

A Scheduled Return

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ABSTRACT

A Scheduled Return is a fictional novel written in the first-person perspective, with most of the text in the past tense, switching to the present in leaps in time to delve into the human unconscious experience, through the experiences of the protagonist. This is a hero's quest, a journey of friendship, and a love story wrapped in elements of fantasy and the spiritual world.

This work is experimental and includes topics of race, social divisions, heritage, hate crimes, as well as fantasy, love, rebirth, and many more deep themes. Poetry is also found in some parts of the novel to express the feelings and mental situation of the main character in relation to her circumstances.

Authors such as Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Jack London, William Faulkner, Shirley Jackson, Adolfo Anaya, Tony Morrison, and Nalo Hopkinson have influenced my ideas in the development of this work. But also, Geraldine Heng, Sigmund Freud, and Jeffrey Weinstock, the latter three literary theorists, helped me to design the sophisticated and psychoanalytical part of the novel, marked by its characteristic ambiguity.

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INTRODUCTION

Literature has always been an art form that transcends time and space. Whether in one hemisphere or the other, the world of words exists in many forms and in countless languages. It seeks to convey a message, teach a lesson, reach others, and sometimes change a part of the world or the whole world. And one of my greatest passions, creative writing, is also in this direction. Even as a child, I was involved in writing though I did not give it the importance it deserved and did not consider it for my future academic career. I was an only child and tried to find a way to collect my thoughts and put them out into the world so that others could understand me. Therefore, in middle school I started writing short poems and even stories, and it gradually became more than just a hobby. I was not aware of what I was doing, but my teachers always wanted me to participate in contests or other literary events where I could showcase my talents. I entered poetry contests, story contests, and drawing contests and was rewarded for it. Nevertheless, I was not aware of my potential because no one in my family or my closest circle of acquaintances was really interested in it.

I remember that when I was about ten years old, I liked to watch films, but I never liked cartoons much, only fantasy and mystery. At that time (2001) a series of movies came out. The first movie of *The Lord of the Rings*, for example, inspired me heavily with its fictional world. I spent hours analyzing the story and its characters. And I always wondered how someone could imagine all that and build such a complicated environment in their head. What fascinated me the most was the spirit behind the story. I was still a kid, but the seemingly intended purpose behind things caught my attention more than the final product. I experienced how people were so captivated and seduced by the movies that I fell in love with storytelling more than I had before.

And interestingly, there was always a reason for the creation of the fictional world, there was always a journey, a goal, a lesson. Most of the time the lesson was too complicated to understand, but in other cases it really touched the fibers of my soul. My love of storytelling grew even more with the release of the *Harry Potter* series. The first film in that series hit theaters around the same time in 2001, and I was blown away. This world was even more carefully and strategically designed. There were categories for everything, for magic and for the nature of things, which made me want to research the author. That was the moment when I thought, this is what I want to do. I wanted to write. At that point, I did not know what I was going to create, but I just knew that one day I would. That interest intensified when *The Twilight Saga* hit theaters in 2008. I was about seventeen years old at the time and already knew that the books were calling me, and even though I was pursuing a science-based path, my mind often drifted to letters. *The Twilight Saga* made me realize that I was born for the creative world of writing and should do nothing else. What was I supposed to do with all the creativity I had inside me? Just write about it.

Similarly, I think one of the most influential series I have watched and immersed myself in is *Dark*, which was released in 2017 and can be found on Netflix. How can I even begin to explain *Dark*? Its story has so many plot twists spread throughout the seasons that it is impossible for the viewer to predict them. It is a homogeneous mix of science fiction, real facts, historical locations, and even a lot of time travel in between. Hence, it is one of the most challenging series I have ever followed to understand the motive behind the characters, the events, and the hallucinating, completely unexpected plots that unfold in each round. Undoubtedly, this is one of the aspects that captured my full attention and made me glued to my seat while watching several episodes in a day. I wanted to know more each time, even if I was

not able to understand what was going on. In the end, though, it was worth it because the truths that the various characters had to discover were unfathomable. There were also the interwoven lines of the past, generations back to the ancestors of the place called Winden in Germany, and a constant reminder that everything is connected. This and other features of *Dark* greatly inspired me to write something more than a linear story.

