



This document is devoted to poetry by bipolar authors or related bipolar themes

All contributions are welcome

Ingrid Jonker (1933-1965)

Ingrid Jonker was born on the farm of her maternal grandfather in the small town of Douglas in the Northern Cape, close to the confluence of the Vaal and Orange rivers. Her parents, Abraham Jonker and Beatrice Cilliers, were separated before she was born. Abraham Jonker suspected his wife of falling pregnant by another man and threw her and his daughters out in disgrace, her mother staying with her and her older sister Anna. Following the death of her grandfather who had moved to a farm near Cape Town, the woman of the family were left destitute and relocated to a house in Durbanville. From then on their mother's health deteriorated. She suffered from leukemia and a nervous condition which led to her suicide in 1943, dying at Valkenberg Psychiatric Hospital when Ingrid was only ten.

When Abraham arrived 'out of the blue' to claim his daughters, Ingrid and Anna were sent to Wynberg Girls' High School in the Southern suburbs of Cape Town where Ingrid began writing poetry for the school magazine. Both girls moved in with their father and his third wife and their children, however they continued to be treated as outsiders with Ingrid choosing to spend time in the servant's quarters.

By the age of sixteen Ingrid had struck up a correspondence D. J. Opperman, one South Africa's foremost Afrikaans poets, who was to prove highly influential to her own writing. Although several publishers showed interest in her work at this time, she was advised to delay going to print. After Ingrid matriculated with an mediocre D aggregate, but with a brilliant A in Afrikaans, she moved into a flat in Cape Town, where for three years she did proofreading and copy-editing for various publishers.

Ingrid herself had been voluntarily admitted to Valkenberg on more than one occasion and her first collection of poems, *Ontvlugting* ('Escape') published in 1956 opens with a poem of the same name. The collection was dedicated to her father Abraham Jonker, who on being handed the first copy stated, "My child, I hope there is more to it than the covers. I'll look tonight to see how you have disgraced me."

Ontvlugting (1956)

Uit hierdie Valkenburg het ek ontvlug

en dink my nou in Gordonsbaai terug:

Ek speel met paddavisse in 'n stroom
 en kerf swastikas in 'n rookransboom

Ek is die hond wat op die strande draf
 en dom-allenig teen die aandwind blaf

Ek is die seevoël wat verhongerd dwaal
 en dooie nagte opdig as 'n maal

Die god wat jou geskep het uit die wind
 sodat my smart in jou volmaaktheid vind:

My lyk lê uitgespoel in wier en gras
 op al die plekke waar ons eenmaal was.

In the opening couplet Jonker leaps from her flight from Valkenberg to fond memories of herself as a child at play and swimming with her sister 'like otters' in Gordon's Bay. Despite the happy memories, these were of a time of extreme deprivation for the all-female family. On occasions they had to do with some soup or a fish head for supper at other times nothing at all.

Although not written in the style of her later years where she breaks free from the format of rhyming couplets, this poem is prophetic because it foreshadows her own suicide on the night of 19 July 1965, when she walked into the Atlantic at Three Anchor Bay in Cape Town and died by drowning. Her body was later recovered. Note the penultimate line, "My corpse lies washed ashore among seaweed and grass..."

In the same year *Ontvlugting* was published Jonker married Pieter Venter and moved with him to Johannesburg. In 1957 their daughter Simone was born, however after three years their marriage fell apart and Jonker moved back to Cape Town.

This poem below, almost a decade later evinces a much darker, cynical, suicidally obsessed soul in torment. By this time Jonker had endured every kind of humiliation from her father who had publically disowned her to her handful of lovers who blew hot and cold, treating her as a consensual sexual object and intellectual curiosity. Her relationship with the writer and academic André Brink was passionate but more mercurial. When however she announced to her other lover, Jack Cope, that she had fallen pregnant, his reaction was to ask, "What are you going to do about it?" According to Jonker, what she did about it was to organize a back street abortion performed by an old woman with a knitting needle.

