

https://dspace.org/

Volume of verse: wandering through water

Rachbuch, Shelley Ann.;

2006-10-26T09:34:40Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/1465

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

CONTENTS

	Page
1. Volume of verse: Wandering through Water	7- 48
2. Reflexive essay regarding the volume of verse (to be read after the poetry).	49- 76
3. Bibliography	77-79

VOLUME OF VERSE: WANDERING THROUGH WATER AND REFLEXIVE ESSAY.

Shelley Ann Rachbuch

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Johannesburg, 2005

ABSTRACT

This thesis comprises a volume of verse entitled 'Wandering through water' and a theoretical reflection on it. The volume contains poems written, edited and refined over the two year research period (July 2003 to May 2005). A reflexive essay accompanies it, providing a template for an account of the poems' composition and a description of poetic devices and practices employed. It also engages with the primary concerns of the verse and its possibilities.

The essay reflects on the working method employed: the process and necessity of refining a poem by tracing its multiple revisions. Reflexive tools utilized in this 'mapping', include the 'Writer's Reflexive Journal', suggestions and comments made during supervision and workshop processes, as well as engagement with other poet's work.

The reflexive essay also explores that the thematic priorities of the poetry and its inspiration which is rooted in a historical, Jewish and South African context. In the space of the poetry it is re-narrated, negotiated and struggled with and at times experienced without the mediation of conscious thought, to produce alternative meaning and the possibility of selfhood. It explores the responsibilities of a poet to her community. Further, that the writing of poetry contains within it the possibility of extending that which is personal and contextualised into a spiritual or universal experience.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Shelley Ann Rachbuch

2nd day of June 2005.

Dedication

This anthology is dedicated to
my daughters: Kayla Leah
and Temima Sarah.
Mein kindelach, so shein.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr Michael Titlestad for his intellectual guidance, inspiration and unwavering confidence in my abilities. Dr Ashleigh Harris for her wisdom and support, especially with regard to ethical responsibility and writing. Nanette Page for her friendship and encouragement to write and begin the journey toward authentic selfhood. My Yiddishe Mama and my Dad for their love and financial assistance. The members of my creative writing workshops held at the University of the Witwatersrand, during 2003 and 2004.

Volume of verse:

Wandering through water

Sukkah

1.

An awning of palm leaves
hung with strands of straw
knotted to: rich scented pine cones,
dewy apples, tiny coloured strings
of light, dates, figs and brown bottles
of oil, flour and wine

Rests on scarved walls, thread with silver,
and crayoned children's dreams. Inside
candelabras burn, and the smell of
roses cut at their heads —
lie in tumblers of water.
We toast, He who took us to the desert
to roam in poetry.

2.

The thunder calls out its warning
and we eat the round raisin loaves,
dipped in honey.
As the first droplets of liquid
crystal, fall on our hair,
slide down our eyelids, and kiss
our tongues.

The hostess sighs as the pine cones
drip and swing, her children's
visions are soaked, and the lights
flicker and hiss.

Following her lead, guests clutch
wet glasses and slippery
forks in their palms and
run in the rain,
cursing and laughing
to the house.

I linger under the awning
holding a tumbler of roses,
and wet knives.
Watching the shell like cloud empty
itself, stretching out its whirring middle,
and loosening its load

3.

Lightning, standing on the
blind roof outside,
points to the secret dry dunes of
shells, crushed
after being roamed
on for forty years.

And in a soundless moment,
before the wind and the door —
I see the desert has moved,
since we walked with Him,
leading in a cloud of glory.

4.

She spoons onto waiting
gold embossed plates — slices of meat
in a red wine sauce; chicken roasted
in olive oil, garlic and sweet peppers;
butternut sweetened with brown sugar
and cinnamon.

Steam rising, fogs up
the cottage pane windows, hidden
beneath cascades of satin curtains,
and erasing the rain.

The conversation like a jazz jam,
follows its own internal rhythm.
The speakers joined, by underlying
magical soul cohesion :
that dissipates on the street
by morning.

5.

I open a window, to let out some heat
and see that the rain
continues to fall softly.

The hostess clears the table and
serves — strawberries on meringue
boats, topped with non dairy cream;

chocolate mousse annointed
with mint leaves ; baklava dripping
with nuts, cinnamon and syrup —
with fresh black Brazilian
filtered coffee.

6.

'It's the roaming, that was It
in the desert.' I say, between
mouthfuls of chocolate mousse.

'Roaming?' His mouth dripping
syrup, nuts and flakes of pastry.
'No. It was Hashem leading us
from the thick, stone sphinxes.'
'Yes. But
roaming is the searching for Him.'

He eats.
'We are still roaming,' I argue,
'amongst our gold embossed plates,
non dairy cream and Brazilian coffee
beans.'

'Interesting.' He returns to the
sweetness, scraping the syrup
with a little fork. 'Could I have
some more?'

7.
I return to the dripping palm awning
and look up at the stars. Still there,
guiding a lone fisher woman on
her small boat. Casting her nets out,
then in. Patient in her wandering
through water.

I take the wet again, knife. And cut
down the three brown bottles.
Oil for memory, wine for forgetfulness
and the flour shaken: a white cloud
above me, and then kisses on my
shoulders — poetry.

Stones

My grandfather did not
have a clock, but
a slim leather case —
filled with precious stones,
flattened into ovals, dyed and
carved in numbers.

We'd play with them my
brother and I —
monopoly with stones.

I'd conjure him
playing alongside us
around the green felt
covered table, holding
velvet cards in his big hands
and winning, with whisky
lolling on his tongue.

My brother and I
angered sometimes, at
each other's — many
red plastic hotels,
green houses, and fancy streets,
would throw the stones.
And my grandfather would nod
and point and say:
'This is how luck left me
(striking the table). In a tantrum.
Staining the felt here,
leaving bile there.'

Once a year we visit the white,
greying stones, which cover
his sand casing now.
And each visit to this:
his final earthy place
is marked out by us,
with stones veined with
mud, and engraving time.

Blue

At the Coronia hotel in
Berea, my Bobba moved
from floor, to floor. In her
orange and green pant suits,
and blue rinsed, teased hair.
A cigarette, forever dangling
from the edge of
her red-lipsticked mouth.

She played cards
one week at Clarice's,
another at Sonia's
and 'At that Old vuman.
She's seventy two,
(she shakes her head),
'But nu, what can I do. I don't
have choices. Like you mein
einkelach.' And she'd hold
my chin, up to hers
where, I watched her smoke
unravel
way past the heavens.

On Mondays she'd rushed off
to the OK Bazaars
in Commisioner Street
for milk,
boxes of Courtleigh Satin Leaf
and strawberry flavoured wafers.
She ate supper in the dining hall,
visiting us on Sundays for a braai

in her own pale blue Ford,
with beige interior and
pin-punched steering wheel cover,
which she held between
her gloved hands.

A sad ending when
that 'Meshugana nurse,
jumped off the top of the Coronia
and landed on mein roof .'

A blessing my family said:

‘Now she can’t drive around
at ninety kilometres plus,
leaving motorists staring after
one so blue-haired
and small.’

When she died
I found an Ouma rusks tin
full of photo-postcards of women
in crushed velvet dresses, and wigs.
Their hands
carved from kneading, peeling,
and wringing out
the future.
That came to death by gas
and fire and bullets.

I ask her in my dreams and she
tells me: ‘For you, mein kind.
For you (she lights another).
To be, what ve couldn’t.’
And I wake up and look at my
hands, veined and feel the sweat
wet. And wish that I had her —
blue Ford to take me there.

Family Album

The women in my family
cry a lot —
My Bobba at my brother's
coming of age,
could not find her way up
the stairs, to her seat.
'Ich bin blint' she said.
(My mother said, 'Mama, please').

My auntie Ethel
at her Cyrildene house,
would play with the curls in
my brother's hair —
'Kindelach so shein.'
And she'd take tissues from
the pocket of her blue and white
checked housecoat
wipe her eyes,
and offer us cake that was always
in the oven.

Ethel's husband tore his white shirt
and sat on a hard bench for a week.
'My son is dead' he said.
He called and said 'Mama, please.
I love you too.'
And she'd cover her eyes
and put the phone down.

My aunt Miriam
would invite us into her council
flat in Netanya.
She always wore black
and long sleeves, even in Hamsin
(one day she absently pushed up
her sleeve, and there was a cattle
stamp on her arm).

She was a huge woman
who'd take us to the kitchen table,
covered in a red-striped cloth.
She'd bring hot kugel, tsimmes
and kreplach to the table.
We'd stare at the steaming dishes

sweating.
My mother would say 'Eat'
though we had understood.

Miriam's sister, Esther
looked like she had self-imposed
anorexia. My mother said she
couldn't keep much down
since Dachau —
her stomach had shrunk.

My mother tells again.
'Do you know why I am ?'
(and the hollows under her eyes are
already filled before she is finished).
'My aunt — Pesah, drowned
in soil when they had no
gas and bullets left.'

As a child I'd lie in bed.
What if my mother was never.
And her aunt was
wearing her hair down, curled —
would I be hers?
I'd comfort my eyes
on my ' Love is' duvet.

I came home with the man —
my mother played violin on
the stereo, lay on her back
the carpet her cushion,
hand over her eyes.
'This is the Jewish soul you hear,
but cannot feel.'

