents had gone to fetch my brother, his other grandson.

'Dilkash.'

He smiled slightly as if he had heard the name before. 'So you're a friend of the family, then?'

'I am, sort of.'

'Oh. Well, I just want to tell them who was here in case you leave before they get back.'

'I live here, so I don't think I'm going anywhere soon ...'

'Oh, okay,' he said, with an offended tone. He scrutinised me closely as I continued to raid the fridge.

He returned to the kitchen with a pen and a piece of paper. 'Write your name and number here so I can tell them you were here.'

This was an awkward moment. I was hoping he would realise who I was after a while and forget that he had forgotten me.

He gave the page to me and I sloppily wrote D-I-L-K-A-S-H.

He stared at the page for a few moments and raised an eyebrow.

'Dilkash.' He said it in a pondering tone as if he were trying to put a name to a face. Then, as enlightenment dawned: 'All this time you were Dilkash?'

'Yes.' A lump developed in my throat.

'Phew, I thought I'd let a complete stranger in!'

I smiled. He patted me on the shoulder and walked away, shaking his head and chuckling, I felt a sense of temporary relief. I was still remembered by the old man, I did still exist in his mind. But I was only a part-time

visitor now, and I couldn't help wondering how long it would be before I was evicted from his mind.

Dilkash Harryprasadh, St John's College

Be yourself

'Be yourself,' they say
But which self do they wish me to be?
The sad boy
who writes poems about the stars
or about the happiness that
won't acknowledge his existence,
or the shy boy
who stays silent
knowing his voice will only
be ignored,
or the tired boy
who sleeps all day because
his thoughts keep him up all night?
Pray, tell me which 'self'
because these are all the sides of me
I hide
because these are all the sides of me
nobody wants to see

Aneeb Hendricks, Cedar House School

My teacher asked me to write about happiness

My teacher asked me to write about happiness.

Or, rather, a moment in which I felt happy.

Now,
I don't mean to get too technical or anything
but what kind of happy was she talking about?
The long-walks-on-the-beach-followed-by-a-romantic-kiss-with-my-fiancé-
as-the-sun-sets-over-the-palm-trees kind?
Because
let me tell you
the only thing I have done while the sun sets over palm-trees
is play Frisbee
with my brother.

Or at least we did
until that wave swallowed it.
Spoilsport.
So we drew patterns in the sand
until the cold stung our feet
and the sun had set
and our lungs ached from the sea air
and our sides hurt from laughing
and sand caked us from head to toe.

And I wrote about happiness.

Helena Maertens, Cedar House School

Eight letters. Three Words.

'Jen, there's something important I need to tell you.'

This is it. He's finally going to say it.

Eight letters. Three words ...

The lyrics to a Madonna song fill the room.

'Sorry, I have to take this,' he says.

He casually gets up and walks out. We've been a couple for a year now. I don't know if he feels the same way I feel about him. There have been times when I think he is going to say it, but he is always interrupted.

As he walks back, I can't help but admire his appearance.

He is really beautiful; the epitome of male beauty. Those dark, intense eyes, filled with secrets, stare at me as if they're daring me to unlock them. His raven black hair is all mussed and tousled, giving the impression of bed head. He's wearing that bright, yellow plaid shirt that accentuates his muscles (all in the right places). His soft lips are slightly parted in the shape of a small diamond. I smile at the thought of where those lips have last been. I stare at his thumbs that dangle from the front pockets of his bermudas (the ones which hang from his hips, in that way I like). He looks like a male model – absolutely breathtaking.

He takes a seat next to me, gently brushing my arm with his, which ignites the oh-so-familiar sparks I feel whenever I'm around him.

'Sorry about that phone call,' he says.

'It's all right,' I say, my voice husky.

'So, as I was saying, I have something to tell you.'

This is it. He's going to say it.

Eight letters. Three words.

'Jen, I'm gay.'

Jessica Mugambe, Clarendon High School for Girls

Lost property

there's light from the window
 spilling into the lowering darkness,
 fracturing the contours of stalks
 and stones and late blossoms
 into lights and darks;
 beyond the silhouettes of branches,
 the lights of cars are strung along in chains,
 like Christmas trimmings –
 glimmering in the sinking dusk
 before dissolving behind the grey hospital;
 there is grass underfoot –
 a green skin slowly wasting
 with the coming inventiveness
 that is the slow change
 from season to season;
 stretching across the street are the shadows
 of people, heads down, walking the trails
 they have trooped many times,
 for years – like strong pilgrims,
 resigned to their tramping home;
 the rocks at my feet
 do a little laugh when I kick them –
 as they clack and crack together,
 they chuckle to the weeds
 and the wet, cold soil;
 and smoke and clouds blend briefly
 across the horizon, touched by
 the last brushstrokes of sunset;
 they talk to each other and
 then dance off into new shapes.
 just watching awakens a sort of harmony,
 now and then shaken by a tyre's squeal
 rising from the road; and
 tempered by a dry leaf clattering
 through a tree on its autumn descent.
 this is nature's lost property!
 a glimpse into the green and the burning.
 the sunset and the coming night make a brief Eden
 amid sirens' wailing and
 the sounds of a tumbling leaf;
 it is never still and ever full of movement
 that the dirt gives. its eternity is guaranteed

by the steady falling of leaves in the uneven echoes of a city
settling down in the lowering darkness.
and there is walking home,
and there is watching and here we are,
attending to the disorder of it all –
muddling the cores of city and nature
into a home for our human clutter.

James Süster, St John's College

2015

Does it still hurt?

Please, Miss, my heart is broken.
The part I gave him is missing.
There's cracks in it from all of his words.
'Be quiet, child, and listen.'

