

**Prof. Sarah Moore Fitzgerald:** Good afternoon.

**Audience:** Good afternoon.

**Sarah:** And because of the silence and the expectation, I thought of going ahead. I think there may be a couple of more people expected but I just, when Ída rang me to ask me would I be prepared to introduce today's event, I was just so excited and privileged at having been asked because we have the opportunity today to welcome again, to welcome back one of Ireland's most important writers, one of the world's most important writers and her name is, you all know is Melatu Uche Okorie.

It is an absolute pleasure Melatu, that you are here and we are really, really delighted and I know that today's conversation is going to be incredibly interesting and educational and inspiring and informative and part of the reason for that is Lawrence Cleary, and the fact that his interviewing skills are really outstanding and he is a great hero of the exploration of the writing process and that is something that I think is of huge interest to all of us but mostly, it is because of you Melatu, and because of the wonderful stories that you have written and because of the writer that you are and because we respect that in so many different ways at the University of Limerick and we are just utterly privileged that you are here to share with us how you write.

I think, asking writers how they write is often a way of opening up another door of understanding to the writer's work. Some writers do not like being asked how they write because they have never reflected on it, and it is often a difficult question, I think, to answer, and I think that some of the two of the most important questions that we, or two of the most interesting questions that I think, always give rise to interesting insights are: 'When did you start writing?' And that is a really useful question to ask because it is often the case, I have found, when I ask people that question, that they started their creative writing at a time in their life that was particularly challenging or difficult or even catastrophic or devastating. That something brings them to the page that is born of things to do with suffering and pain, and I think that is a really interesting. It is not universally the case, but I think it is often the case.

And, secondly, another question that I often ask writers is: 'When did you start taking your writing seriously?' And that is a different question and, and often, writers will say, it is when somebody who was in my corner spotted a talent that I could not see or that I did not fully recognise. So I think, they are the kind of questions that I know we will find really interesting and, today, this afternoon, between Lawrence and Melatu and I know that you have lots of other questions to ask as well.

Anna Flynn spoke of Melatu's book as one of the most pertinent books of modern Ireland, and what Melatu has done is framed, experienced through story in a way that has important messages for all of us and, and so, I think, this afternoon we are going to be given many gifts and the writing and the work that Melatu is responsible for and has created is for everyone whose story has been ignored or dismissed or devalued. It is for everyone who has suffered pain or indignity in the face of indifference. It is for everyone who is blunted by apathy or an absence of empathy or lack of awareness.

Now, we have *This Hostel Life* and now, we have Melatu. Thank you.

**Lawrence:** Thank you, Sarah.

**Sarah:** Do you need this?

**Lawrence:** Oh, I do not think so. I think there is a thing on here, so I think we are kosher, we are good. I just, as a preface to all of this, if this is the first time you have been to a 'How I write' interview, the inspiration comes from Hilton Obenzinger in Stanford, if you ever get a chance to go on to iTunes and see some his interviews.

He is an enormously flamboyant and a much better dresser than I am, but he also, he is just really good at this and he does exactly what I am doing here. I actually wrote to him and he wrote back to me to say that he was really pleased to see that we were doing, because I was worried that we were kind of like infringing or something and as it turns out, he was encouraging us to do it. So hopefully, he checks out our videos too.

Anyway, the programme, the way it works is that I will, I will talk to Melatu for about 40 minutes and then, I am going to open it up to the floor and allow you folks to ask questions as well.

The focus is on her process, what she does. The focus is on her strategies for negotiating that process and also like, how she perceives her writing situation and how that affects her process and her strategies and so, when people are asking questions, my job as, as a moderator is to kind of like, steer you in that direction rather than talking about what she writes, we want to talk to about how she goes about doing it and we learn from people, I think. I was asked the question once, is, I was, I said that what we do in the writing centre is that we talk, and the response was: 'Is talk enough?' And I had to go away and think about that and recognise that actually it is.

Talk is enough. We learn so much from each other by talking about what we do when we write, so that is what we are going to do here today and, hopefully, you will get something from it, okay?

Melatu, thank you a million times over for coming down here from Dublin.

**Melatu:** Thank you, the pleasure is all mine.

**Lawrence:** Okay, I know that that is an excruciating drive. Well, at least it is for me.

And, we talked a little bit before sitting down here with an audience, and I kind of explained to you my approach and what, what we are going to talk about, and one of the things that I wanted to focus on first, and I ask this every time we do an interview, how would you characterise yourself as a writer? Like, are you a nervous writer? Are you a frantic writer? Are you a methodical writer? How do you characterise yourself as a writer? How do you see yourself?

**Melatu:** I, I think, if one could answer that question like, honestly relating to myself as possible, I think I character myself more as a, as a storyteller.

**Lawrence:** Okay.

**Melatu:** I think, I prefer writing more as a story.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** I get the story down on paper and then, I start doing the writing bit. Then, I start editing and making it sound, finding the right way to, to portray that story.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** So, first of all I, I am more of a storyteller. I think of a story or you know, or something comes to my mind, I want to write about it or frame this around something and then I write it down in the form of a story.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** And, and then I start working on it.

**Lawrence:** Okay.

**Melatu:** To, you know, in, in a, in the way a writer would, you know.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** Then I start you know, adding all the crafts that I have picked up here and there in terms of becoming a writer.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** So, that is what happens afterwards.

**Lawrence:** That makes sense and I am thinking about, was it, it's 'Under the Awning'.

**Melatu:** Hmm, hmm.

**Lawrence:** And how you had started out as a story and then it turned into a story within a story.

**Melatu:** Yes.

**Lawrence:** And so, like, as it was being developed.

**Melatu:** Hmm, hmm. Ideas would start coming in and then.

**Lawrence:** You framed it in a whole different way.

**Melatu:** Yes.

**Lawrence:** And so, it yeah, I can see how that works. You are actually touching on something that I did want to touch on and I will just go right to it. I am just thinking about all the people that, because I have read some of your interviews and, and some of the people that influenced your writing, and I thought this was really interesting.

You say, the way that you frame your influences like, you talk about Chinua Achebe and Amos Tutuola, I am not saying this very well, but anyway, and how they, they affected you or they influenced you in terms of the language that they use and how they, how they use language but then, you had a whole other set of categories of authors that you say, influenced you in terms of characterisation and when it comes to, and then in terms of mood, another whole set of authors in terms how they affect you in those ways. Is that the extent of the categorisation of how people influence you or how different writers influence you?

**Melatu:** You know, you know, every day you find some else.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** Someone new.

**Lawrence:** Yeah, but in a new way?

**Melatu:** Yeah, in a new way.

**Lawrence:** Yeah?

**Melatu:** Just recently, I was reading a, a, a book called, what is it now? It is going to come to me.

**Lawrence:** Okay, let's go, yeah.

**Melatu:** Gilliard and that is an, she is an American writer.

**Lawrence:** Okay.

**Melatu:** Marilynne like, I just read her book and I just remembered, while I was reading it, just every line, it is just beautiful.