Fiction makes it possible to create new spaces that may not have existed in literature or film, but which begin to exist the moment a writer pushes them out of his mind. Consequently, I have always been drawn to fiction, and to those of its genre variants that appeal to me the most. I also reflected on my education as a child, and I remember that as I contemplated events and my daily life, I kept weaving ideas together to imagine alternative possibilities to what I had experienced. This exercise has stayed with me throughout my life, helping me to look at, analyze, and understand difficult situations from different perspectives. In doing so, I was always focused on a specific goal or outcome that I wanted to achieve. Some situations are more complicated than others, of course, and require different scenarios and outcomes, but I always imagined how things would change if I acted differently.

This constant mindset created stories in my head quite often. And I got lost in my thoughts, instead of putting them into words and writing them, because I did not even think about that possibility. No one around me had the habit of writing and expressing themselves so freely in words, so it did not occur to me. This led to more introversion and introspection, with imagination sometimes bubbling over without me knowing how to contain it. I did not know that the best way to get a handle on my thoughts and essence was to pick up a pen and write. But later I came to understand that. It also made me realize that the goal behind most of my writing goes hand in hand with empathy. I want to touch the reader with the story and give them a message

about the importance of inclusion, acceptance, kindness, and making a positive contribution to life. In previous stories, I have not only used different languages to unite differences, but also conveyed the message in different dimensions. Many of my characters represent the marginalized, the rejected, and the invisible to most people.

Moreover, I officially began my path to writing during the end of my undergraduate studies and reinforced it in my current graduate program. Since then, I have written various short stories and poems in English, Spanish, and French. And I cannot (ironically) express in words how important it is to me. I spend my days making up stories based on my experiences or situations I observe in others. I think a lot about writing and use my perceptions as a foreigner who lived abroad for almost six years as part of my inspiration for creating new projects like this one.

When I have the opportunity to sit down and type the first lines of a story, it is like a rebirth, and I experience anew, the world that I create. As Gloria Anzaldúa expresses about her writing, it is a way of healing herself more than just grabbing a pen and inking the pages of a notebook. “That’s what writing is for me, an endless cycle of making it worse, making it better, but always making meaning out of the experience, whatever it may be” (Anzaldúa 73). As a result, I have also been inspired by the fantastic stories I have read during my studies and also in my free time.

While drafting *A Scheduled Return*, I immersed myself in a new aspect of my writing that I had not explored much before. The space of the main character is roughly unstable and there are external forces that affect her on several occasions. These forces impact the way she sees things, or how she perceives the world around her, even how she feels with herself and others. There are various instances of spiritual intervention, as in dreams, visions, and episodes in which

the character is in between here and there, the spiritual realm and the physical world. This kind of world-building can be disjunctive and not easy to follow, but in a story it is intended to construct realms that are both realistic and fabulist, and where the protagonist will have legitimate experiences in this journey. These spiritual happenings are not limited to any particular actual religious practice or spiritual rituals. I am working with a collection of ideas and observations compiled into this fictive space I have created. Since the mind is mysterious and sometimes unpredictable, just as life is, the novel's characters go on adventures that supersede their expectations in search of something meaningful for them. They have the motive of living and searching for meaning.

This introduction is divided into three parts: part one is about my literary influences, the creative works that help me define my narrative style; part two is about the academic influences I had during my studies, which also shaped the way I write this and other works. The third part presents the challenges I had while working on this novel, including my views about it.

I

As for my influences, I could say that Edgar Allan Poe is one of the writers who influenced my style and the intent of the worlds I imagine in my stories, especially in “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839) and “The Masque of the Red Death” (1842). Even though he is not contemporary, I must admit that his stories have been floating around in my head for a very long time and sometimes influence the way I write my stories. As in “The Masque of the Red Death” and its depiction of the darkness of the disease, which lingers in the memory for a long time, it is also attractive and sinister at the same time. “The scarlet stains upon the body and especially upon the face of the victim, were the pest-ban which shut him out from the aid and from the sympathy of his fellow-men” (Poe 1585).