Really, Mum, my mind is spinning,
There's a war raging inside of my head.
All these thoughts are spiralling out of control.
'Stop whining and get out of bed.'

I hurt, Doctor, every part of me screams,
I'm worried my body won't last.
Can't you see the bruises, the cuts from the world?
'You look fine, child, go to class.'

Look, guys, my soul's turned black.
It leaks into my bones till they ache.
I'm afraid they'll give in and I'm going to give up.
'Oh please, you're being a fake.'

Take a pill. Patch it up.
Have a bath. Go to bed.
Just breathe deeply, love.
I reckon a hug might work.
Have some tea, a good meal.
Here's a Band Aid, a plaster.
There now, does it still hurt?

Ty Bennett, St Cyprian's School

Talk circled about the room

Talk circled about the room, which is a pretty weird thing for talk to do because talk can't walk. Neither can I. Well, I can normally because I am normal (I promise), but I am lying on the floor and I can't stand up right now and they are all looking at me and the man in the blue jacket with the radio on it is holding my arms against my back. It isn't nice of him to do that because it hurts and Mrs Miller always says that hurting people is ugly and bad. Mrs Miller isn't at school now because she got hurt and had to go home. Anyway, my arms hurt, so I tell the man in the blue jacket with the radio on it.

He doesn't say anything back, which is rude because he is the one hurting me and that is ugly and also bad. He tells everyone to get out of the classroom and Ben-who-sits-in-front-of-me gives me a weird look. I do not like Ben-who-sits-in-front-of-me. Also, I do not like him because he gave me a weird look but I think that is just his face. Mrs Miller likes Ben-who-sits-in-front-of-me but that isn't nice of her because I like Mrs Miller and she's meant to be my teacher and not his because he has a weird face. It looks a bit like my neighbour's dog's face. Or the way it looked because it is dead. I will tell you about the dog now because the man in the blue jacket with the radio on it is still holding my arms and he might be for a while.

It was when I got home from school and I was doing my spelling, but I couldn't do my spelling because the dog that I told you about was barking which was rude because I was trying to do my spelling. I really didn't like the dog because it was a dog and I do not like dogs and also because it was making a noise. I went to the wall and shouted at the dog but it kept shouting back, which was rude, so I tried to climb on the wall to tell it that it was rude but I fell off the wall and I fell on the dog. It stopped shouting and I got up and dusted off my pants because I had to wear them again and because my leg hurt because your leg hurts when you fall on a small dog. Anyway, the dog was making weird noises so I had to help it like the vet actually does when your mum says your dog is going to go live on a farm. So I got a brick and I broke its head and went and did my spelling because the dog wasn't shouting anymore. I want to break Ben-who-sits-in-front-of-me's head with a brick. I do not like Ben-who-sits-in-front-of-me but Mrs Miller does.

Anyway, the man in the blue jacket with the radio on it is still holding my arms and there are more men in blue jackets with radios on them coming into the room. They are talking to each other but they are talking softly and that isn't nice because I want to hear. I hear them say something about Mrs Miller being in the 'I see you' which doesn't make sense and I hope that she can still see otherwise she can't be my teacher. Unless she gets a guide-dog but I do not like dogs.

The man in the blue jacket with the radio on it has taken me out of the room and I am in a blue car with a radio in it now. I am sorry that I didn't tell you when I was walking to the car but the men in the blue jackets with radios on them were asking me questions about Mrs Miller and what I did. I told them that we were painting because there is red paint on my hands and on Mrs Miller's desk but I think she spilled it because it is all over her desk and chair. I don't remember painting, though, and I don't know why I would paint with my scissors. The car is driving now and I wonder where we are going. I hope we are going to go see Mrs Miller in the 'I see you'. I should get her some flowers. Mrs Miller likes flowers.

Christian Botha, Michaelhouse

Max

When I was diagnosed with colon cancer four years ago, I never expected my life to actually get better – but then I met Max Evans. I can still recall walking into Unit 3 of the cancer ward and seeing this bald, skinny, sickly boy lying in his bed with a smile as broad as the Great Wall of China, excited to have some company. We instantly became 'cancer-ward-unit-three' buddies; and so he changed my life.

In our four years of sharing a unit together, we formed a friendship that could last a lifetime. We had a lot in common: we were both in Stage 5 of colon cancer, enjoyed the same music and watched the same television. He was two years older than I, but we were both diagnosed at the age of twelve. He had lost his older brother to leukaemia when he was only six. When he was still in school, he was part of the student council and an excellent swimmer. To Max, life was an adventure, a gift. (Even though his life consisted mainly of doing blood tests and enduring chemotherapy.)

He was so positive, it annoyed me at times. We used to watch *American Idol* and comment on all the auditions. He was a champion when it came to Uno and magic tricks. The nurses loved him; he was always giving them compliments. On our birthdays, we would order personalised pizzas. When charities visited to hand out gifts, we would always pretend to sleep. Come on, one can only have so many teddy bears.

I, on the other hand, am the total opposite of Max. My mother couldn't conceive again after I was born, so I grew up on my own. I hated social events and wasn't very popular. I also had no clue how to talk to boys, but, with Max, everything felt natural. He was like the brother I wish I had. He knew I was kind of an outsider and always encouraged me to be more sociable and have more fun, but I couldn't feel safe with anyone but him.

On the day I got my final blood tests back, I found out I was cured. It felt as if Mission Impossible had been accomplished. I couldn't wait to

tell Max. When I got to our unit, I found that his bed was neatly made up. I asked the nurse what was going on; and, with tears in her eyes, she told me that his organs had started to fail and he had been transferred to the ICU. My heart sank. My best and only friend passed away later that day. He changed my life and I had promised him that I would go out and live, without regrets, just like Max.