**Lawrence:** Oh, right.

**Melatu:** Every sentence.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** Is a craft you know, like.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** I, I, it wasn't just, I wasn't just reading the book. I was enjoying what I was reading but then, I was really enjoying the fact it was just rich in.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** You know, the, the way she crafted out her sentences.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** And all of that.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** So, every day you will, you pick up you know, surprisingly you, you find someone that makes Marilyne Robinson, the lines come to me now.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** You pick up you know, something and it is just like fantastic and you, you.

**Lawrence:** Sure.

**Melatu:** Learn from that. Not necessary but you are like, if this person could perform this way that means there is, I can.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** You know, tighten up my work a lot more. Yeah but, in terms of Chinua Achebe and Amos Tutuola, I, I was struggling with how to write or portray the language of the characters you know, because I was struggling between writing with English as a, as a second language as opposed to writing with English as a foreign language.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** And I think, when you write with English as a foreign language, it is kind of friendlier. You, you treat it, you mould it to a form that you want to use it.

**Lawrence:** Sure.

**Melatu:** But when are writing with English as a second language, like you have to write it this, this way, that's you know, anyway.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** That's taken a bit from Chinua Achebe's argument, you have to write it a certain way to sound a certain way, to sound much more like the Queen's English.

**Lawrence:** Okay.

**Melatu:** And I was struggling because the characters that I, I write about do not sound that way.

**Lawrence:** Exactly.

**Melatu:** They do not talk that way.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** So, how do I make, so when I came across this argument, this was actually written by Chinua Achebe you know, 'Morning Yet on Creation Day' and you know, he was arguing about how a writer could write in a form that fits them best.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** It tells their story the best. I said, 'Oh, this is, this is it!' I am free to write in this form.

**Lawrence:** Sure.

**Melatu:** It was, it was, it was almost like a validation. So this, I, I can actually write in the way that I, I want to just make the characters sound a bit more like me.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** So, I started learning, so I think, what I, the learning for me is always how to interpret the sounds on paper.

**Lawrence:** Sure.

**Melatu:** You know, what I am hearing, how do I put it down on paper, to sound the same thing.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** So, I think, that's just what I keep looking at even in my reading as well to, to, to.

**Lawrence:** So, do you read out loud?

**Melatu:** Not really.

**Lawrence:** No? Yeah.

**Melatu:** But then, I have found that it's very important to actually do that some times.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** Because of, you, you know, you write.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** Again, you find that when you read out aloud, it does not really you know, sound.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** Like what you have put on paper.

**Lawrence:** Yeah, I remember reading Seamus Heaney poems and I was like, I know he does not talk like this. You know, because like, he was Northern Irish if I am not mistaken, and it is like a whole different accent.

**Melatu:** Hmm, hmm.

**Lawrence:** And like a super American accent, so it is like, did not work but I could hear his music. I could hear it but still. We talked a little bit about that idea, about the, this was in, in 'The Hostel Life' where you imitated the sounds that you were hearing in direct provision and started with a Congolese lady but you had a bunch of other people as well and you were emulating their Pidgin English and I was saying to you, 'I thought that was really brilliant. You have a really good ear and then, also that this is research' and you kind of like, 'Oh!' but it is research, right?

It's one of the things that writers do as in, and I know that, when I talked to Donal, I was like the same way, it was just like, is he still here? Is he here? Oh, he left. Oh, there, way the hell over there. Could you get any further away? But when I was talking to Donal, it was the same thing. Some of his, he had all these characters and yet they all sounded differently. I was like, 'Wow, what an ear this guy must have!'

But that is part of the research that writers do is listening to what people say. I mean, I have read about things like James Joyce ducking into the toilet and writing stuff down on toilet paper just so that he could record it you know, things that people said. So, that is really a big part of research.

What other kinds of research would you be doing for any of your work? Anything else that you do or how does research present itself for the writer who is creative?

**Melatu:** I think for me, I don't, you know, like you said, when you said, 'Oh, that's research' it was, it came as a shock to me because I never thought of it as, as that.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** You know, I am always, it's, it's more of a what has it got? Things come to you. Sometimes it's your own, it's your own life.

**Lawrence:** Hmm.

**Melatu:** And sometimes, it's just a story.

**Lawrence:** Hmm.

**Melatu:** That someone tells you and you are like, that's, that's, a story is even a lot, it is just a phrase or a line or.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** You know, something that would be like, oh, that's, that's great and you want to.

**Lawrence:** Sure.

**Melatu:** Put that in somewhere but as a writer, you are always observing without realising that you are always observing.

**Lawrence:** Hmm, hmm.

**Melatu:** I think there is always that thing that you kind of.

**Lawrence:** Exactly!

**Melatu:** Like, take it all in.

**Lawrence:** And you observe not just sounds but?

**Melatu:** People.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** Things around you, you notice things around you a lot.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** And, and in a way, it's a sad, it's sad because it stops you from enjoying life.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** The way that other people.

**Lawrence:** I can, I can.

**Melatu:** You know, they just get in.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** And you know, to.

**Lawrence:** But it's better than TV. I know you agree with that.

**Melatu:** I, I do watch a lot of, when I am writing, that's, I think it's, it's almost like a way of escaping things.

**Lawrence:** Sure.

**Melatu:** So, I do that but that does not really represent itself in my writing.

**Lawrence:** In 'The Hostel Life', you were talking about how the TV was actually organising the way people learn their language and talked about things in their conversations, I thought that was really funny. That was really interesting because that is really like life, isn't it?

**Melatu:** That's, absolutely!

**Lawrence:** I want to get back to the story telling thing and one of things that I recall was, I had a Nigerian professor in, in Illinois when I was there. I took a Political Science class. It was studying African politics and so forth and I got an A, by the way.

**Melatu:** Great!

**Lawrence:** It was a paper you know, but yeah, he, I remember, he brought in somebody from Mali who was a griot, but I think, Nigeria also has a strong storytelling tradition. It has a big oral tradition as well. I would imagine there are different traditions in different tribes and so forth.

**Melatu:** Hmm.

**Lawrence:** But I think, I don't know if you are from the Yoruba or?

**Melatu:** No, I am from Ebu.

**Lawrence:** Ebu? Okay.

**Melatu:** Yeah.

**Lawrence:** I think, they talk about like, all the stuff I have read is usually about the Yoruba but, your, your tribe also would have had this tradition of storytelling.

**Melatu:** Absolutely!

**Lawrence:** Yeah? And you talk about your mom.

**Melatu:** Yes.

**Lawrence:** As a big influence in terms of storytelling and so, may be you could tell us a little bit more about how that, that realisation that you had.

**Melatu:** I, I think she was more of a, you know, sometimes that, you know, I have been asked how did she you know, did she influence my storytelling?

**Lawrence:** Yeah?

**Melatu:** And in a way, not in terms of my writing.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** Because she would have been, she would have told us stories and, you know, of the tortoise and you know, those kind of stories, how the tortoise run away and the wise, you know, just you know, I was quite little, I would sit around her and she would tell us but she was quite a good storyteller.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** In that sense and she, and she probably does not realise this and I never realised that as well but she would have been someone that would have liked literature because she, she would, she would read things in Ebu language.