I have always admired the way Poe creates suspense in his mysterious tales by veiling everything and then suddenly surprising the reader by taking him aback. Also, the dark, gloomy, and unknown realm into which he immerses the reader has stayed with me ever since I first read one of his stories. One of the things that inspired me to create a character as deadly as death itself was his own way of portraying it in his stories. “His vesture was dabbled in *blood*—and his broad brow, with all the features of the face, was besprinkled with the scarlet horror” (Poe 1589). As often as I read his stories and poems, or even watch movies inspired by his works, I can never get enough of them. They just speak to my soul.

In “The Birthmark” (1843) by Nathaniel Hawthorne, he explores the intricate dimension of the pursuit of perfection with such intensity that it becomes dangerous. He presents the cause and effect of decisions and actions that also work with an atmosphere of mystery and unpredictability. “As the last crimson tint of the birth-mark—that sole token of human imperfection—faded from her cheek, the parting breath of the now perfect woman passed into the atmosphere, and her soul, lingering a moment near her husband, took its heavenly flight” (Hawthorne 1331). There is also the dangers of toxic love and the danger of not taking care of oneself or giving too much away to others. The complicated nature of relationships and real love taken for granted are just some of the themes. I work with this kind of dynamic in the portrayal of romance that I show in my novel; there is not only the beauty, but also the ugly and the dark side. Therefore, it does not have to be necessarily equated with an unwanted birthmark, but the lack of genuine love and acceptance of the other can be evil in any kind of story.

In addition to Poe’s gothic writings, realist Jack London’s story “To Build a Fire” (1902) influenced me greatly. His talent for portraying the introspective and almost meditative essence of the mind and how it is reflected in his unnamed character “the man” under all those icy piles

of snow was too alluring for me. Especially the depth with which London builds the emotional and psychological connection between the man and the wild dog that goes beyond survival or mere instinct. Both are animals with different levels and circumstances of development, and yet they have the same needs in surviving in this extreme environment where they are almost hypothermic. “But the man remained silent. Later, the dog whined loudly. And still later it crept close to the man and caught the scent of death. This made the animal bristle and back away. A little longer it delayed, howling under the stars that leaped and danced and shone brightly in the cold sky” (London 14). His lyrical and intense way with words, and the way he makes this mental connection between the two creatures and their differences has changed the way I read stories. He made me put myself in the inner world of the characters and the author, imagining and visualizing the feelings, sensations, and thoughts. I also liked the way the animal is portrayed, not only as a surviving beast, but also with a conscience, just on a human level. This way of writing influenced the way I let my characters pose questions and search for answers within themselves.

As for my use of italics and stream-of-consciousness inspiration in my writing, there is influence of William Faulkner’s novels *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) and *As I Lay Dying* (1930). When I first read these and other Faulkner works, I also found them very compelling. Not only because of the way he crafts the novels and the uncomfortable themes he works with, but also because of how he develops the inner nature of his characters. He deals very well with how the mind works and how thoughts leap through the ages with explosions of thought without regimen of order. This is because the mind is always awake, always working, and thoughts flood it for no particular reason. That is why I was carried away by the musings of his characters even though readers must lose themselves in a lagoon of dark thoughts. That kind of thought process happens,

too. His use of italics for these individual character thoughts stuck with me, and in consequence, I used it in my novel. It was a kind of tool that made it easier to sketch personalities, tendencies, and goals. And also, to allow readers to explore the thoughts of my characters.

