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Outroduction: Sedimenting FicSci

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In 2022, we met for coffee and conceptualised FicSci to explore experimentally how creative writing could be both mobilised and enjoyed as a crucial form of communication in contemporary culture, for the SARChI in Science Communication. At the time, we did not have a fixed idea of how the workshops would be structured. We chose to book Mont Fleur for three days as it seemed a sensible amount of time in which to expect writers to produce an experimental piece, and we matched that with a request to our invited scientist to prepare three presentations for the writers we'd assemble. We knew that we would have the budget to accommodate 10 to 12 writers, including their travel from around the country, so we settled on that as a good number. We were certain that we would require writers to produce *something* out of their attendance, in real time and on site, but other than that we made no demands nor did we entertain other expectations, our faith firm in the creative process.

This anthology marks the fourth iteration of our creative-writing-meets-science encounter, the fourth workshop, the fourth scientist, making it an opportune moment to reflect on what FicSci is becoming, and what it might yet become. We plan two more FicSci workshops as part of this SARChI-funded series. From the bedrock that has been layered down in this volume, the three preceding

it, and the two to come, we see our ongoing exploratory work in this domain as leading to an opportunity for creative science communication to be further embedded as praxis and point to ways that science and creativity can continue to interface productively. FicSci is not the only way that science and creative communication interrelate. Creative writing can be scientific; science requires creativity and risk. The FicSci contribution to knowledge production in the science-creative writing matrix is still emerging, and is not yet nameable (should it ever be). As Wamuwi explored in his contribution to this collection, there is an inherent irreconcilability between creative writing and science. But this tension is intriguing and fascinating enough for us to keep returning to it.

Looking back on the FicSci journey so far as an accretive process, like sedimentation, we observe the first layer, its format: 10 to 12 writers (including ourselves), one scientist, three days, three provocations and a requirement to write. Then there is the place, Mont Fleur. Our chosen location has become a kind of character in the FicSci story, too, though one to which we have not yet given our full attention: the Blaauwklippen Valley, and its moody winter weather and formidable surrounding mountains making sunrise later and sunset earlier; the horse-shoe arrangements of rooms cocooning each group into an even more intimate sense of temporary isolation; the ever-replenishing fires that ward off the chilly nights and invite community and conversation; the hearty home-style meals, a similar menu offered each year on rotation, the same delicious cakes for tea breaks; the kind faces that welcome us as we return for another gathering. Although the invited writers each year are different and encounter the venue and its abundant yet unpretentious service with awe and joy each time, we two are the same, returning again and again, such that Mont Fleur has started to feel a little like a holiday home, and we the annual returnees. All these repetitions have in a way solidified FicSci into something tangible: an idea reinforced by repetitive action.

Although our formats and framings repeat, each year also brings something new, specifically in the contribution of the invited scientist, and the participation of our writers. Each scientist arrives

with their own passion and expertise, sharing their questions, methods and findings with unparalleled originality. In 2025 our invited scientist, Dr Tebogo Makhubela was a delight: his presentations positively fizzed with enthusiasm and optimism. Never had the questions of rock formation, fossils, and cave exploration ever seemed so thrilling, never had a chosen career in science seemed more fitting to a brilliant mind, or inspiring to those listening to it. But every year, the scientist makes us feel that way, so even though Dr Makhubela's work was a phenomenal inspiration to the writers assembled (as their creative outputs show), there is also something unique to our format that creates this special feeling about the science and scientist: for three days one scientist has the leisure and pleasure of sharing their work in detail with a small and interested group of creative minds, and they in turn get the rare opportunity to think in the company of a qualified and passionate expert about a specific domain of scientific enquiry. This recipe brings forth different outcomes every time, as each writer finds a unique spark of enquiry that they can chase with words and ideas until they have something new to say in offering to the world of letters.

And each year, a different group of writers: FicSci 04 has taught us—or brought into relief knowledge we already had—that the creatives we bring together always arrive as fully formed writers. They bring their particular interests, genre affinities, existential questions, and style idiosyncrasies with them. In their encounters with the science, the experiment lies in how they regard the new information they are offered from their own embedded epistemological presence. More than ever, FicSci 04 shows that creative writers are not blank slates that science can write onto. Instead, *they bring their writing to the science*. While the science speaks for itself, so too does the writing.