**Lawrence:** Hmm, hmm.

**Melatu:** Like they were taught you know, they would have read stories or.

**Lawrence:** Sure.

**Melatu:** Or books.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** In Ebu language.

**Lawrence:** Wow!

**Melatu:** And she would remember all of these literature that she read as a, as a child and she would, you know, she had her favourites.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** And she would pick those stories, the stories of **(inaudible) 00:16:44** and all of those kind of people.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** And she would tell us the stories. You know, it, it wasn't probably, I would have gotten that from her in a sense.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** I didn't know but.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** But she does, she would be a character that I am very interested in as a human being.

**Lawrence:** Sure, yeah.

**Melatu:** Really, as she is.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** You know, she would be someone that I would, you know.

**Lawrence:** I would imagine mums are always very interesting, yeah.

**Melatu:** She is very interesting. She doesn't know it.

**Lawrence:** Especially, when it comes to storytelling like, life lessons like, here is a story and this is the life lesson or here is a story, it is warning.

**Melatu:** Hmm.

**Lawrence:** You know, that kind of thing, yeah, that's really interesting. Okay cool! Yeah, I wanted to touch on that before I, I left you today but the other thing I was looking at, you said

something in the, we see here it is, oh, I know what I wanted to talk to you about, was your, the process in terms of how it has changed from the time you started.

You didn't start writing until you were in direct provision and for obvious reasons. It was interesting to me because you, you stated in one of the interviews that you wrote, you wrote at night with your daughter sleeping next to you and I was, and at that same time, I remember you also saying that there was a lot, there was just no structure to your lives and so like, I was kind of wondering, why did you choose that time, if there was no structure? Like, you could have done it any time but why didn't you do at any time? Why did you choose that time?

**Melatu:** Well, I suppose, I, I don't have any specific reason you know.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** Of why. I, I think it was just the time that was like a quiet moment for me.

**Lawrence:** Hmm, hmm.

**Melatu:** That I would sit alone and just enjoy, just write.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** Just tell the stories on paper, you know.

**Lawrence:** Sure.

**Melatu:** You know, type them out and I, I think when she, she started school you know, when they are pretty young, you are running around with them every day. So, you can't, you don't have that moment to write.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** But then, when she became, when she was of school age, that she would go off to school.

**Lawrence:** Hmm.

**Melatu:** I would write when she is at school.

**Lawrence:** Hmm, hmm.

**Melatu:** And then, those would be the hours that I would write, probably couple of days, probably couple hours a day or something like that and now, that is she, so you know, those were, so, so my writing time kind of changed except if I have a deadline to meet.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** Then, I would write in the night and then, or any time that I can grab.

**Lawrence:** Sure.

**Melatu:** Recently, it has changed. It is, it has gotten worse.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** Because I, I barely write at all.

**Lawrence:** And you are actually doing your PhD in Creative Writing so?

**Melatu:** Yes.

**Lawrence:** Is there not a creative writing element in that? Do you not have to produce creative texts or?

**Melatu:** No, I am actually looking at texts of all people who use this particular writing and terms.

**Lawrence:** Alright, okay.

**Melatu:** So, I just look at their texts and how they, the impact of coming into writing centre.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** Has had on them.

**Lawrence:** Okay.

**Melatu:** And then, you know, so I am, it is more academic in terms of.

**Lawrence:** Sure.

**Melatu:** You know, as opposed to, I am looking at their composition.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** Markedly.

**Lawrence:** Okay but your Masters would have been more producing.

**Melatu:** Oh, yes!

**Lawrence:** Creative texts.

**Melatu:** Oh, with my Masters, I think that was the most I wrote.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** Because I had to write.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** Every day and I really give my essay to people all the time. I really enjoy that because that, you know, it made me write.

**Lawrence:** Sure.

**Melatu:** Very often and, and I did try my hands at so many things.

**Lawrence:** Hmm, hmm.

**Melatu:** You know, I, I tried writing poems. I tried writing plays. I tried all of these.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** Little things that I wouldn't have done at all, you know.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** So, it was great in terms of, it helped me produce a lot of work.

**Lawrence:** Do you miss that?

**Melatu:** I do miss that.

**Lawrence:** Okay. Yeah, I would as well. That's great!

**Melatu:** Yeah.

**Lawrence:** Yeah, I can imagine.

**Melatu:** There's something about having other people and writing at the same time.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** That makes you write more than what it is.

**Lawrence:** Yeah, but it's, it's so interesting from the perspective of somebody who is trying to figure out what is the best way to write is that these situations starting out in direct provision, then going into your Masters and at that point, you were out of direct provision?

**Melatu:** No, I was still in direct provision.

**Lawrence:** No? You were still in direct provision? But your writing process, you, you switched times with your daughter going to school at the same that you were in a Master's programme?

**Melatu:** Yeah, she was, she had started.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** She has started crèche at that time.

**Lawrence:** Yeah?

**Melatu:** So, it wasn't that I had that much time.

**Lawrence:** Okay.

**Melatu:** I used to write at night.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** Around that, that period.

**Lawrence:** But you were definitely working your writing time around your daughter.

**Melatu:** Yes.

**Lawrence:** And your daughter was getting older and.

**Melatu:** Yeah.

**Lawrence:** You know, more socialised and so forth.

**Melatu:** Well, definitely!

**Lawrence:** So, I mean, it's just to think, you know, the fact that you had to adapt like that is an indication of how the situation can make such a difference in your process, you know?

**Melatu:** It was and, in a way, I kind of like, I liked that a bit more, I liked the fact that nobody knew what I was doing.

**Lawrence:** Yeah, yeah.

**Melatu:** It's just the fact you know, what.

**Lawrence:** Sure, sure.

**Melatu:** Just you know, living your life and just doing work, people know that I am writing but they don't even pay any mind to it and I don't think any of my friends has read my book you know, so.

**Lawrence:** Right, yeah.

**Melatu:** They don't you know, they don't really, you know.

**Lawrence:** Have a clue?

**Melatu:** They are, they are not interested.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** I don't know how to phrase the same thing.

**Lawrence:** No, I know exactly.

**Melatu:** If I said anything wrong but they don't really pay that, I am still who I am, I have always been to them.

**Lawrence:** Yeah, yeah.

**Melatu:** So, you, you just having that thing that no one cared about it and, and but now, I think people kind of, care a bit more and.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** And that makes me, that's, it, it kind of obstructs the flow of creativity in a way.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** You know like, you are like, always conscious of the fact that, you know, people are interested.

**Lawrence:** And so, when that happens, you have to come up with new strategies in order to get your, to motivate or to move over obstacles to writing?

**Melatu:** Well, I, I think the, sometimes I have to even, it gets to the extent where I have to leave my house.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** And go to a friend's house.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** Where there are children running around and no one, you know like, there is always this noise and everything.

**Lawrence:** Yeah, yeah.

**Melatu:** And just, just to write, you know.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** I, I, it takes me actually leaving you know, where I am just to, to relocate myself to somewhere else and just be there and to, to be able to write.

