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A PAN - AFRICAN QUARTERLY FOR THOUGHT LEADERS

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AN ISSUE ON

**New Terrains in African
Sociopolitical Imaginaries**

The Thinker

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Prof Ronit Frenkel and
Prof Nedine Moonsamy,
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20 YEARS
— 2005-2025 —

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The University of Johannesburg acquired *The Thinker* in April 2019 from Dr Essop Pahad. Over the last decade, *The Thinker* has gained a reputation as a journal that explores Pan-African issues across fields and times. Ronit Frenkel, as the incoming editor, plans on maintaining the pan-African scope of the journal while increasing its coverage into fields such as books, art, literature and popular cultures. *The Thinker* is a 'hybrid' journal, publishing both journalistic pieces with more academic articles and contributors can now opt to have their submissions peer reviewed. We welcome Africa-centred articles from diverse perspectives, in order to enrich both knowledge of the continent and of issues impacting the continent.



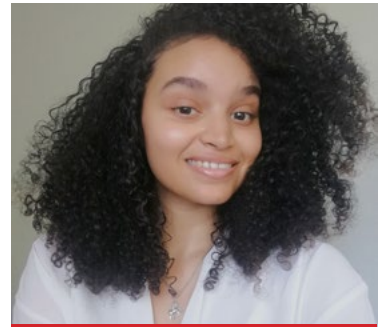
Prof Ronit Frenkel

Nedine Moonsamy is an associate professor in the English department at the University of Johannesburg. She is currently writing a monograph on contemporary South African Fiction and otherwise conducts research on science fiction in Africa. Her debut novel, *The Unfamous Five* (Modjaji Books, 2019) was shortlisted for the HSS Fiction Award (2021), and her poetry was shortlisted for the inaugural New Contrast National Poetry Award (2021).



Nedine Moonsamy

Tamia Phiri is a PhD candidate in the field of English literature at the University of Johannesburg. Her doctoral research explores trauma, memory, and Coloured identity in post-apartheid South African texts. She is also a poet and creative writer, with poetry featured in the *Journal of African Youth Literature* and *Brittle Paper*.



Tamia Phiri

All contributing analysts write in their personal capacity

The Cheeky Natives is a literary podcast primarily focused on the review, curatorship, and archiving of Black literature. It is hosted by Dr. Alma-Nalisha Cele and Letlhogonolo Mokgoroane.

Pumla Cutalele-Maqhude is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Education, Language Education Department at the University of the Western Cape. She is training pre-service teachers in the Bachelor of Education -Senior and Further Education and Training phase, the Post graduate Certificate in education and B. ED Honours programmes. Her research focus is on literature and language education, with a keen interest in how language policy under democracy gets implemented in the school curriculum. Her teaching is research-led, as she is active in several research projects with the teaching of language as a focus area. She has published articles on language and literature.

Sizwe Zwelakhe Dlamini is currently a Senior Lecturer in the Department of African Languages, under the Faculty of Humanities, at the University of Johannesburg. He holds a Bachelor of Education degree in Senior and FET Phase, a BA Honour's degree in African languages (both obtained with distinctions), a master's degree and a PhD (both in African Languages). Sizwe received the National Research Fund (NRF) (for Honours in 2018), the Global Excellence Scholarship (for Masters in 2019), and the NIHSS-SAHUDA Doctoral Scholarship (from 2021-2023). He has published several research articles in local and international journals, with some of these articles having been presented in local and international conferences in countries like Switzerland and Indonesia. Sizwe's research interests include African literature, creative media, visual language, and stylistics.

Mondli Hlatshwayo is an Associate Professor at the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation of the University of Johannesburg. He has published numerous peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters on the following topics: xenophobia and trade unions, football world cup and stadia, education and immigrant learners, and trade unions and technology. He is co-editor (with Aziz Choudry) of the Pluto Press book, *Just Work? Migrant Workers, Globalization and Resistance*.

Perfect Hlongwane is a writer and editor who lives and works in Johannesburg. His first novel, *Jozi*, was published by UKZN Press in 2013, and was shortlisted for the UJ Prize for South African Writing in English in the debut category. *Sanity Prevail*, his second novel, was published by Blackbird Books in 2021. He is currently working on his third novel, *A Tighrope Hope*.

Chipo Hungwe, Ph. D., is an Associate Professor of Sociology and the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Midlands State University in Zimbabwe.

Gaelle Fitong Ketchiwou holds a Doctorate in Human Resource Management and is currently conducting research in the School of Interdisciplinary Research and Graduate Studies at the University of South Africa. Her research interests include human resource development, women, and the fourth industrial revolution, which have resulted in several publications in peer-reviewed journals.

