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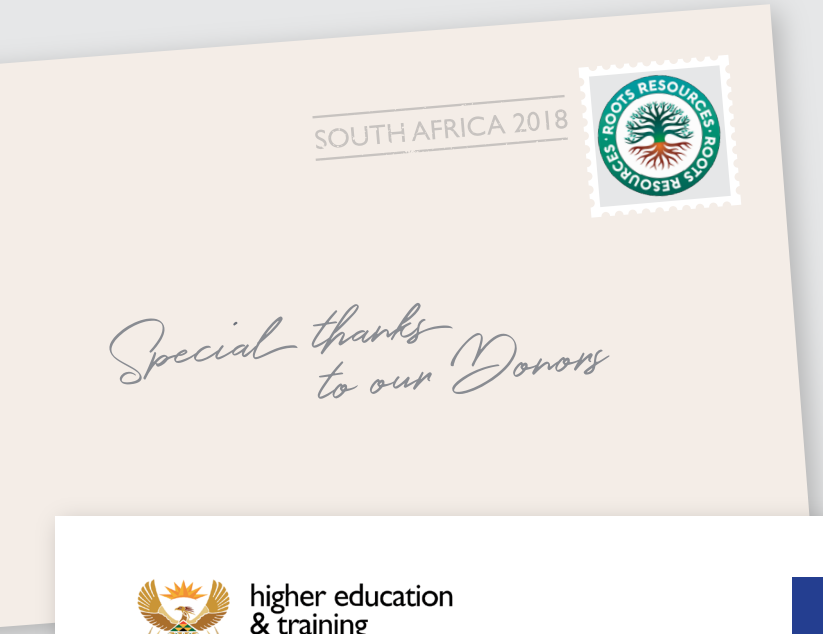
Poetry



Fragments of Silence

Guy McIlroy



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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

the centre for DEAF STUDIES 20th Anniversary



Fragments of Silence

Guy Mcilroy

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Poems ©Guy Mcilroy

About the Author

Guy has had a hearing loss for as long as he can remember, but it was only formally identified when he was 7 years old. The cause of his severe to profound bilateral hearing loss is unknown. His parents are hearing and he is an only child. He got his first hearing aids at the age of 7 and attended a private mainstream school in Johannesburg. During his school years, he did not have contact with deaf people nor consider himself to be deaf. Instead, he self-identified as hearing-impaired as per the oral educational discourse. Guy matriculated in 1983 and attended Rhodes University where he majored in Psychology and Anthropology.

After teaching English at a high school for 11 years, he began to accept his deafness and moved professionally to The Wits Centre for Deaf Studies. In taking this first step into the Deaf world, he began to meet Deaf people and started attending a local church with a vibrant and integrated Deaf community. Guy began learning sign language and this brought about a major change to his identity, leading to what he termed 'his coming-out' as a Deaf person. His love of English language, literacy and literature continued and was supplemented by the parallel awareness and growth of his Sign Language knowledge and skills as an emergent bilingual signer. He recently completed his PhD in Deaf Education and currently lectures in Deaf Education at The Centre for Deaf Studies. Guy is a single father of twin (hearing) teenage girls and has a passion for reading, good coffee and chocolate, as well as writing blogs and poems.

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Introduction

Welcome to the first publication in our 'Deaf Literature Series'! We are proud to be showcasing the work of the South African Deaf Community in this new series for two key reasons: i) Deaf learners in Schools for the Deaf will get exposure to their very own Deaf literature (published in either SASL or English) and ii) Hearing learners will become aware of this wonderful new body of literature and so doing be exposed to Deaf Culture and the beauty and complexity of South African Sign Language.

The first Deaf Poetry Anthology that we know of, was published in 1827 by James Nack (1809 – 1864), Deaf poet and author. In *Fragments of Silence* we introduce you to Dr Guy Mcilroy, a DeaF poet from Johannesburg, South Africa. Guy grew up oral, without any knowledge of the Deaf Community or even awareness of schools for the Deaf. He describes his journey as an adult and the discovery of the Deaf Community as a form of 'home-coming', and says he felt at ease and accepted for the 1st time in his life within this community. Guy celebrates Bilingual-Biculturalism and has described himself as DeaF, having a fluid Bi-Bi identity where he can choose to move between the Deaf and Hearing worlds. Guy has always been a poet at heart, and the poems in *Fragments of Silence* reveal his experiences, sufferings and joy as he comes to terms with and then flourishes as a Deaf man. ENJOY!

Prof Claudine Storbeck

What is Deaf Literature?

A core component of Deaf people and their unique Deaf Culture is the literature created by Deaf Authors, Poets, Play writes and Artists. Deaf Literature can be presented in either English or Sign Language and includes Poetry, Prose, Stories, Drama and Deaf Humour. When presented in Sign Language, it is referred to as Signed Literature, and in our case, South African Sign Language Literature (SASL) and when presented in English (or any other language), its called Deaf literature. With its own unique visual genre and the artistic use of the hands, the body and the linguistic parameters of the language, SASL Literature can stand tall among the greatest of world literatures.

Prelude

"We don't read and write poetry because it's cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race, a race that is filled with passion. Medicine, law, business, engineering, these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life, but poetry, beauty, romance and love are what we live for... that you are here, that life exists, and identity in the powerful play goes on; and that you may contribute a verse. What will your verse be…?"

John Keating, Dead Poet's Society, 2001

Poetry is a difficulty concept to tie-down. Everyone has their own ideas of what makes good poetry. For me, this quote is doubly appropriate; I can recall with fond memories teaching poetry to high school learners which used this as the launch pad into for me what poetry really is about, taking up the challenge and opportunity offered to contribute a verse to the mega-narrative of life. From this invitation, I began writing my own verse in the form of this collection of poems. And also for the playful substitution of 'Deaf' for 'Dead' in Dead Poets Society that makes up this anthology of Deaf Literature. Deaf literature is literature, including poems or writings about deaf themes and these texts carry considerable weight of authenticity when the experiences of deaf writers/poets are published.