**Lawrence:** Brilliant!

**Melatu:** So, I did so.

**Lawrence:** So, you have to remove yourself from what you know.

**Melatu:** Yeah.

**Lawrence:** In order to get into something that's may be a little more chaotic.

**Melatu:** Yeah, absolutely!

**Lawrence:** Yeah, and I can relate to that. I mean, when I write, my best writing I do when I am in a crowded cafeteria and I can't hear anything except for people talking.

**Melatu:** Yeah.

**Lawrence:** And it doesn't mean anything to me. I am just, I am in my head.

**Melatu:** Yeah, yes, yes.

**Lawrence:** I am in my head, yeah.

**Melatu:** Absolutely!

**Lawrence:** That's really, that's really interesting. Do you have a, at this point, are you writing now?

**Melatu:** I, I write in bits and yes, it is not like my, the way I, I write like, I am not that, I have, I have not gotten into that zone that I would have you know, where I would have reached years before.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** But I will get there.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** But it is just, I am writing but I, I don't think I am producing my best. Does that make sense?

**Lawrence:** Okay, right, yeah.

**Melatu:** I just, I, I put down ideas down.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** But I haven't really gone back to those ideas to, to turn it into something that is worth.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** Showing to someone else. Does that make sense?

**Lawrence:** Right. All the stuff that you have done like, you have done the Masters, you are doing a PhD and these things are really probably making it really difficult to develop a routine.

**Melatu:** I would, I don't think it's that or it's just that I wouldn't even it blame it on all those things.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** I think it's more of my, of myself as a person.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** You know, just kind of, I think with 'This Hostel Life' I, I wouldn't even you know, knowing what I know now, I probably would have done all my writing and then retired after they all get published and that's it, I am not writing anymore. You know, that's what I would have, I should have done.

**Lawrence:** I love it!

**Melatu:** And then, not, not bother writing anything else or.

**Lawrence:** Sure.

**Melatu:** I, I, but then you know, your stories still come and you want to write to those things and you have ideas all the time which I will eventually get to, it's just.

**Lawrence:** Right. Are you being approached for a contract or anything like that with publishers or?

**Melatu:** Not really.

**Lawrence:** Okay, yeah. I am just asking because sometimes that is another factor that changes the way that you approach your situation and you know, how you write.

**Melatu:** I, I think that's a, I think for me, it is the visibility you know, I have always been someone that kind of likes my own, like my own privacy a lot.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** You know.

**Lawrence:** And I get that from a lot of your interviews.

**Melatu:** Yeah, yeah. I think it's just the visibility of it all that's just, but I think when, there is going to come a time when no one cares, you know.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** At all or I think that you know, probably no one cares but in my head, people care you know, so.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** So, I think it will get to that point where I will just be me and then, I can you know, like.

**Lawrence:** Is that a good place to be you?

**Melatu:** Oh, that is a very good place for me.

**Lawrence:** Yeah, so there you go.

**Melatu:** I love that spot.

**Lawrence:** And the incredible part of that is that it's so much confidence. In words like, it doesn't worry you really. It is kind of like, yeah, that happens and then when it happens and I think that's really healthy first of all. There are so many times when you can get, you could get, you can feel so much anxiety over the fact that maybe you are not producing but it's not really about, it's not really about the numbers really, is it? It is about the quality.

**Melatu:** Oh, for me, you know like, writing has always been like my way, it's, it's another way of expression for me, you know.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** A way of expressing myself. I am comfortable in that form.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** And so, I, I don't think there is ever going to be a time when, it might not be, you know, I, I don't worry about the publication bit but I will always write.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** In terms of you know, write something so.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** So, that, that part of a, would that stop or, I am not worrying about that. I don't, I don't even you know, I, I look at this way. That is something that is, I am going to go a bit philosophical about it.

**Lawrence:** Yeah, good! Because I am going to press you to be more philosophical.

**Melatu:** You know, that's just, I, I think that with everything in life, there is always, if we were about where we are getting to, you know, okay, I am going to use social media for instance and say okay, how many likes or how people are reading this and how many people are doing that and all of that, how many likes did I get with this comment. It kind of, it stops you as a person, you, you are fixated.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** On, on those things.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** And I think, with, with all these kinds of prizes and our words and if you focus so much on them, you are always going to be looking over your shoulder.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** And that's not a good place to be.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** You know like, it's, you know life is much, much more bigger. Like, I am not interested in those things.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** It's great that is happening but it's not, it's not.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** Why, I am doing what I do.

**Lawrence:** You get most of your, it's like, intrinsic satisfaction. It's something inside you that feels good when you write.

**Melatu:** Oh, yeah!

**Lawrence:** It's not about whether somebody reads it or not.

**Melatu:** Absolutely!

**Lawrence:** It's about whether you, it's just making a story.

**Melatu:** Absolutely!

**Lawrence:** Creating a story and, and being happy with the story.

**Melatu:** That is it, you have just, you know.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** You have just framed it so beautifully.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** And that's just what it is for me. I love to, I love to tell stories.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** And that is also the reason that you know, that I have written that people do not get but I am passionate about them and I protect them.

**Lawrence:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Melatu:** I am not changing anything.

**Lawrence:** Yeah, yeah.

**Melatu:** I understand this character. This is how it's going to be, you know.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** So, I, I don't change that because you know, you wanted to go a certain way or someone wants it to go, you know or they don't know that this is just like, this is it.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** Like, sometimes, I take you know, the criticism and feel that this story needs to move, move a bit more or you know, I need to change something to make it better.

**Lawrence:** Hmm, hmm.

**Melatu:** And sometimes, I feel this is it. It is this, this is this thing I have created and I, I love it the way it is.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** So, it is not usually about you know, sometimes, I think about the audience depending on the writing that you do. I do think about the audience with some writings.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** But in some stories, it's just, it's just the way things are.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** That's it. I just protect them.

**Lawrence:** I, I know that because I remember you were talking about, I, I can't remember where I kept this but you had talked about how in direct provision, there was a massive like, loneliness and isolation and I kind of wondered, there is, there, I am thinking about 'The Awning' again, that isolation didn't seem to go away once you get out of direct provision.

There was still some isolation and that seems to be, is that like, kind of, at this point, almost like a unifying point of order for you like, in other words, it's an, it's an aesthetic, like it's, like it's something that kind of like, coming out of that isolation is what the storytelling is doing for you?

**Melatu:** Yeah, probably. I think for myself you know, like, not everybody is going to feel like that.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** I think, when I was in direct provision, I had more people around me.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** You know like, I had much more, you know like, it was more of a community in the sense.

**Lawrence:** Sure, yeah.

**Melatu:** Even though you are, you are isolated but there is a, there is a community there.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** But coming out of direct provision, it's, it's kind of, it's much more pronounced because you know, but I think I will always be that kind of person that would never feel a part of something. It's, it's sad saying that, not like I am.

**Lawrence:** No, I know, I know what you are saying, yeah.

**Melatu:** I think that's, that's the kind of person I am.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** And I like that.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** I like inhabiting that space.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** You know like, I always want to stay outside of something.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** And just kind of like, observe. I have close friends. I have you know, a loving family but at the same time, I will always want to be you know, kind of like, I think that's just the kind of nature that I have, just.