Sewela Langeni is an author and the owner of Book Circle Capital (BCC), an independent bookshop focusing on African Literature in Johannesburg. She is a Marketing Manager and her academic background is in Journalism, Communication Sciences, and Marketing. She holds a Master's degree in Strategic Marketing and Consulting (*cum laude*) from the University of Birmingham, UK. Sewela is an avid reader and reviewer of local books for adults and kids. She facilitates book conversations with authors at BCC, book fairs, and on ETV's *Morning Show SA*.

Xolile Mabuza is a teacher at Emshekantambo Secondary School. She holds a Bachelor of Education (BEd), an Honours degree in African Languages, a master's degree in African Languages, and a Doctoral degree in African Languages. She was awarded a merit bursary for Masters and Doctorate students by the University of Johannesburg for her Doctorate degree, which assisted her in completing the qualification. For the past 10 years, Mabuza has been teaching IsiZulu home language, fostering a deep appreciation for the language at the above-mentioned school. Her research focuses on the analysis of IsiZulu literature, and she remains dedicated to preserving

and promoting the language and its culture. Her research work particularly emphasises family dynamics and challenges faced by young girls.

Lerato Moletsane, born and raised in Dobsonville, Soweto, is an aunt, a daughter, a sister, a wife, and everything in between. She is the mother of Katlego and Tshidiso Moletsane (winner of the 2022 Sunday Times Literary Fiction Award), a title she feels inadequate to bear but declares with pride and joy. A solo traveller. A self-confessed adrenaline junkie with a fear of heights, has summited Kilimanjaro, skydived in Cape Town, and bungee jumped in Victoria Falls. She is an aspiring writer whose short story, "Pink Balloon Trousers," is part of the anthology *Fluid: The Freedom to Be* (2023). Lerato is an avid fan of Thandiswa Mazwai, Johnny Clegg, and Eminem... in that order.

Rofhiwa Maneta is a freelance arts and culture journalist. He has written for *City Press*, the *Mail & Guardian*, the *Sunday Times*, *Vice*, *New Frame* and *The Fader*. He was also a contributor to *Our Ghosts Were Once People*, and has published a memoir, *A Man, A Fire, A Corpse* (2022).

Marzia Milazzo is a writer, critic, and associate professor of English at the University of Johannesburg. Her book, *Colorblind Tools: Global Technologies of Racial Power* (2022), which shows how white people disavow racism across national boundaries to maintain power and how anti-Black and colonial logics can be reproduced even in some decolonial literatures, won the 2023 Association for Ethnic Studies Outstanding Book Award. A globetrotter and polyglot, Milazzo lives between Johannesburg and perpetual fernweh.

Kennedy Monari is a dedicated EiE specialist, researcher, peacebuilder, and teacher with extensive experience in refugee education, conflict resolution, and policy advocacy. With over 8 years' experience in the education sector, particularly in refugee settings and in arid and semi-arid land (ASAL) regions, he has gained a deep understanding of the intersection between education, conflict, and crisis, using a critical political economy of education lens.

As a Rotary Peace Fellow Alumni and an Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) Peace Ambassador, Kennedy has actively contributed to peace building initiatives, training over 200 young leaders

in conflict resolution and youth engagement. He has also contributed to academic research and policy development, with publications in reputable journals. His research focuses on refugee education, peace, and political economy of education in conflict-affected regions.

Additionally, Kennedy serves as an educator and mentor at Patterson Memorial Secondary School in Kenya and is a member of ECW's Youth/Student-led constituency sub-group. He has a Masters in EiE from the University of Nairobi and a Postgraduate Diploma in Peace Building and Conflict Transformation from Makerere University.

Matagane Drebies Mohlala is the Departmental Head at Kgetsa Primary School under the Limpopo Department of Education, South Africa. He holds a Bachelor of Education in Foundation Phase, an Honours Degree in Educational Management, Law, and Policy, and a master's degree in Education (Curriculum Studies). His research explores the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on teaching and learning, with a particular focus on the coping strategies employed by Foundation Phase educators in rural South African schools.

Zvenyika Eckson Mugari is the Campus Director for Midlands State University, Zvishavane Campus and a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Media, Communication, Film and Theatre Arts.

Patrick Ngulube is a Professor of Information Science in the School of Interdisciplinary Research and Graduate Studies at the University of South Africa. His research interests are in records and archives, e-government, application of information and communication technologies, research methods, and knowledge management, including indigenous knowledge systems.

Lofane Peter Nicholas is a Ugandan political scientist with over two decades of experience in development, peacebuilding, conflict management, and mediation across East Africa. He has served in leadership and technical roles with more than six international and national NGOs, including over 15 years as the Executive Director of Manna Development Agency (MADA).

Currently, he serves as a Research Associate at the University of Johannesburg's SARCHI Chair in African Diplomacy and Foreign Policy. He is also the Chairperson of Uganda for Resilience (U4R) and a

Caretaker Board Member of Africa for Resilience (A4R), contributing to regional strategies for conflict transformation, climate resilience, and inclusive development.