The poems are presented in chronological order from 2012 to 2018 to show the emergence of the poetic as a journey of self-discovery as a deaf poet. Each poem tells a story, although these are not written in prose form. For me, poetry uses words to capture the experience, or a moment, a thought, to pose a question or a challenge, or to make a comment as well as to dialogue with the reader as the intended audience. It needs to be added that there is another collection of poems with a spiritual focus that have not been included here to appeal to a wider audience, although there is one cross-over poem that has been included *'Silence of Solitude'* (2015). The poem that started this journey was *'On My Deafness'* in 2012. Followed by *'My Hands'* (2012) and the bilingual poem *'In my Mind'* (2013) which has also been published in the Centre for Deaf Studies 10 year coffee table book. The *'Thunder or Lightning*' (2013) poem looks at the worlds of sound and sight through the metaphor of a thunderstorm. As an introvert, silence has great transformative and poetic power which is tapped into in *'Quietness'* (2013) and again in *'Signs of Solitude'* (2015) and in *'Healing Silence'* (2018). Even though these poems address silence and solitude, this theme is has not yet reached saturation, there is still (sic) more to write on this deep theme. An overtly Deaf awareness themed poem *'Subtitles'* (2013) followed on from personal frustration with the lack of subtitles available for movies, DVDs/blurays for deaf/hoh viewers, but also as a riposte to the kinds of things hearing people say to deaf/hoh as our subtitled counter-text. To provide a sense of balance, *'Empathy'* (2013) offers an outline to the transformative process of being empathetic of both Deaf and hearing worlds. Despite earlier reservations,

the bilingual poem of words: *'Words of my Journey'* (2014) was added after being updated and continues and expands on the bilingual theme that was started with *'In My Mind'*. In 2015, *'Books'* focused on the power of literacy for deaf readers and writers. *'Signs of Solitude'* (2015) is another cross-over poem that explores the world of deaf introverts. In 2016, *'Hear our Hands'* was released as an affirmative statement as sign bilingual Hard-of-Hearing person that crosses boundaries, to quote Paddy Ladd's concept of a 'subaltern' (2011)with knowledge, experiences and access to both worlds. With the mental shift to an academic mindset as a deaf doctoral candidate, a series of *'Tankas'* (2017) were composed and followed up the triumvirate of poems *'Healing Silence'* (2018), *'Odd One Out'* (2018) and *'I Know'* (2018) to close this anthology.

The poems are presented in chronological order. After each poem is a commentary by the poet about the background, the structure, language key features and meaning of the poem. The first poem, *'On His Deafness'* (2012) is the deaf person's adaptation of famous allegorical poem by John Milton '*On His Blindness*'.

On my Deafness

- with thanks to John Milton

When I consider how my silence is spent,
Where I am isolated from the world of voices,
And that the one gift I have, I tried to deny,
Instead I tried to understand, and pretend
To be Normal, till my soul whispered:
In God you will find your true center.
'How does God expect me to serve; I am deaf'
I fondly ask. But Dignity quells that cry
of rejection and pity. 'God does not need
either man's industry or his praise. Those who serve
God best have an honest spirit. His truth
brings freedom: thousands of deaf obey His Word
And tirelessly connect with everyone:
They also serve those in complete acceptance.

On His Blindness - *John Milton*

WHEN I consider how my light is spent
Here half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one Talent which is death to hide,
Lodged with me useless, though my Soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning chide,
Doth God exact day-labour, light denied,
I fondly ask; But patience to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts, who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best, his State
Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
And post over Land and Ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait

In my Mind

Listen to my hands, and watch my lips
I am deaf but I speak, that is the paradox I have lived with.
You may ask me how?
I used to mind, but now I am settled with this struggle.
And what is this, you may also ask:
it is the power and paradox of the choices that I have,
You see, I am bilingual and I am deaf.
And I do not mean that I speak two languages.
No, in my case, I am deaf, so this is a different way of life to me.
That this is my treasure: being bilingual, because
In my mind, my hands speak.

Looking back, I grew up with hearing parents who chose
My path in life; as a mainstreamed deaf learner.
And with hearing-aids, I had to cope: I did not see there was
Another option because this is all that I knew,
And I did not know the extent of my ignorance then.
While at school, I did not see myself as deaf, but as H-o-H
H-o-h? That was the label I used without knowing it was a label.

All I knew was that I just wanted to fit in,
Tell me, is that too much to ask?
In my mind, then, my lips spoke,
And I did not see my own self-deception spread by others.

But when I met Deaf people who really accepted me
Despite my paradox of being deaf
but not having a clue about being a deaf person
This lack of deaf-self-awareness was broken
By the silence of signs.
I discovered signing for myself.
This was the start of my journey into sign language,
And into a deep deaf experience and into myself.
Into becoming a deaf bilingual person.
All of this was new territory for me.
I was excited but also confused and lost in my mind.

Until I accepted myself as a second language signer but
Also as a deaf person. This is the paradox of knowing that
SASL is my language but it is not my first language
And I let go of trying to be Deaf when I am not.
Instead, I learned to live with being oral, and owned this again.

While making the next step as an oral deaf person who signs
By teaching in sign language in class.
For me, this was about being making the choice to sign,
and living it out, simply because I owned that fact that I am deaf
And the journey has brought me back to the starting point:
Know yourself, *Nosce te ipsum*
But I am changed by the journey, as if I am in a different place.
In my mind now, I am empowered by the power of choice at my disposal
I am deaf in my own way, I am a deaf bilingual.

I love doing both: speaking and signing
With some people, I speak or write, and with others I choose to sign.
This is who I am, and I know that there are many people
who have this power of choice on how to communicate
and are living bilingual lives as Deaf persons
by being true to themselves.
Let me ask you: are you building bridges to dialogue
Between hearing and Deaf worlds
by your truthfulness to yourself, and to others?
In my mind, words have the power to heal,
Choose words or signs that communicate your heart.
I have learned that the fear of not fitting in

Is broken by having the courage to connect myself
To others through the words you use, spoken or signed,
Respectfully, on my terms and on their terms, together.
So I choose to match myself to the needs of others
without denying or diluting my languages or cultures.
In this way, I am not living a lie, as I was before
or two separate lives, but an integrated life
as a deaf bilingual person.
In my mind, I am being true to myself
and to you when we meet.
Listen to my signs, and I will watch my speech.

Thunder or Lightning?

When it rains, I wonder which you prefer?
The sudden double-bass thunderclap of noise or
The dazzling blue-white welding flash of the heavens?
Or neither?
Or both, as these mark that the storm has arrived.

You see, I like both and for different reasons to many.
For me, storms are more spectacular at night:
As this is when the fury of sights and sounds are more
dramatically displayed.

Without my hearing-aids, I hear nothing, not even the rain.
But I see the flash that lights up everything.
And unless the lightning strike is really close, I hear nothing.
But some flashes are so close that I feel the air thunder through me
In a near-instantaneous primal flash and roar.
And right after that I feel a wave of relief that I am still alive
And release a sigh when I realise just how close that one was.
It is at that moment that I feel intensely alive,
But also incredibly finite beneath the power of the storm:
I cannot balance this paradox of the awe and rage of nature.



Then with my hearing aids on, the storm is not the same:
In that I hear more and see less.
I hear the falling rain as a grey shotgun blast of water
That ricochets off the ground and drenches me in noise.
Until the thunder blasts through this sodden soundscape
With its whip-crack of authority over all other sounds.
In the meantime, the lightning has had less of an impact on me
While the thunder rules, but it is no less deadly than before.