Met hulle is ek (January 1965)

Met hulle is ek
 wat seks misbruik
 omdat die individu nie tel nie
 met hulle wat dronk word
 teen die afgrond van die brein
 teen die illusie dat die lewe
 eenmaal goed of mooi of betekenisvol was
 teen die tuinpartytjies van die valsheid
 teen die stilte wat slaan teen die slape
 met hulle wat oud en arm
 meeding met die dood die atoombom van die dae
 met hulle verdwaas in inrigtings
 geskok met elektriese strome
 deur die katarakte van die sintuie
 met hulle van wie die hart ontnem is
 soos die lig uit die robot van veiligheid
 met hulle kleurling african ontroof
 met hulle wat moor
 omdat elke sterfte opnuut bevestig
 die leuen van die lewe
 en vergeet asseblief
 van geregtigheid dit bestaan nie
 van broederskap dis bedrog
 van liefde dit het geen reg nie

Met hulle is ek begins with a statement of solidarity with those who are shunned by the “civilized” society of her day: ‘those who abuse sex’ was surely, besides its literal meaning, a reference to the

then Freudian idea that psychopathology was the results of untamed and repressed sexual forces in the unconscious. Without a tissue of evidence, this was the dominant paradigm in psychiatry at the time that she consented to be admitted to Valkenberg. Clearly she would have been blamed for her own state of mind, not to mention that she could have faced criminal prosecution if her then illegal abortion had come to the attention of the authorities. The reference to electric shocks “with electric currents through the cataracts of the senses...” is a literal one, she underwent electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) at Valkenberg at a time when its use was primitive, dangerous and poorly understood. Unlike today when ECT is exquisitely controlled by dedicated equipment that detects the onset of a seizure and cuts the current before any harm can be done, ECT in those days consisted of a doctor holding live electrodes to the patient’s forehead and counting down the seconds before removing them.

It is all too easy to dismiss Jonker’s final plea to “forget about...” as the ranting of a severely depressed, deranged woman. Ask yourself, does justice really exist in any better sense in the world today or have we simply traded one set of injustices for another? What about brotherhood, or is that only something that terrorists cherish these days? And love, does it really enjoy any right? Well not of the constitutional sort but is it not too bold to hope that each of us has a right to be loved and to love dependably?

While *Met hulle is ek* is one of several of Jonker’s darkest cries from despair, *Die kind wat dood geskiet is deur soldate* by Nyanga is a work of triumphant defiance. Coming on the heels of the Sharpeville Massacre on 21 March 1960, riots broke out across the country, including Cape Town where a black baby was shot dead by the security police in his mother’s arms. In her colorblind solidarity and morbid obsession, Jonker went down to the police station at Philippi and demanded to see the infant body. In a moment of inspiration and outrage she penned the following verse, read out by President Nelson Mandela at the opening of the Houses of Parliament at Cape Town on the 24 May 1994:

Die kind wat dood geskiet is deur soldate by Nyanga (March, 1960)

Die kind is nie dood nie

die kind lig sy vuiste teen sy moeder

wat Afrika skreeu skreeu die geur van vryheid en heide

in die lokasies van die omsingelde hart

Die kind lig sy vuiste teen sy vader

in die optog van die generasies

wat Afrika skreeu skreeu die geur

van geregtigheid en bloed

in die strate van sy gewapende trots

Die kind is nie dood nie

nòg by Langa nòg by Nyanga

nòg by Orlando nòg by Sharpville
 nòg by die polisiestatie in Philippi
 waar hy lê met 'n koeël deur sy kop
 Die kind is die skaduwee van die soldate
 op wag met gewere sarasene en knuppels
 die kind is teenwoordig by alle vergaderings en wetgewings
 die kind loer deur die vensters van huise en in die harte
 van moeders
 die kind wat net wou speel in die son by Nyanga is orals
 die kind wat 'n man geword het trek deur die ganse Afrika
 die kind wat 'n reus geword het reis deur die hele wêreld
 Sonder 'n pas

Jonker wrote of the poem in *Drum* magazine: "I am surprised when people call it political... It grew out of my own experiences and sense of bereavement. It rests on a foundation of all philosophy, a certain belief in "life eternal", a belief that nothing is ever wholly lost." Of course the child's life was literally lost but we have to ask did it die in vain? True, South Africa was never the same after these massacres. The pass laws have gone and the moneyed classes may travel freely wherever they choose but how many senseless massacres have we endured since, including the massacre of over 100 psychiatric patients, in what the authorities described a cost saving move, in Johannesburg just this year?

