

# DELIVER US FROM HIV - A REVIEW

12/12/2016

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GLHTH 302 Global Narratives of HIV/AIDS

Word count: 799  
Bibliography format: APA

180,000 South African lives were lost to HIV/AIDS in 2015. Widespread poverty, President Mbeki's denialism, and inhibited access for years to public and affordable antiretroviral treatment, are undoubtedly the prominent pallbearers that have led many thousands of HIV+ South African individuals to their graves. We do not consider the earnest Christians so devoted to God, engulfed by their trust in Him, that they unknowingly laid themselves to rest at the hands of "God-sent" healers.

*Deliver Us From HIV* forces us to acknowledge another critical, and perhaps the most distressing proponent of HIV/AIDS-related mortality in South Africa; the blind faith of many diagnosed individuals in traditional healing. Sangoma and spiritual healers attest to spiritual contact and a calling to diagnose, treat and prevent ailments holistically, in the denunciation of Western medicine and at significant costs to the patient – both monetary, and those far more grave.

Within an ominously murky cemetery scene, one's eyes gravitate to the red beads draped over a hand in the foreground, the only splash of color among shades of charcoal grey. The Catholic "rosary pills" are a tragic foreshadowing of the new story that shines through the visible text; "Almighty God - it is difficult to - be HIV positive - however I fear not - I depend on - you - to heal me". Hallowes' piece is full of devastating irony; each bead in the rosary represents a prayer to the Holy Trinity and Virgin Mary, seeking forgiveness, provision, and eternal life. The perverse surrogating of ARV pills conveys the true "Savior" of HIV sufferers; though too late, it seems.

Hallowes draws inspiration from English artist Tom Phillips, the brain behind *A Humument*, to adapt a page of text from *Fulfilling reproductive rights for women affected by HIV; A tool for monitoring progress toward three Millennium Development Goals*, a report compiled by medical anthropologist Maria de Bruyn. De Bruyn devoted her career to working for nonprofit organizations in the sphere of sexual and reproductive rights, with focus on HIV/AIDS.

Phillips' "Humument" method involves extracting words from pages of text to fashion new narratives, a technique he has used to transform W.H. Mallock's *A Human Document* six times. Phillips demands reinterpretation of the original text; one could argue it simultaneously disrespects Mallock's authoring and resurrects it from near obscurity. Phillips conveys that before one may read a page, "there must be wonder... a space that disobeys convention's demands to read linearly, left-to-right, up-to-down. Phillips offers his own signposts to this wonder by connecting highlighted words, more enactments of individual liberty... than assertions of interpretive primacy." (King, 2012).

It seems obvious that Hallowes certainly did violate the standard scrutiny of written word, as *Deliver Us From Evil* appears to bear little relevance to de Bruyn's