He holds a PhD in Political Science, with a specialization in terrorism studies. His doctoral research focused on the effectiveness of the African Union in addressing the root causes of terrorism, with Somalia as a case study. His academic credentials also include multiple master's degrees in Local Governance and Human Rights, International Relations, and Development Studies, as well as a strong foundation in Philosophy and Religious Studies, which informs my critical thinking and ethical perspective.

His expertise spans diplomacy, legal and institutional analysis, program design and management, and policy-oriented research in the fields of governance, security, and development. He has made notable contributions to promoting democratic values, human rights, and community resilience especially in Eastern Equatoria, South Sudan, and Northern Karamoja, Uganda amplifying the voices of marginalized and conflict-affected communities.

Quincy Pule is a multilingual South African, raised in East London (Eastern Cape Province) and Pietersburg (Polokwane, Limpopo Province). He was inspired by his former University of the Western Cape (UWC) lecturer, Prof Kwesi Prah, to pursue Sociology at an advanced level. He obtained my BA degree (Sociology & Anthropology 3, English 3, and Psychology 3) through UWC, BSocSc (Hons) degree in Industrial Relations under the auspices of Sociology and Industrial Sociology from Rhodes University, a M.Phil degree (Conflict Transformation & Management) through Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, and a PhD in Sociology from the University of Johannesburg.

Sociology has inculcated in him with a sense that a human being is actually a social being inextricably intertwined with the rest of humanity. Through Sociology he has been able to acquire epistemological understanding of how society operates insofar as they relate as individuals and political beings. In this regard, he wants to contribute by advancing the frontiers of scholarly knowledge through research, impart the knowledge he has acquired and engage my community and society at large.

Shameema Sarang is a master's student in English at the University of Johannesburg. The cornerstone of her thesis is the representation of Black women in South African novels that deal with mental health problems and the role of racism in the production of these texts.

Unathi Slasha is a South African literary scholar and novelist. He is the author of the novella *Jah Hills* (Black Ghost Books, 2017; CLASH Books, 2019), which was nominated for both the 2019 Nommo novel award and 2020 Nommo novella award. His forthcoming novel, *The Hollow Sound of Lightweight Bodies*, is the winner of the 2025 Iskanchi Book Prize. Slasha's creative and critical work has appeared in *New Coin*, *New Contrast*, *Mail & Guardian*, *Herri*, *New Orleans Review*, and other venues.

Lindokuhle Ubisi (PhD) is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Psychology at the University of South Africa. His research interests are mainly within the psychology of sexual minorities, including the sexuality of children, LGBT+ individuals, as well as persons with various disabilities.

Kudzaiishe Vanyoro is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Pan African Thought and Conversation (IPATC) at the University of Johannesburg. During his fellowship he worked on queering Pan-Africanism and intersectional Pan-Africanism(s).

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University of Johannesburg (UJ)
Auckland Park Kingsway Campus
Auckland Park
Johannesburg
Tel: +27 11 559 2553

Editors

Prof Ronit Frenkel & Prof Nedine Moonsamy
thethinker@uj.ac.za

Assistant Editor

Tamia Phiri
thethinker@uj.ac.za

Design Direction

UJ Graphic Design Studio
+27 11 559 2805

Advisory Council

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TRIBUTE



Some Burn Too Bright: Remembering Tshidiso Moletsane

Compiled and edited by Marzia Milazzo, University of Johannesburg.

“I am balance. I am opalescent. All around me, instead of mere people, I see celestial bodies. I feel like we are the centre of the universe. I exist and then I don’t and then I do again. I think I died. I want to die again. I want to die a thousand times.”

—Tshidiso Moletsane, *Junx*

The winner of the 2022 Sunday Times Award and finalist of the UJ Prize for South African Writing, Tshidiso Moletsane’s novel *Junx* (2021) made an indelible mark on the South African literary scene with its powerful portrayal of a young Black man frantically attempting to escape his mental anguish while roaming the nightly streets of Johannesburg, sinking deeper and deeper into his own depression, yet never losing his self-deprecating humour. Far from being a city of gold, the Joburg of *Junx* is “a city in enormous discomfort, a city in mourning” (94)—a city symbolic of larger struggles that continue to shape Black life in South Africa. As it offers an unflinching lens onto post-apartheid society, *Junx* ultimately suggests that the consequences of white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and racial inequality are nothing less than devastating for poor Black South African youth.

On 26 May 2024, Moletsane died tragically by suicide at the young age of thirty-one, leaving an indelible void among family members, friends, and fellow writers. Here, Lerato Moletsane, Rofhiwa Maneta, Perfect Hlongwane, The Cheeky Natives, Marzia Milazzo, Shameema Sarang, Sewela Langeni and Unathi Slasha pay tribute to Tshidiso Moletsane, his work, and his undeniable legacy.