Thunder and lightning or lightning and thunder
Or is it lightning only and thunder only?
Which do I prefer?
That depends on what I am looking at or listening to.
Sometimes the lightning more, sometimes the thunder more,
To me, both are real and wonderful:
I love observing and signing and/or listening and speaking.
Sometimes I am able to choose which one: either to hear lots or nothing
And I do not mind not hearing when I can enter this world of silence
because I know that the lightning rules this world.
And I enjoy this power of choice: of living bilingually
But in the storms of life that I encounter daily,
I need to learn to choose wisely which one to use.

How do you experience the storm?
Are you once again in awe of the power of sound and sight
to capture the violence and intensity of the storm?
Shhh, be still and close your eyes, in your mind what do you see?
Now, enjoy the next storm filled with
Thunder and lightning.

Subtitles

"Did you hear what I said?"

How could I: I am deaf.

"Speak up, boy!"

Why, you are not deaf, I am.

"I am not going to say this again!"

Why not, I did not get it the first time.

"Were you talking behind my back?"

No, I was signing out your sight.

"Oh, don't worry, they did not say anything important."

Tell me and let me decide what is important or not.

"Ag, Shame, he doesn't talk, he is deaf."

And you cannot sign.

"Listen up, you have to...."

I have no idea how anyone can 'listen up.'

"Open your ears!"

I am still looking for the 'on' switch

"Speaking for myself..."

So, if I say nothing, no one takes me in account.

"He can talk the hind leg off a donkey."

I see mouths moving, so there must a three-legged donkey somewhere.

"I am all ears."

And I am all eyes, so look at me: sign to me.

"We need to talk."

You doing the talking and I am supposed to listen, how?

Where is the 'we'?

"He is all talk but no action."

Ah, that makes sense to me, but he does warm up the room.

"I'll tell you later."

Are you ignoring me again?

"He has a profound hearing loss."

Oh no, where did you leave it last? Let's go find it.

"Watch your tone, with me young lady."

How do you watch something you cannot see?

"She has verbal diarrhea!"

I think I'll stop there, you get the idea…

These are some of the words that invade my life of silence,

And these are the subtitles of my thoughts.

You see, I cannot hear you, but I can see you:

Can you hear me when you see me?

And do you see what I am saying?

When I see you and you see me there are no more subtitles.

Hands of Hope

My hands:
I have two symmetrical hands,
With ten tactile fingers,
Two opposable thumbs,
Two hands that twist freely at wrists,
Moulded around 64 articulated bones,
Tautly bound with tendons,
And neat nails and pulsing pipelines of power,
Into these skillful manipulators of my worlds
As a 'leftie' in a right-handed world.
Hands for 'hunting and gathering': food and knowledge
And for grasping the tools of my trade:
Pens, keyboards, mice and screens.
For writing, typing and signing.
My hands are also silent signing hands
That make words through my spelling fingers,
And the harmonious rhythm and rhyme of handshapes
Orchestrated into the symphonic syntax of sign language.
So that I can use my hands to hold conversations.
When you understand my hands, you touch my heart and soul.

Our human hands:
Our hands make us human: and reveal our spirit through our actions:
Open hands that touch, shake, rub, sooth, hold, anoint, bless, heal and love.
Or the closed hands of violence that punch, tear, stab, shoot, hurt and kill.
Our hands talk about us, and for us, without saying a word.

His hands of hope:
Rough, callused, strong, pierced,
And gentle, loving, open, forgiving, welcoming, restoring.

My weak, empty, sinful, unworthy hands:
Humbled, praying, thanking, surrendering,
Praising, worshiping, adoring, receiving,
Doing, connecting, serving, sharing.

Your precious hands:
Trembling, stubborn, cold, dirty…
Here are my hands: here is hope.
Whatever is holding you back, let it go,
Open your hands,
And hold on to His hands.

Silence of Solitude

The noise of sin drives out the sanctity of silence
'Oh my soul, be quiet:
Hands, stop your labour,
Eyes, cease from seeking,
Mind, focus on purity not on selfish pleasures,
Heart, surrender your frustrated feelings.
Soul, behold your Creator;

Brushed across the beautiful canvas of sunrise,
Felt in the cool refreshment of a stream,
And the soul-stirring harmony and lyrics of a song,
Smelt in the fragrance of rain on the parched earth,
And in the tingle of saltiness of the sea on my lips.

Or from the generosity of a giver,
Or the look from a lover,
Or the honest hugs of a child,
Or the wisdom of words,
Or the healing of a broken heart
Or the words of thankfulness,
Or the joy of laughter,

'Wait? For what, why? My restless soul fidgets
'Shhhhh, just wait. Still your soul in silence'
'Ok, I ll try it, just for a few minutes, then I must…'
'No!'
'…what? Surely that is enough, besides…'
'My Child' the voice of God chastises
Gulp, (I am speechless, wordless, humbled)
'I am with you, now be still' everything of me is aflame with love
'I am here, Lord' I answer shakily
'Good, now you are listening, be silent: see the beauty around you
Let it soak into you,
Let your heart be unlocked in confession,
Let your hands open and let go of the pain,
Let your mind release the thoughts and memories that bind you,
Let your soul kneel in wonder.
Lie down flat on the ground in awe of Grace.
Wait, cry, breathe, receive, arise and
Go forth with gratitude.'

It is well with your soul, when you find holy solitude in which your disquiet is replaced by quietness of the spirit.

Books

Words
Sentences
Paragraphs
Pages
Chapters
Books:
The beginning and the end,
Stories: heroes and villains
Or facts and information,
“How does it work?”

Read, read, read
Just go to the library
Google it,
Look for it on Amazon.
Go to bookshops.
Read the movie with subtitles
All of this information is available to me
I can read and understand it all in silence
And my silence is not a barrier to learning anymore

I delight in reading because I know
I am not alone when I read.
I share your world with you so
Remember that I cannot hear you
But I can read what you are saying
So share your story.
Write about it
So I can read about your journey.

Read, read, read
Read to know,
Read to learn,
Read to feel,
Read to cry/laugh
Read to understand,
Read to learn to think,
Read to remember,
Read to imagine,
Read to be challenged,
Read to be surprised,

Read to be someone else,
Read to go somewhere,
Read to change,
Read to let go,
Read to accept it,
Read to find peace,
Read to forgive,
Read to move on,
Read to find God,
Read to find yourself,
Read to be find mercy,
Read to be wise,
Read to hear with your mind.

Read anything: magazines, newspapers, journals,
diaries, recipes, instructions, menus, blogs novels,
prayers, biographies, poetry, comics, classics,
scripture…

Books are the silent guardians and gatekeepers
Of our communities
Of our past and present
And our faith

And give us hope.
Words on paper
Changed my life.
I love books. And I see that
You are reading this, so do you too.
Have you written your story yet?
Someone must to read it
I want to read it.
Publish your piece.