Emma Cloete, La Rochelle Girls' High School

A woman's place

They wanted to speak about the cartoon. The president had not done as much as she would have liked during her first three months in office, but she couldn't help thinking she'd done some things worth discussing. The opening of negotiations with the dictator of a small Eastern country. The removal of the last troops from another Eastern country in which her predecessor had started a half-hearted war. But it seemed the public were far more interested in a certain cartoon which had gone 'viral' and been sent to her so many times by friends and foes alike that she was sick of it.

It was a crude, sexual joke, and disappointingly from a cartoonist whose work she usually found witty. She was used to seeing herself in a hand-drawn dominatrix outfit by now. The first time, in a College newspaper, it had made her cry angry tears, but at this stage in her life she only wished she looked that good in fishnets. This time, though, the cartoonist had thrown in her husband, as a cowering Uncle Sam (his name was Sam, so it was funny, see?) on a leash.

And it was this that caused Jessica Brinkett to comment.

'I would like to start by saying I take no offence at the depiction of myself in the cartoon, or any such cartoon. A public figure such as myself is of course going to be satirised and so might as well accept the fact and maintain a sense of humour. However,' – and here the journalists lifted their heads, so that it seemed the room took an inward breath – 'I do take offence at the depiction of my husband, Samuel Brinkett. My husband is a successful academic in his own right. That he shies away from politics is, I think, to his credit. Yet there has been a general assumption made from the start of my campaign, that because he is married to a strong woman' – she should not have said *strong*, she should have said *powerful*; *strong* sounded self-promoting; *powerful* was an undisputed fact – 'he must be a weak man. This is further accentuated by the fact that the role of a president's partner up until now has been to stand in his shadow, support him from behind, smile and wave. No one has questioned this role when the partner was a woman, but America seems uncomfortable with a First Husband and so deems him weak. They are wrong on two counts. My husband is not weak, and he does not stand behind me, but beside me.'

Watching his wife on the television in his hotel room, he didn't listen to the words, he'd known what she was going to say. They would accuse her of mixing politics with the personal. They'd be right: Jessica never had known where to draw the line. The cameras were not kind to her. He could see that the skin of her once-lovely throat was starting to form folds beneath her chin. Sam Brinkett turned away from his wife in front of him to the firm, smooth body of the woman beside him.

It came out, eventually. Everything does. Not for the first time, Jessica Brinkett wished her country could separate the personal lives of its presidents from their policies. Had she been having an affair, she would have been seen as dishonest and cunning. But to be cheated on was to be naïve, pitiable, a national joke. Her people knew it was better to dupe than be duped.

They stand waiting before the press conference. He looks at her with eyes that can never be sorry enough.

'What do I do?' he says.

'You smile and wave,' she answers, 'and you stand behind me.'

Hannah Fagan, Camps Bay High School*

Different in this world

Just fade into the crowd
You must never
Stand out
Always remember to
Be the same as everyone else
You can't
Be different in this world

Just fade into the faces
You will be lost if you
Haven't got the right hair or make-up
Don't worry if you
Feel adrift in your own skin
It's normal to
Never act like
The real you
Remember that the only person you should aspire to be is
One accepted by society
You don't have to be
Your true self
You are

Not good enough
Never feel that you are
Special, unique and acceptable
You will always be
Just another face in the crowd
You can't be
Different in this world

(Be different and read from the bottom to the top)

Samantha Johnson, St Dominic's School, Boksburg

Phuluso – my story

'I will kill you!' He vomited the foul phrase, releasing his anger along with it. My grandmother cowered back into her little hut, her protective arms wrapped around my shivering little brothers.

'Will you please just ...?'

'Quiet, Marian! This whole village will suffer. And you ... Marian ... YOU!' Words scurried away from my uncle's vile mind. Frustration swarmed over him. He grabbed a plastic bucket from my trembling hands and propelled it into the hut. Fuelled by the anger that was still in him, it sliced through the air and headed straight for Marian, my mom. She jumped back just in time to see the bucket crash on to the floor. Water splashed. My uncle turned to face me. His face was dark as oil. Veins formed streams of blood in his eyes. His nose flared as air tried to escape his fury. I had never seen him like this before. It had become worse ...

I jumped out of my bed. My heart thumped at my ribcage like a wild ape. A fountain of sweat poured out from my pores.

'You are safe, Max,' I convinced myself. 'You are two hundred kilometres away from your uncle and he does not know where you are. Your brothers are safe. Your mother is safe. Everyone is safe.' I was regaining control over my breathing. 'But, Granny ...' I quickly shut the thought away. I could not afford to think about her. Not now ...

After a cold salty bath, I shoved some dried pap into my empty stomach, threw my old school bag on to my back and advanced to the door.

'Max ...' my mom stopped me. 'Everything will be okay now. Don't worry yourself.' It was as if she had been in my nightmare and relived the last days in Duthuni with me. I never understood how she always knew when there was something wrong with me.

'I know, Ma,' I lied.

'Take this.' She held out a R2 coin. 'You still remember where the school is, right? I'd walk you there but – I've got to send your brothers to crèche.'

'Don't worry about me, Ma, those two boys from next door said they'd show me the way.' And with that I ran out on to the warm sandy grounds of Mavalani village.

'Read!' a chubby man grunted. He swung his arm and the stick he was wielding cracked on a boy's back. The boy, who had walked me to school that day, cried out in agony.

'Vana va Xikwembu va ... va ... va ...' CRACK!

'You come to school to learn, not stutter. You disgrace me. Can't even read in your own language!' he spat, and left the scrawny boy.

'What's your name?' the man asked me.