He sat in his old jeans
and hand knit cable jersey and
nodded kindly (it's beautiful?).

She only saw hitler and
her mother's parents, and five
aunts and uncles —
who stare out from
their photographs
with Yiddish on the back —
blinded

by the flash.
(She looks at me, ‘how can you
forget? And I say:
Mama, please. I love you too).
I still do and can’t forget
(the cable jersey).
I chose the black and white
photographs and didn’t add
to the album,
another girl who wanted to
wear red stockings
under her worn, grey dress.

The Wedding Canopy

Framed by the sun, getting
a last look through the trees
at what was left of the day,
the black and cream striped
prayer shawl
rose and fell, rose and fell
to the rhythm
of the four men clasping
their fingers around,
its four fringed corners.

The white-laced, red-rosed bride
swayed towards it
held up, by the elbows
by the man who loved her
and the woman
who loved her more.

Ten bearded, black-hatted men sang:
the sound rising up
heavenward, leaving behind
only a trail of tears —
down the women's faces.

The groom climbed a kopje
to get to the shawl,
alone
like David plucking at his harp

and still the shawl
rose and fell, rose and fell.

I wept at the figures drenched
in dappled red and gold
and all at once thought of you,
and then for a second saw
the redness of your skin —
no voice, no burning bush,
nor splitting sea.
Just your skin
amongst the shaking
stockinged legs
and breathless hair.

The prayer shawl and you —
the milk and meat of my life
which I could not mix
and loved equally and
separately

and then the shawl rose up in its
final fall,
and the men danced backwards
clapping and chanting:
leading husband and wife
away from it,
as the last of the stars
came out in the sky.

Cinderella

After the candles are
blown out, and the puppet
voice man is gone
away with Cinderella
and her Prince,
the little-bowed girls see

the stars are made
of cardboard, which
hang on lines of
streamers
(washed white)
and stuck
to the roof, with
sticky tape.

They chatter and pull
at them and
I think of us,
under
the white-washing wire:
that knots
where the pegged puppets
lift and fall—
whipped windward.

I wonder if Cinderella
did the washing after she
kissed him,
and if she now also sees
how silly we look
alone
in our red-lipsticked mouths
and glass slippers,
hanging soiled laundry
from string —
our Princes alive only
under ribboned
cardboard skies.

Mikveh

Only seven steps to renewal —
to the waters caught in a tank,
dropped from the heavens
and poured into a bath: forty seah —

I stand after sunset
after my twelfth clean day
in my white bath towel
before the door, waiting.
I look at the combful of my hair
and an earbud wrapped in wax,
in the bin,
and massage my feet
that I have in preparation
scraped, rubbed and freed
of my walks
on His
muddy thick, earth.

The attendant calls me and
I stand before her
and try —
to remember the woman
reciting psalms in the foyer,
her head bent in supplication
an aura of white
around her figure
praying for another child —

But I keep slipping,
and she with her buttoned neck,
borrowed hair, tight lily stockings,
and tired womb steadies me
though I don't want her to.

I give in.
She checks my hands —
those that have planted roses
and lilies and sought out weeds;
then my feet —
that have walked with me
in the circles, thorned;
my back —

that has lain under
acacias and cursed the stars.
I try
to remember that this is
one hour in a whole month —
but a man
draped in tallis and tefillin,
thanking Him
for not making him a woman
flutters over my memory.

She holds my towel up
and asks me to tell her
when I'm at the bottom —
(of myself?)
of a bath at sunset, forty seah.

My fingers and toes
spread wide, my hair covered
by a canopy of water,
she pronounces me kosher —
(like the steak I ate last night?)
for Adam,
so we can join to his lost self
in bright white.
Bloodless.

Tell Me

I want to ask him to tell me —

how his wife
eats chocolates with truffle centres,
and smoked cigars in a loft
long ago,
with a boy who played
saxophone
and how she listened to
the floorboards creaking
as she gave her kiss
away.

How I see my life
in monotone,
as I ash
what's left
of my story
into the air.

How he sometimes forgets:
to brush his teeth
and pat the dog
in his rush to the car,
dripping coffee
down
his shirt front.

How he's forgotten
not to want my mouth
on his.

But I don't.
I have waited so —
for those cigar smoke rings
to kiss the air again and
to know that
I am made of saliva:
sticky and wet
and as bad as he.

Tiger

The tiger moves slowly
stridently, through the suburbs.
There are houses on either side
of the tar road,
and I'm not afraid

in the enclosure of my small car,
children, calm on the back seat.
I find the house:
his car parked
in the circular driveway.

I get out and he is leaving
the house,
smiling at me
but shaken.

The man there has spoken of
others and not us,
and we soulfully kiss.
He comes out the house,
and smoke rises
from a dead chimney.

He waves his finger, and tells
us 'No'.
The tiger enters the gate and
moves past us to rest
on the woven mat,
in front of the door.

I tell him I love him,
and he, like the smoke
disappears
leaving me alone with the tiger,
stretched out on the mat.

Tzoras

When Tzoras comes to visit:
I pull up a soft leather couch
for him,
try to settle his floating head
on a feathered cushion and
place a hot water bottle
(wrapped in sheepskin)
where I think his tired
formless feet are. I give him
my tales to read
with a glass of thick red wine
I keep in my cellar.

I sing to him, all the while:
hoping he will also hear
David's harp.
We get drunk together —
his head remains light as ever
and mine, bellows with arguments.

I go to sleep to that place :
where we can talk in tongues
we both understand.

I try to tell him there,
that I have learned so —
he can go.

But he is hard to corner,
being a liquid gift.
He reminds me that I'm
unfinished,
and that I'm not so kind:
the sheep skin
I put at his feet
(like a modern day Abraham)
is parched and separated flesh.

I try to hear his echoing voice
but it comes to me in overlapping
waves of undulating sound.
Still I wave
and dance barefoot, for him
to the harp's fingered strains.

He pours the ruby wine
over my head and it trickles down
leaving tails and stains
on my cheeks:
the only trace of our meeting.

At death they come

At death they come with kugel,
blintzes, herring and kichel —
they sit on the hard bench
with you, and let you weep
and talk only when
your dry lips, can break
open your voice.

At weddings they dance around
you in circles
with such fervour, that
the sprung floor boards jump.

After birth they wipe their
cheeks from mother's tears —
and caress small limbs,
tying knots of string
and Blessings
to the pram's hood.

This in the beginning: my covered
head bows —

They hold her pale hand
when she is stuck in bed
and make her thick chicken soup,
in the nine days.

They speak loudly of he,
who takes his Torah and mixes it
with stars and the lotus flower —
and they bow towards
his mouth.

She wears Mona Lisa's smile,
and doesn't wear sandals —
'not modest' she says,
touching her hair,
covered with a sock.
She prays on her knees
whispering in His ear.

They come to the Birthday party
and ask if the cake, sweets,

balloons and chocolates
are Parev
(They're your friend
and the Rabbi's wife).

This in the middle: my covered head
shakes —
(don't look, remember before)

When a car rolls over a woman
leaving her limbs cold
they beg him in David's psalms,
staining their books with tears.

The man pins the lotus flower
to the woman's naked breast
(she is on her knees, whispering in
his ear).

A friend comes home
with your daughter,
her curls stretched against
her scalp into a bun and
her hemline sweeping the floor.
At four, she will only eat bread
and drink water in
a glass cup — plastic may break
His word.

This in the middle end: my covered
head sinks —

They share a business and he steals
my covering,
and throws it on a lonely sand road.
There are no trees or butterflies
left.

You make your husband lunch in
a box everyday and put
down the phone when he opens the
front door —
They said, if you do this
you Will be
his queen.
(He's king, you're not).

The girl wears clothes to her
ears, plaits challahs and
and makes candles after school.
(The word, the word, the word,
It's on the black board.)

You look at her and want her
to gyrate to music
and chew bubblegum.

There is no end: I free my
hair, pulling my fingers through
the curls.

You go and listen to the ram's horn
and you bend your knees, and shake
and beg, that you won't have to wipe
your words off the black board:
chalk dust in your nose, ears, mouth
(and start again).

The Jacarandas

She wears her tresses in
lengths of angular coils, clothed
in the flowing memory of buds
and peeling bark.

The wind comes to play with her
and they dance like lovers.
Her lavender flowers caught
in the turbulence
fall between her toes,
making a purple blanket
that squishes
under a boy's feet.

He hides beneath her canopy
holding out his compass and
wipes his test tube
against his sodden pants.
He shivers and whispers to her
to the rhythm of awakening crickets:
the secrets of her perfumed flowers.
'Its all just cause and effect,' he says
to the rhythm of the green world
swallowing his words,
'cause and effect'.

'And the rings, and chimes,'
she whispers back, her tresses
wild from love making:
'The rings and chimes,' she says
waving to the passing wind,
'of the uncaught wind and whistles.'

Bella

She lives in a small house
in Orange Grove,
an Italian woman
who when we first met
had long black hair
and still, big brown eyes.
She calls me 'Bella'
and shortens the hemlines of my new
printed, embroidered or laced skirts.