I was drawn to *Absalom! Absalom!* in part because of Faulkner's representation of fire. This is a very important element in my story, and it also fits with what the Austrian composer Gustav Mahler once said, "Tradition is not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire." I am not referring to tradition in the novel, but to lineage and heritage. These aspects are constantly linked in my work to a representation of fire and even lava, never losing their relevance as the narrative progresses. In Faulkner's work, he concludes *Absalom! Absalom!* with Clytie setting fire to Stupen's Hundred, which functions as an act of destruction and cleansing from the traumas of her ancestry and heritage. But the symbolism of fire can be interpreted differently. It can also lead to preservation, to the maintenance of ancient power, wisdom, and continuity, as in the case of the ancestral heritage.

Another author who has captivated me since I first read "The Lottery" (1948) is Shirley Jackson. The story was interesting and kept me riveted the whole way through, only to find that the ending was not what I had expected when I started reading. I always took it as a kind of creative and very sharp critique of society. That human behavior and psyche are strangely ambivalent and constantly changing. Some people are not what they pretend to be. "Bill Hutchinson went over to his wife and forced the slip of paper out of her hand. It had a black spot on it, the black spot Mr. Summers had made the night before with the heavy pencil in the coal company office. Bill Hutchinson held it up, and there was a stir in the crowd" (Jackson 7). This is the kind of view of society and people in general that I have also tried to convey in my novel with the antagonist of the story and the way events are obscured by circumstances that the

characters cannot clearly see. In the times we live in today, the ironic portrayal of twisted characters and circumstances is just as realistic as that of corruption, burglary, hacking, fraud, and other situations. As a result, Jackson's story modeled how to portray such characters, circumstances, and narrative twists.

As for the tendency to create a spiritual atmosphere in my writing, by evoking ancestors with the figure of a goddess, I recognize an influence of Rudolfo Anaya with his *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972). He works with the ancestral figure of Ultima, a magical old woman who embodies ancient wisdom, indigenous knowledge, natural medicine, nature itself, and feminine power. "As Ultima walked past me I smelled for the first time a trace of the sweet fragrance of herbs that always lingered in her wake. Many years later, long after Ultima was gone and I had grown to be a man, I would awaken sometimes at night and think I caught a scent of her fragrance in the cool-night breeze" (Anaya 13). Accordingly, this is something I like to address in my writing, the influence of history, heritage, ancestral lines, older female figures in a family, healers who existed in the past, etc. They were important in their time, but they are still important with their everlasting knowledge that is passed down from one generation to the next. My character is very similar to Ultima, although I did not realize it at first, but she also has her own characteristics and traits. Her powers are more fictional in nature, as well. Thus, she is the guide, the healer, and the spirit of life itself.

More so, the incredible Tony Morrison with *Beloved* (1987) and *The Bluest Eye* (1970), inspired me to write about the things I did not want to write about, the hard, the bad, and the ugly. These are the experiences or perceptions I have had in my life but probably had hidden in my subconscious and did not know how to put them into words. I also admire the way in which she writes the thoughts of the characters as they would flood the mind from time to time, the

thoughts of afflicted and damaged characters. "...those able to die are in a pile I cannot find my man the one whose teeth I have loved a hot thing the little hill of dead people A hot thing ..." (Morrison 249). I am deeply grateful to have encountered her writing, her mastery of complicated stories involving racial and violent confrontations, and the unapologetic form in which she presents the truth of her art. The way she depicts violence, abuse, cruelty, discrimination, and despair is, to me, very artistic. And even when she is introspective, she captures the heart of the reader. "She was getting ready to smile at me and when she saw the dead people pushed into the sea she went also and left me there with no face or hers" (Morrison 253). It is hard to put these issues on paper, but she does it so naturally, so beautifully. She turns readers' stomachs, but she also creates an awareness of the suffering of others, and she pays respect to history, to the accounts of those who have endured the worst. This is something I kept in mind when depicting violence, hatred, and other obscure aspects of humanity in this novel.