'Max ... Phuluso Maxwell Mawela,' I added quickly before the stick whistled.

'Can you read the next paragraph, please?'

'I've just moved in from Venda. I can't read in Tsong ...' WHISTLE, CRACK!

I screamed.

'Where is Ma?' I asked my brother as I got home from yet another horrific day at my new school.

'She went home. Granny died.' He threw a note at me and dashed out of the room. I dumped the note in the dustbin.

No use reading this, I thought.

Preparing my two brothers for crèche and making sure there was pap on the table was hard work. For two weeks I skipped school, spent nights gazing at the stars and I herded cattle for a can of beans.

'I'm tired of beans. Cook something else,' my brothers complained one day and I ignored them. Seeming to understand, they stopped complaining and the two weeks passed.

'Where are we going?' my youngest brother asked as he carried a box full of crockery to the back of a bakkie.

'We are going home, dear,' my mom replied. Tears like white paint were dried on her face. She looked thinner than when I had last seen her. While packing up the last few boxes, which fitted perfectly in the small bakkie, we ate some pap, said our goodbyes to our new neighbours and, with my mom sitting in front with the hired driver and me sitting in the back with my two younger brothers and the little furniture we had, we drove back the way we had come.

‘Cough! Cough!’ A wet, slimy cough echoed from the hut which stood quite still in the middle of a maize field.

‘You are not to go in there, boys,’ my mom ordered.

‘But that’s where we used to braai corn with Granny,’ my brother protested.

‘You can do it there, dear.’ She pointed to a newly-made patch in the middle of the crop under a lemon tree.

‘Oh. Okay!’ My brother shrugged and dismissed the conversation by leaping away merrily.

‘Your uncle is very sick, Max,’ my mom explained to me when my brothers were well out of earshot. She took a long break. I did not ask her anything, never had to. I had grown to know that she would tell me things when she felt that the time was right.

‘He is suffering from Aids. When your granny found out, she died of a heart attack ... or so says the doctor. I ... I need your help. What should I do?’ She burst into tears. I stared into an empty space as my mom continued weeping, resting her head on my shoulder. She had finally been defeated and her burden was now mine to carry. The hatred for my uncle spilled out of her eyes and seeped into my skin. The love and pity for him also crawled in like a snake. I stood up and stormed out of the house and headed straight for the hut ...

I pushed the old wooden door open and a green gas with the smell of rotten eggs and vinegar hit me by surprise. I gagged and stumbled. Forcing myself to ignore the stench, I cursed into the hut.

As I neared the figure curled up on a straw mat on the far side of the hut, the egg stench changed into that of rotten iron. The green fog became a warm blanket of air. My uncle, limbs thin as twigs with tattered cloth wrapped around them, lay on the mat. His eyes seemed as if they would pop right out of their sockets. Sparse wiry hair stood motionless on his head. His dark face was now pale and in a rusty voice he said:

‘Max ... I am so sorry, please ... forgive me.’

My anger whimpered like a beaten puppy. I felt ashamed of my hate. And so I turned back and walked out of the hut.

The soil took a piece of me with it as I released it into the pit where my uncle’s body now lay. I stood back and watched as my brothers repeated the ritual, each pouring a handful of soil into the grave.

‘Why do they cry? He deserved to die,’ a villager murmured in the crowd.

A few more murmured in agreement. I forced back tears and ran out of the graveyard.

'Vhana vha Mudzimu vha a funana. Hafhu, vha dovha vha hangwelana,' I read in fluent Venda.

'Beautiful!' My Venda teacher congratulated me with a smile etched into her face. 'And welcome back to our school, Max. Do you want to translate that into English for us?'

'God's children love each other.' The words were sweet on my lips. 'And they forgive each other.'

The end ... for now.

Phuluso Mawela, Ridgeway College, Makhado

Charlotte

'I am no bird; and no net enslaves me!' said Charlotte Brontë, breaking her cuffs, using positive thinking and forward planning. She pushed past uncertainty and through the door.

Emerging into an alley, lit by a lamp as weak as a poor metaphor, she turned left and started running. She joined a crowd of mainstream literature, doing her best to look inconspicuous.

The Patriarchy was after her. Present was no longer safe. She needed to get to Future where she could rest easy, maybe instil a sense of equality in high-school English aficionados. She'd have to pass through the poorly checked Annals of Time, compiled by those notable klutzes: A N Everyman, John Q Public and, of course, Sensationalist Media, the most efficient publishing house out there.

She picked her way through the Annals, dodging faulty rhetoric and misdirected anger until she made it to Jargon Alley and knocked on the door.

'If yer hip, you'll give me 5 bob from yer mother or be called Judas,' said the small Irishman who answered. He took the money and let her in, babbling incoherent nonsense all the while. Charlotte looked around, praying to find a particular face.

She spotted it and headed over to the table at which the body it belonged to was seated.

'My name is Brontë, Charlotte Brontë.'

'And you can call me Ishmael.' Herman Melville sat back in his deep, sea-bleached chair and took a swig of his frothing ale from a weathered pewter mug.

'I have a problem, Mr Melville ...'

He sat back and listened to her tale, slowly drawing on an aged pipe of bleached whalebone. His answer was not long in coming and not short in finishing. He agreed to help her.

They discussed their plan and by the time they were finished, the sun was slowly rising and those not still deep in slumber had headed home for a day of expounding life's mysteries.

Their plan was simple. Melville would help her sneak out to Future via Classic Novel Boulevard on the wagon of Progress. They made it to the nearest station and found a train, but unfortunately this would not be a straight ride. They met up with Oscar Wilde and discovered that they would be taking an Easterly route.