With pins in her teeth, her featherless
parrot saying 'Hello, pretty boy',
and 702 handing out
needling opinions —
she measures and lifts and
pins, and asks if the length is
— okay ?

I always nod, even though
I'm not sure and she leads me back
to the street, past her garden
of transcendence:
Azaleas grow amongst agapanthas,
mielies, lettuce, trailing sweet peas,
roses, red peppers and little pink daisies.

If I speak to her long enough,
she takes me across the broken
paving to her backyard —
there in peeling white pots,
grow orchids, so.
I try to tell her how so,
and she says, in her now
grey long hair, pinned up absently
'It's nothing, Bella. Nothing.'

She won't hear my protests
as she picks one for each of
my little girls, like it isn't a
miracle.

She laughs in my dreams
and tells me:
'It's small. All the world.

And, it's not Bella.'
'But it is,' I tell her,
'remember your hair down
your back, and your orchids so,
in your crumbling backyard.'
Bella.

A garden in a glass

My uncle brought us
a garden in a glass,
when we were living in our
stone floored flat, in Herzelia.

In Hamsin we'd close the shutters
and sit in the dark, dripping and
drunk from the heat,
draped
on the brown velvet couch,
looking into the glass

seeing the summers
by the pool in Sandton:
picking peaches and plums,
that pushed at their skins
with their juice. Together,
we bobbed in the pool:
chlorine and juice mixed
on our tongues.

Our home in a glass —
bore those
fruit from memory
and fresh pomegranates.
But, when we strapped it on
our backs and came home —
its fruits wrinkled and rotted.

The glass now stands empty
in my attic —
where it collects dust,
and a spider
that grows fat
in the darkness.

Some nights, she comes
to me:
'It would be so
good
to have the garden back.'

No. I tell her,
seeing the couch again

and wishing her away.
She stretches a leg and
moves closer.
'It was only a dream,'
she whispers
(sounding like an ancient seer
in a tent,
holding a glass ball)
'a hot dream, of summer
in the desert.'
She feels my neck,
moves up and then
evaporates.

I wake up sweaty and wet,
my duvet crumpled and
flung aside, and open the
window
watching, waiting:
for time and the wind
to break open my uncle's
gift of frail glass.

My brother and I

My brother and I would
play at the far end of the
garden, under the peach
and apricot trees.

He, the cowboy with
silver plastic coated guns,
and I the Indian, dress
tucked in my panties and
found feathers in my hair —

At the click of the trigger
I'd die a dramatic death,
hand to heart, on top of
the compost heap.
He'd have to beg me
to Rise, again.

I so loved the rich, thick
compost, the leaves tickling
my neck and arms, apple
peels brown and simmering
at the edges, filling my eyes.

We'd squash dung beetles
just to hear the crack
of their carapaces and
tear leaves slowly,
greenest green inside,
down
to their stems.

We heard Mother's voice
only when we had to,
the peaches now shadows
in the dark
and rush to scrub off
for supper.

Father's shouts were nodded
at, silently gulping, all
those words that I could
speak, in the compost heap.

Now grown, I preside over
three course meals: in a
spotless dining room,
smoothing my long skirt
over my knees, and smiling
prettily at the guest Kings,
having their say.

And I argue rigorously
and poignantly,
my brother clapping for
me, back at the
compost heap.

I fear that I shall die there,
drowning in soil.
She's a shadow,
they will say, passing their
hands through me.

I'll give you my sheriff's
badge he says, unclipping
Father's prefect brooch
from his shirt.
You've got to. There aren't
any Indians left.

And the Fathers saw

And the fathers saw
that women were made
with curves of moving light

that could mould men.
So they covered them
in the word:
Modesty.

And the fathers saw
that, what the women
couldn't read
they might never think.
So they took away
Books
on the order of things,
and gave them the stories
and ways of Goodness.

And the mothers saw
in their piety,
what the fathers saw
in their solemnity.

So, they laid themselves
out on a wooden altar
and burned,
showering black ash
across the ages.

And their daughters born on
the sacrificial wood,
sweated too
beneath their
heavy garments. Their mouths
blackened from chewing coal:
their labour of prostration.

Some thought they saw hope,
in the smoke
rising
and sought forbidden books
from the libraries
of quiet imprisonment and

shelved illumination.
Amid their fathers cries,
as they tore at their beards
and begged Him
in their piety
for forgiveness,
the daughters
fed their heavy garments
to the pyre.

Some remained though
(in their guilt over
the shredded beards)
but others arose,
held their mothers
and kissed their foreheads.

And then read
until the daylight
matched their curves.
That twirled and whirled
and re-annointed, sight.

Bells

No-one hears them
but I; brassed on a shop
shelf, and up, large
towered —

All clanging, and wild.
Silent
to the rushers by: in
work hootered cars,
shelved dreams, and women's
voices, gone throatless and
mild —

They swing and sing
and beckon and wait
for me — who resists as
mad, the holes they leave
in their pathways to late.

Vanilla House

I sat in his big red car
my head against the rest,
and looked up at our vanilla
house, thick and tall against
the clouds —

Closing my eyes, I dragged
on columns of smoke and
looked back up

at the black clouds sucking
at the vanilla
and licking it,
with its wet tongues.

And wondered:
How had I come to the long
oak lined driveway,
and how I couldn't
follow its length
to the front door,
open it and
go in, turning my back
from the mystery.

How I couldn't :
tell him about it,
the clouds,
their hunger,
and the taste of vanilla.

Windows

I dreamed of
a small room with
one window which slid open
to a pattern of red and black
bricks, grouted with cement.

I told the men with hard hats:
'No. There is no view.'
And they tried to move it,
but didn't know how.

So, I took them to a building site,
but there, the windows looked
at walls and the people
were blind.

I took a pick and chipped away
at the bricks, until I saw
a hole of blue.

And then, exhausted, I lay on my bed.
And stared out the hole,
and breathed.
And the red-skinned man,
squinting from the light
of it, promised
to break out the rest.

I looked at him,
nodding,
and saw the checkerboard
in his plaid shirt,
and I took him in my arms
and loved him so
we became a tornado
of spiraling, light.

When I awoke, the
hole had spread and
the light, now played on:
the tiled floor, the plastered
walls, the bedspread,
and his abandoned shirt.

Liz

I watched Elizabeth,
rolling pastry
and then chopping the nuts,
her shaven head
in a pink doek,
her feet bare
against the stone floor,
and her overall stretched
across her buttoned breasts.

'Madam,' her eyes sought mine,
'my eyes are paining me.'
I looked down and promised
to take her to the eye doctor
on my day off;
when school holidays were over —

But my girls needed
party dresses: 'Those ones,
with the bows at the back',
and I wanted violet eyes
like Liz Taylor.

'My eyes are paining me,'
she said, wiping the tears
with the back of her palm.
I saw more droplets pricking
at the corners and
sliding slowly down
thick globules, of jellied pus.

I covered my purple, tinted
eyes and wished I was Liz:
giving orders behind her
dark glasses,
propped up
on goose feather cushions,
in her heated
satin four-poster bed.

I paid for her glasses, but then
I saw:

all the baklavas
dripping with syrup
that she had made,
were her visions and
I'd stolen and eaten them
on our broekie-laced terrace,
watching the roses grow.

Now, I want to take her glasses —
from around her soft ears —
and smash them
under my black,
bought heels.
And ask Liz, to dinner.

The cot

I saw you in your cot today
crying,
abandoned at two months
in a naartjie box, naked
but for a red lipstick mark
on your cheek.

A woman, who just got out of
her BMW, at twenty five
in her long blonde hair,
and her burnished brown skin
found you, outside
the shopping centre
where she bought:
spicy perfume, bottled peppadews
for her quiches, magnolia-scented
bubble bath, Belgian chocolate
and ribbed condoms.

She put you on the back seat
of her BMW, together with
her other parcels
and drove you at eighty
kilometres an hour
to St. Anne's home on the hill.

There she deposited you into
the sweating arms of a nurse:
suggesting that you call
the child
'Moodley'.

Mother

Mother lies between them.
She sees the light
from her toes,
curling up
and then over her head
and between their spaces.

She blesses the
threads of white:
which stretch
around and around

weaving
more blue white,
around the one
whose joy
bounces on the mattress:
up and over !
Moving fast-past
like little white signs
pointing to towns:
tinier and tinier
(through the mud-splashed
back window of the car).

Then the lengths of white
cross over:
like a freeway
leaving with the offramps,
and joining with the onramps

weaving
more yellow white
over the one,
who weeps:
Moving slowly
like a drip
falling
into a girl's veins
(her arms resting
on a white-steel bed.
Her mother
saying Tehillim, and
stroking her fingers).

She is so pulled and stretched,
like highway lights,
running together
in the distance
but each
one
against the night sky,
threading her being.

Away

I watched the roses turn
from pink to white,
threaded beads to make
a red hot chilli pepper
on a wire,
drank
coffee in Melville, watching
the fairy lights swing
in the overhanging trees,
wandered around the house
lost
amongst loved books and
old photographs.
And still I couldn't sleep.

I dared myself to
enter their room: where their
beds stood empty, and their
pillows missed their shape.
I imagined them back
and saw
a leg hanging
over the mattress's edge,
the pink duvet thrown aside,
their curls squashed against
the wrinkled sheets.
I smelled their skin:
a mixture of milk, spit
and shampoo.