Ana Castillo is also a writer that has influenced my ideas with her novel *So Far from God* (1993). The depiction of a patriarchal society taking its toll on the female characters in the story touched me deeply, especially with the character of Caridad. This has always been an important theme, and literature itself has been a great form of protest, activism, and revolution for women. Castillo expresses the cruelty that Caridad suffers in a raw and direct way, something that I have also tried to emulate in my work. As I mentioned with Toni Morrison, this approach and these characteristics are not easy to work with, but they are necessary. She does this so well when the character was brutally attacked and left for dead. "There was too much blood to see at the time, but after Caridad had been taken by ambulance to the hospital, treated and saved (just barely), Sofi was told that her daughter's nipples had been bitten off. She had also been scourged with 'something, branded like cattle' (Castillo 27-28). Even though this was an event included in the

work as part of the development of one of the characters, it represents the truth in various parts of the world where women have been mutilated, raped, and killed. Something like this plays a role in my work only in a few cases, but I mark the difference between good and evil, and also the lack of empathy that leads to karmic repercussions.

One more author who has made a big impression on me and influenced my writing is Nalo Hopkinson with her short story “The Glass Bottle Trick” (2000). I like the way her story keeps the reader interested, looking for clues as to what is really going on with the characters and the place. Also, her impeccable way of hinting at the story with signs and symbols that can lead to the climax and essence of the story. “He would have seen the broken bottles, would feel the warmth of the house. Beatrice felt that initial calm of the prey that realizes it has no choice but to turn and face the beast that is pursuing it. She wondered if Samuel would be able to read the truth hidden in her body, like the egg in the bottle” (Hopkinson 270). From her I learned the art of foreshadowing, as well as the way to subtly portray the mystery and anticipation at the heart of a story that builds little by little, although this is not easy to master either.

II

Part of my inspiration in writing was influenced by my study of literary theory during my academic preparation, more specifically, psychoanalytic theory founded by Sigmund Freud. The studies that most shaped my ideas were *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and *The Uncanny* (1973). The use of symbols associated with underlying ideas about emotional or psychological effects comes from his works on these subjects. My tendency to delve into the realms of the dream or the unconscious was also strongly influenced by his studies of dreams and their meaning. In addition, the death drive, which he

identifies and studies, also appears in my novel to construct more deeply the psyche of one of the characters, as a means of understanding his nature and the motivations for his actions.

First, I was not aware of the extent of Freud's presence in my creative thesis until recently, when I saw it reflected in almost the entire novel. I begin by thinking about the main character's thoughts and feelings, as well as her psychological state, which changes throughout the novel. The changes are sometimes erratic and without linear progression because they reflect the real struggles of the mind. The unknown or slightly familiar is also reflected in my work because of the uncanny, that ever-recurring state in which one recognizes what is going on but is unable to explain or identify it. "I will say at once that both courses lead to the same result: the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (800). This happens regularly with the main character and her reaction to the experiences on her journey. She has a constant feeling of knowing what seems to have no real origin because there is no clear memory of having experienced it before. But in her soul, it is familiar.

I found scholarly work in *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (2018) by Geraldine Heng that piqued my interest in the dilemma of racial differences, the invention of race, the rejection of certain races, skin colors, etc., among other aspects I have always wanted to explore. I found her book more than fascinating and appreciated the way she addresses how important it is to know how the idea of race was created in the past because it still defines the world today. This is one of the central themes of my novel and the reason I chose to work with it in the first place. In her book, Heng attributes the invention of race to humanity's need to maintain power and dominance over others. Furthermore, she assumes that this imaginary

dividing line between races arose from a sense of otherness and separation from what was seen as different.

In the fifth chapter, “World I,” she explores topics such as the first races of America, Settler Colonization, Race, and DNA. She begins with a crude but important quote, “The smaller the number of Indians ... the easier it is to regard the continent as disposable. It is perfectly acceptable to move into unoccupied land and land with only a few ‘savages’ is the next best thing” (Heng 1448). Heng further explains that in a world of difference, the categories of *physiognomic taxonomy* (which allows the classifications of humans) had to make room for the physiology of Native Americans, the ethnic races in the Mongol Confederacy; Han and non-Han Chinese of the Middle Kingdom; and the Jat, Rajput, or other races of India, groups of whom moved westward in the Middle Ages - dark-skinned peoples who morphed into Gypsies and Egyptians as they migrated. This and other information in her book, highlights the ideas of difference I wanted to portray and also challenge, in a way. Although I deal with the meaning and the whole ideology of race in my novel, I admit that it is a delicate subject that I work with and that I attempt to respect all the historical aspects of it. At the heart of my idea is the human race as a global reality, beyond labels and distinct physical differences. Ultimately, the opportunity to learn about Heng’s book helped me a lot to put into words what I wanted to convey.