If Ingrid Jonker was outraged by the injustice, Abraham Jonker was incensed at her audacity, not just at this poem but in her opposition to his political beliefs in general. While his first wife and girls were struggling just to get by in Durbanville, Abraham Jonker was inveigling his way into the Nationalist Party structures, later being appointed as chairman of the parliamentary select committee responsible for censorship laws on art, publications and entertainment. When their differences became public, Jonker's father denied her as his daughter in a speech to parliament.

In 1963 Jonker's most critically acclaimed work, *Rook en oker* ("Smoke and Ochre") was published. This slim but intense volume earned her £1000 from the *Afrikaanse Pers-Boekhandel* (Afrikaans Press-Booksellers) literary prize as well as a scholarship from the Anglo American Corporation. This allowed her to realise her lifelong dream of traveling to Europe, where she was accompanied on parts of her journey by André Brink. From Brink's autobiography it is clear that the trip was a disaster, which she cut short to return to Cape Town after failing to convince him to leave his wife for her.

The Bipolar Connection While reading Brink's account of Jonker's European journey, I became increasingly frustrated that at nearly every turn, and despite her best intentions, Jonker was her own worst enemy. Her wild mood swings and impulsiveness led her from one imprudent decision to another. Even though she was obviously highly intelligent and sensitive, she allowed herself to be misused by most of the men in her life without ever becoming aware of the repeated pattern of abuse.

When things fell apart completely she consented to being admitted again to the very institution from which she once fled. The diagnosis of bipolar disorder did not exist then, although the German psychiatrist Emil Kraepelin (1856–1926) had coined the term “manic depressive psychosis”, however Jonker was not psychotic, as far as we know. Having read various biographical accounts of Jonker and taken the Mood Disorder Questionnaire from what I believe would have been her perspective; I believe that she would have been diagnosed as bipolar by today’s standards. Unfortunately, even if she had had the correct diagnosis there were no effective treatments in her day. Even Lithium Carbonate, which was discovered as a treatment in 1949, was not approved for use by The U.S. Food and Drug Administration until 1970.

We conclude with the words that President Nelson Mandela used to introduce her poem above in parliament in 1994:

The time will come when our nation will honour the memory of all the sons, the daughters, the mothers, the fathers, the youth and the children who, by their thoughts and deeds, gave us the right to assert with pride that we are South Africans, that we are Africans and that we are citizens of the world.

The certainties that come with age tell me that among these we shall find an Afrikaner woman who transcended a particular experience and became a South African, an African and a citizen of the world.

Her name is Ingrid Jonker.

She was both a poet and a South African. She was both an Afrikaner and an African. She was both an artist and a human being.

In the midst of despair, she celebrated hope. Confronted with death, she asserted the beauty of life.

In the dark days when all seemed hopeless in our country, when many refused to hear her resonant voice, she took her own life.

To her and others like her, we owe a debt to life itself. To her and others like her, we owe a commitment to the poor, the oppressed, the wretched and the despised.



Ingrid Jonker with her Characteristically Unkempt Blond Hair and Dark Brown Eyes

Endnote: The Valkenberg Hospital of today has been greatly modernized and upgraded. It functions as a teaching hospital, associated with the School of Health Sciences of the University of Cape Town and is staffed by competent medical personal who practice evidence based medicine. ECT is still in use today but only as a last resort in treatment resistant depression. Patients are required to give their consent and an anesthetic and muscle relaxant are always administered. The way the procedure carried out today is considered safe and effective.

Evanescence (1995 -)

Is there such a thing as bipolar music? No of course not literally, however there are plenty of composers from George Frideric Handel to Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky and Kurt Cobain to Sinéad O'Connor who are or were bipolar. And because music is essentially about the articulation of emotion in sound and in time, it is no surprise that many of the emotional characteristics of bipolar disorder such as intense and contrasting moods, both exuberant and melancholy find expression in their work. And our lives are the richer for their sometimes tragic legacy.