The trouble started in China as a bunch of Middle Kingdom poets were dragged off by the proletariat, armed with government bans. Their carriage, with western beliefs, managed to escape the raid but on their return to Europe, they fared little better. First went the Economic Treaties and Capitalist Discourse, dragged off to Siberia by red-jacketed thugs. Next to go were the religious texts, dragged off by brown-attired men and replaced by Fascist Doctrines. Luckily Brontë and Melville hid behind the doors of momentary irrelevance, not seen as a threat.

On arrival, Herman introduced them to a friend, Hemminson or something.

Dark, brooding and armed, she could see he wouldn't be the best travelling companion. 'Stick with him, he'll get you to the halls of well-studied literature.'

He gave her a gentle push towards Hemway.

'But what about you?' she asked.

'No, I was never destined for Close Reading. I'm heading across to the hall of Barely Read Classics, Tolstoy's saving me a seat.'

He turned, and she watched him go, disappearing behind a crowd of Psychologists, completely obscured by their egos.

Jesse Stevens, St John's College

1795–1821

a tribute to Keats

The desert flower blooms but once.
Then, scorched by the desert sun,
Wilts, its course short spent.
Yet such fleeting bloom
Forever hangs upon the desert wind:
Its thousand scents embalmed.

You walked but short
Upon this land,
Fired by the Muse.

Then, chilled by the icy wind,
 Died, with flames scarce burnt.
 Yet such inchoate warmth
 Forever holds upon this passing tide:
 Your thousand words enshrined.

Katie Stofberg, The Wykeham Collegiate

Nearly fiction

in a photo I took of you last may, your toes are painted with dirt (your skirt hides the rest of your feet) and your hair twines like thin fingers. your arms are longer than other girls' – I think that's because you are a feminist – and you have a little gap between two teeth on the right of your smile, probably from being so outspoken. that was the same day you told me you were going to italy next december, and you told me to go with you, I nodded yes. the next time I saw you your hair had gotten shorter but your skirt had stayed long. dressed in all black you looked like the moon would if she had a bob-cut and wore long skirts. then you told me you'd be leaving sooner – march – and that I should come to your going away party. four or five months passed and I didn't see you. in a gallery somewhere I saw a girl who could've been you if I'd went up and looked, but I told myself, no, it couldn't be you, because her hair reached the middle of her neck and her skirt the middle of her thighs. I thought about you once or twice after that, wondered if you ever saw someone who might have been me if you'd said my name. I wrote a short story about that girl in the gallery and I've been meaning to send it to you, but frankly, it's april, and I'm not sure where you are. in the story I wrote, the girl is you, only you do not recognise me. I tell you all about yourself and our friendship and the photo I took of you last may, but it seems you are just a girl in a gallery, not anyone that I know. I do not think I will be coming to italy.

Adam van Graan, Westerford High School

2016

Blatherskite

splotches, splatters and
 drips of insignificant words
 incinerate slowly as the sky cries
 its foggy tears

scratches and scribbles
 blotting of spills
 fill up these journals

these indecipherable scrawlings
 pour out of my mind
 while the sky feeds
 creation below

and just as the tears
 of the sky
 feed the ground
 these spills and scribbles
 nourish my soul

Horeb Asher, Clarendon High School for Girls

How do you say your name?

'Chi-man-da Nn-gozee Aah-dee,' the girl frowned at the name staring back at her 'exotic' brown skin. It was someone's name. A name of meaning and value and she could not pronounce it. She could feel her ignorance burning at the tip of her tongue. Words seemed strange as if they were not words at all, as if they were hieroglyphs. The shame gleamed in her cheeks. She tried again, 'Chi-mam-anda Nnn-gozee Adee-chee.' She felt too fearful to ask another person in case they were repelled by ignorance. But how could she explain to them, it was not her fault!

She had been raised by a society that only focused on English trivialities and the failures of the American Dream. Society did not care about how to pronounce a Nigerian woman's name. As far as the Western world was concerned, Africa seemed to be one vast disease-ridden skeleton. The works of the Brontës, Fitzgerald, Walker, Dahl or Salinger did not prepare her to face the people of her soil. This angered her. She was not like them. She understood the frustration of people being unable to pronounce one's name.

'Aah-lay-yah, say it slowly,' she would encourage the straining mouth. Her name was often pronounced Aahliya and it bugged her.

She was often told, 'But the names are so similar.'

'No, they are not,' she would reply snappily. Her name was her name. Her dignity embedded in five letters and now she was ruining someone else's.

She was old enough to know better, she knew that. The significance of understanding different cultures and people had been drummed into her since pre-school. She had learnt to sing songs of different tongues that represented myriads of cultures coming together. And, besides that, most of her friends and family she knew could speak more than one language. Ketho spoke Zulu at home, Jamilla was learning Arabic, Auntie Cecilia spoke Afrikaans. Nani and Nana spoke Hindi. She wanted to speak to all of them, she wanted to be included.

Like an itch, another crumpled memory spread to her conscience. A teacher with hair the colour of wheat standing in front of a microphone, in front of rows of blue blazers, some a bit more scuffed than others.

'Aa-leey-yaa Bon-war-ri,' rung the strange sound in the stuffy air and a chubby bronze brown face being balanced by long plaits of black rope on either side rose up and walked up to the stage, smiling, and, with eager hands, took the certificate signifying nothing more except that she, like every other child in Grade 3, was moving on to Grade 4. She returned to her seat with no complaint in her mind. 'Why didn't I say something?' reminisced the same face years later. 'Not even after the assembly?'

As she escaped the spiral of the past, she glanced up from the burning words to see her mother's pyjama-clad figure standing next to the kitchen counter, scraping the cheese off the sandwich press.