Similarly, Jeffrey Weinstock influenced my work with his book *The Monster Theory Reader* (2020). When I first came into contact with monster theory, I was already a lover of literary theory in all its variations, and this academic approach to monsters made me realize many things about the stories I had heard or read before. The most relevant aspect of the book was a discussion of stories about monstrous beings that are sometimes rejected by society and

then reveal themselves against it. He also defines what is considered a monster, "... 'monster' derives from the Latin *monstrum*, which is related to the verbs *monstrare* ('show' or 'reveal') and *monere* ('warn' or 'portend')" (Weinstock 2). Thus, I understand that a monster is created in the imagination or through folklore, legends, and myths to reveal something that also serves to warn others. Keeping this definition of a monster in mind, it makes sense to remember the recurring stories that old people in most cultures tell younger people. This is because these stories contain secret warnings that are usually ignored or not fully understood by the less experienced. There are so many of these stories, adapted according to the country or culture in which they are told.

With this information in hand, I was able to design a figure that has abnormal characteristics. This figure can be seen as a witch, a goddess, a shape-shifting monster, or in many other ways. But she also reflects the power and the heritage of Africa. She is part of nature and lives through it; however, nature is also part of her. Her appearance is part monstrous, part enchanting, but again there is a dichotomy between what may appear monstrous, and the idea others have of what is accepted as "normal." Since Africa is a continent of diverse cultural heritage, but also of ancient wisdom, this figure must also be strong to convey a message in relation to the place of origin. Weinstock's scholarship helped me define this character, who is one of the most important in my novel. "However, further research reveals these monsters to be complex, provocative creatures, open to a variety of conflicting interpretations" (Weinstock 176). Reading his work, I understood that with the diversity of the human population comes the diversity of thoughts and interpretations about this phenomenon, monsters and what they might represent.

III

However, there were numerous challenges in writing this work, my first work of fiction in book form. First of all, because of most of my literary influences, my writing style is most closely associated with the Victorian style of storytelling. This is something I have had to change and have been working on since I started working with this creative project. My mentor, Loretta Collins Klobah, was kind enough to help me transition to a more contemporary writing style. My writing previously followed a gothic novel style. I also had to change my literary craft and move to a simpler and more straightforward writing style, using less decorative but antiquated language. It was something I had not anticipated, but it helped me a lot, because when I look back at the writers I loved from the beginning, they were from a different era, and so were the word choices they used. I have been heavily influenced by writers like Poe, as I mentioned earlier, and also poets such as John Keats, Thomas Hardy, and Robert Browning. Nowadays, on the other hand, there is no need for certain ornate words and phrases, which I have gradually left behind.

The process of writing about such a topic as race, on the other hand, was more than challenging and a whole new learning process. How can one ask a question about race without it becoming a mere controversy? How to communicate such ideas frankly but also respectfully? These are difficult questions to answer. I knew I had a complicated task at hand when I decided to write “A Scheduled Return”, but I wanted to do it as well as I could. I have read in the past the example of other writers who were faced with the constraints of their time, resources, or censorship, yet did not hold back in expressing themselves and communicating their truth. I said yes to the challenge. And my mentor made it possible by giving me the tools to accomplish my task and feedback on how to do so successfully without replicating problematic tropes related to

the othering of one ethnic or racial groups by another. While I have done everything in my power to do it this way, I understand that it can still be a job that involves aspects to consider before committing to writing a novel on these themes. My idea is to try to set my focus in large part on race, gender, nationalities, and spirituality.