I got into bed with them,
and whispered,
lifting stray curls:
'Its okay. Mommy's here.'

Glass

I wonder, she thought,
when a glass falls:
whether it imagines,
as it's suspended
between air and earth,
how beautiful it was.

If the bearer of champagne,
hears the crunch:
of past celebration,
she now chews, leaving splinters
in her gums, so they hang like
another set of chattering teeth.

Whether her tongue,
once the liquor of love,
feels itself drained:
and served
like a cow's on a platter,
dripping with
mustard sauce.

If her voice,
believes itself, still fluted
and crystal in the garden of
abundant Eden,
even though it
sticks in her throat like,
a blob of unblown glass.

She wonders, when the glass,
falling out her ring forever,
now mixing
her bowels: smells dead
cow and mustard and apples
and honey and hot.
She wanders.

My paper camera

I stand behind
my paper camera,
drawing with light:
men dancing in a circle
on a square carpet,
holding a herb from
the desert and a lemon;
the surprised dew
on a spider's saliva at
sunrise;
a dog playing
with his dig —
once a rose bush,
and little boys
on a Friday afternoon
carrying their mother's wig
on a polystyrene head,
side curls flying.

I play like the developer
with these and others,
like the birds and men
and tulips I made
quietly,
with the night light
on my bedroom wall:
my home made cinema
when I was small.

Still, I hide under
the sheets
from it,
behind
the billowing black curtain:
which watches
clap, clapping
against the panes.

Reflexive Essay

Inspiration: The beginnings of a poem

The verse contained in the anthology was inspired by a variety of sources: emotional states, intellectual or philosophical concerns, images, 'magic', dreams, memory and imagination. They are explored with reference to poems such as *'Away'*, *'Mikveh'* and *'Bella'*, with reference to other poems in the anthology and the works of other poets.

Some of the poems in were affective in inspiration. For example '*Away'* was inspired by a conscious longing which I sought to express, and is therefore largely descriptive of a lived reality. I wrote it to calm an all encompassing and therefore immobilising emotional state. It seemed to me that if the emotional and behavioural energy was encapsulated in a poem, the lived reality would become more reasonable and 'sane'. This transformative nature of 'art' (see below for further discussion) is explored by Yeats in his poem ***'The Circus Animal's Desertion'*** in which he describes how poetry may originate from a variety of unlikely and surprising sources such as 'the sweepings of the street', and transform them into '(t)hose masterful images':

> 'Those masterful images because complete
> Grew in pure mind, but out of what began?
> A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,
> Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
> Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut
> Who keeps the till...'
> (Yeats 1987:392).

While other poems such as '*Mikveh'* were also affective in inspiration, they reveal emotion rather than record it. The poem therefore becomes the vehicle through which a verbally inexpressible and a densely layered, conflicting emotion or intellectual confusion is explored. Robert Frost wrote (in Heaney 2002:21) " a poem begins as a lump in the throat, a homesickness, a lovesickness. It finds the thought and the thought finds the words." I find myself at such

moments, at my computer with an intense longing to write. I 'play' with phrases and words, usually by way of description of the person, place or situation which inspires the quagmire of emotion or conflicting thought, until an idea or emotion and then a poem begins to develop.

While both '*Mikveh'* and '*Bella'* began with a description of the subject, their inspiration was different. '*Mikveh'* was inspired by conflicting emotion and thought, '*Bella'* began with an image: of the dressmaker, standing in her backyard before her orchids which grew with great abundance from 'peeling white pots'. Images and moments such as this one, have been the inspiration for the poetry. They tend to adhere to my mind in a very visual way and are revisited in an attempt to understand their meaning or significance.

Other poems began with a phrase, and sometimes several phrases or stanzas, that popped into my head without preparation or explanation. Of this Heaney (2002:21) writes :

"The first emergence (of the poem) involves the divining, vatic, oracular function; the second the making function ... the best moments are those when your mind seems to implode and words and images rush of their own accord into the vortex. Which happened to me once when the line 'We have no prairies' drifted into my head..."

The first time this occurred to me, I was preparing for bed and 'My uncle brought us/ a garden in a glass' arrived as if by some magic (see below for further discussion). While the first phrase or phrases of a poem may appear almost effortlessly, the remaining stanzas and resolution requires much concentrated effort. There are however singular moments of immense joy, when a poem almost writes itself in a single sitting as in the poem '*My brother and I'*.

While '*My brother and I'* was written by some 'magic', its origin was intellectual or philosophical in concern. I had been reading Grewal's **Home and Harem** (Grewal 1996) for several days and had began thinking about my own past and present, how I have modeled and silenced myself by 'masculine' and religious conceptions of 'goodness' and 'beauty' and my conception of 'home'. For

example the conception of feminine 'goodness' is explored in '*My brother and I'*. Women and 'good girls' are supposed to, in orthodox, religious and 'masculine' terms, remain silent and accepting of their roles:

'Now grown, I preside over
three course meals: in a
spotless dining room,
smoothing my long skirt
over my knees, and smiling
prettily at the guest Kings,
having their say.'
(stanza 8)

The adherence to such ideology leads the speaker in the poem, to a deathly psychological place where she feels she is 'a shadow'.

Dream experiences also inspired some of the poetry. For example '*Bells'* was written when I awoke from a dream which I thought was personally significant. While poems such as this are a recordal of a 'lived' experience, their 'realities' are altered in the writing of the poem for purposes of coherence, clarity or purpose.

Memory has been described by such poets as Heaney, Hopkins, and Wordsworth as a rich resource for writing poetry. Wordsworth wrote in ***'Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey'*** :

' These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration: — feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure...'
(Wordsworth 1969:31)

He describes how memory enabled him to revisit 'beauteous' places for comfort and joy. In ***' I wandered as lonely as a cloud'*** he further describes how memories are a great source (wealth) of inspiration:

'I gazed — and gazed — but little thought
What wealth the show had brought:

For oft when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills...'

(Wordsworth :2005)

Memory has played a similar role in my poetry, for example in my earlier poems such as '*Blue'* where the speaker remembers time spent with her Bobba and the restoration of what Wordsworth describes as 'unremembered pleasure':

'And she'd hold
my chin, up to hers
where, I watched her smoke
unravel
way past the heavens.'

This is also evident in later poems such as: '*My brother and I'*, where the speaker revisits childhood joys of dressing up as 'the Indian, dress/ tucked in my panties, and/ found feathers in (her) hair'. Memory has been the inspiration for verse and been utilised as a method for re-narrating the past. Perhaps as Edna O'Brien stated, in an interview with Phillip Roth (Roth 2002:103), with regard to the sharpness of her memory that: "It's the price of being a writer. One is dogged by the past-pain, sensations, rejections, all of it. I do believe that this clinging to the past is a zealous, albeit hopeless, desire to reinvent it so that one could change it."

I have found that the poetic space is a place where the struggles of thought, emotion and circumstance may be expressed, with little interference. Stampfer (1971: xiii) writes in this regard "poems are not simply art objects, but successive grapplings with the concerns of the poet's imagination." Looking back on the poems I have written over the past two years, I can trace my "successive

grapplings", not only with what Stampfer describes as "the poet's imagination", but engagement with my lived 'realities' (for example the childhood memories in *'Family Album'*). I have found that in the writing of poetry, my memory magically as Raban (in Korte 2000:11) puts it: "feeds the irrelevancies to the shredder, enlarges on crucial details, makes links and patterns, finds symbols, constructs plots." (This is explored further in the account of my 'working method').

My verse has also served as a mechanism for recording the past and offering some form of resolution, or exploring the way in which it resists resolution. For example I was inspired to write '*Family Album'* to deal with the memory of the man who 'sat in his old jeans/and hand knit cable jersey and/nodded kindly (it's beautiful?)'. The poetry therefore enabled examination of personal history and spirituality and became a psycho-spiritual endeavour.

Working Method: The making of a poem

It is difficult to describe my working method once a poem has begun, since I have not developed or followed a singular procedure. Each poem has a unique development, which is dependent on the strength or weakness of its initial 'outpouring'. I will however trace the development of '*Cinderella', 'Family Album'* and '*Mikveh'* with reference to other poems in the anthology and those of other poets who have influenced my poetic style, since together they map the elements of my working method.

Once the idea or beginning of a poem has come to me, it is written with a complete lack of control: as a kind of outpouring. It usually has no ending or resolution (save for the singular moments aforementioned) or it is personally unsatisfactory. Before I revise or consider the 'outpouring' to be a poem, I find it essential to discover its ending by way of an obsessive reading and re-reading of it: I develop a compulsive relationship with the 'poem', so that it becomes my companion for days and even months. For example I read and re-read *'And the fathers saw'* until I was able to recite it without reference to the written text.

While engaged in my daily routines I recited it (in my head) in the hope that its resolution would arrive, which in this case it did.

If this 'method' is unsuccessful, its resolution may be found within the language or imagery of the 'poem' as was the case with '*Cinderella'* (originally named 'Stars in her eyes').

'Stars in her eyes'

After the candles are
out blown, the puppet
voice man gone; bows and
wrapping on the floor,
spent -
I see the stars are
of cardboard made,
hanging on lines of
streamers washed
white, stuck to the roof so -
sticky taped.