My Baby Boy!

by Lerato Moletsane

A vivid memory I have of Tshidiso was on a Saturday, in March 1994, just after he turned one. He was wearing red shorts and a red and white striped t-shirt, singing along to a song by All-4-One titled "I Swear." As I write this, I can almost hear his voice singing to the lyrics "*I swear, by the moon and the stars in the sky, I'll be there.*" On his last birthday, I shared this memory with him and thanked him for allowing me to try to mother him for thirty-one years. He then went on to share it on his social media, declaring that he has always been "dope." Tshidiso was such a happy child who was surrounded by cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. It is difficult for me to speak about him in the past tense. I had it easy with him being the first grandchild. Raising him was a collaborative effort that echoed the saying "it takes a village to raise a child." It was my mother who named him Tshidiso, which means to comfort – "Condolences."

He had his first tooth at three months, at six months he could say "lato," and at nine months he could walk. My mom said it was unusual for boys to be this fast and that Tshidiso was going to be smart – and smart he was. It was as if he was in a hurry to complete his mission, whatever it was. He was independent, faced challenges head on, and was never one to complain. Tshidiso and I are so much alike, what with the love of the arts, writing and reading. Our language was Silence. We could be in a room together for hours and not say a word to each other; we understood the silence spoken by one another. It is our silent encounters, his warm and loving hugs, and his kisses on my forehead that I miss the most.

I knew his love for reading – because during my travels, he'd always ask me to buy him books. I did not know that Tshidiso was a writer. He never shared his plans until they were executed – he was more of an Action man than a Talker. So, it took

me by surprise when one Sunday morning he came to my bedroom to show me an email from the publishers announcing that they were going to publish his book. I was a bit jealous because I fancied myself a writer in the family. But jealousy was short-lived as it quickly turned to pride. I was always behind him during his book engagements and commanding my friends to buy his book and get it signed. When he sent me a message on the night of the awards ceremony to let me know that he'd won, I burst out crying tears of joy. My son, the author! I had never cried that much in my entire life until the day my life collapsed on me – 26 May 2024. Now I cry the tears of sorrow. I love Tshidiso gravely and miss him so much it pains me.

A Life in Two Tenses

by Rofhiwa Maneta

Present tense: the tense of a verb that expresses action or state in the present time. Example: Tshidiso Moletsane lives in Gauteng, splitting his time between Soweto and Weltevreden Park. Junx is his first novel.

Towards the middle of Tshidiso Moletsane's debut novel *Junx*, the nameless narrator speaks about the artistic utility of pain: "But I suppose pain does have some redeeming qualities. I see it like this: the best thing about any sort of pain is that it can be alchemised into the most moving art imaginable". It's a well-worn trope that the worst circumstances produce the greatest art, but in Tshidiso's case, this was thoroughly true. "I can say writing [*Junx*] was certainly cathartic for me. I was very angry, and I was going through a deep depression at the time I was writing this and it shows," he told *NOWinSA* in a 2022 interview.

Tshidiso and I grew up together and went to the same primary school but only became friends in adulthood. We had a mutual appreciation for the same transgressive authors (Hubert Selby Jr, William Burroughs, and the like) and I found his writing more direct and lucid than mine could ever hope to be.

Death is always around the corner in both his novel and the neighbourhood we grew up in. But the type of death discussed in *Junx* is the long, drawn-out self-destruction that comes with repeated overdosing, dangerous sex, and bodily neglect. "Everyday my body reminds me that it is falling apart," the unnamed narrator laments. "Everyday it

reminds me that it's dying. Life is stupid, man ... You check in naked and check out in a suit. Everything that happens in between is madness."

In some respects, *Junx* is an attempt to make sense of this madness. "Depression really sucks the life out of you," the narrator bemoans. "Your friends stop inviting you out because when you're out with them, you just sit silently in a corner drinking as much as you can as fast as you can until you go into a stupor." Over the course of 147 pages, the novel sprints to cover the distance it travels. The distance between Dobsonville and Braamfontein (where the novel concludes) is about a thirty-minute drive. But the existential interspace between life and death, living and surviving, is far greater. For the most part, *Junx's* narrator uses sex and drugs to try and make sense of the great 'in-between.'

In early 2024, Tshidiso and I made arrangements to meet. I have an idea for a book about religion and the trauma it exacts on its adherents. The day before we're scheduled to meet, I ask if we could move our get together to another time. "No flop bro. We'll do it some other time."