Another challenge I encountered with this novel is the differences I have as an author with the protagonist, Lilly. Since this is a story written in first person perspective, it is really complicated to imagine life and events in the story through Lilly's eyes. Her experiences contrast with my own experiences as a Caribbean academic and writer. I had to put aside my preconceptions, what I had previously learned, and the blocks that censored my ideas from time to time. I also had to imagine how she saw and felt about the characters and the place she suddenly found herself in. Lilly was a daunting task, not only because of the whole world that lies between me and her, but also because of the narrative I chose for it. The themes involving different nationalities, sensibilities and spaces go hand in hand with people's essences, their perceptions, their suffering, and struggles. This is something I deeply respect. I also have my views about my work. I know the difficulties it presents.

After mentioning my literary influences and the process of creating this work, I want to specify that my novel draft "A Schedule Return," could be considered to be a hero's quest or epic that also incorporates other elements of various narrative genres. The novel contains controversial themes of race, ethnicity, violence, hate crimes, civil unrest, and revolution, as well as romance, love, sacrifice, magic, reincarnation, fate, and karma, as well as the themes of man versus nature, man versus man, and more. There are moments when I deal explicitly with violence and the ugly possibilities of evil in its various forms. There is antagonism, in the form that reveals a malignant capacity for hatred that is extremely harmful. And there is trauma, but

also healing. Yet not only are the heinous parts of the story intense, love and the healing presence of ancient wisdom are also strong in the novel. Consequently, much is not as it seems when the reader encounters the plot; there is more to it.

With this novel, I wanted to experiment and create a different story that had to do with race and in which persons interact with each other while considering their societal or self-labeling vis-à-vis race. My intention is to write about of a community of blacks and whites, Asians, or racial groupings, as well as people of mixed races. I do not pretend to erase or dismiss the history or struggles that any group has faced or still faces. I also connect different ancestors to everyone involved, only to eventually discover that there are more ancestors in common between the characters than they ever thought possible.

I also portray the importance of nature and its capacity of healing. In the world of this novel, what matters in the end is what man has made of his life and what lies within his soul rather than the constructed categories of difference that have resulted in historical violence, social disparities, bigotry, and racism.

Since this is an experimental work, I have inserted poetry between the prose passages at certain moments in the novel. These poetic inserts, which are emotional and sometimes intense in nature, reflect the state of mind and heart of the protagonist at those moments. They also serve as a measuring device to test and monitor her transformations, her learning processes over the course of her experiences, and her gradual decline or, more accurately, her loss of a sense of the present. As a poet would, she uses poetry as a reflection of her inner state and even her intentions that are not otherwise fully articulated, and which may be hidden or obscured to her by her fears.

“The ability of story (prose and poetry) to transform the storyteller and the listener into something or someone else is shamanistic. The writer, as shape-changer, is a nahual, a shaman” (Anzaldúa 66). As Gloria Anzaldúa beautifully explains in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), poetry reaches the soul and is in many ways a kind of spiritual tool that allows a clear connection to one’s core, to nature, and to the spiritual world.

Hence, in my novel, these poetic sections may be interwoven with episodes of unconsciousness, physical detachment, or confusing states of synesthesia. The moments when Lilly is immersed in this state of consciousness, in and out of her awareness of surroundings and self, are sub-headed and divided into small sections to mark the different intensity and individuality. Using section sub-headings and shifting narrative styles, I felt inspired by Marcia Douglas and her way of organizing her novel *The Marvellous Equations of the Dread: A Novel in Bass Riddim* (2018), which captures the reader’s attention.

Furthermore, the theme of past lives and rebirth recurs throughout this work. There is a reason, a purpose, why I use this theme and its consequences in the story. Cause and effect are a constant karmic bridge between the lifetimes, the actions, and the choices of the characters along the way. But with the possibility of different lifetimes also comes the chance to solve problems and restore balance to what needs to be fixed individually and socially. This has the idealistic but needed effect of revising what is wrong in order to bring about change for the better. I put in this idea of a continuation of life to set things right for the protagonist, something of which there is no certainty in reality. But why not have an imagined, fictional space where this is possible? The poet Robert Browning also presents the idea of rebirth in his works, for example in the poem “At the Mermaid” (1895). “My sun sets to rise again” (Browning 2067). I follow the idea that every day brings a new opportunity, but so does a multiple succession of lives.