Read, read, read
Against the ignorance of the foolish.

Empathy

Deaf
Eyes
Hands
Signs
Signers
Words

Hearing
Ears
Mouth
Sounds
Speaker
Words

Brain
Sentences
Thoughts
Ideas
Communication
Concepts
Beliefs
Theories
Metatheory

Social Model
Human Rights discourse
Deaf pride
Schools for the Deaf
Minority
Lack of access

Medical model
Diability discourse
Audism
Mainstreaming
Majority
Paternalism

Frustration
Deaf awareness
Victim's stories
Understanding hearing culture
Communication
Dialogue
Tolerance

Ignorance
Awareness of deaf
'Perpetrator's' stories
understanding Deaf culture
Communication
Dialogue
Tolerance

Changes of attitude
Respect of others
Respect of diversity
Change of heart
Change of thinking
Change of theory
Changes to meta-theory
Changes to deaf education
Acceptance of identities
Acceptance of self
Acceptance of others
Acceptance of communities
Acceptance of sign languages
Translanguaging
Dignity
Empathy.

Hear our Hands (HoH)

I grew up as a monolingual oral deaf boy
But now I am a multilingual signing man
Doctors treated me as a damaged toy
'No Sign Language', they said, 'do you understand?'

Yes, that is a silent 'd', just like me.
The language of the Deaf, now with a capital 'D'
That shattered my crystal prison of loneliness and pity
And gave me signs for everything and I found intimacy.

I realised that Sign Language is not my language to own
But it is the voice of silence of a multitude of deaf minds and souls.
Using the language for knowledge, stories, jokes and poetry
This opens the world of silence and makes wounded deaf lives whole.

The bitter memories of my mainstream school experience remind
Me of the loneliness, frustration and tears from years of exclusion.
I have bitter knowledge of ignoring my past by saying "I am fine"
I used the 'deaf nod' to pass. But my life was an unhappy delusion.

So to calm the disquiet of deaf denial, I tried to bury my bitter past,
But now, the trauma of the past can hurt me no more.
The sweetness and the bitterness of life made me strong, at last
In their eyes, I am 'hearing-impaired', but not in mine anymore.

I have a new language and I am telling a new story of me.
But when I chose to ignore my hearing-aids and my voice
And say that I am deaf and a signer, with naivety
Then I found myself telling another lie: 'I am not Deaf enough'.

And I felt excluded from the Deaf community:
Sign language is not my first language nor did I go to a school for the Deaf
Until I realised that for me, I can let both languages and lives live in unity
What do I say when I meet you? Am I deaf/Deaf/HoH/hh/HH or DeaF?

Hear my hands, watch and listen with your mind and soul
To my HEARING words and DEAF hands
I have two eyes, two hands and one voice:
I sign 'ME HEARING-DEAF-TWO'.

Let my voice and hands speak true
And my ears and eyes will listen to you.

Tankas

1 Self/identity

1. The frame cannot hold (5)
2. my mirror'd self lies shattered (7)
3. Spraying shards of self (5)
4. The fall releases the prism within, (7)
5. freeing me from monolingual prison. (7)

2 Teachers

1. Authoritarians (5)
2. Whose power is resolute (5)
3. Till signing disrupts (5)
4. Them: 'deaf lives matter'; (7)
5. A narrative of empathy. (7)

3 Teachers 2

1. Language Apartheid (5)
2. Builds walls between us and others. (7)
3. Signing catalyzes (5)
4. The mutual understanding (7)
5. as bilingual bridge-builders. (7)

4 Teachers 3

1. The unopened doors (5)
2. of audism are unlocked (7)
3. when hands touch hearts, (5)
4. then transformation happens (7)
5. with post-audist stories. (7)

5 Becoming an Academic

1. Silent survivor (5)
2. Who was lost and adrift (7)
3. Till my voice was found (5)
4. As an emergent writer (5)
5. With something profound to say/sign/write. (7)

6 PhD

1. The private and public (5)
2. become an enigmatic 'one' (7)
3. when the red robe tasks (5)
4. the wearer with the honour (7)
5. of 'Gatekeeper of Knowledge.' (7)

7 PhD 2

1. ‘Follow our steps, (5)
2. do not deviate from the path.’ (7)
3. but my path was different (5)
4. my journey was divergent (7)
5. But in others I found myself. (7)

8 Bilingual

1. one pedagogy: (5)
2. two languages: separated (7)
3. one special touch (5)
4. two hearts and minds changed (7)
5. two languages respected. (7)

9 Decolonize your mind

1. Colonial choke chain (5)
2. of control constrains (7)
3. cross-cultural contact. (5)
4. Conversion of cognition (7)
5. creates conceptual capital. (7)

10 Decolonize your mind 2

1. Stop holding onto
2. to what you know and feel.
3. Tell your story of pain.
4. Let go of your bitterness
5. and embrace diversity.

Healing Silence

When an extravagant noise of words bombards my hearing –aids
Till I am lost in a spiraling hurricane of sound
And my mind is flustered from listening to everything
Until it responds by shutting down.

Forgive me, I need to introvert
Please understand me: I need to ‘switch off’
It is not you, it is me.
I need to stop listening
And rest in the cool calm empty silence
Inside that restores me.
Then I can listen and reconnect with you.

When the flurry of signing blurs my vision
Till I get lost in the blizzard of hands
And my mind becomes flustered from watching everything
Until it responds by shutting down
Forgive me, I need to introvert
Please understand me: I need to switch-off
It is not you, it is me.

I need to stop watching
And rest in the cool, calm, empty silence
Inside that restores me.
Then I can watch and reconnect with you.

Odd one Out

Right, I am a lefty
So I know what it is like to the odd one out

I write and sign with my left
And my writing and signing is somehow odd

But this is how my brain is works
Even if I do things an odd way

But I am not alone
Even if I am the odd one out

And in the minority
I am exercising my rights to be odd

I wear my watch on my right
Since writing with a watch on the left feels odd

This exposes my diversity
That I am a non-conforming oddity

Because being a lefty is my identity
That adds to my oddly attractive personality.

I Know

I know that I am deaf
I know that I have always been deaf
I know the solitude of silence
I know that I have hearing-aids
I know how you look at me
I know that I look a bit strange
I know that you called me ‘hearing-impaired’
I know that I did not fit in
I know that I was social misfit
I know that I escape into myself
I know that looks like I am strange
I know that some people will help me
I know that they are special stars
I know that some people won’t
I know that they are deaf ignorant
I know that I need to forgive them
I know speech and lipread well
I know that I hear imperfectly
I know that I do mis-hear you
I know that I do not understand all that was said
I know that I use the ‘deaf nod’
I know how to pretend to be ‘hearing’
I know the loneliness of the exclusion.