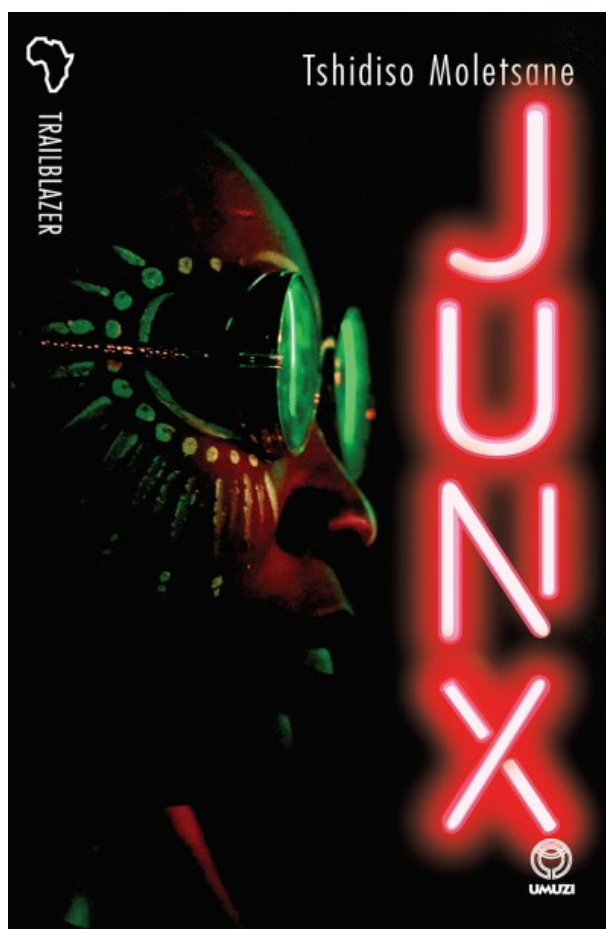
It is the last time I ever have a conversation with him.

*

Past tense: a verb or tense expressing action in or as if in the past. Example: Tshidiso Moletsane, winner of the 2022 Sunday Times Literary Awards fiction prize has died.

My brother sent me the message just after dawn breaks. "Tshidiso is no longer with us." I am driving at the time and have to pull over to steady both myself and the car. Out of a sheer combination of panic, confusion, and blind grief, I try to message him. A pink band of sunshine, fog, and industrial smog looms on the horizon and, for a moment, I look into the distance and try to make out the outline of Dobsonville, Soweto. I message a first, second, and third time. No response.

Something about this occasion whispers back the memory of a passage from *Junx*. At the very beginning of the novel, the unnamed narrator has a conversation with his friend Thabo about death: "The government doesn't want you to kill yourself because dead people don't pay taxes," he ruminates in his shack.



I remember sending Tshidiso that line and the subsequent discussion we had about death and the schemes we invent to keep the reaper at a remove. *Junx* is full of such schemes. The self-destructive excess that populates the novel is always an attempt to kick the can down the road, as it were. To tell death: not today, we have more immediate concerns than dying.

"I think your novel is about more than surviving," I told Tshidiso during our discussion. "It's about the mechanisms we employ – healthy and unhealthy – to make a life out of the different prisons we've been conscripted to." He neither agreed nor disagreed with my assessment but told me he was glad I found so much resonance with the book and that "a lot of anger went into its making."

On the weekend of his funeral, I attend another funeral (not his) and think of how death looms large in Tshidiso's novel and life itself. On that weekend, I remember thinking that life is a terminal disease whose inevitable end is death. I remember thinking about Dobsonville, where Tshidiso and I grew up,

and how it wasn't so much a place we grew up in, but a place we survived.

But mostly, I think about Tshidiso's death and remember a line from "Ghetto", a song from the band The Muffinz: "No fair, no fair, it's not fair. No fair, no fair, it's not fair. No fair, no fair..."

A Man Who Made His Mark

by Perfect Hlongwane

My first encounter with Tshidiso Moletsane happened when I got a copy of his debut novel, recommended by a writer and reader whose judgement I hold in high esteem. I read through *Junx* in two captivated days, and again at the tail-end of that week. Tshidiso's novel was, in many senses, the kind of book one had been waiting for, having grown hesitant about some of the formulaic, moralising executions of storytelling by local authors. *Junx* was an unexpected breath of fresh air, and a solid punch in the gut. I was excited reading it, and could not shake off the feeling that an important new voice was making itself known to us. Given Tshidiso's sudden and untimely passing, I have been wavering between being sad that *Junx* is all we will know of his singular and fearless pen... and gratitude that *Junx* is what life chose for us to remember him by.

Socially, I first met Tshidiso not long after he had been awarded the 2022 Sunday Times Fiction prize. He reached out to me asking if I had a copy of Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*. That searing historical polemic seemed to me a fascinating choice for a promising young writer, and it gave me an encouraging sign of the breadth of his curiosity. In person, he was thoughtful and affable, and honest to a fault (he was very frank about what a difficult reading challenge *Two Thousand Seasons* turned out to be). When he met my dad, the old geezer gave him one look and said, "Ya, this one looks like a writer," while Tshidiso fidgeted in embarrassment. Over drinks, during a number of subsequent meetings, it became clear to me that Tshidiso preferred listening to talking and was determined to expand the range of his reading. He also wanted to meet and interact with other artists, and we made many fruitless plans to hook up with several writers based in Jozi.