Little bowed girls, around
them chatter and pull,
and their colour crayons
press - leaving
bits steamed hard,
then run off sliding

To white washing wire,
knotting
where the pegged puppets:
lift and fall,
whipped windward -

I close my eyes, a conjurer,
blowing the party candles
back, to see before the after,
that I ; a failed
washer woman am -
girlish in a red dress and heels,
crayons out held, pulling
at a string and chattering.

Its resolution was incoherent and dissonant (as was the majority of the 'poem'). However I enjoyed its imagery: that of the puppet, of its speaker: 'girlish in a red

dress and heels,' who hangs washing on the line and the stars 'made/of cardboard'. To simplify the 'poem's' dense and complex imagery, I returned to the 'poem's' inspiration: a dream in which I looked up at the stars at a children's party and discovered that they were made of cardboard. In the following draft (see below), I re-wrote the first two stanzas, using the inspirational image as my guide:

'The stars are made
of cardboard. They
hang from lines of
ribbon. Stuck to the
sky with sticky tape.

Little girls, in their party
dresses stand beneath. And
when it's over, pull at them.
And chatter about the puppet
voice man. Who made
Snow White and her Prince,
come alive.'

I had learned, through workshop feedback and comments made during supervision, that coherence is often achieved through simplicity and a 'logical' progression of experience. I introduced the fairy tale character 'Snow White', to convey a practicality: the 'puppet/voice man' was a puppeteer who had performed the fairy tale, 'Snow White'. This approach led me to unify the image of the puppetry, its fantastical qualities, and that of the cardboard stars: 'stuck to the/ sky with sticky tape'. The chance introduction of the fairy tale character gave the 'poem' a thematic coherence, I had sought and which it had lacked. The speaker 'girlish in a red dress and heels', of the final stanza of the initial draft (who had stood out inexplicably), became in my mind linked to 'Snow White' (Cinderella in the later draft). I re-wrote the final stanzas:

'And wonder if Snow white
did the washing, after
she kissed him. And if
she also, now sees the
cardboard stars. How silly
we look in our red-lipsticked
mouths. And wishes the ribbons
would fly away, making the

stars shoot. And jiggle
the lines.

We are silly, in our red lipstick
and heels, hanging washing on
the line.
Without our princes who
live only under ribboned skies.'

The image of 'our red lipstick/**and heels'**, and that of the prince together (although four months later) led me to choose 'Cinderella' as the fairy tale character. I spent months then attempting to coherently distill the subject and themes of '*Cinderella'*. I had read a lot of Heaney's poetry and greatly admired his poem '***Harvest Bow'*** (Heaney 1990:128), because of his ability to contain all his thought and emotion in the description and body of one single object. I was also taken with Hopkins' fascination with the intrinsic quality of objects to capture *'the outward reflection of the inner nature of the thing'* (Gardner 1987:xx-xxii).
I wrote in my reflexive journal regarding *'Family Album'*:

'I think that perhaps, part of what worked in ' The women in my family cry' (renamed *'Family Album'*) was that I was able to distill each 'character' to a kind of essence (at least in how I viewed them). Although there was no single object or subject as in Heaney's ***Harvest Bow***, I felt (after a lot of work and obsession) that I could encapsulate my experience of the 'characters' in a single stanza.'

In order to achieve this in *'Cinderella'* I attempted to distill the metaphor of Cinderella and extend it throughout the body of the poem, by aligning the speaker 'girlish in a red dress and heels' (of the earlier draft) and the character Cinderella (of the later draft). I extended the image further by establishing a relationship between the puppeteer and Cinderella. In doing so: the character Cinderella, the speaker and the puppeteer all became part of a metaphorical unity which encapsulated my densely layered emotional and intellectual subject and paved the way to layered levels of meaning.

I found that such employment of more simple and economic language also contributes towards 'layers' of meaning. I had learned during workshop feedback and supervision that language and words have a virtually limitless complexity,

and the capacity for producing statements characterised by multiplicity, duplicity, and ambiguity (Marcus In Berman 1993:63). For example in the second draft of the second stanza of '*Bella'* I wrote:

> 'With pins in her teeth, her featherless
> parrot saying " Hello, pretty boy",
> and seven o' two handing out opinions
> like free condoms -
> she measured and lifted, and
> pinned, and asked if the length was
> - okay ?'

Dr. Titlestad pointed out that the image of the 'free condoms' was dissonant to the context in which it occurred. Consequently I rejected the image of the 'free condoms' and wrote '702 handing out **needling opinions**.' 'Needling' was selected because it was consistent with the other imagery of the poem and restricted potential ambiguities of meaning. It was also selected because it was consistent with the imagery of: 'measured', 'pinned' and 'shortened'.

I adopted a similar approach in '*Cinderella'*. I looked at both the aforementioned drafts and sought to combine them, by firstly rejecting those images which were inconsistent and ambiguous with those of the others in the 'poem'. For example I rejected the image of the crayons (of the first draft), because although they may belong to the world of childhood and fairy tale in their potential imaginative sense, they merely served as a distraction rather than a method for furthering coherence and unity. I therefore also rejected the following: 'their colour crayons/ press - leaving/ bits steamed hard/ then run off sliding'. Although the words 'press' and 'steamed' were consistent with the 'washing' imagery, I felt that they perhaps were 'overloaded' with meaning: I had been trying too hard to make the crayon imagery consistent with that of the washing imagery, and to make a connection between them.

In order to enable the reader to understand the movement from the 'party' to the 'washing line' both logically and figuratively, I introduced what the 'little-bowed girls' first saw and then what they did: 'chatter(ed) and pull(ed)' at 'lines of/streamers'. The description of the streamers as '(washed white)', was

specifically bracketed to emphasize their relationship to 'us/ under / the white washing wire'. Further, their chattering and pulling at the 'stars' hanging on lines of streamers, leads the speaker to thoughts of 'us': 'under/the white-washing wire'.

I recognised that the description of 'the little-bowed' pulling at and chattering beneath the cardboard stars, related to the final stanza of the initial draft:

> 'that I ; a failed
> washer woman am -
> girlish in a red dress and heels,
> crayons out held, pulling
> at a string and chattering.'

Even though these lines were later rejected for reasons of clarity, they became enmeshed in my mind with the 'silliness' (of the earlier drafts) and the tragedy of belief in romantic notions of love and marriage. In the final stanza I introduced the lines: 'I wonder if Cinderella/ did the washing after she/ kissed him' to align the fairy tale with 'us'. Further I aligned childhood and its entertainment with the lived reality of adulthood, by the description of us as 'silly' (in its ironic sense) in 'our red-lipsticked mouths'. The 'glass slippers' were introduced in the final draft as they further thematically connected the fairy tale 'Cinderella', with the speaker's 'reality' in adulthood and the fragility of such an experience. In these ways the fairy tale was re-invented as a tragedy.

Through experimentation and guidance received during supervision and workshop feedback, when I edit and re-edit my poetry I seek words that best describe the experience, and those that in their seeming simplicity best convey inter-related and complex emotional and intellectual states. I recognised this initially, during the feedback I received in a workshop session, on '*The cot'* (the first poem I wrote for the course 'Lessons in Storytelling').

> 'A woman, who just got out of
> her BMW, at twenty five
> **in** her long blonde hair,'
> (stanza 2)

It was pointed out that the 'simple' choice of preposition conveyed the writer's experience of the woman and the thematic concerns of the poem ('Cot' was included despite its difference to most of the poetry in this anthology: it is polemical in nature, but was included because it reflects my 'development' as a 'poet').

An enormous amount of time is spent choosing the 'most' suitable word for a line in a poem. Thackery (in Sewall 1963:59-60) writes of Dickinson: "Her constant practice of compiling a thesaurus of word choices for a single line, while constituting grave editorial difficulty, is at least an indication that each word was a veritable dynamo of implications and associations." This can be seen for example when I edited '*And the fathers saw'*. I changed the word 're-anointed (sight)', several times. It had been 'changed' ,'re-sculptured', 'remade', 're-invented' and 're-figured'. '(R)e-anointed' was finally chosen, because it related to the religious and historical themes of the poem and described the complete transformation in a biblical fashion.

Although I did not spend an inordinate amount of time choosing any particular word when I edited **'***Cinderella'*, I did consider that describing the washing 'line' and the 'lines' from which the cardboard stars hung, in the same way would be repetitious and too 'obvious'. I therefore chose to describe the washing line in an unconventional manner as 'washing wire', intentionally drawing the reader's attention to its description and aligning its thematic connection to the cardboard stars. This effect was furthered by the reference to the 'soiled laundry' hanging on 'string'. String was specifically chosen to unify the images: 'us' hanging the washing, the puppet show and Cinderella (and her Prince).

I have employed metaphor in the poetic space, as a method for untangling the mystery of perceived or lived experience. Its use has been employed as Berlin (in Spence 1993:103) puts it:

"as neither mere embellishment, nor an addition to, nor distortion of reality, but the natural inevitably transient and only possible way of perceiving, interpreting, explaining that is open to a person of that particular time and place, at that particular stage of their culture."

