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A Short *Leap* INTO THE FUTURE

A large part of this edition has strong personal resonances. In September 2022, I had the privilege of participating as one of the guest writers at Novellfest, a short story festival held in Lund, Sweden. While in Sweden, I participated online in the award ceremony for the 2022 Kendeka Prize for African Literature in my capacity as the chairperson of the adjudication panel. These two projects reaffirmed my long-held conviction that short story writing is on the rise.

Judging the Kendeka Prize gave me exposure to a kaleidoscope of diverse voices, themes and narrative styles – testament to the burgeoning of a new generation of African writers. The dynamism of new African voices is indicative of the vastness

and abundance of creative talent that is simmering on the continent. The overall winner of the 2022 Kendeka Prize was Kenyan writer, Scholastica Moraa, with her story, “Chained”. Adaoro Raji, from Nigeria, was the first runner-up with her story, “Star Boy”, and Beverley Abrahams, from Zimbabwe, was the second runner-up with her story, “Isithunzi”.

Short story writing has always been a convenient platform to discover new voices, experiment with characters, themes, narrative styles and approaches to writing. If one publication rejects your story, it is easy to try another within a short space of time – unlike longer prose like novels, which take much longer to write and which are even more difficult to publish because of the limitations of publishing platforms.

Mbulelo Mzamane, one of South Africa's leading short story writers and literary critics, states that he was "discovered" through short story writing in magazines. "The short story has also been able to flourish because of the existence of some magazines to which you could send your contributions." Literary journals, magazines and literary prizes have long played a fundamental role in the development of the short story tradition. In South Africa, publications such as *Umteteli waBantu*, *Ilanga lase Natal*, *Drum* and *Staffrider* magazines, served as launchpads for many writers to kick off their careers. The pioneers of the genre in South Africa such as RRR Dhlomo and Herman Charles Bosman, and subsequent generations of Nadine Gordimer, Can Themba, and later Njabulo S. Ndebele, Mtutuzeli Matshoba and Sindiwe Magona established a solid short story tradition in the country.

In view of this background, Mzamane opines: "The literary tradition inside black South Africa has largely centred around the short story." This is echoed by Michael Chapman in his preface to *The New Century of South African Short Stories*, where he describes short stories as "South Africa's most resilient and most innovative form of literary expression". Despite its strong history of resilience, short stories had a period of decline, when publishers around the world were not keen to publish the genre owing to the perceived lack of markets. In his book, *The Short Story: An Introduction* (2009: 50), Arthur March-Russell alludes to this factor: "Agents and publishers tended to discourage writers from writing short stories, since the success of a collection depended upon the reputation of the writer, but that a themed collection was easier to sell than one that was not interlinked." This assertion is echoed by South African writer Niq Mhlongo who has been writing short stories since 2005, but because "short stories weren't the most popular genre in South Africa around the time, I decided to put them away. (Sandwith, 2022)"

With the emergence of new writing competitions, literary journals and the exponential rise of online publishing platforms over the past decade, short story writing reclaimed its rightful place in the literary landscape. Writers who were previously known as novelists started churning out short story collections. Mhlongo produced *Affluenza* (2016), *Soweto, Under the Apricot Tree* (2018) and *For You, I'd Steal a Goat* (2022). Fred Khumalo published *Talk of the Town* (2019) and *A Coat of Many Colours* (2021). In 2019, Mohale Mashigo published *Intruders*, a short story collection that distinguished her fantastical voice by drawing from the narratives of the past to leap into the future in what she calls "Afrofuturism". Sifiso Mzobe and Nthikeng Mohlele both published short story collections *Searching for Simphiwe* (2020), *The*

Discovery of Love (2021) respectively. Keletso Mopai stands out as a lone figure whose reputation purely rests on short stories, as she burst into the literary scene with a riveting collection, *If You Keep Digging* in 2019. There are other writers like Lidudumalingani, winner of the 2016 Caine Prize for African Writing, who do not have books of their own as yet. This edition features his newest short story, "Everywhere, Nowhere."

SHORT STORY WRITING HAS ALWAYS BEEN A CONVENIENT PLATFORM TO DISCOVER NEW VOICES, EXPERIMENT WITH CHARACTERS, THEMES, NARRATIVE STYLES AND APPROACHES TO WRITING.



Photo: Sydelle Willow Smith

Mohale Mashigo is the author of *Intruders*, a collection of short stories in which she explores the concept of "Afrofuturism".



While many of the writers featured in this edition have published books as listed above, many others continue to develop their literary muscle by publishing in anthologies, journals and magazines. The past five years have seen Mhlongo emerging as the leading proponent of the short story genre in South Africa. In addition to the three short story collections mentioned above, Mhlongo compiled two award-winning anthologies, *Joburg Noir* (2020) and *Hauntings* (2021), thus using his agency as an established short story writer to create platforms for other emerging voices in the genre to thrive. It was through such anthologies that many of us were exposed to the writing of dynamic scribes such as Sibongile Fisher, who also dabbles in poetry. Fisher is featured in this edition with a new intriguing short story titled, "Pigeon's Nest".