With her throat oozing with anguish, the words spilled out. 'Ma, how do you pronounce this name?' Her mother gently put the knife on the saucer which held the grilled cheese sandwich. She walked towards the kitchen stool where her first-born sat, with crumbs on the edges of her mouth. Her mature eyes then darted over the hieroglyphs.

'Chee-maa-maandaa Nn-goozee Aah-dee-ch-ee,' flowed the words from her worldly mouth. The hieroglyphs unveiled into the English alphabet of the guilt-riddled girl's mind: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

Her encompassing of Western ideology had left her ignorant. The hyper focus of the girl's chocolaty brown eyes etched into the page.

'You will not be ignorant. You will read and become aware of African and Asian literature. You will not feel guilty of being unable to pronounce one's name.'

Aleya Banwari, Cedar House School

Marvin Pike

Marvin Pike was old,
Old, man, like crumbling brickwork
Like cobwebs and dusty skulls
That used to be King Richard
Or Littlefoot or Lucy
Or shrivelled Tutankhamun,
Mummified old.

And, boy, was he tough, hard
Like nails down a blackboard
Could old, mad Marv Pike
Sit all day and gripe
And moan about 'the kids,'
'The God-damn kids,'
Who walked around like
They owned the place.

Still green but he could see it in their eyes,
'Look at me, boy, you think you know everything, don'tcha?'
Well, Marvin Pike had outlived nursing homes!
He had spent years seeing the world
And to hell with these upstarts
Who thought they could see it too.

Oh, and he had friends,
Drinking buddies long dead,
Who would have backed him up.
They'd smoked long before 'Doctors recommend Camel'
And walked out of operating rooms
Puffing away new lungs.
They'd cut their hands ragged
Whittling pipes with penknives
And fought the 'modern world',
The 'progress' of health and safety.

Men like Marvin Pike
Had wars under their belts
They'd swapped literal war stories,
Jokes about their times
In Mai Lai, in Dresden, in
Berlin or on the Somme.

You, born decades later,
When the value of a good fight
Was no longer appreciated,
What could you possibly know
That these men don't?

And if you'd asked Marvin Pike,
A man who lived on the knife edge
Between the aged and the dead
So steeped in tradition he reeked
Like an alcoholic of liquor,
'What do we need?'
'We need,' he would say, 'more sons saying "Sir"
To more fathers saying "boy",'
Because that's how you do it,
That's how you produce
More men, like Marvin Pike.

Keegan Leech, St John's College

Post-English Alive careers in literary and related fields

Individuals whose writing appears in more than one year are listed under the year in which they first appear.

1967

Jeremy Cronin: *Inside; Even the Dead; More than a Casual Contact; Inside and Out;* (with Raymond Suttner) *Thirty Years of the Freedom Charter*; former Deputy Minister of Transport; Deputy Minister of Public Works and Administration; Deputy Secretary-General of the South African Communist Party; Ingrid Jonker Prize 1984; Sydney Clouts Memorial Prize for Poetry 1996

David Lan: *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe; Painting a Wall; Desire and other plays; Euripides' Hippolytus; Sergeant Ola and His Followers; Flight; Plays One;* (with Caryl Churchill) *A Mouthful of Birds; Anton Chekhov's Uncle Vanya; Giovanni Verga's La Lupa; Tobias and the Angel; Euripides' Ion; The Ends of the Earth;* Director of The Young Vic Theatre in London since 2000; Consultant Director of the Performing Arts Center of Ground Zero World Trade Center; John Whiting Award 1977; George Orwell Memorial Award 1983; Laurence Olivier Achievement Award for an Outstanding Season at the Young Vic 2003; CBE 2013

Jeff Peires: *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Cattle Killing of 1856–57; The House of Phalo: A History of the Xhosa People in the Days of Their Independence;* winner of the *Sunday Times* Alan Paton Award 1990; former Rhodes University lecturer; former ANC Member of Parliament

Charles Rom: Several of his pieces were published elsewhere: 'How shall I tell' in national magazines and in anthologies such as *Explorings*; three poems in *Inscapes* and *New Inscapes*; 'Of cabbages and kings' in *New Beginnings*. After some years working on a kibbutz in Israel, he has spent his life as a successful plant and flower nurseryman.

Elaine Unterhalter: *Forced Removal;* (co-edited) *Apartheid Education and Popular Struggles;* (co-edited) *Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and Social Justice in Education;* (co-authored) *Beyond Access: Transforming Policy and Practice for Gender Equality in Education;* (co-edited) *Global Inequalities and Higher Education: Whose interests are we serving?;* et al.

1968

Nigel Fogg: This poem has been published in numerous anthologies, such as *Inscapes, New Inscapes* and *Worldscapes*; it is regularly used as both a prescribed and an unseen poem in National Senior Certificate exams. He now lives and works in the south of France, where he makes specialist photographers' bags.