I am not convinced though that the metaphors employed in my poetry, are the **only** possible way to imaginatively interpret the mysteries and illusions of my lived experience. Although the metaphors employed are largely reflective of personal identity (see for example '*Bells' and 'Mikveh'*) they are also representative of collective identity (see *'Cinderella' and 'Family Album').*

Although writers are a product of social, psychological and cultural histories their works (and so too the metaphors employed) need to have an independent existence. Heaney (2003: 344) admires Elizabeth Bishop's ability to write poetry that "can be read without any special knowledge of Bishop's life." Writers arguably prefer their works to exist independently of themselves. I wrote in my journal regarding Barthes' ***'Death of the Author'*** (1977: 142-8) in 2002:

'I have come to understand that although writers like everyone else in the world, are a product of their social, psychological and cultural histories they need to give enough to a reader in a work so that, they will not have to be consulted to interpret it.'

It is hoped that my verse should not require extensive research and consultation for the unraveling of its meaning. As Barthes wrote: "the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced.." Its 'meaning' should not fixed, for to do so would be to "impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing." (1977: 142-8).

Punctuation has been employed as a methodology to signify meaning in the poetry. My supervisor rightly pointed out that the punctuation in my poetry required attention. I tended to use a particular symbol, where it 'felt right' as opposed to where it served as an enhancement of meaning or clarification of the poetry. I learned that as Truss (2003:20) puts it " Punctuation herds words together, keeps others apart. Punctuation directs you how to read, in the way that

musical notation directs a musician how to play." The following is the final stanza of an earlier draft of '*Bella'*:

> 'She laughs in my dreams
> and tells me, It's
> small. All the world. And it's
> - not Bella.
> But it is - I tell her -
> remember your hair down your
> back and your orchids so
> in your crumbling backyard :
> Bella.'

The lines: 'She laughs in my dreams/ and tells me, It's/ small.', are problematical for several reasons. The lack of inverted commas, immediately preceding 'It's/ small', fails to indicate to the reader that there, begins a dialogue between the speaker of the poem and the dressmaker. Their insertion both clarifies and advances understanding of the poetry. The comma between 'tells me' and 'It's', although resulting in a pause fails to achieve what the colon does. The final draft's use of the colon ('and tells me:/ It's small.'), theatrically announces what is to come: the unexpected dialogue. Truss describes such use of the colon as a well trained magician's assistant, which pauses slightly to create expectation and reveals the trick.

The lines: 'And it's/ -not Bella', presented several problems. The employment of the hyphen was inappropriate. In fact I had wanted to use the dash (incorrectly though), to indicate dialogue and emphasize that the world was according to the dressmaker 'not Bella'. I found that by placing the phrase 'And, it's not Bella' on a separate line entirely, the desired effect was achieved and the opening inverted commas did away with the necessity of the dash to indicate dialogue.

In other of my poems I utilised the hyphen instead of the end dash. For example in '*Family Album'*, I wrote: 'The women in my family/ cry a lot -'. My supervisor pointed out that the hyphen should be replaced with a dash, and that I had been confusing them as they in fact serve different functions. The dash connects (or separates) phrases and sentences, while the hyphen is used to connect (or

separate) individual words (Truss 2003:158). The aforementioned lines required the dash, which created the dramatic disjunction I wished to employ for purposes of pathos. In '*Liz'* ('four-poster bed' and 'our broekie-laced terrace') and '*Cinderella'* ('little-bowed girls', 'white-washing wire', and 'red-lipsticked mouths') I came to admire the coherence a hyphen correctly employed could create. It also has in a sense enabled me to create a language of my 'own'.

I discovered that choice of punctuation could either create intentional 'ugliness' or typographical pleasure. For example in '*Liz'*, the line 'from around her soft ears', was specifically separated from its preceding and following line by the use of the dashes. Typographically they are far less soothing than commas, and since the speaker's confession is an ugly one, the dash was chosen for this purpose. In the later draft of '*Bella'*, the commas were chosen for the line: 'But it is,' I tell her,' for their fluidity and in keeping with the poem's concern with beauty and transcendence.

Regarding the use of descriptive words, I wrote in my writer's reflexive journal at the end of 2003:

"I need to learn not to use so many adverbs and adjectives in my writing. I should try to convey the feeling or thought by a description of the subject or circumstance. In writing often, less is more: I must give readers space to develop personal assessments or interpretations and so draw them into the story or poem."

The initial draft of *'Stones'* required extensive editing since it overstated the description of the stones (they were described both in stanza 1 and stanza 2 below). In order to rectify this I discarded the description of the stones (in bold) of the second stanza.

'My grandfather did not
have a clock, but
a slim leather case —
filled with precious stones,
flattened into ovals, dyed and
carved in numbers.

‘We’d play with them my
brother and I - monopoly
with stones. **Their coolness
against my cheek, their
taste on my tongue: almond
cigar smoke.**’

Contemporaneously however, being overly subtle may also distance the reader. For example one of the initial drafts of *‘Stones’* (stanza 3) was so discreet that it was incomprehensible:

‘He around the green felt
four legs
Won!
Then all gone.’

(Stones stanza 3)

To remedy it I re-wrote the stanza providing more detail: how the grandfather came to sit at the table (not simply ‘around the green felt’), and that he was a gambler. (The line ‘Then all gone’ was explored in the final stanzas, of the final draft).

‘I’d conjure him, playing
alongside us, around a green felt
covered table, holding
velvet cards in his big hands,
and winning, with whisky lolling
on his tongue.’

(stanza 3 *‘Stones’*)

During the editing process certain phrases are rejected not only for their inconsistency, ambiguity, or complexity. They may be replaced by that which is visually communicative. For example in *‘Cinderella’* the phrase ‘Without our princes’ was rejected, and ‘alone’ was chosen in its stead. ‘(A)lone’ was purposefully placed on a line of its own, to communicate its meaning in both a descriptive and visual way: it is the only word in the poem which stands on its own.

An entire poem may be rejected in the editing process, as was the case with a poem which was excluded from this anthology (it remains untitled). I felt that it was simply word play. Heaney refers to such poems as "verbal athletic display": those poems which do not engage with the self. I was inspired to write the poem, after I visited an elderly woman who was dying. Ambitiously, I wanted to explore approaching death and how it may be entirely different from a lived life. I read and re-wrote it a number of times over approximately one year, altered and re-figured the imagery, the speaker, the language and its composition, so that it emerged entirely 'new' when compared to its initial 'outpouring' (perhaps this is the reason Dickinson so eloquently wrote: "It is finished, can never be said of us."(in Sewall 1963:59)). Yet it remained a poem that failed to 'explode in silence/ without forcing, without violence', one that's music was not "strong and clear and good..." It was rejected because nothing happened inside me: no epiphany, nor experience (Heaney 2002:19).

Sometimes the mere choice of word leads to an unexpected revelation and an exploration of another level of meaning. For example in the search for a word to describe the garden in *'Bella'*, transcendence was chosen . This choice of word led to an exploration of the garden's existence as a spiritual experience, and the abstract ideas of miracle, transcendence and beauty. The language of poetry was then, the creative force which had the ability to penetrate that which was known and connect to that which was unknown. As Heaney puts it, "words themselves are doors." (Heaney 1980:52)

I learned by way of experimentation to represent what I saw in the physical world and simultaneously express its spiritual elements. I discovered that I was able to do so by initially placing the subject of the poem firmly in a physical reality. In '*Bella'*, I placed the dressmaker firmly in her home in 'Orange Grove'. Once I had done so, I was able with the progression of each stanza, to move her into a more spiritual and ultimately dream-like realm (see the third stanza as compared to the first two stanzas of the poem).

The sixth stanza of '*Bella'*, places the subject of the poem in the aforementioned spiritual realm. I was enabled to do so at this stage of the poem through the aforementioned reference to: 'transcendence' (stanza three), orchids as 'so' (stanza four), and 'miracle' (stanza five). Although these stanzas remain within the 'physical' realm, these references provided and 'set up' the transition to the dream realm. As an early poem, I found it essential to state: 'She laughs ***in my dreams***'. In some of my later poems I found the confidence through trial and error, to make such transitions without the necessity of such statements.

In '*Vanilla house'*, although the movement to the 'dream' experience was not specifically stated, it was clearly marked out for the reader: the subject 'looked back up' (stanza two), into the realm where:

> at the black clouds sucking
> at the vanilla,
> and licking it,
> with its wet tongues.
> (stanza three).

In later poems such as '*Windows'* I felt able to make transitions without 'guiding' statements, such as 'looked back up'. I came to realise that the poetic space contained within it the possibility, of a place where my subjects were not required to follow 'earthly' confinement of time, space and logic.

I discovered through the reading of other poets and by way of experimentation, to employ different devices to represent the world in a fashion best suited to my experience of it. For example in *'Sukkah'* I chose to use 'sensual' language. I read and admire the sensual nature of Keats' poetry for his ability to engage all the senses in the description of his subjects, consequentially enabling the reader to become immersed in his poems and experience them on a 'personal' level. His influence is perhaps most evident in '*Sukkah'* where I attempted to create clear visions in the reader's mind, by engaging the senses: sight: 'Rests on scarved walls thread with silver'; sound: 'The thunder calls out its warning'; smell: 'rich scented pine cones'; taste: 'chicken roasted in olive oil,/ garlic and sweet

peppers'; and touch: 'as the first droplets of liquid/ crystal, fall on our hair,/slide down our eyelids, and kiss/ our tongues'. Although these descriptions do not approximate Keats' genius, the reading of his work has been exceptionally valuable and instructive.