**Lawrence:** I guess for, for me, as an interviewer, and I am trying to tap into the kinds of things that frustrate your writing but it doesn't sound like there is any. In a way, are there things

that frustrate you? In other words, stand in the way between you and finishing a story or you and developing a story or is there anything that, that's like either thoughts that intrude or emotions that intrude or social situations that intrude?

**Melatu:** There, there are, different, different situations in all of that but I think sometimes, a lot of my stories have actually come from that kind of, sometimes it comes from rage.

**Lawrence:** Right, yeah.

**Melatu:** And then, I just pour it down.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** I pour it out, sorry.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** And then, I start you know, framing it in a way that you know, that someone, someone else can read.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** And.

**Lawrence:** Be more receptive.

**Melatu:** Yeah.

**Lawrence:** Yeah?

**Melatu:** In a form that's, other people can get to read it. I just, it's just like.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** And, yes so, a lot of the times there is always that kind of signs that, there is, it's, it's probably, it's coming out in a, I think, that's coming out in April. I wrote some, a kind of article about my writing space.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** You know.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** I think you know, with where I am living at the moment, my frustration with the noise that I get around me.

**Lawrence:** Oh, that's right. Yeah, yeah.

**Melatu:** With that, with that, I think, it's coming out like, I think next month and all of that. So, it's always, I think sometimes, some things that I write are very personal to me.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** And then it comes from that and then only I start to you know, reshaping it to, to suit you know, the audience. I mustn't say the audience, but for people to be able to read it and not feel.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** A bit, like, what is she, what is she ranting about?

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** You know so, there is always a.

**Lawrence:** It is so much kind of like, the, the writing is actually how you deal with your life.

**Melatu:** Oh, yeah!

**Lawrence:** In a, in a way, it's like other people might like, think writing is what I do. It's like you, writing is what you do in order to, to kind of like, be in a good place, you know.

**Melatu:** Oh, absolutely!

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** And I think sometimes when I am, there are moments when I am, or months or periods when I am very frustrated.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** Periods that I have not written anything, that I have not been able to express something that is going on in my head.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** Like, I am, I am having that kind of moment now.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** I am thinking you know, like I am, I am forming you know, kind of like the past few months and all of that. I am, I am kind of getting a story around that.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** To be able to you know, to write out, to be able to reflect on it as well.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** You know, writing is a way of reflecting on things.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** So, when I put it down, I am like, oh you know, I, I have a different opinion of certain things.

**Lawrence:** Sure.

**Melatu:** That are going on in my head as well.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** So, it's, it's my way of expressing better some feelings that I have.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** Or some emotions that I have.

**Lawrence:** So, it's, it's just interesting the way that writing functions for you. It's, it's like, yeah.

**Melatu:** Oh, absolutely! I never think of myself as a, you know, I know I should think of myself as a writer but I never think of myself as a writer per say, as, as something that I do, you know.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** It's just this thing that I do that is much more personal for me.

**Lawrence:** Yeah, yeah, good for you.

**Melatu:** It has always, it has always.

**Lawrence:** I, I guess, I wanted to ask you a little bit about, we, when we talk about writing in a writing-centred life, we talk about this, this process like how you go about doing it. Like, you explained it right from the beginning.

You, you actually answered the question before I even asked it, about how you started out with some ideas and you write them down and then, once you feel like you have a story, you start kind of polishing it and developing it and honing it and so forth and which means drafting and rewriting and so forth which is what you obviously do and then, you know, we talked a little bit about you know like, when you do it and you know, that kind of thing and what kinds of strategies you used to do it.

It, it sounds like, ah, there is one thing that I wanted to ask you about was the situation and the situation that you originally were in was direct provision but now you are in university and but it is not really your creative writing situation. Part of the situation is also purpose and so like, one of the questions that I had was about your, your, your purpose for writing and you have answered it to some extent but there is, there is messages in your stories. It's, it's not like, I mean there is, there is a lesson to be learnt at the end of these stories. You know what I am saying?

I am thinking I, I wrote a note to myself that there seems to be a bit of **(inaudible) 00:34:20** deconstruction of the Irish class and the experience of Irish racism in 'Under the Awning' and I said, when I ask about how this informs, so I am wondering how this informs your aesthetic and I guess, when I think about aesthetic, it's reflections again on our culture, nature and how much of this is the 'them and us' divide informing your aesthetic.

So, do you think in terms like that? Do you think in terms of like, this is my aesthetic or this is my, my artistic stance or you know, once I have gone through this reflective bit and do you see it moving in a different direction or do you see it staying where it is or how do you perceive it?

**Melatu:** I think some of the, to answer that question, some of the books that I have actually influenced me, okay, let me mention a few just like, if you read Chinua Achebe's 'Things Fall Apart'.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** And I was like, they always have this social you know, construction around them, you know.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** There is always that feeling about, there is something. It is not just about telling, telling you know, writing.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** A book, that is telling us to, there is, there is something. There is a message there.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** There is something there.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** Like you, you know like, George Orwell's 'Animal Farm' and.

**Lawrence:** Sure, yes, yes.

**Melatu:** You, you know, so they all, always, I find those kind of stories very interesting that you know, I can read and enjoy something. I am, I am reading you know, I have, I have cheated a bit. I have read bits of the **(inaudible) 00:35:55**, you know. Someone would say something and I would go away and check it at that point for quite a while but I just started to read and just from the first page, it was almost like she was telling my story, you know.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** From my home. I am just, I just read a few pages of the book.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** You know like, I could, at this, you can tell that she is telling you something.

**Lawrence:** Yes.

**Melatu:** She is not just writing.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** You know, she is telling something, all of this. I think these are the, the stories that when I read and I, I think that's what, I wouldn't say they influence me but these are the kind of stories I tell as well.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** That's why I said, I call myself a storyteller.

**Lawrence:** Sure.

**Melatu:** In a sense.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** Because I write for, I wouldn't say for a reason but there is always something, there is a story I want to tell.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** You know and, and hopefully, there is a message there, you know.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** In terms of that story.

**Lawrence:** I was kind of wondering like, I can't think of any examples of the top of my head but may be, this is a conscious thing for you. I don't know but like, when we think about things like binaries like them and us for instance, there is distance and there is proximity like, and we have all kinds of examples and language like 'them and us' right? There and that you know, or this and that, that kind of thing. We are, we are kind of creating distances. Do you consciously like, is that something that you incorporate into your stories in, in a conscious way? Or is that something that just happens or?

**Melatu:** I, I think that 'them' is not something that, it's something that I just have because I don't think I am conscious of it but I, I think.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** I was referring to the 'us and them' in terms of how people perceived writing.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** You know, there is always this divide, 'Is she talking about us?'

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** And if I read certain books and I am thinking of it that way in terms of, 'Oh, they are criticising us.'

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** Then I am not. I am not looking at the story as a whole, you know.