Michael King: Editor of *English Alive* 1982–89; *The Fool and other poems;* (edited) *English Alive 1967–1987: Writing from Senior Schools in Southern Africa;* former editor of *New Contrast*; former Deputy Principal, Bishops (Diocesan College)

Peter Terry: *Teer en Veer/The Lamont Case; Rapid Eye Movements; Next of Kin; Dispossessed; Immortal;* actor, director, playwright

1969

Menán du Plessis: *A State of Fear; Longlive*; Olive Schreiner Prize 1985; Sanlam Literary Prize 1986; Visiting Professor in Linguistics, University of Kentucky; Research Associate, University of Stellenbosch

Jeremy Gordin: *Hard On; With My Tongue in My Hand; Pomegranates for My Son; The Infernal Tower; A Long Night's Damage; Zuma: A Biography*; Editor of the South African *Playboy*; Managing Director of Exclusive Books; Associate Editor of *The Sunday Independent*, *The Sunday Tribune* and *The Sunday Argus*; Director of the Investigative Journalism Workshop's Justice Project at the University of the Witwatersrand; AA Mutual Life/Vita Poetry Award 1987; Vita/Arthur Nortje Memorial Poetry Award 1992; Mondi Shanduka Newspaper Award (creative journalism) 2004; Mondi Shanduka South African Journalist of the Year 2007

Kelwyn Sole: *The Blood of Our Silence; Projections in the Past Tense; Land Dreaming; Absent Tongues; Love That is Night; Mirror and Water Gazing*; Olive Schreiner Prize 1989; runner-up for the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa 1989; Hugh MacDiarmid Prize 1990; Sydney Clouts Prize 1993; Thomas Pringle Award 1998; Professor of English Literature, University of Cape Town

Robert van der Valk: (with Andy Colquhoun) *Nick and I: An Adventure in Rugby*; former Manager of Springbok Rugby Team

1970

Andre Eva Bosch: *Alive Again*; Sanlam Prize for Youth Literature (Gold); MER Prize for Youth Novels

1971

Graeme Bloch: *The Toxic Mix: What's wrong with South Africa's schools and how to fix it*; education policy analyst at the Development Bank of South Africa

1972

Gerald Kraak: *Ice in the Lungs*; Committee of South African War Resisters in Exile; CEO of Atlantic Philanthropies; died 2013; the Gerald Kraak Award and anthology established 2016

Clare Stopford: theatre director; Senior Lecturer in the Department of Drama, University of Cape Town

1973

Mike Kantey: *Some of us are Leopards, Some of us are Lions; The Terribly Vain Squirrel; All Tickets/Alle Kaartjies*; Old Mutual Literary Award 1988; Honourable Mention Bologna Book Fair 1989

1975

Julia Martin: *Writing Home; Ecological Responsibility: A Dialogue with Buddhism*; Vita Short Story Award 1991; Award of Excellence for Women in Research from the South African Association of Women Graduates 2000

Stuart Stromin: film director: *Spice* 1989

1976

Robin Auld: *Tight Lines; Kelp*; albums: *Diamonds of a Day; Luxury; Iron in the Sky*; singer, songwriter

Shaun Johnson: *Strange Days Indeed; The Native Commissioner*; the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best Book in Africa, the M-Net Literary Award, the Nielsen Booksellers' Choice Book of the Year; Gardner Prize, Oxford University 1983; Rhodes University inaugural Old Rhodian Award 2004; founding editor of *The Sunday Independent*; founding Chief Executive of The Mandela Rhodes Foundation

1978

Helen Moffett: *Strange Fruit*; (edited) *Seasons Come to Pass*; (co-edited) *Stray: an anthology of stories and poems about animals*; freelance editor and writer

1981

Shaun de Waal: *These Things Happen; Jack Marks; Exposure: Queer Fiction*; (with Anthony Manion) *Pride – Protest and Celebration*; (with Barbara Ludman) *Mirth of a Nation*; (edited) *25 Years of the Mail & Guardian*; *Not the Movie of the Week: Frightening Flops and Fabulous Flicks*; former Arts Editor, now editor-at-large, *Mail & Guardian*; Sanlam Short Story Award 1993; Thomas Pringle Award 1997, 2001

Heather Robertson: *Under the Sun*; Ingrid Jonker Prize 1992; (with Stephen Haw and Andrew Unsworth) *Rediscovering South Africa: A Wayward Guide*; Deputy Editor of the *Sunday Times*; former Editor of *The Herald* and *Weekend Post*; Times Media consultant on digital and editorial training

1983

Kathleen Dey: Director of Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust

Dan Pillay: *Harrow* (unpublished novel); South Africa's Deputy High Commissioner to India; UK Government Marketing Strategy for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games; Waterford Kamhlaba College UK Trust

1984

Justin Fox: *Just Add Dust: Overland from Cape to Cairo; Unspotted: One Man's Obsessive Search for Africa's Most Elusive Leopard; Whoever Fears the Sea; With Both Hands Waving: A Journey through Mozambique; The Marginal Safari: Scouting the Edge of South Africa*; Mondi Journalism Award 1999, 2004

1985

Peter Anderson: *Litany Bird; Foundling's Island*; (edited) *The Country of the Heart*; Senior Lecturer in the Department of English, University of Cape Town; Sanlam Literary Award for Poetry 2003

Marion Edmunds: Features writer for the *Mail & Guardian*; documentary producer and director

1986

Sheena (Siona) O'Connell: curator of photographic exhibitions: *Martyrs, Saints and Sell-outs*; *Extraordinary Lives*; Lecturer, Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town; Director of the Centre for Curating the Archive at UCT; curated exhibition *Promises and Lies: the ANC in Exile* 2016

Henrietta Rose-Innes: published in *English Alive* in all five years of high school; *Shark's Egg*; *The Rock Alphabet*; *Nineveh*; *Green Lion*; *Homing*; (compiled) *Nice Times!*; winner of the Cosmopolitan/Vita Short Story Competition 1996; Winner of The Caine Prize for African Writing 2012; Donald Gordon Creative Arts Fellow at the Gordon Institute for Performing and Creative Arts (GIPCA), University of Cape Town; studying towards a PhD in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia; *Green Lion* shortlisted for *Sunday Times* Barry Ronge Fiction Prize 2016

Stephen B Walker: This piece won an international essay competition for which the prize was a trip around the world. Stephen asked to have the prize converted to a cash amount, with which he created the Mbuso Trust Fund, to care for Mbuso throughout his school years and beyond.