In the '*Bella'* poem on the other hand, I attempted to employ the power of silence. I felt that there were no words to describe the magic and beauty of the orchids. I wrote:

'there in peeling white pots,
grew orchids, so,
I tried to tell her how so,...'

I did not attempt to express the beauty of the orchids because I felt that language (ironically) was unable to communicate it. I felt that my reader could experience just how beautiful they were without and as a result of my failure to describe them. Dickinson similarly saw that "the most awe inspiring and significant things experienced in the external world are wrapped in silence and mystery". She was also concerned with the reason, words which ordinarily seemed capable of expressing emotion and thought, sometimes becomes inadequate. She wrote: "Is it that words are suddenly small, or that we are suddenly large, that they cease to suffice us (to thank a friend?)" (Thackery in Sewall 1963:65). Perhaps as Thackery writes: the increase in awareness of a person, is accompanied by a decrease in the effectiveness of words, to express the newly acquired excess of thought or emotion.

Therefore there are seemingly contradictory influences and methodologies in the approach to my verse, but as aforementioned each poem requires a unique application of poetic devices, experience and procedures. In this regard Heaney (1980:52) rightly discounts placing too much emphasis on this process: " ..it is dangerous for a writer to become too self-conscious about his own processes: to name them too definitively may have the effect of confining them to what is named."

Reflections: Poetry as a mirror.

A requirement of the Master's Experiments in Telling course, during the final semester of 2003, was the submission of five poems. The possibility of producing a volume of poetry arose from my experience of composing these poems. I have elected to work in the genre of poetry because in the writing of poetry, my voice began and continues to emerge. In the space of poetry a vehicle for communication has been discovered which best presents my experience of both the physical and spiritual aspects of life.

Lived 'moments' of personal significance tend to adhere to my mind in a very visual way. These moments are revisited in an attempt to understand their meaning or significance. Arguably this is similar to the form and structure of poetry which presents in the manner described the inner most longings, desires and difficulties of the poet and then attempts some form of resolution.

> 'Now, to pry into roots, to finger slime,
> To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring
> Is beneath all adult dignity. I rhyme
> To see myself, to set the darkness echoing.'

This final stanza of Heaney's poem '***Personal Helicon'*** (Heaney 1990:9) describes the heuristic nature of writing poetry which has clearly emerged in my experience of writing the verse in the anthology. Heaney in ***'Preoccupations'*** (Heaney 1980:43) refers to the development of his poetic voice to various 'selves' Regarding his poem 'Bogland' he states that childhood memories, cultural associations or beliefs, and his Irish nationality wove together in his mind to create the poem. Similarly I can trace these in my verse. For example in '*My brother and I'* childhood memories: 'He the cowboy with/ silver plastic coated guns,/ and I the Indian..', cultural beliefs: 'smoothing my long skirt/ over my knees, and smiling...' and Jewish consciousness: 'I fear I shall die there,/ drowning in soil..' together created the poem.

The tension between individuality and collective religious, historical identity created a personal struggle which is reflected in the poetry. As Yeats puts it 'Out of the quarrel with ourselves we make poetry' (O'Donoghue 1994:135). An example of this is the poem '*Mikveh'* which is concerned with the Orthodox Jewish ritual in terms of which, a married women is required to immerse herself in a ritual bath (a mikveh) of exacting proportions twelve days after her menstruation. During the twelve days she and her husband are forbidden any physical contact. When the woman goes to the mikveh she undergoes a 'spiritual rebirth.'

Various aspects of the Mikveh experience reinforce this notion of rebirth. The woman must have no ornaments or barriers between herself and the water, for her emerging from the Mikveh is analogous to the newborn leaving the waters of the womb (Appel 1995:1). The laws of Mikveh derive from the Torah (in Leviticus) and from Halacha (law).

'Mikveh' explores the woman's quarrel with herself and her religious, historical identity regarding this practice:

> 'I stumble but try
> to remember that this is
> one hour in a whole month —
> but a man
> draped, in tallis and tefillin,
> thanking Him
> for not making him a woman,
> flutters over my memory.'
>
> (stanza 6).

The writing of the verse has therefore required personal authenticity. I have come to recognise that as Woolf wrote so beautifully in ***Orlando*** (1928:167)***:*** ".. we write, not with the fingers, but with the whole person. The nerve which controls the pen winds itself about every fibre of our being, threads the heart, pierces the liver." I experienced the 'truth' of this statement in the writing of the poetry. Appiah (in Taylor 1994:154) points out that the development of individual

identity and so authenticity is developed through dialogue with one's society. A self is that which one creates or "makes up", so that a life is like an artwork whose "creator is, in some sense, his or her own greatest creation." There is a concept such as this in Jewish thought: that when a life is completed and a person stands before G-d, He will not ask why s/he, wasn't as great as the prophets, but why s/he wasn't the best s/he possible. As Browning put it: "My business is not to remake myself,/ But make the absolute best of what God made" (in Breathnach 1997: February 4).

The writing of poems such as '*Mikveh'* has led to an uncertainty as to where and if I still can call myself a 'religious' Jewess. In difficult moments such as these I attempt to work through it and consider the poetry as a personal reflection which may not necessarily question my commitment to Judaism. '*Mikveh'* may be considered by some to amount to betrayal, since it negotiates both within and without communal and religious structures. My supervisor suggested that I must remind myself that the poetry does not ridicule but rather reveals the rich complexities of belief and belonging. If I were to consciously avoid such complexities, I would not be able to write authentically and perhaps not at all. Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary (ed. Bell 1997:248) in this regard:

" Father's birthday. He would have been ninety-six, yes, today; and could have been ninety-six, like other people one has known; but mercifully was not. His life would have entirely ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books; -inconceivable."

(Monday 3 September 1928).

The question that arises is, what happens when the poet discovers part of him/herself of which s/he was previously unaware? Rivka Eiferman (in Berman 1993:450) describes her experience of the process of writing as leading to the examination of her inner world. She states that if the writer fails to work through what is encountered, his/her writing may be impeded or as in her case entirely held up (she further asserts that 'writer's block' may be the result of such failure). I discovered this when I wrote '*At death they come'*: until I had dealt with the issues relating to the ethics of writing, and personal and communal responsibility, I was unable to 'complete' the poem, nor begin another.

Memory has played a significant role in my verse (see aforementioned). It has also been an intersection between personal and social consciousness. Heaney writes regarding 'Bogland' that he had an unrealised need to make a congruence between memory, bogland and Irish national consciousness (Heaney 1980:54). This can be seen in my verse. For example: my great Aunt Miriam, represented in '*Family Album'*, lived in my memory as a painful personal reminder of the Holocaust and came to represent Jewish collective suffering and its consequences. As a child I wondered how many baths she must have had since the Nazis had 'stamped' her, and thought how it had never faded. This is symbolically represented in *'Family Album'* by its continuous hidden presence sometimes unconsciously revealed:

> '(one day she absently pushed up
> her sleeve, and there was a cattle
> stamp on her arm).'
>
> (stanza 4)

Her placement in the poem does not reinvent the past, but serves to provide significance to her unrecorded life (besides those of the Nazis' carefully documented records) and is an expression of memory and Jewish consciousness.

As AR Ammons stated at an international poetry convention in Pittsburgh, " Poetry is a verbal means to a non verbal source" (in Epoch 1968:114). The source, the unconscious, then exists outside the perimeters of language and is accessed through words and so expressed in poetry. Perhaps then, poetry becomes its voice and the poem is not only my voice, but the voice of my Aunt Miriam and those depicted in the '*Family Album'*. Phillips (2000:1971) writes: "The unconscious describes an apprehension that there are other minds - other, that is, than the one we easily recognise - going on inside us; that there is something inside us, and between ourselves and other people..." The role of the collective unconscious though at times incoherent, plays more of a role in the writing of poetry than we recognise. Heaney identifies its presence in his poetry

when he writes that " Little *did they* - or I - know that I would filch it ..." (Heaney 1980:54).

Similarly the operation of the collective unconscious is evident in my poetry, in such poems as '*Family Album':* '...hand over her eyes./ 'This is the Jewish soul you hear,/ but cannot feel.'(stanza 9). It expresses the Jewish belief (at times unconscious) that gentile communities, cannot and do not understand the extent of the collective suffering of the Jewish people. In '*Blue'* the collective unconscious is also reflected:

'I ask her in my dreams. And she
tells me. 'For you, mein kind.
For you. (She lights another).
To be, what ve couldn't.'
(final stanza)

It expresses that as a member of the Jewish community there is a responsibility to remember Jewish collective suffering and further, despite and as a result of 'freedom' from the physical and spiritual constraints of the past, there is a duty to remain within those boundaries (this is arguably an unconscious knowledge which is not necessarily directly communicated). It is a duty which leaves the speaker of the poem immobilised and unable to move 'forward' metaphorically or at all: 'to be, what ve couldn't' (final stanza). It is for these reasons that she:

'... wake(s) up and look(s) at my (her)
hands, veined, and feel(s) the sweat,
wet. And wish(es) that I(she) had her
blue Ford, to take me(her) there.'
(final stanza *'Family Album'*)

The verse creates the difficulty of translating a Jewish world for a gentile community. My supervisor and I have endlessly debated the necessity of translating Hebrew or Yiddish words and phrases, for the reader. He views translations as unnecessary as they tend to be adequately explained within the poems. Other writers use 'foreign' language in their work, without the provision of translation (see for example McCarthy's ***'the crossing'*** 1994 which includes large tracts of dialogue in Spanish which he doesn't translate for the reader) and such 'failure' in fact contributes to the work's meaning.