Today, I think of *Junx* again; of the startling figure of Ari, of the sheer originality with which the writer wove the unnamed narrator's rollercoaster hell-ride from Dobsie to the inner city. I remind myself that none among us can know beforehand what length of days has been reserved for us. For this reason, I am grateful all over again that Tshidiso, having lost the first manuscript for *Junx*, pressed on and rewrote that disturbing, revelatory tale. It gives me some comfort to think that, beyond our instinctive urge to mourn the young when they die, the bare bones of the matter are that Tshidiso made his mark. He left his mark, and no amount of grief can erase the intervention that *Junx* made on the local literary scene. Seen in that light, "what ifs" seem a poor substitute for the terrible beauty that is *Junx*. Beyond the pain of Tshidiso Moletsane's sudden departure, he left us a novel of such timeous significance that we cannot fail to grasp what we have gained through the writer's life and gift, the pain of our loss notwithstanding.

An Ode to Brilliance

by The Cheeky Natives

Mental health has gained prominence in the public domain, and several books have been published in South Africa exploring mental health and one such book is Tshidiso Moletsane's *Junx*. Moletsane's brave story begins at a party in Dobsonville. A guy shares a joint with Ari — an imaginary friend, angel and demon — and the roller-coaster jol of a night begins. There are stolen cars with joyriding, brothels, sex, drugs, and anxiety. It's a trip of a book that is not only exciting but pokes cheekily and bluntly at the South Africa we live in.

The Cheeky Natives had the wonderful honour of being in conversation with Moletsane about his genre-bending debut in October 2021. The [conversation](#) covered a lot of ground. We spoke about emotional neglect, life on the fringes, Black life as a juxtaposition, the process of writing the book, mental health awareness and the stigma around mental health. In this talk, he openly spoke about struggling with depression and revealed that the book had autobiographical elements. Moletsane wrote the novel as a way of processing his feelings and emotions.

The gems of the conversation were the softer

moments in the book, such as the theme of friendship that pervades the novel. We spoke about Black men and masculinities, and how often toxic displays of masculinity inhibit the growth in friendships. For Molestane, his friendships were his solace. He said, “I’m very fortunate my friends are a very affectionate bunch, so I never got to struggle with being inhibited around my friends, so like we’re very, very open about our feelings. We’re very open about just basically everything. We tell each other that we love and miss each other.”

Molestane was a talented writer who wrote about contemporary life with razor-sharp commentary. We are saddened by his passing. We hope that his work will continue to live on and shine a light on mental health and its often-deadly effects.

A Humble Genius

by Marzia Milazzo

When I first read Tshidiso Moletsane’s *Junx*, as a jury member tasked with assessing hundreds of book submissions for the 2022 UJ Prize for South African Writing, it became immediately evident to me that the South African literary scene had never seen anything like it. The following year, entrusted with organising a UJ event with a creative writer or scholar of my choice, I knew Moletsane was the one artist I wanted to interview. Looking back at our [conversation](#), which is available on YouTube and excerpted in the sixth issue of *Imbiza*, Moletsane struck me as displaying the same honesty, sensibility, and sharp-wittedness as the narrator of his award-winning debut novel, which Moletsane started writing when he was only nineteen years old, and which has been compared to J. D. Salinger’s classic *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951).

Not someone in love with the spotlight, Moletsane during the interview conceded: “I struggle with compliments about my work, so when I am compared with Salinger, I think that’s a lot.” His humbleness might have prevented Moletsane from seeing his own genius, but the sombre reality is that we have lost one of the most original, brave, and relentlessly introspective young voices in the country. As Moletsane’s untimely death has left an unfillable void, we hold onto the brilliance that is *Junx*, attempting to uncover its profound depths and peeling off its countless layers with each new read.

Visceral and elegiac, *Junx* catapults the reader into one single night in the life of a young Black man from Soweto who struggles with mental illness. Moving from Dobsonville to Johannesburg CBD, and from Melville to Braamfontein, the narrator shifts in an out of consciousness under the effect of multiple drugs, including cocaine and profuse amounts of alcohol, as he tries to cope with depression. The narrator, who has “been suicidal for years” (18), traces his mental anguish back to childhood neglect and an alcoholic father in the obsessive attempt to find a cause for his suffering.

The reader, however, soon realises that the narrator’s agony has wider social implications and is inevitably tied to the “squalor and filth” (38) of his environment, a squalor that is symbolic of the precarity of Black life that defines post-1994 South Africa. The novel, in fact, provides a devastating critique of neoapartheid society, in which, the narrator laments: “The Oppenheims and the like are all sitting pretty with money that was taken from us, while we live among rats and strays”.