But

I know that I love reading
I know that books are silent knowledge-givers
I know that I was an orphan of oralism
I know I have an audist past
I know that my mind was colonised
I know that I though like a victim
I know that being deaf is good
I now that I have a deaf soul
I know that I learned sign language late
I know that I love sign language
I know that sign language is my language
I know that I am not the only deaf one
I know that there is a Deaf community
I know the value and values of Deaf culture
I know many diverse deaf people
I know that I am bilingual
I know that I am multicultural too
I know that I am not alone
I know that I belong in both worlds
I know that I have peace in our deaf diversity
I know that I have hope for deaf people
I know that because I am one too.
I know that I have found healing

I know that words have power to change minds
I know that these words heal the trauma
I know new love for the deaf me inside
I know a new way of seeing myself:
I know ‘Deaf Pride’ and ‘Deaf Gain’.
I know how deaf children, like me, need love.
I know there that my hands are my future
I know that your hands and mind is open
I know that you heard me here.
I know that you understand me now,
I know that you know what to do.

Crossover

Choice of words or signs:
Handshapes, movement, location, palm orientation and non-manual features
Or tone, accent, pitch.
No voice or voice
No hearing-aids or hearing-aids
Deaf friends or hearing family
Sight of Deaf humour in signs or the verbal puns of spoken humour
Silence within and with Deaf people
Or the cacophony of the world of sounds
Seeing the world with your eyes and talking with your hands
Or trying to fit in to hearing world
Passing as a hearing person or proudly claiming your Deaf identity
Maintain invisible walls of silence or reach out to the person
Build walls of prejudice or crossover to the other side
Rationalise or empathise
The choice is mine and yours.
Let’s meet in this dangerous place between silence and sound
To connect as individuals: finding and living out our choices.

Words of my Journey

The *'hearing loss/deaf loss me':* born deaf, diagnosed 'severe to profound bi-lateral sensorineural hearing loss' dehumanised medical jargon of deafness; ENT; 87 dB left, 92 dB right hearing loss; my experience of the world: hear almost nothing: no voices, traffic, no music, no domestic noises, no voices - only really loud and close bangs and thumps or screams; sonic violence. I see lips moving, but cannot understand people. First sound test memory – 5-years old: doctor's tinkling pen on green glass astray, first sound with hearing aids, hearing aids; huge analog hearing-aids digital, hi-power; batteries; distortion, Danavox, mercury batteries, flat, sound, noise, Grade One, confusion, pain, people, children persevere, sounds, speech therapy, words, "Say the word: '…'" repetition, sound booth, sentences, some knowledge, blocked tubes, earaches, grommets, operations, no swimming allowed = excluded, muffled sounds, missed words, lost in class, pin unblocked wax, hated comprehension tests and reading aloud, dictated notes, Assemblies and Chapel, just follow everyone else, humiliated, faiIed to understand, failed Standard Two: socially immature, cried, embarrassed, coped better the next year, fitted in better when reading improved, literacy was my sanctuary of accessible knowledge: library. Bullied, discriminated, 'big ears', ignored, no rugby, no hearing aids, felt lost in pool, insecure, alone at school, supportive friends, Matthew (unquestioning acceptance), Wally (my gentle giant), Paul (a mutual soul), hymns, banned from singing, high school loneliness, Siemen's in-the-ear: cosmetic, weaker hearing aid, level misdiagnosed, struggled to keep up in class, hated Afrikaans, lipreading improved, always sat in front, felt isolated and inferior, English was a struggle to follow talk, talk, talk. Turning point: awarded Industry Prize Standard 7, honoured, maybe it was their sympathy for me as disabled or genuinely earned? Who cares, I decided: this honour changed me: Biology marks soared, loved science books, struggled with novels, comprehension below par, Science Olympiad Top 10%, visited Wits 1980, in awe of academia, but shy, many pink slips: merits presented to headmaster (highly esteemed Mr Henning), never got demerits, Science teacher hoh, avoided him: poor role model, denied his deafness. Bonded with school counsellor, blind-he, deaf-me, we-connected. Passed matric, university exemption, relief, visit family Scotland, Rhodes, independent, Livingstone house, Anthropology, missed the irony of hi-fi for 21st present, Psychology honours, Bryanston Methodist Church: deep inner acceptance of deaf. Youth leader, YFC, camps, still struggled to fit-in and follow. Conscription SADF army, 'I am hard of hearing, not deaf!' Basics, G4K3 (nearly dischargeable), joined Medics (SAMS), passed officer's course, became full 'Loot' (lieutenant). Specialised in psychology: pilot stress - Dunnottar, Air Force. Derek (the big-brother/counsellor), Rory (the 'seize the day' buddy), returned to powerful over-the-ear hearing aids, identity shift, and acknowledgement: I am deaf. End of dream: psychologist: I cannot hear you, living a lie, let it go: release. Likewise: Dawnview High school, English teacher. 11 years, Right place? Not coping: too much noise, and too little voices. Identity crossroads "Who am I?" Resigned... and found new space of being and peace…

ME DEAF NOW: met Prof Claudine (mediator and mentor), Centre for Deaf Studies. Inducted into Deaf world: Wits Deaf Education, lecturer. Deaf community in action: Bryanston New Covenant church, signing, awestruck: “found my people”, wanted to learn sign language, deaf friends: Gavin (the friend), Paulo (the sign language teacher, Inge (the Deaf culture teacher/therapist) and Jane (proper sign language interpreter) classes, marginal identity, liminality, and re-integration: I am (bilingual) deaf: It is OK. Following SASL interpreter, exhausted, switched off hearing aids: better. Fingerspelling. Met oral deaf girl, dating, engagement, signing improved, switched from signed English to South African Sign Language: much better, living visually, married, (hearing) twin girls. Tinnitus: sound saturation - switch hearing-aids off. Completed Masters with distinction, theorised bilingual DeaF identity. Less signed English in meetings/interpreter, stopping the ‘deaf nod’, asserting deaf identity. Oticon hi-power digital hearing-aids Sumo, Domino: ‘power-junkie’. Assistive technology: neckloop, Domino FM system - connection in meetings/bluray. Emotional healing from oral (PTSD) trauma of ‘victimhood’: ‘letter to my teachers’. Hi-HOPES Deaf mentor, visit and empower deaf children and families. DTV interviews, St Vincent Open days, first signed speech MCK Honours day, voice training (revisiting speech therapy), own business (ProWords proofreading), contact clients by email. Divorce: complete communication breakdown. Registered with SARS as ‘deaf person’, own deaf friends, DeaF dogtag, signing in class only, no hearing aids, no voice, scary but liberated, Lucas (supportive Deaf colleague), SASL: mastering idioms, NMFs, placement, classifiers, deaf discourse - now my second language. PhD 6-year journey into deafselfness, sign bilingualism (Garcia and Cole), and sign bilingual teacher identity. Teaching SASL in SASL: linguistic breakthrough. Embracing quietness: introvert personality merges with contemplative spirituality, quiet gardens retreats, drive and fly without hearing aids. Presentations: Scotland & Ireland (ISEC), Singapore (ISB9), Greece (ICED), Rosebank Union (FCEI) and Paris (WFD) soon - emergent deaf researcher. Writer: poetry, blogs, SASL writing team, subtitles, reading. Deaf Identity: not Deaf but sign bilingual deaf academic. Doctor: post-audist narratives, i-PTSD, ontological metaphors. Deaf Gain: living visually. Sign bilingual journey continues…