Aharon Applefield stated in an interview with Phillip Roth (2002:36): "What has preoccupied me and continues to perturb me, is this anti-Semitism directed at oneself, an ancient Jewish ailment which in modern times has taken on various guises... It took me years to draw close to the Jew within me." It is perhaps the anti-Semitic Jew within myself that is afraid of exposing and presenting Jewish thought and language. The source of this kind of self hatred suggests Taylor, (1994:36) is a consequence of the internalisation of an inferior, demeaning and oppressive image. The presentation of my poems then (without accompanying translations) seeks to remedy this on both a personal and collective level of identity.

The recognition of Jewish culture, thought and religion as valuable to Jewish identity formation is directed not only to a Jewish audience, but to the human community as a whole. Rockefeller states (in Taylor 1994:97):

" We also need an enduring sense of belonging to- of being a valued part of- the larger whole which is the universe...Moreover, from a cosmic perspective, all peoples together with their diverse cultures may well possess inherent value and belong in some ultimate sense."

This may be viewed as idealistic but such idealism has been the making of much of my poetry.

My development as a 'poet' and my 'working method' have emerged largely through the engagement of my supervisors with the initial outpourings of my

verse, while it was still in process. I learned to trust their judgment and suggestions because their supervision has not been polemical. They pointed out the difficulties in my verse and consequently I was enabled to recognise, and develop a method to deal with them. This was achieved largely by experimentation and my reading of other poets. Athough it is largely unconscious I have through their comments and my reading, developed a 'third eye' which is able to identify the 'problems' of the initial and later drafts of a 'poem'. While I still give them and a select few my 'verse' while it is in process, I do so on a less frequent basis. I wrote in my Writer's reflexive journal at the end of 2003:

"It worries me to a certain extent, that without the valuable feedback I received during the course, I would fail to recognise the inadequacies in my writing. I often wonder what I am going to do when I will not be able to rely on it. Perhaps this is the reason it is important for a writer, to set up a network of other writers on whose opinion they can rely."

Dr Titlestad commented in this regard that while I am very adept at taking advice and following recommendations, I might as a writer wish to stand up more for some of my ideas both against the class and his recommendations. He suggested that in failing to do so, I may make changes that compromise what I am trying to accomplish.

Experientially I have found that 'ill considered' and polemical views tend to complicate my difficulties with a poem. For example '*At death they come',* is a poem which I had in mind for a long time and was afraid to write. When I showed it to a member of my family, he became outraged and fearful of the consequences of my writing it. I became obsessed with questions relating to the ethics of such writing. In this regard I was sensitively guided by Dr Harris, who advised that adopting a cautious attitude and avoiding the expression of my concerns, the specificity of my poetic voice would be lost. She encouraged me to see that my poetic voice will reflect my faith and that my poetic writing, be it faith, community, family, nation and so forth, is made more emotionally and spiritually subtle by allowing for an entire complex (and painful at times) range of human emotions. This has to include critique, or ambivalence, or pain, or

disagreement, or solitude that may be painful for those I know to read my work. However she suggested that if they read my work well, the love and agreement and cohesion as a community and all the other things I love in my people will also be apparent to them. Regarding my responsibility as a 'poet' to my community, she enabled me to see that it is as much a responsibility to challenge as to celebrate.

Neruda (1971:4) has stated "..the poet must take part, the poet will take part, in the sweat, in the bread, in the wine, in the whole dream of humanity." He raises the question as to the usefulness of poetry. In psychoanalytic language the poet Phillips (2000:19) states, is "often linked, in some obscure way, with fantasies of freedom and independence: the poet represents the apotheosis (at least for some people) of self-becoming, of individuality, of difference.." Although a poet is not a bread maker nor a wine maker and does not contribute a 'product' which physically aids humanity s/he arguably, as the poet J.V. Cunningham (in Phillips 2000:33) wrote, "enable(s) us to see how we could think and feel otherwise than as we do." Poetry therefore may have the capacity to extend the range of human experience and understanding beyond the confines of the personal.

Further Phillips (Phillips 2000:27)writes: " Poetry is words hospitable to interpretation, words wanting to be subject to multiple perspectives. Words that are inspiring because they resist fetishization, because they are not propaganda." He explains that as a result poetry is communication to which we cannot remain indifferent. Consequently poetry may in the hopeful words of Neruda (1971: 4) "constitute the building of a community, the changing of the conditions which surround mankind, the handing over of mankind's products: bread, truth, wine, dreams." Although '*Wandering through Water'* does not serve any particular social, political or feminist ideology, it attempts to reflect on experience beyond individualistic confines. As such it negotiates both within and without those structures which separate and may reflect on that which binds humanity on psycho-spiritual levels of experience.

Bibliography

1. Ammons, AR 'A poem Is a Walk', in ***Epoch 18*** (Fall 1968) 114-19. International Poetry Forum April 1967.

2. Appel, A 'All About the Mikveh',1995. Available URL:http//www.aish.com/torahportion/appel/All_About_the_Mikveh.asp

3. Appiah, KA 'Identity, Authenticity, Survival, Multicultural Societies And Social Reproduction' ***In Multiculturalism: examining the politics of recognition***. Ed. Taylor, C and Gutmann. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

4. Applefield, A 'Aharon Applefield' In ***Shop Talk, A Writer and his Colleagues and Their Work*** Ed, Roth , P. London: Vintage, 2002.

5. Barthes, R 'The Death of the Author' In ***Image Music Text*** Ed. Heath, S. London: Fontana, 1977.

6. Berman, E ***Essential Papers on Literature and Psychoanalysis,*** New York: New York University Press, 1993.

7. Breathnach, SB ***Simple Abundance, A Daybook Of Comfort And Joy***, London: Bantam, 1997.

8. Gardner,W.H ***Gerard Manley Hopkins, Poems and Prose***, Great Britain: Penguin Books LTD, 1987.

9. Grewal, I ***Home and harem: nation, gender, empire, and the cultures of travel***, London: Leicester University Press, 1996.

10. Heaney, S ***Finders Keepers, Selected Prose 1971-2001.*** London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2002.

11. Heaney, S ***New Selected Poems 1966-1987.*** London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1990.

12. Herman, S ***Jewish Identity: A Social Psychological Perspective.*** London: Sage Publications, 1971.

13. Kirkby, J ***Emily Dickinson, Women Writers***, London: Macmillan, 1991.

14. Kristeva, J ***Revolution in Poetic Language***, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.

15. Malan, R ***Inscapes***, Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1969.

16. Marcus, S 'Freud and Dora' In ***Essential Papers on Literature and Psychoanalysis***. Ed. Berman, E. New York: New York University Press, 1993.
17. McCarthy, C ***The crossing***, New York: Picador, 1994.
18. Mudge, JM ***Emily Dickinson and the Image of Home***, Amherst: The University of Massachusetts, 1975.
19. Neruda, P 'Towards the Splendid City', December 13,1971. Available URL:http//www.nobelprize.org/.../1971/neruda-lecture-e.html.
20. O'Donoghue, B: ***Seamus Heaney and the Language of Poetry.*** Simon and Schuster, Herfordshire, 1994.
21. Papermac ***The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats***, London: Macmillan London Limited, 1982.
22. Phillips, A ***Promises Promises***, London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2000.
23. Phillips, A ***On Flirtation***. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1995.
24. Rockefeller, SC 'Comment' ***In Multiculturalism: examining the politics of recognition.*** Ed. Taylor, C and Gutmann. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.
25. Roth, P ***Shop Talk, A Writer and His Colleagues and Their Work***, London: Vintage, 2001.
26. Sewall, RB ***Emily Dickinson, A Collection of Critical Essays***. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1963.
27. Taylor, C 'Reproduction' In ***Multiculturalism: examining the politics of recognition***. Ed. Taylor, C and Guttman. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.
28. Stampfer, J ***John Donne and the Metaphysical Gesture.*** New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971.
29. Taylor, C ***Multiculturalism: examining the politics of recognition.*** New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994.
30. Thackery, D E **'**The Communication of the Word' In ***Emily Dickinson, A Collection of Critical Essays.*** Ed. Sewall, RB, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc.: 1963.
31. Trilling, L ***Sincerity and Authenticity***, Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971.

32. Truss, L ***Eats, Shoots & Leaves, The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation***, London: Profile Books Ltd, 2003.

33. Woolf, V ***Orlando***, Hammondsworth: Penguin,1928.

34. Woolf, V ***A Moment's Liberty: The Shorter Diary.*** Ed. Bell, AO. London: Pimilico, 1997

35. Wordsworth, W 'Daffodils' Available:
URL: http: // www.englishverse.com/poems/daffodils