Neither drugs nor sex or the escapist youth culture of Braamfontein and Melville can provide respite for the narrator’s pain. They “only give you temporary relief,” the narrator argues, as his body falls apart under the pressure of self-neglect (40). Only in death, the ending intimates, can the narrator find freedom and hope for the future. I hope that Tshidiso, too, has found his happy place.

An Unassuming Creative

by Sewela Langeni

I had the pleasure of first meeting Tshidiso Moletsane at the Kingsmead Book Fair in 2023. As a bookseller, I am always excited to meet authors with the possibility of hosting them at Book Circle Capital. I approached him in the green room where he was waiting for his session to discuss writing about Johannesburg with Tanya Zack, the author of *Wake Up, This Is Joburg*.

He first struck me as shy and even a little bit uncomfortable to be among the hubbub of the room. But as I introduced myself to request his number he warmed up and flashed his winning smile. We reconnected in June the same year to film an [Episode](#) of The Morning Show SA Book Club

where he spoke to Tshwanelo Serumola about his award-winning book *Junx*.

Tshidiso came across as an unassuming, intelligent, witty, and respectful young man who found all the fuss around him and *Junx*, especially after winning the Sunday Times Literary Awards fiction prize, quite unexpected. He said it was a story borrowed from his life and the lives of his friends which he had been writing since he was in high school. He wrote the story to show the anger young South Africans feel in the face of a range of societal issues that can negatively affect their mental health. He spoke fondly of his mother and grandmother, laughing nervously about how they would receive *Junx*.

My second encounter with Tshidiso was at UJ where he spoke about *Junx* in the English Department with Marzia Milazzo and Shameema Sarang. At **the session**, Tshidiso inspired a room full of aspiring writers, sharing how his manuscript faced some rejections from publishers until he landed his publishing deal with Penguin Random House. During the discussion, he shared difficult topics using humour, like getting shot and losing the manuscript of the novel, and having to rewrite it.

Hearing about his passing in May 2024 was a deep shock for me. When we last spoke, he shared that he had an idea about his next book even though he had not yet started writing. He spoke candidly about the subtle pressure he felt about his next book as he wondered if it would live up to the success of *Junx*, which he wrote to prove to himself that he could write. "I wanted to write a good story, but even more than that, I wanted it to be fun to read," said Tshidiso. The South African literary space has lost a naturally talented writer that still had so much to offer.

A Contemplative and Philosophical Writer

by Shameema Sarang

In May 2023, I had the honour of **interviewing** Tshidiso Moletsane at the University of Johannesburg together with Marzia Milazzo. When Tshidiso walked down the passage, I was nervous at the thought of meeting the mind that brought *Junx* into the world. But Tshidiso's easy smile and the way we hugged after being introduced was disarming

and made him feel familiar, like someone I'd known. I saw later, during our interview, that his quiet confidence masked a nimble mind as was evident from his responses to our questions and from how he engaged the novel itself.

Tshidiso's willingness to thoughtfully reflect on serious and difficult issues raised in *Junx* revealed an intimately visceral yet contemplative and philosophical view of the world, allowing us to glimpse into the mind of a young Black man's fumbling high-speed chase through life. The novel deals with truths about mental health not easily communicated. For instance, *Junx* reflects upon how sometimes depression has no clearly traceable source and how the battle to keep oneself together can be ultimately lost. In the end, the narrator finds no solace even when he is surrounded by people who love him. The narrative leaves the reader feeling dirty and enthralled at the same time and, when I think about it, I believe he might be pleased with this outcome.

After the interview, we talked briefly about a next book project and the hope that he would filter himself less. On the first page of my copy of *Junx*, Tshidiso left me a note about this conversation, but the last line of this note transforms into something ominous and weighty now: "I am so glad you liked this book. I will be thinking of you when I get the urge to filter myself in the next thing I write, if I ever do." I am saddened knowing that there will not be another thing. The world seems less bright without Tshidiso in it.