Conclusion

Despite appearances, writing looks permanent, the verses in this anthology are part of a work in progress. Becoming and being are always in a state of flux, and so too is what is written. This is not the final product. We are always inventing and re-imagining ourselves. I have found that writing these poems has catalysed the process of being comfortable with being a bilingual deaf (HoH) person. I am changed by writing reflectively, and it is a privilege to share some experiences that stand out in my complex inner journey of self-discovery with you.

This anthology experimented with a variety of poetic forms to explore the themes of bilingual experiences and knowledge through the lens of empathy, the power of literacy, and the sacredness and mystery of silence and solitude.

I invite you to continue the conversation with comments, feedback and encourage you to contribute your own verse of Deaf literature as we celebrate our 20 year anniversary of The Centre for Deaf Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Commentaries

1. On My Deafness

This poem began the inward poetry journey that I wanted to write about and share with you. This poem is mirror of my self as a deaf person rather than as a blind person but when I studies this poem, it was a fondly remembered poem from my school days, I often wondered how this poem would look if it were written from a deaf person's point of view. The seed had been planted in those formative years by my English teachers, but I had yet to acquire the language skills and depth of life experience to tap into to be able to write my own version that would bear justice to the original's poetic language and message.

For me, the original poem is for a hearing, sighted person to read the poem out aloud to blind persons since it captures the elegance and symmetry of the language to convey the struggles and meaning of life despite being blind: blind lives matter. The second intended audience is the sighted person reading this poem to see (sic) the world of the blind from their point of view and to begin to understand the complexity and difficulty of their lives. This point of view encodes a human rights reading of the poem as a treatise against oppression of blind people as useless. Likewise, the modified poem *'On His Deafness'* echoes the human rights stance against discrimination and marginalisation of deaf persons. At the time, as a young academic, this language of the social model was just becoming into my consciousness and its influence

on how I saw the world was in the process of transformation and I wanted to share this new way of seeing the world of being deaf as my core/soul. Thus, this poem marks the centre of a deaf identity.

2. In My Mind

This poem explores the anguish of being lost between two worlds but through talking about it, the unvoiced dilemma of being deaf the poet finds hope in the bilingual world, of 'inbetweenity' (Brueggermann, 2011). Here I wanted to write an epic style poem that mimics the narrative of the Odyssey in Greek literature as a platform for talking to the reader as a poem crafted in the oral tradition does. This is freestyle poem that uses varied line length to show the flow and convoluted streams of the inner conversation of the poet with the reader. It ends with hope, even when there is dark and murky water to swim through from the beginning to the last stanza where being true to oneself clears the water of self into a pool of calm and hope.

3. Thunder or Lightning

This poem was inspired and written during a typically violent Highveld thunderstorm that deluges Gauteng with great regularity after a sweltering day at the height of summer. The storm began its thunderous downfall in the late afternoon and carried on until it was completely spend of moisture sucked up from the baked earth. The intense lightning and thunder display is the spectacular sight and sound prologue to the imminent release of ice cloud water from the looming black clouds that soaks everything. Then the storm plays out with an epilogue with repeat display of lightning and thunder after the rain. The thunder and lightning is a bilingual metaphor that uses thunder to symbolise the world of sound, and lightning for the visual dimension. I wanted to capture the vividness of the storm and the two worlds through lightning and the thunder. For me, I can hear the thunder through hearing-aids, or take my hearing-aids off and watch the lightning show. When I do that, I am in another world: I am seeing the world through deaf eyes which is precisely what I am attempting to capture here. For this reason, this poem is a play around the capturing of the sensation of the storm and formlessness and awesome power of nature rather than focussing on the form of the poem as a classically structured entity. It is meant to be an invitation to watch the storm and even to come outside into the rain to feel my worlds. It is an invitation to share my worlds with me, and to see things differently and for hearing readers to gain understanding of how deaf people see the world and for deaf people to understand how hearing people hear the world through the storm. Of course, hearing people have access to sight and sound, but I wanted to stress how sound is at the core of their way of understanding the world and that lightning without sound is another way of seeing the world. This first-person narrative was adopted to make the storm real and personal. This is a call to pause and watch the storm in all its violence and beauty. To feel alive by simply being there and experiencing the storm's power.

4. Subtitles

This is a satirical collection of things hearing people say, to deaf persons. I know these; I have heard these throw-away comments and put-downs before, some of them many times. The intention is to foreground the subtitled

text of what a deaf person thinks in response to the verbal/spoken language based idioms that cut deaf persons off from being deaf. This is free verse poem that plays with a dual structure that tracks what is said by hearing persons with the underlying deaf subtext as a rebuttal to the tactless or careless comments of unintended arrogance from a place of superiority. It is meant to create awareness that there are two sides to the story, and to re-humanise the deaf experience through humour of witty, but unsaid come-backs (the subtitled text. The last section consolidates the narrative into a call for recognition and reconciliation of hearing and deaf persons. Let the war of words (spoken and unspoken) cease.

5. Hands of Hope

We take our hands for granted, at least that is what motivated me to use my hands to type this. It starts with an allegory to the poetic beauty of the anatomy of hands. Then I wanted to draw attention to being a left-handed person in a right-handed world. Then the focus is on the function of hands, as tools for manipulating our world, in my case, typing out of a doctoral thesis. My hands are also tools of sign language through signing and fingerspelling. I wanted this language of the hands to come across here to capture the value that my hands bring to my world as silent communicators of my thoughts and soul. The second stanza expands into our hands as a metanomy of our shared humanity with all its glory in constructing beauty and the flip side of the atrocities committed by human hands, against other humans, our world and its creatures. We are an ambivalent species, capable of great deeds of majesty or of utter cruelty. Where is the hope? We need a hand here...
As a Christ-follower, to me, this is where the hands of God reach into our broken world and take hold of us if we allow ourselves to open our hands and let go of our tight-fisted grip on ourselves and our sin. Jesus' hands are emblematic of hands that heal. In this way, the third stanza casts light upon his hands as the hands of hope for us. His hands are pierced hands from the crucifixion for us that extend to us. This poem ends with a chant-like prayer to open our hands in surrender to the grace offered to us.