Part of what it is to be bipolar is to experience the full spectrum of human emotion almost too keenly and sometimes overwhelmingly. Because listening to music provides a means of experiencing other's emotions vicariously we actively incorporate it in modulating or enhancing our own mood. Think of the last time you felt overwhelming sadness only to play your most heartrending music, so that paradoxically you would feel worse before you felt better. And then there is the social aspect: at least when music speaks to us, we are not alone - someone who felt the same emotions was moved enough to compose it or perform it. Add to that words that have the force of poetry and we have a whole other dimension of articulated thought in its meaning.

These four characteristics: depth and sweep of emotion, intensity, interpersonal connection and poetics are to be found united in individual works of composers of genres as diverse as baroque and gothic metal. Sometimes they find universal appeal because they speak to the human 'spirit' but just as often they may be perceived as tumultuous or overpowering by all but a dedicated following. I believe that following selection has all of these qualities:

The group Evanescence was founded in 1995 by singer / pianist Amy Lee and guitarist Ben Moody who had been romantically involved in high school. The story that the two met while attending youth camp at Little Rock, Arkansas the year before is therefore false; they had known each other for years. What may be true of the story is that Moody heard Lee playing a Meatloaf song on the piano at the camp which may have kindled the idea of forming a band. *Rolling Stone* magazine describe their genre as 'gothic metal' while others have characterized their music variously as 'gothic rock' or 'Nu metal'. Lee simply describes Evanescence as 'a rock band'.

After recording several independent records, including two EP's: *Evanescence* in 1998 and *Sound Asleep* (aka the *Whisper*) in 1999, they released their first demo album, *Origin* which included an early version of the song *My Immortal* written by Ben Moody, Amy Lee and keyboardist David Hodges. Their first studio album *Fallen* (2003) including the singles *Bring Me to Life*, *Going Under*, *My Immortal* and *Everybody's Fool*, was a remarkable commercial success, selling over 17 million copies worldwide. Since then there have been several changes to the band's lineup including the departure of Moody over creative differences and that of Hodges.

My Immortal is a piano power ballad in the key of A major, set in common time and played 'slowly and freely ♩ = 80' according to the sheet musical instruction. The vocals (over a simple piano accompaniment) span just over two octaves from A₃ to C#₅. According to Lee "*My Immortal* was Ben's song!" indeed the lyrics are based on a short story previously written by him. According to Moody, the song is about "a spirit staying with you after its death and haunting you until you actually wish that the spirit were gone because it won't leave you alone." According to Lee, *My Immortal* is a song of pain and despair caused by the loss of a family member or very close friend and how it drove her to the edge of insanity." These feelings are evinced in the line, "Though you're still with me, I've been alone all along."

According to the alum notes, Moody dedicated *My Immortal* to his grandfather Bill Holcomb. The song was nominated for Best Pop Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocals at the 47th Grammy Awards and was certified gold in the US and platinum in Australia.

My Immortal (Lyrics)

I'm so tired of being here
 Suppressed by all my childish fears
 And if you have to leave
 I wish that you would just leave
 'Cause your presence still lingers here
 And it won't leave me alone

These wounds won't seem to heal, this pain is just too real
 There's just too much that time cannot erase

When you cried, I'd wipe away all of your tears
 When you'd scream, I'd fight away all of your fears
 And I held your hand through all of these years
 But you still have all of me

You used to captivate me by your resonating light
 Now, I'm bound by the life you left behind
 Your face it haunts my once pleasant dreams
 Your voice it chased away all the sanity in me

These wounds won't seem to heal, this pain is just too real
 There's just too much that time cannot erase

When you cried, I'd wipe away all of your tears
 When you'd scream, I'd fight away all of your fears
 And I held your hand through all of these years
 But you still have all of me

I've tried so hard to tell myself that you're gone
 But though you're still with me, I've been alone all along

When you cried, I'd wipe away all of your tears
 When you'd scream, I'd fight away all of your fears
 And I held your hand through all of these years
 You still have all of me, me, me

This and other music by Evanescence is available for download at your favorite music store, while the sheet music for voice, piano as well as guitar chords is available from our library as well as Musicnotes.com where other arrangements are available as well.