All that Remains is the Word

by Unathi Slasha

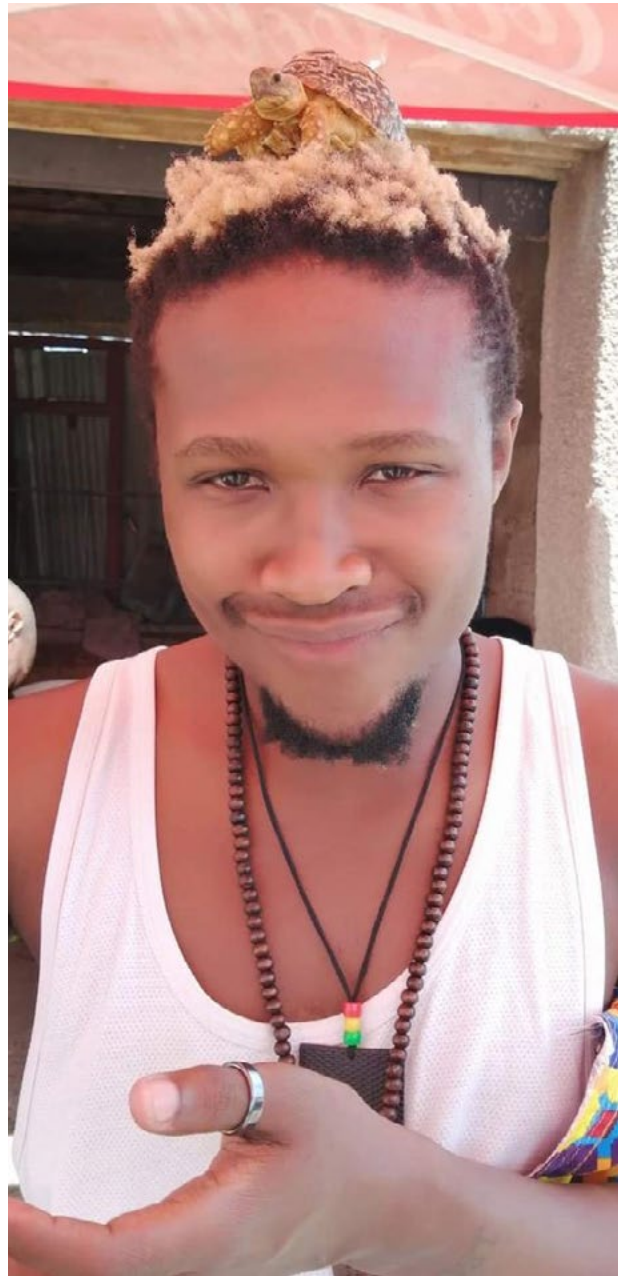
Steve Biko declares that it's a miracle for any Black person in the township to reach adulthood. We can extend this beyond simply the township. It's true for the suburbs where Blacks assume to have escaped the death-blows and woes of Black Life. It's true for the chaotic and crowded streets of the Central Building District. It's true for the uncared-for lives in the villages. South Africa as a site of endless violence refuses to allow Black people to breathe: wherever we are, there's always something that seems to suffocate us. This is true for the ordinary wayward youths. True for the unemployed and unemployables. It's also true for those with

extraordinary talents like Tshidiso Moletsane, the author of *Junx*.

Junx is as racy a novel as the township and city life it narrates. It openly refuses to be sentimental, romantic, apologetic: it even succeeds at avoiding being preachy about the party night-life that features the usual suspects: sex, danger, drugs, and alcohol. Readers find themselves immersed in the psychic world of the narrator. A ride through the precarious environment, the daring reader tails the narrator's nocturnal meanderings to the end. And the party the protagonist is rushing to get at is not without a bout of witty commentary on the daily politics of the country, with its jabs at politicians and priests who happen to be sexpredators.

Lewis Nkosi's biting obituary of his contemporary and friend Can Themba is well-known. In it, Nkosi complains by quoting a statement of someone who supposedly said, at a funeral, that their friend had no business dying. Nkosi maintains that, due to Themba's erudition, he was supposed to have produced literary material prodigiously, but unfortunately his life was cut short by alcoholism. Nkosi speaks of Themba's talent-misuse and talent-neglect—traits I cannot attribute to Moletsane, for his achievement is not underwhelming, and in his interviews he spoke about his future writing plans before being struck down by death. This is important because it shows that Moletsane was excited to continue producing more literary work even as the country neglects and rarely celebrates the talented young, like Moletsane himself, unless their works are misused for state propaganda projects.

Here, in my short homage to Moletsane, I refuse to partake in Nkosi's polemical *should've could've would've* if only to accept and engage the literary work that Moletsane has left behind. The might-have-beens are neither helpful nor insightful in the evaluation of a talent gone too soon. Quantity, after all, has never been a barometer for a good writer. Evidently, South Africa does not have a lack of good writers, including plenty of authors who produced less than three works only to disappear or die while aficionados of literature were anticipating much more from them: Can Themba, Dugmore Boetie, Joel Matlou, Wopko Jensma, Bheki Maseko, Phaswane Mpe, Phumlani Pikoli, etc.



As readers, we are compelled into a serious conversation with what Moletsane tried to communicate in his work and not what he could have achieved in work he did not produce. Any serious reader knows that an author's ability can only be judged when they are dead for the sole reason that they can no longer produce new work. No new work to which we can respond, to which we can look at the literary trajectory, and conclude, whether the author has, over the years, improved, or regressed. With *Junx*, Moletsane's original voice will ring eternal in the world of South African literature, that's for sure.