We also feature "Fireplace" by Mhlongo, a story that uncannily resembles an incident that is currently a topical issue in South African news circles, yet the story was published before the incident became public knowledge. This story has intertextual resonances with Mhlongo's story, "Nailed", previously published in *Soweto, Under the Apricot Tree*, and performed as a play at the Market Theatre in 2019. "Fireplace" was first published in *Hauntings*, and later in *For You, I'd Steal a Goat*. Likewise, Mzobe's collection, *Searching for Simphiwe*, is comprised of stories that largely appeared online before he published a full collection. This duplicative nature of short stories makes them all the more attractive, as it is possible to earn multiple streams of income from a single story.

In the essays section, we have novelist and short story writer, Nthikeng Mohlele, reflecting on short story writing in South Africa. In his essay, "Art, Capitalism and Heritage", Mohlele traces the contours of modern short story writing in South Africa. Raquel Baker, a scholar of Postcolonial and Transnational Literatures at California State University Channel Islands, writes an extensive essay exploring the question of "Whiteness and the Present Moment". She evokes scholars like Homi Bhabha in arguing that the "intimate spheres of the self and modes of identification, affiliation, and desire are important foci of decolonisation in order to begin to challenge the hold of ideologies of racialized belonging, modes of racialized differentiation". Nigerian-American writer and scholar, Itoro Bassey, gives a critical analysis of Lesley Nneka Arimah's short story, "What It Means When a Man Falls from the Sky", published in a similarly titled collection. Arimah's story won the 2019 Caine Prize and she remains one of the most notable short story writers on the continent.

Imbiza continues with its commitment to promoting the use of African languages. We are encouraged by the United Nations Declaration of the period 2022 – 2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. We remain optimistic that there will be intensified efforts to meaningfully support the use and development of African languages during this period. One of the most resilient contemporary voices in African languages is Sabata-Mpho Mokae, who is a major proponent of Setswana literature. Mokae has won multiple awards for his writings, including the now defunct MNet Awards, the South African Literary Awards and, most recently, was announced as the winner of the 2022 PanSALB Multilingualism Award for Literature in Setswana.

This edition features one of the living legends in the South African literary landscape – Professor Tshobisa Peter (P.T.) Mtuze, a highly respected writer and scholar who has contributed immensely to isiXhosa language and literature for more than fifty years. Mtuze has not only contributed to language development through his writing, but has had a great impact as a lecturer, broadcaster and a translator, among others. The year 2023 marks 200 years of isiXhosa as a written language, and it is fitting that we commence the celebrations of this milestone by honouring one of the greatest contributors to the language.



Prof. Mtuze is one of the major contributors to isiXhosa in its 200 years as a written language.



Photo: Thandukwazi Gcalashe | Photo taken at The Rand Club, Johannesburg

(From left) Niq Mhlongo, Salamina Mosese, Angela Makholwa and Nthikeng Mohlele

Although the introduction of isiXhosa orthography in 1823 was part of the expansion of the missionary enterprise aimed at subjugating and creating divisions among Black people, writers such as W.B. Rubusana, Jon Knox Bokwe and S.E.K. Mqhayi, remained deeply rooted in the cultures, norms and values of their people. They employed their writing as an instrument to subvert the missionary enterprise whose objective was to use the new black elite as agents for the destruction of African social fabric. Instead of serving the colonial objectives, the Black intelligentsia and Xhosa writers like Mqhayi became the custodians and chroniclers of their people's life stories. Mtuze followed in this tradition and stands out as the doyen of Xhosa writing.

One of the least explored areas in the arts fraternity is the cross-pollination of genres. In this regard, short stories are an ideal genre for adaptation. Can Themba's classical short story, "The Suit", which was first published in 1963, has been anthologised multiple times and adapted into theatre, musical, graphics and an award-winning film featuring the Kani duo – the legendary actor John Kani and his equally talented son, Atandwa Kani, and actress Phuti Nakene. Contemporary writers such as Nozizwe Cynthia Jele, author of *Happiness is a Four-Letter Word* (2010), which was adapted into a blockbuster movie in 2016, have demonstrated the enormous potential of adaptation from script to screen. Similarly, novelist Angela Makholwa is in the process of having her work adapted into a film. These are just few examples of the cross-pollination between literature and film,

and such synergies have been established with laudable success all over the world. There ought to be concerted efforts to fully exploit the benefits presented by adaptation of existing material into different mediums within the creative industries.

Actress and producer, Salamina Mosese makes her debut in the literary landscape with a children's book, *Disaster at Gogo's Spaza* (2022). In her intensive conversation with Nokuthula Mazibuko Msimang, Mosese demonstrates to us how her cinematic imagination translates to literary art. We also have one of our long-time contributors, jazz musician Gloria Bosman, writing about a fellow musician and master guitarist, Billy Monama, who has just written a book. Bosman does not just tell the story of Monama and the "guitaring" tradition in South Africa, but she also takes us through the diverse sounds produced by some of the best guitarists that have ever set foot on this planet.

This edition of *Imbiza* is very deliberate in privileging short stories. It features a total of fifteen short stories by contemporary African writers. To have a host of prominent short story writers contributing to the same edition is a marvelous feat beyond serendipity. It is the fulfilment of one of my greatest fantasies: to host a party where writers gather together and produce a literary feast. If short stories signify the shape that the literary landscape would take in the future, this edition of *Imbiza* gives us a sneak peek into the future.