Lithium, besides being the lightest metal, is an Evanescence song which appeared on their second studio album, *The Open Door*. Lithium salts, especially lithium carbonate and lithium citrate, on the other hand, are used in the treatment of Bipolar I disorder as an antimanic agent. Amy Lee wrote the song on the guitar at the age of 16 however it was later rearranged for the album. *Lithium* is a power ballad in the key of B \flat minor, set in common time and played at a 'moderate rock' tempo of $\text{♩} = 116$, according to the sheet musical instruction. Although originally recorded on a 7 string guitar, the piece

can be played on a regular 6 string following a basic chord progression of B \flat minor - A \flat - E \flat minor, with a brief transition into G \flat . *Lithium* begins with vocals over the piano, then joined by drums and guitar at the first verse. Lee's vocal range spans an impressive, nearly three octaves from A \flat_3 to G \flat_5 .

According to Lee the song "is about making the choice between the comfort of sorrow and the idea of happiness. You get in these cycles where you're stuck in bad situations or relationships or whatever and it's hard to make yourself get out even though it's negative and hard. So that's sort of what it's about, breaking free." Lee explains that she chose the title from Nirvana's eponymous song of 1992, because it's "a metaphor for happiness from a negative point of view."

Lee admits that she had never taken lithium and unfortunately the lyrics perpetuate some of the popular myths surrounding the drug, such as that it makes one feel emotionally numb inside. Ironically Ben Moody, who could have benefited from Lithium, was diagnosed as bipolar only after he left the band. According to an interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine, although Moody suspected that a medical problem might be at the root of his trouble, he resisted seeking help, afraid of the stigma mental illness can carry.

Lithium was a modest commercial success with mostly positive critical reception.

Lithium (Lyrics)

Lithium, don't want to lock me up inside
 Lithium, don't want to forget how it feels without
 Lithium, I want to stay in love with my sorrow
 Oh, but, God, I want to let it go

Come to bed, don't make me sleep alone
 Couldn't hide the emptiness; you let it show
 Never wanted it to be so cold
 Just didn't drink enough to say you love me

I can't hold on to me
 Wonder what's wrong with me

Lithium, don't want to lock me up inside
 Lithium, don't want to forget how it feels without
 Lithium, I want to stay in love with my sorrow

Don't want to let it lay me down this time
 Drown my will to fly
 Here in the darkness I know myself
 Can't break free until I let it go
 Let me go

Darling, I forgive you after all
 Anything is better than to be alone
 And in the end I guess I had to fall
 Always find my place among the ashes

I can't hold on to me
 Wonder what's wrong with me

Lithium, don't want to lock me up inside
 Lithium, don't want to forget how it feels without
 Lithium, I want to stay in love with my sorrow
 Oh, but, God, I want to let it go

Bring Me to Life is another gothic metal song released as a single from their debut studio album *Fallen* (2003). It was composed by then band members Amy Lee, Ben Moody and David Hodges. The song is in the key of E minor, set in common time and played at a 'moderate rock' tempo of ♩ = 95.

The original version, available only on the bootlegged album *Not for Your Ears*, features Lee only on vocals spanning a range from A₃ to D₅. However during the recording she recalls, "It was presented to me as, 'You're a girl singing in a rock band, there's nothing else like that out there, nobody's going to listen to you. You need a guy to come in and sing back-up for it to be successful.'" Paul McCoy of the band 12 Stones was therefore brought in as the unaccredited male voice on the version for *Fallen*. Unfortunately this was a creative misjudgment with McCoy shouting *sotto voce* repeats of Lee's sung phrases that actually detracts from the quality of her vocals.

Unfortunately *Bring Me to Life* had been misinterpreted Christians as a call for new a new life in Jesus Christ however the band made it clear they did not want to be identified with Christian rock genre. According to Lee, the song has several meanings beginning with an incident at a restaurant in which she was asked by a friend of a friend if she was happy. She says she felt her heart leap and lied about what she had been experiencing by simply saying "I'm fine." In a 2003 interview with VH1 she said of the song, it is about, "Open-mindedness. It's about waking up to all the things you've been missing for so long. One day someone said something that made my heart race for a second and I realized that for months I'd been numb, just going through the motions of life." Three years later Lee claimed that she wrote *Bring Me to Life* about a young therapist and long-time friend Josh Hartzler, whom she married in 2007.