6. Silence of Solitude

This poem depicts the cycle of coping with hearing-aids or signing as an introvert. As you may well know, Susan Cain famously described the inner life of introverts in her book *'Quiet'*. For me, this book was a massive moment of recognition and what she described resonated deeply within me. As an introvert, social interactions drain me. I need to break away and shut-down. So, this poem retells the process of shutting down and recovery and re-starting from a deaf person's point of view.

The first stanza takes the reader through the systematic shut–down so that the reader is aware of what is happening, of introverting. The message is you do not hear from us, it is most likely that we (introverts) are utterly drained and need to disengage and we will reconnect with you and everyone else later when we are re-charged. 'It's not you, it's me!' These are the signs of withdrawal. And it happens just as intensely among when I socialise with hearing people with my hearing-aids on as when signing with Deaf people. My brain is over-saturated with the noise of language regardless of whether in spoken English or Sign Language. I simply need a break to rest my brain, hands, eyes, ears, and voice. Keep in mind (sic), as Swartennegger said "I

will be back!...” The middle stanza invites the reader into my sanctum of silence. The key part of the break-away is complete solitude, it does not mean that I am completely alone, but it means that the contact with people and over-thinking is broken for a period. If you know what is happening, then this makes sense. Then the third stanza is a reverse of the shutting-down process as I reconnect with people. The poem plays with the cycle motif of ‘connecting, disengaging and reconnecting and getting exhausted and needing to disconnect’. I had fun writing this down because it is about something I have wanted to share for a long time and this poem became the ideal vehicle for expressing these experiences and thoughts as a deaf introvert.

7. Books

The quote by CS Lewis: “I read to know that I am not alone” inspired this poem. I wanted to capture the essence of what reading is and what it did and still does for me as a deaf person and also as an English teacher, when I taught English at a High School. For me, I discovered in primary schoolhow reading provided a much needed way of accessing knowledge without sound. This realization was central to my desire to improve reading to supplement and make up what I missed in class. I remember devouring everything I could find in the little school library, and when I read the Roald Dahl book *‘Matilda’* I exclaimed: That is me too!” My favourite period at school was Reading. To be alone in silence at last with a book that silently gave me all the information that I craved is bliss. Once I began to understand how books work, decoding the language and improved reading with comprehension, then I was hooked. It definitely helps coming from a home where reading was not only valorized and we had dedicated time in the late afternoon and evening (pre-TV days) to quietly read for a substantial period of time. I am so appreciative of this family habit that was engrained into me from early on. So much so, I cannot go to sleep without reading something for a while first. Asterix, Tintin and cartoons were my earliest literary history experience that built the interest and skill of reading. The message here is ‘Read anything, just read’. Reading against being ignorant about the world, know about everything. This poem plays with words, short simple, to advanced complex thoughts in complex sentences and repeats the mantra of ‘Read...’ There are so many literacies available and reading opens your mind as a reader but also as a writer. Good readers are writers too and I challenge the reader to write.

8. Empathy

This is a shape poem that helped to shape the PhD around the concept of empathy. I started with two different, divergent worlds, Deaf and Hearing which came closer and closer, in my mind, as a bilingual person. Then the battleground of the mind, of the different metatheories or major theories that drive Deaf culture and Hearing culture and unpacked these into their increasingly opposite positions until a state of re-unification began. It was the writings of Prof Jonathan Jansen that created in my mind this need and capacity to bring the warring minds closer together through tolerance that comes from communication, by dialoguing with each other about what is common and what both sides actually want to each other. The greatest problem of a lack of empathy comes from the lack of knowledge and how mis-information festers in the minds of both parties causing mistrust and breakdown of communication. Therefore, talking to each other, honestly,

and really listening is key to making progress marked by growing tolerance of each other. This means that change is now possible and can begin in this fertile soil of understanding and connection with each other. From this change, deep acceptance happens. Ultimately, empathy is the fruit of this process of healing of minds from the brokenness of miscommunication. This poem laid out a template of bilingual dialogue and revealed the nature and requirements necessary for change of minds to happen that bear the fruit of empathy. It is not possible to be empathetic without going through these often difficult conversations with ourself, to uncover our own bias and assumptions that we hold onto to preserve our position despite the attacks against our beloved theories of the romanticism of Deaf culture or indisputable need to cure everyone to speak in a hearing majority world, with the ostracized and divorced other. Ironically, this poem happened during the painful period of divorce. So the themes of divorce and 'no contact', 'irreconcilable differences' are pertinent terms to draw upon. This poem provided cathartic release for the mental anguish, confusion and bitterness; another key word from Jansen, but also scoped a pathway of hope through communication. I did not want another 'irreconcilable difference', in this case, between 'Deaf and deaf' worlds to persist, escalate and cause permanent damage. In this way, the poem tackles the heart issues of the emotions of conflict by visualising the separation with the placement of the words on the page and head/mind/mental side is depicted in the words as thoughts from both sides to show the often unvoiced thoughts of both sides. I took on the role of a benevolent judge, or a wise mediator that draws both parties back together through developing their empathy of each other.

9. Hear Our Hands

This poem of identity emerged from the inner struggle about being a 'hoh,' 'hard of hearing' person. Not only that, I was uncomfortable with both my place in both Deaf and Hearing worlds since I was neither a good, fluent, natural signer nor able to participate fully in hearing contexts even with strong hearing-aids, I still missed an uncomfortable amount of vital information. That is the background context to this poem that explores the terms hard-of hearing as a journey into Hard-of Hearing as a bilingual world of both languages and cultures. As I discovered, if I have the courage to claim this bilingual space of with proud, then, I found that I have also discovered my freedom. This is a particular message from the movie 'Braveheart, "They can take our land, our possessions, our but they cannot take our freedom." Unless we did not know that we had lost our freedom or bargained it away cheaply. I am free to be both: for me that is what Hard-of-Hearing (HOH) means, with the capitalisation of the H. This is the newly discovered HoH space of being in both and living freely. This realisation brings closure to the bilingual DeaF concept proposed in my masters. Now I have come full circle in making this real for myself, I am DeaF.

The poem features eight four line stanzas and a concluding rhyming couplet, a Shakespearean strategy to conclude sonnets neatly. But also, I wanted to end with a pair of lines to mirror the bilingual theme of HoH. The lines are structured as two enjambed, run-on sentences in each stanza to carry the flow of the conversation with the reader. From the outset, this structure was chosen to illustrate the adherence to a classical form of poetry, with rhyming at the end of the lines but the use of enjambment highlights the breaking away from tight classical structure to show the overflow and fluidity

of the storied lives of bilingual identities that do not conform to societies rigid boundaries of self by deaf and Hearing worlds. I was not fitting in and discovering new identity space beyond both worlds. The rhyme scheme adopted is a hybrid scheme of that alternates conventional phonetic rhyming of sounds with visual rhyming. Visual rhyming uses the similar look of the words, with two or more similarities to catch the eye even though the words do not sound at all alike. This is the poet's intention to draw the reader into the way that good Deaf readers see words. The poem contains glossing (capitalized words) to show where something is signed.