1989

Megan Hall: *Fourth Child*; Ingrid Jonker Prize 2008; Editor of *English Alive* 2013; Dictionaries and Literature Publishing Manager at Oxford University Press Southern Africa; festivals: Poetry Africa, Badilisha Poetry X-change; Twitter: @one_word

1991

Vaneshran Arumugam: Actor, played Hamlet in the Baxter Theatre Centre's *Hamlet*, the opening production of The Complete Works Festival at the Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford-upon-Avon

1993

Rosamund Kendal: *Karma Suture*; *The Angina Monologues*; *The Murder of Norman Ware*; medical general practitioner

1994

Nadia Davids: *At Her Feet*; *Cissie*; *An Imperfect Blessing*; Fleur du Cap Rosalie van der Gucht Prize for Best New Director 2003; Mellon Fellowship 2000–05; Visiting Scholar at the University of California Berkeley 2001 and New York University 2004–05; Lecturer in the Drama Department at the Queen Mary University of London; compiled and presented a documentary *Shakespeare in South Africa* for BBC4 to mark the 400th year since Shakespeare's death

1995

Carolyn Esser: Head of European and Middle East Communications for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation 2013–16; BA Honours, Journalism, *summa cum laude*, University of Stellenbosch

Karen Schlebusch (Karen Jeynes): *Everybody Else (is fucking perfect)*; (with Nkuli Sibeko) *Jacques Attack*; (with Eeshaam September) *Flipside*; President of the International Centre for Women Playwrights; on the board of Women Playwrights International; as head writer for ZANews, was nominated for an Emmy Award; winner of SAFTA (South African Film & Television) Award for Best TV Comedy writing 2016; winner of WGSA (Writers' Guild of South Africa) Muse Award for Best TV Comedy Series (both for ZANews: *Puppet Nation*)

Robert Silke: architect; film director: *The Satyr of Springbok Heights*

1996

Sarah Johnson (Rowan): published in *English Alive* in all five years of high school; *Personae*; Editor of *English Alive* 2005–06; DALRO Prize for best poem in *New Coin* 2000; winner of Stellenbosch University Creative Writing Competition 2003

Nicholas Spagnoletti: *London Road*; *Special Thanks to Friends from Afar*; Olive Schreiner Prize for Drama 2011; owner of Theatre Upstairs at the Alexander Bar, Cape Town

Jan van Zyl Smit: *The Appointment, Tenure and Removal of Judges under Commonwealth Principles: A Compendium and Analysis of Best Practice*; LL.B. *magna cum laude*, University of Cape Town; law clerk to Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court; Rhodes Scholar: DPhil University of Oxford; Senior Lecturer Oxford Brookes University; Research Fellow of the Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law in the British Institute of International and Comparative Law

1997

Emma Attwell: publisher, Electric Book Works; publisher, Maskew Miller Longman; commissioning editor, Oxford University Press; freelance editor

Daliso Chaponda: *And Then What Happened?*; *Barely Legal* DVD; *Citizen of Nowhere* CD; stand-up comic; comedy writer

1998

Mikhael Subotzky: photographer; international exhibitions of his work in the US, the UK, Venice, Amsterdam, etc.: *Die Vier Hoeke*; *Umjiegwana*; *Beaufort West*; (with Patrick Waterhouse) *Ponte City*; *Retinal Shift*; *Show 'n Tell*; *Pixel interface*; most recent film project WYE examines the dark past that links Britain, South Africa and Australia

Hedley Twidle: researcher and copy-editor for (and contributor to) *Cambridge History of South African Literature* (2012); Senior Lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Cape Town

1999

Natasha Joseph: News Editor, *City Press*; Education Editor, Conversation Media Group; Women in Media 'Rising Star' Award 2010

2000

Jon Keavy: playwright; manager of the Theatre Upstairs at the Alexander Bar, Cape Town; was part of New Visions | New Voices at the Kennedy Center in Washington DC, during which his play *The Underground Library* was given a staged reading

Onele Mfeketo: (with Mteto Mzongwana, Orbin Lamna) *Mom's Taxi*; Deputy Director: Communications, Military Ombud

2001

Karen Jennings: *Finding Soutbek*; (edited) *Feast, Famine & Potluck*; *Shake on it and Spit in the Dirt: the Mystery on the Big Cypress River*; winner of the Commonwealth Short Story Competition 2010

Duane Jethro: *Weekend Away*; *Being Young*; PhD graduate from Utrecht University: *Aesthetics of Power: Heritage Formation and the Senses in Post-Apartheid South Africa*; Department of Religious Studies, University of Cape Town; currently in Archive and Public Culture research unit affiliated to the Department of Historical Studies

2002

Siphokazi Jonas: performance poet; DVD *Wrestling with Dawn*; Home of Poetry slam champion at the Cape Town Ultimate Slam 2015; wrote and solo-performed *Around the Fire* with seven-piece band 2016; performed in June 16 *Oratorio for a Forgotten Generation* 2016; (co-authored) 'Breaking the Silence: Black and White Women's writing' in the volume *SA Lit: Beyond 2000*

2003

Andisiwe Mgibantaka: Owner and CEO of Junkets Publisher 2016

2006

Amy Jephtha: *Other People's Lives*; *All Who Pass* (forthcoming); playwright (2016: *Kristalvlakte*) and theatre director (2016: Joint Winner Best Direction for *Nouluks of Niks* at the Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees; and *Portret*)

2008

Andy Petersen: *Daniel Fox and the Jester's Legacy*; winner of the Percy Fitzpatrick Prize for Youth Literature

2015

Hannah Fagan: Winner of the English Olympiad 2015 (while still at school)

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