Bring Me to Life won a Grammy Award for Best Hard Rock Performance at the 46th Grammy Awards and was certified platinum in the US.

Bring Me to Life (Lyrics)

How can you see into my eyes like open doors?
 Leading you down, into my core
 Where I've become so numb, without a soul
 My spirit's sleeping somewhere cold
 Until you find it there, and lead it, back, home

Wake me up inside
 Wake me up inside
 Call my name and save me from the dark
 Bid my blood to run
 Before I come undone
 Save me from the nothing I've become

Now that I know what I'm without
You can't just leave me
Breathe into me and make me real
Bring me to life

Wake me up inside
Wake me up inside
Call my name and save me from the dark
Bid my blood to run
Before I come undone
Save me from the nothing I've become

Bring me to life
Bring me to life

Frozen inside, without your touch
Without your love, darling
Only you are my life
Among the dead

I've been sleeping a thousand years it seems
Got to open my eyes to everything
Don't let me die here
Bring, me, to, life

Wake me up inside
Wake me up inside
Call my name and save me from the dark
Bid my blood to run
Before I come undone
Save me from the nothing I've become

Bring me to life
Bring me to life
Bring me to life

Evanescence in 2003



The Bipolar Haiku

The *Haiku* (俳句) is a very short form of Japanese poetry, the traditional form of which has three elements:

- “Cutting” (*kiru*), which involves the juxtaposition of two ideas or images with a “cutting word” (*kireji*) between them.
- A fixed meter of 17 syllables (*on* or *mora*e) consisting of three phrases of 5, 7, and 5 syllables respectively.
- A seasonal reference (*kigo*) drawn from a *saijiki*, an extensive list of such poetic terms.

The subjective experience of bipolar mood disorder, which involves intensely and agonisingly contrasting affects¹, sometimes cycling rapidly between the one extreme and the other, is productively and economically expressed in the form the haiku.

Bipolar Haiku

Happy Sad Angry

Things I feel in 2 minutes

Joys of Bipolar

By BlueChica (Bethany) Published anonymously on the website allpoetry.com

The English haiku form may incorporate some or all of the traditional elements above. Sean Rima’s “North bipolar haiku” is remarkable for seamlessly combining all three, deferring the blow until the final syllable.

North bipolar haiku

Christmas is here! Red

ribbons and children laughing

and I want to die.

By Sean Rima, in her book, “Mondo Haiku” (2014) Canned Ham Press

A novel form in which an entire poem is composed of stanzas that are themselves haikus has become popular in English but would probably horrify the traditionalist for its capitulation to verbosity. A more charitable reading would be to regard each stanza as a single pearl strung together with others as a necklace of pearls. The following poem of that form was written by an anonymous fifty-something nurse and mother of four adult children and six grandchildren.

¹ ‘Affect’, ‘mood’ and ‘emotion’ are often used interchangeably in common parlance. Strictly speaking however; affect describes the immediately expressed experience or feelings of emotion from moment to moment. Mood by contrast refers to a pervasive and sustained affect. It is therefore possible to switch rapidly between affective states such as euphoria, anger, and sadness, while the expression of emotion is accompanied by characteristic behavioural and physiological responses.

Bipolar Haiku

White pill, yellow pill
blue pill and amber capsules
This is my nightcap.

Manic-depressive
don't know which is which today.
Damned mixed episodes!

Dancing by myself,
I can't stop the music that
plays inside my head.

I curse as I bend
to the floor and pick up all
the meds I just spilled.

Rain is pouring down
reaching deep into my soul
with its tears of rage.

Depressed woman feels
filthy, rotten to the core
as she dies inside.

Bipolar shopping,
I went out to buy some milk.
You'll love our new car.

Anonymous, published on her blog <https://bpnurse.com/2013/06/24/bipolar-haiku/>

The author notes that she has never actually set out to buy milk only to buy a car instead, although she has come close.