10. The Tanka on the PhD Journey

The tanka is a specific form of a poem that follows the syllabic structure of five syllables for the first and third lines and lines three, four and five haves seven syllables. Although the Haiku is the more well-known poem of 14 syllables, I was inspired by a group of PhD students who took up the challenge to compose a short, tightly constructed poem around the more broad structure of the tanka. Tanka is not intended to be a rhyming poem, but has a tight structure to test the poet's wordcraft. Every word and syllable counts. These ten tankas charted the doctoral journey, near completion and spilled over into the post-graduation space of entering academia as a post-colonial sign bilingual academic. For me, these poems focused on identity, in particular, that of the poet's identity, teachers of the Deaf with different perspectives, and becoming and being an academic through completion of the PhD. It would be difficult to choose personal favourite from these ten tankas as each captures an intense poetic moment. Trying different poetic forms and ways of writing is a powerful way of self-discovery of one's poetic voice and style as well as an opportunity to tackle and play around with style to find one's one way of writing. Nevertheless, when writing these tankas, I was aware of a topic and a message that I wanted to put down then sculpted the words by chipping away at the words and their syllables until the heart and soul of what I wanted to say laid bare. Although, sometimes, as in the first tanka, the vividness of the words had a cascading effect and the poem evolved out of the image rather than the theme of identity since this is difficult to visualize in your mind.

11. Healing Silence

This poem charts the cycle of connection that is familiar to introverts. The aim is to connect with introverts and show how the process is magnified for deaf//Deaf/HoH introverts for whom speech, signing and any variation between is used to communicate with a variety of people, especially with hearing people. This is doubly exhausting for us. The second purpose is to enlighten extroverts as to what is happening in the minds and body of introverts so that there is better awareness and understanding instead of unnecessary disconnection between people. The poem is a cycle that is listening an engagement that introverts do, but superficial conversation in large groups is hugely draining. Typically this leads to the introvert person shutting-down in order to cope. The second stanza is an explanation which fellow-introverts will identify with as a response to the over-stimulation and the desperate need for some down-time to recover. This is my way of coping, everyone is different, but I need complete silence, away from people and all the singing and cacophony of competing voices to recover. It happens in both worlds Deaf and Hearing, I get overwhelmed by the onslaught of language. I need

time to think. When you see me shutting-down, then understand what is happening. I choose words to capture the intensity of being swamped by words and signs. This poem ends with reconnection.

12. Odd One Out

This is a shape poem that deliberately separates left from right. Not only that, it shows the contrastive views to being left or right handed in a right handed world. Being a left-handed signer adds to the identity mix. It is a springy and rebellious poem on the oddity of being different. The right-hand column focusses mischievously on the word 'odd', because for me right is odd, and inversion of how left-handed people feel discriminated in a right-handed world. Being odd is ok.

13. I Know

My mom tells me that I always say: "I know". So I have taken this comment as the poetic conceit/theme that introduces each interlinked sound/signbyte that expresses my thoughts and my heart's struggles and joys. This poem has two distinct sections: the pre-sign language (deaf) experience of knowing and the sign language experience of knowing myself as a de-colonised (by sign language) deaf person. This poem is about the power of knowledge and deaf epistemology (our system of knowledge) and the shift that happened when sign language freed me from the audist epistemoology. Re-reading it, I see not only how indoctrinated into the oral way of thinking of myself as a lonely, heroic victim but also how unaware I was of another world. Up till then, I had a warped view of sign language as inferior. This was a lie that held me back.

14. Crossover

This is a free-verse poem that revolves around the choices that Hard-of-Hearing people face every day as bilinguals. The key conceit/motif is the word 'or' that captures that binary worlds of spoken and signed languages. This was influenced by my own struggles of being deaf while doing a masters degree on deaf identity that culminated in the DeaF (Mcilroy 2008) identity that explores the bilingual space. Being deaf or hearing is the central struggle of selfhood. I wondered about bringing the two worlds together with the 'and', hence the fluid DeaF ontology of moving frequently between both 'in-my-own-way' as Ohna, (2006) suggested. For me, this conception of HoH self works, and this poem captures the metaphors that reveal a deep sense of inner resolution.

15. Words of my Journey

This poem is inspired by the freedom of writing by E E Cummings. I wanted words or micro-phrases to tell a story as a collage of meaning like a picture or a stained glass that has meaning to the only from afar. The first half is the deaf life before sign language de-colonialised my mind with its visual beauty and power of language of the Deaf world. There are many memories that are bitter-sweet and on reflection I recall the scene and my reaction to each. In contrast, as a bilingual poem, the second half is far more vibrant

with hope and life and joy, although there are difficult times and events there too in the process of stumbling out of the audist closet which I lived in for a long time. This stanza is a record of key events that make up my new verse of selfhood. It is not meant to have a logical flow other than following a time order and some events have more weight for me than others while there are probably events that I have missed altogether, or paid little attention to when these actually were more important than I give these credits for. Maybe I will see these in a better light in the future and revisit these and give the recognition they deserve to the journey. This is a cathartic form of poetry that shed light on many areas of my life and made these real for me again since it is all too easy to forget where we have come from and the impact of our past. Remembering who you are is good therapy and worth doing often by adding to the poem: it is not finished. So I invite you to write your own Word poem of your life.

Some Ideas for Assessment

Questions to Consider

1. Identify the theme/s in each of the poems
2. What are some of the recurring themes in the poems?
3. How does the poet explore the juxtaposition between sound/hearing and signs/Deaf?
4. Consider the 'rhyming strategies' the poet uses.
5. What do you learn about the poet and his journey into the Deaf World?
6. Consider the poets use of irony and humour in his poems, and reflect on what they reveal in the specific poems.
7. Find examples of artistic use of language.
8. Do you see evidence in the poems of the impact of Sign Language on the English expression (in its form, structure, content, rhythm etc.)?
9. Which poem is your favourite and why?

Questions I'd like to ask the Poet

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

3. _____

_____

4. _____

_____

Exercise

Choose one of the poems and adapt/ translate/ re-develop it into a true SASL Poem. Consider the use of some of the following components of Signing and how they can be used as poetic devices.

- Handshapes
- Choice of signs
- Repetition
- Movement
- Space and Location
- Perspective
- Use of body and Non-manual Features

Hint: Poetic devices such as rhyme, rhythm, personification, anthropomorphism, metaphors, synecdoche etc.