**Lawrence:** Right, yeah.

**Melatu:** That's not, sometimes, there is no 'us'. I don't think there is any 'us'.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** And any 'them' you know, like. It could be any one, you know, we can be on different sides at different points of our life.

**Lawrence:** Yeah, yeah.

**Melatu:** So, I, I think, it's just the way of, I think that girl is just speaking about how people perceive some of the, you know, especially on 'Under the Awning' in terms of all.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** Your, your criticising 'us' as opposed to, as opposed to we can all always inhabit the.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** The two different positions, I think.

**Lawrence:** But I saw you being self-critical as well. It wasn't just external, it was also internal in, in all your stories, not just in 'Under the Awning'.

**Melatu:** Oh, yeah! Oh, yeah! That's.

**Lawrence:** So, so, but, so because you are a private person, what did you say, 'Out of share, natural share' something like that? And it's like you know, and I thought that this could be a challenge but it's, I see a lot of self-exploration but also external exploration trying to understand the things outside you as well as the things inside you and that's what, that's when I say, there is a, there is a 'them and us' and being kind of like that, that's only metaphorical in a sense. It's like, I am more thinking about spaces and distance and things like that and how those things get framed in text, in, in creative writing for instance, whether it is ever contrasting or I will give you a good example.

**Melatu:** Yes.

**Lawrence:** There was a Seamus Heaney poem, Jesus, I am trying to remember what it was now. I can't think what it was but he, I was looking at the, I had, I did an IPA transcription so that people, because I had a bunch of French people in class and they couldn't hear the rhyme.

So, I wanted them to see the rhymes because they couldn't hear them and when I did it, I realised, 'Oh, my God, there is a pattern here' and it was the, the rhyme scheme, the way he did the 'N' rhymes. It started out like, first line rhymed with the fourth line in the first stanza and the second and third lines rhymed and then, in the second stanza, the outside lines rhymed and the inside lines rhymed and in the fourth stanza, the, the, it was the, the first and the last didn't rhyme but the middle ones did.

So, it was almost like the rhyme scheme collapsed in on itself and then, I thought that was kind of like a, a, almost like a collapse of space, you know what I mean? And I thought that was basically may be his message in terms of like, Northern Ireland and Ireland and things like that and so, I wondered if this was something that you play with?

**Melatu:** It wasn't, definitely wasn't the conscious thought.

**Lawrence:** Okay, yeah.

**Melatu:** And I would be making it sound very intelligent if you actually thought of it.

**Lawrence:** No, I am very intelligent. I am sure of it, yeah, yeah.

**Melatu:** Because that was not, you know like, there was no, there was no conscious effort to do that.

**Lawrence:** Yeah, yeah. I am really interested in seeing more of your stuff then in the future. I really am. So, I am looking forward to it.

I am going to hand you over to the audience because I have gone way too far.

**Melatu:** Thank you.

**Lawrence:** And I just wanted to open it up to people. Rachel, are you going to it? Eda or? Rachel has a mike so, if that way we can here you. If you have questions for Melatu, please ask and try to think in terms of like, yourselves as writers and what could you find out from Melatu that would make you a better writer.

**Audience:** Alright, Melatu, I think your story, 'The Egg Broke' for me is as close to perfectionist literature can get. It is a masterpiece really and since I first read it maybe six months ago, it has remained pristine in my memory. I think about it every day and I talk about how you wrote it and how, the process you must have gone through and I am interested to know how you wrote that story? How you got it so perfect?

**Melatu:** That's a, that's a story that no one ever mentions. I think for me, that, that story was, you know, I have said it so many times. It's a story, it's, it's kind of like a, one of those things that you overhear in passing as a child and then, you know, I got to you know, frame it into that story and I think that it is one of oldest stories actually that I have written, 'Under the Awning' and 'This Hostel Life' were much more recent than the 'The Egg Broke' and there were other stories and I, and I, it's those stories I call them, a period when I was really missing home and not that I don't but you know, that was, those stories would have been stories of you know, remembering family and remembering you know like, so many things that happened.

Yeah so, 'The Egg Broke' would be reading out of loneliness per say or nostalgia you know, and that was probably it, but the process of writing it I think, sometimes I look it and I think I could change it a little bit. There are so many things I see that I would love to change if I got the chance to do that again or to rewrite it but yeah, it's just, just as in that first, in terms of using the first person point of view, I would have loved to change that and you know, use something else and then just publish them.

**Audience:** Oh, did you go through many drafts Melatu about, sorry, oh, thanks. Because I mean, I absolutely love 'Under the Awning' and I know the fact, that's the kind of story and the story is framed in a workshop in a really beautiful way and a very interesting away but it just, for some reason, 'The Egg Broke' just seems so absolutely sculpted and pristine. I mean did you draft and re-draft the story with a kind of, kind of a process?

**Melatu:** The other stories, 'Under the Awning' and 'This Hostel Life' I would have re-drafted them more than I did with 'The Egg Broke'. I think with 'The Egg' because it was one of my early stories, I didn't get a chance like, I, I didn't know myself a lot as a writer then when I wrote that story, 'The Egg Broke'. I was just, you know, I was just this raw you know, person writing this story at the time I wrote it and by the time you know, when they chose it to be, to be published, I didn't look at it in terms of changing the things a bit more. So, I wouldn't have re-drafted it that much.

I did change the title though. I, I changed the title at some point. Yeah, but that would be, it wouldn't have been something that I would have, but now, reading it, I see so many things I could have changed but I am not going to say them but, yeah.

**Lawrence:** Didn't Yates rewrite his stuff constantly and republish it? I think so, yeah.

**Audience:** Hi! It is still interesting to hear it, your reflections on the different approaches and your own feelings about your enlightenment. I think it was just so, there is kind of a, really, I think, strong sense of yourself as a writer that evolves with the storyteller. Is that, I mean, I wonder that is something that is a part of who you are? It is your identity? But I think that the idea of privacy is really important. I think all writers need totally private space in which to write and but I am fascinated by you talking about visibility, that visibility can over-expose you almost like.

**Melatu:** Yeah.

**Audience:** In a kind of, I think almost tarnish ideas before they got a chance to grow and the only thing that really struck me is when it was writing while your daughter was asleep. I think a lot of parents who are also writers know that experience of working around you know, times when you know your child would need you. So, which is really doesn't, you can think so, you can actually do something else.

I wondered, I thought I would ask you about her and about whether how she feels about your writing and how much you talk to her about your job as a writer?

**Melatu:** Sometimes I, I, I ask her if I can get her to read my work. It's a bit of a, of a, she has to read something and then, you know, help me, give me her opinions on them but she, she is aware of what's going on but she doesn't pay that much attention. I think, she has one of her friends actually got to read the book before she did. They had to tell her that she should read the story before she read the book and, and, yeah so, I still, I, I get her to read something for me.

She does write herself but that wouldn't be her, her strong suit you know. She calls it. She doesn't think it's a, I think she is a brilliant writer but she doesn't think, that's what she, you know, she is more interested in Maths and you know, things but yeah, she would be, she would be, I don't really like to put her, you know children, not that I don't like it. I, I almost barely write about children you know, so if I would, I think she will make a great character in one of my stories but you know, so.