“A Scheduled Return” is set in Zimbabwe. Therefore, most of the action takes place around called Victoria Falls, with the timeline alternating between 1967 and 2018, by means of something that can be seen as magical time travel. The protagonists are Lilly Kay, from Sweden, an event planner, and Joseph Murray, doctor from Zimbabwe and significant character. Regina, Lilly’s Swedish friend, accompanies her on her travel, and Zane, a skilled African tour guide whom they hire. He is also Joseph’s friend. Then, there is Tuliah, she is an enigmatic African elder. Gary Mercy, Joseph’s dubious friend and colleague has his role to play. Amos, who is a loving African old man with an unusual defect, and Nala, Joseph’s housekeeper, and caregiver are other characters. Finally, there is Death, who is the personification of the end or death itself, among other characters.

The novel consists of eight chapters: “A Trip to My Dreams,” “Between the Falls,” “Sands of Darkness,” “The Physician’s Den,” “Land of Chaos,” “The Forbidden Fruit,” “Dancing the In-Between,” and “A Soul’s Ethnicity.” It begins in Sweden with Lilly embarking on an adventure with her friend Regina after experiencing a vivid dream (a revelation) one night in her sleep about what she believes to be a “past life experience.” In this dream, she sees “herself” in a hospital holding an adorable African baby in her arms. She could feel the love and protective instinct she had for the baby, even though she did not know him. But when she saw that he was sick, she felt great fear and despair that kept jolting her out of sleep. It became a nightmare for her. She wanted to know why she kept dreaming about it. So, she does some research and discovers the place she had glimpsed in the dream world. Then she takes a flight to Africa and organizes a trip that starts in Morocco and goes through Mali, Nigeria, Cameroon, Congo, Angola, and Zimbabwe. Zane, the guide, helps them travel to these places and leads them to their destination of Victoria Falls.

Nonetheless, what had seemed like a casually planned and unexpected journey becomes something else when they arrive. Once there, a series of mysterious events occur, and she meets Joseph, the famous doctor of Victoria Falls, with whom she falls in love rather quickly. Both are unaware of their fate or their real past. Lilly has no idea that her life will change drastically when she finds out who he really is. The protagonist and doctor are also guided by “the fiery woman,” who knows the secrets of this magical and natural place of the falls and the secrets of everyone. They encounter great obstacles and danger and delve into the spiritual depths. It is thanks to the woman spiritual guide and her power that they find their way and seek to heal themselves, as well as others while on their journey.

The last chapter of the novel, “A Soul’s Ethnicity,” is written in the present tense with a specific purpose. That is, to let the reader know that Lily is speaking in the present tense. This was another experimental measure I took in this project. It makes the narrative more dynamic and conveys the message of mindfulness that I wanted to convey. Letting her experiences and her situation in the present moment, after all she has been through, be the focus was what the text asked of me or what I found most appropriate. The haunting presence of the figure of death, with its devious, malicious, but also legitimate actions, is a pure reflection of what should be something so universal and inevitable. For death, love, birth, and other events of life exist regardless of race, gender, or other social implications. This chapter is very intimate between the reader and the protagonist.

Altogether, it is difficult to put into words ideas, feelings, urges, passions, losses. Sensations are the first experiences that a living being has, and people have a direct connection between these sensations and thoughts. The creation of a whole world, universe, characters, and actions that traverse time is a process that starts from an initiator of a reality. As I show with my

novel draft, literary works pursue certain goals that, even if they are not always defined in an obviously didactic way by the author, can seek to mobilize people, penetrate their psyche, interfere with their inner-selves, and eventually influence entire social movements. The act of writing is of paramount importance to humanity. Hereby, the manner of developing within a narrative a universe and a story, as well as the creative-intellectual processes behind such a project are worth exploring by a writer and their readers.

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