**Audience:** Thank you.

**Lawrence:** Come on guys, last chance for romance.

**Audience:** I, I, my question is just in terms of the characters that you have. Do you have, are they kind of people that you know that you kind of base them around or do you, how do you kind of develop your characters in your stories?

**Melatu:** That's a great one! It's a, I think a, you know, you get your, your characters, it depends on what you are writing or the idea that you, you, most of, most of what I write about, let me see now, it comes from things around me, you know.

It could be, it could be something that, it could be based on anything, you know. I have this short stories that I have been, I have just been drafting and that's just widely from my imagination and sometimes, it comes from you know, things that are happening. It could be something happening to me and I want to, just like I said, I want to reflect on that and I am thinking how do I put this, you know?

So, the, the characters come from anywhere. It can be anything. It's, it doesn't, it's not just one thing as I write in notes. I could be writing about something and as I bring in you know, a character that I know that is around me and put into the story and that might not be the main character per say. I could be you know, and, and sometimes you meet people that you find very, very interesting, you know, and you think, ah, this person is, you know, interesting and then you base a story around it, around that particular character.

**Audience:** Hi, Melatu!

**Melatu:** Hi!

**Audience:** I am curious about you in the space of academic writer. So, you are doing your PhD and writing your thesis and I am wondering is your process different in that space? Or is it a very similar process or you know? I am just curious about it.

**Melatu:** I think with a PhD, it's, you know, it's a bit easier in a way. I was saying yeah, no, not, yes, I know. It's, it's a bit easy because once I, you have, you have done all your literature. It's kind of like, putting in everything together. It's much more, more tactical in a way, but you know, they inhabit different spaces.

We have, it's, it's much more straight forward let me, let me put it that way but with creative writing, sometimes you could have a story and the voice isn't right so, and that's another thing that you have to get right before you feel comfortable but the PhD is much, much more straight forward. You just, it takes more, it takes its own time. There is a, there is a bit of frustration along the way but it's much more straight forward in a sense, I think and I, you know, once if I am doing my, if I am writing a PhD, I could spend hours doing it but I, I understand what I am doing.

With writing, I could just do one line and get up and walk around the house just because I am frustrated that it's not going well. You know, I am, I am walking around, making coffee and I am doing all of these things but with my PhD work, I can sit in a space and just write it because you know, the only that might stop me is just because I don't have an information and I will search around for it until I find it. So, it is much more straight forward but with, with creative writing, if a sentence is not right or, or a paragraph is not right, that could take you a month to just get it right, yeah so.

**Audience:** Thank you.

**Lawrence:** There is one up there. How many creative writers are there in here by the way? Oh, good! As many as I thought would be.

**Audience:** We are creative writers too.

**Lawrence:** Well, if you have read my stuff, you will know I am creative.

**Audience:** Hello!

**Melatu:** Hi!

**Audience:** I am, I, I wonder why you did three short stories instead of a whole story?

**Melatu:** Instead of a novel, like a longer piece?

**Audience:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** Oh!

**Audience:** Like one.

**Melatu:** I have never actually, I have always found writing short stories better and I think that's just, I think probably because I think I see myself as a, as a storyteller. The, the stories, stories are usually kind of short you know. I am trying my hand at writing a novel now but I think with just stories I, I find the form much, much more easier and much more straight forward and, and you know, I think that longest you can track your proof is probably with a, with a, I commend those who write novels because I am wondering how do you get it from this point and then write 600 and something pages of a particular story,

you know, but with short stories, there are just about, about that. I like that, the, the form of writing short stories. I like it a lot more. I am trying writing a novel but still, everything I have would have been short stories, every work I have is a short story at this point, so yeah, that's the reason.

**Lawrence:** That makes a lot of sense though. The idea that you know, it's like, if you are in a room, in a room full of people and you are having a party and you were telling a story, you wouldn't take three days to do it, yeah, it makes sense, yeah.

**Melatu:** Yeah, and that's just.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** It, it takes longer work, I think, yeah.

**Lawrence:** I did know a guy though. He could drink like, 18 pints and he would tell a story. May be you know this guy. He could tell a story and in the middle of it, he would go and digress and about two hours later, he would come back to where he left off. We would be like, 'How does he do that?' Irish people are good storytellers too. This is, this is a real oral culture as well, yeah.

**Melatu:** It's, it's a harder process, writing a novel.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** And I hope I will be able to, to do that, you know.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** I am challenging myself, you know, but.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** I am much more comfortable with, yeah, short stories.

**Audience:** I wanted to ask, are you self-critical or do you like, (inaudible) 00:52:36 right from the beginning?

**Melatu:** Am I self-critical?

**Audience:** Self-critical.

**Melatu:** Oh, yes, I am! I am! Oh, Gosh! I am horribly so and yeah, I can be a bit like that. There are somethings I don't, you know, before I send a work out, I would you know, probably analyse. I am still, like I said, I am still re-drafting even though it is in print. I am still re-drafting this book. So, I never stop. So yeah, I would be that way. It does matter

how you know, a story is and if I look at it again, I will find something wrong with it that I should have done differently, yeah. But I, I don't usually, sorry.

**Lawrence:** But she, you are kind of asking like, right from the beginning, are you self-critical? Is that right?

**Audience:** Yeah, that's (inaudible) 00:53:23.

**Lawrence:** Oh, oh, okay, yeah. Because you do allow yourself that opportunity to get the story out first. It doesn't sound like you could get critical until it comes to the rewriting part.

**Melatu:** Oh, yeah. I, I always get, you know like, that's, you know, this is why spaces like this is great because I learnt that you know, that always get the first write finished.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** And then start reworking it.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** And that would have been you know, and probably that's the best thing I ever had in, in my life.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** You know, to always finish, get the whole story out of the head.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** In, on to the paper and then, look at it again.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** So, I have always tried to follow that pattern.

**Lawrence:** Right.

**Melatu:** I always write everything out.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** It doesn't matter how, I wouldn't show it to anyone anyways. It is just for my eyes only and then, I start, you know, working, doing something with it. So, I always finish the first draft before, I know how damaging it can be if you start redrafting while you are, you are still getting the first draft out.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** Yeah.

**Audience:** Thank you. Good afternoon. Thank you very much for this. I am, I am going to get booted here but I must admit that I haven't read any of your work. However, however, by listening how humble you are, and humbling your accounts here today, I am rushing to the book shop after this. I am going to read some of your work.

I have a question because, I would like to, like either, I would like to know a little bit more about that kind of transferability between your writing academically and creatively and I am wondering, do you think one helps the other and do you think sometimes by being such a, a prolific and amazing creative writer, you think that it could sometimes, you know kind of, be an impediment for writing academically where sometimes, you stop writing and you go back and look it and 'Hang on, I have to write more scientifically. I have to write very academically.' And do you think that by being a creative writer helps your work or do you think if it is sometimes an impediment for writing academically?

**Melatu:** Oh, at first it was an impediment definitely. I think, I remember the first, the first chapter that I submitted to Mr (inaudible) 00:55:34 he openly said, 'That sounds just like you.' I don't know why you know, of course, but I have learnt to not let that you know, stop me.

It's, it's, it was at first, I went you know, I could ramble on a little you know, just as if I was writing a, a story but in a way, I think I have come to a place where I am comfortable with that, just like what we are saying about writing with English as a second language and writing with English as a foreign language with something sounding like myself, you know.

I want it to sound like this was written by an African even though the grammar is correct, you know. I don't know how you know, it is going to, you know, work itself out but I am comfortable writing in that, in that sense, sounding like myself as opposed to sounding like somebody that I am, I am quoting you know, and yeah but, with writing both ways, I find that when I am writing my academic work, it could come, I, I struggled. In the beginning, I struggled with it a little. I, I did, I did struggle with it quite a bit you know, just kind of leaving that space and coming into this space to write.

But with my, with my academic work, I find that I write to the deadline, you know. Just when my professor is going like, you know, the emails the pouring in, that's when I start doing that and I go.

**Audience:** We all do this.

**Melatu:** Yeah, and I go, I have sleepless nights trying to get it finished, you know, but with, with my creative writing, when I, I could be watching television and anything can be

happening around me and I just you know, just write away there. So, it is not as, as you know, as.

**Audience:** Have you applied the same kind of processes for those two types of exercises, you applied the same, you said you are very self-critical when you write creatively and to be as self-critical with your academic writing and you apply also the same kind of processes like editing and, or you know, drafting, redrafting?

**Melatu:** Which I should actually. I should apply the same to my academic writing but I don't. I always leave the, you know, the, the, editing to someone else. I give to someone else and, 'What do you think?' And then, they go, 'Oh, you know, I think you should change this.' But with my creative writing, I am much, much more, you know, you know, focused on and I should and probably that would be the transition that I need to make me a better student you know, but I don't, yeah, I don't do that.

**Audience:** Thank you very much.

**Melatu:** Yeah, thanks.

**Audience:** Hi!

**Melatu:** Hi!

**Audience:** It has been fascinating listening to you. I wanted to ask you a question about Irish English. I presume, when you came here, it was a variety of English that you had to become familiar with. So, just to ask you if there is anything that has intrigued you or fascinated you about the way Irish people use English compared to the way people from your background use English?

**Melatu:** I think actually like, I would love it more if you know, Irish people write more in the way Irish people talk you know, the way we talk you know, the way, I would love that. I, I remember the first time I came across the word you know, some, it was actually, I was at a writing centre and a child wrote something, 'What's the, what's the craic?' You know, with the C-R-A-I-C and I thought, 'What is that?' You know, I, I didn't know what that meant.

But I thought, but with time, I, I kind of, I always love it now when I read a work that, especially with, I think the younger people do that. They are much more freer with their, with their language, the way they use language, they are much more, they more authentic, the way they use language.

So, when I read that, I get that much more enjoyment because I am reading, I thinking, 'This person is really from Dublin' you know.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** Yeah, you can hear his (inaudible) 00:59:10. So, there are a lot of different, there is, I, I, I, so many times you know, the way someone says, 'Meet me at half two.' You know, 'half two' would be half of two, 1 o'clock.

**Audience:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** Wouldn't that be? You know, but then you kind of learn that's, that's actually, 'half two' means 2:30, you know. So, it is all those little things that I would like to see, you know, people using the way they speak and, yeah, the authenticity of the way they, the, the, they speak on, on paper. And now, I am, I am finding that out there are so many writers I didn't know before who actually do that and I am reading, you know, I am reading their work and I get, you know like, I love that. I love reading that. It's different by the way, I enjoy that. It's different from how Africans would, would speak but then, it is still that way of deconstructing English and making it our own, yeah.

**Lawrence:** Right, yeah. I mean, Ireland is a colony, always a colony and Nigeria, was a colony.

**Melatu:** Yes.

**Lawrence:** So, you know, your natural inclination is to screw up the language as much as you can, right?

**Melatu:** You can say that again.

**Lawrence:** But there, yeah, you read a lot of Irish writers and is that part of, what you get out of it is you learn the vocabulary of Irish English and things like that or?

**Melatu:** I, I just read out of, just because.

**Lawrence:** Yes.

**Melatu:** I am enjoying the.

**Lawrence:** You like the stories?

**Melatu:** Yeah, I like the stories.

**Lawrence:** Yeah, yeah.

**Melatu:** You know, it's just, you know, what, what do I, if I come across something and then I read it, you know?

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** Yes, and so, I just read just because it's a story there.

**Lawrence:** Yeah, but you must check up the, you must have to look up the dictionary. How was that?

**Melatu:** Sometimes, people recommend people to me and say, have you read this passage? She writes this way or have you read that passage?

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** You know like, and then I go and look them up and then, I might read something about them. I am still trying to get there. I don't know a lot of things.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** I know that about, you know, the literature seen in our Ireland or who.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** The writes are and what they write.

**Lawrence:** Yeah.

**Melatu:** But I am, I am getting there.

**Lawrence:** I would say, if you hang out with these guys you would be travelling a lot.

Any other questions? Yeah, we are, we are kind of gone, kind of away of time but one more question? Yeah?

**Audience:** Sorry, this is my second time now but, I just wanted to ask, is there a very, are there moments where you have to kind of motivate yourself to write or you have a bit of a writer's block and if you do, how do you manage to overcoming that, overcome it?

**Melatu:** The writer's block comes when you know, just when I finish my drafts and it just comes when I am redrafting. It could be that something in the sentence is not right and sometimes, I, you know, just like I said, sometimes something could go and it's still not right to me.

I have actually, that's something that has been you know, accepted for publication and then, it came back to me and I just thought, there is just that particular sentence that has been bogging me for quite a long time and that story has been there for years, you know. I could change it then or I, I leave it but it's just, that, that, what I would call a writer's block would happen then when just something is just not, I don't like the way this character said this or that. All of those things, it's just, I would be bogging me for a long time and that, that would be where it comes.

But I think recently, I wouldn't call it a, a writer's block per say, not just because but I just feel that I have not been in that space to write. This was kind of like, few months ago but that has changed now but it wasn't the writer's block. It's just myself, I was just kind of like, not in the right frame of mind.

**Audience:** Right, yeah.

**Lawrence:** I am going to hand the stage to Eda. I just wanted to say 'thank you' to Melatu and I am honoured and I am, I am.

**Melatu:** Thank you.

**Lawrence:** I really, I enjoyed this immensely. I want to thank you guys for coming and for your questions and I look forward to doing this again with you folks and I will hand it over to Eda.

**Íde:** I just want to say, I am really happy to be a part it but, and a huge thank you to Melatu. She has been so generous with her time this year. I know that lots of you are studying her book. So, I hope that you have enjoyed meeting her and hearing her talk about her book and her process and we want you to wear one of our writing centres goodies we provide.

**Lawrence:** With pleasure!

**Íde:** And these are the gifts and thank you very, very much. It has been, thank you.

**Melatu:** Thank you for having me.