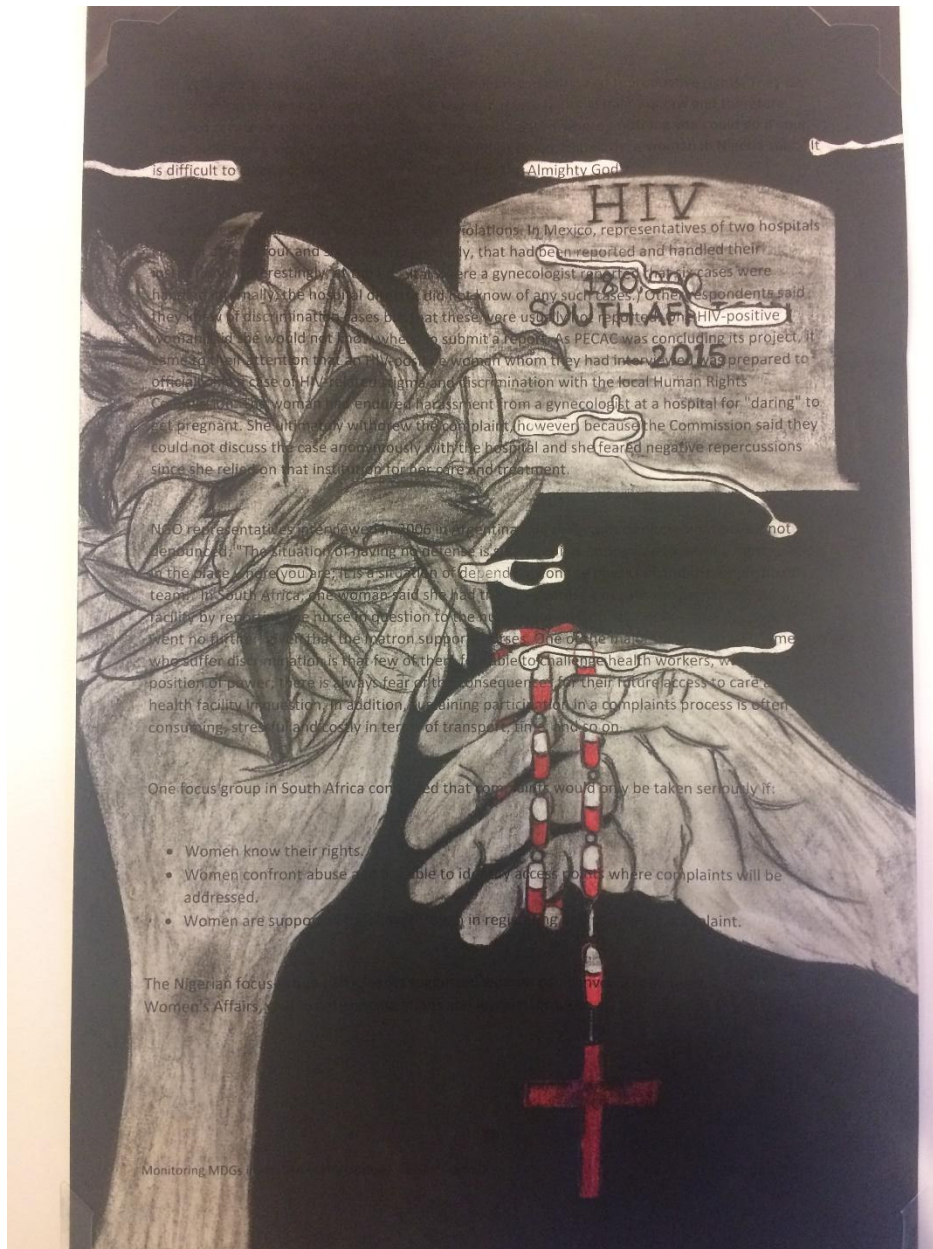
underlying text regarding global sexual and reproductive rights for HIV+ women. Hallowes' "Humument" creation may likewise be observed as an exercise in liberty, though as a child matures in her parents' image, *Deliver Us From HIV* grows from de Bruyn's established roots in HIV/AIDS. Just as words on a page move into, and out of, focus, Hallowes chooses to illuminate a largely underappreciated aspect of HIV/AIDS mortality not only in South Africa, but throughout the world.

The question here is not whether the intentions of *Deliver Us From Evil* are effectively communicated. Certainly, the graveyard imagery and blasphemous "rosary pills" resurrect out of literal blackness the devastation that arises from complete faith in traditional healers and consequent rejection of antiretroviral treatment among individuals with HIV/AIDS.

The concern lies in Hallowes' deviation from de Bruyn's original text. Can one reasonably connect the global reproductive rights of seropositive women and the reliance on deceptive traditional healers to cure HIV/AIDS in South Africa? It's a stretch. Though inspired by de Bruyn's lifelong efforts to inform about the circumstances of individuals with HIV/AIDS to generate better outcomes, as illustrated by that text which remains semi-visible, Hallowes' censors much of her findings.

The answer to the question vis-à-vis the ethics of Hallowes' employment of de Bruyn's work may rest in the motivating forces behind both pieces. Assuming Maria de Bruyn devoted her career to sexual and reproductive human rights out of a desire to bring positive change for affected individuals, *Deliver Us From HIV* augments efforts to increase awareness of the realities of HIV/AIDS and mobilize in productive behaviors to benefit those concerned.

180,000 South Africans died from HIV/AIDS in 2015; one tombstone, one statistic, to represent many. Hallowes shows there are hundreds of thousands of reasons to pray, to seek divine intervention, to seek miracles. Just as *A Humument* generated a level of interest vastly exceeding that which Mallock's novel welcomed previously, *Deliver Us From HIV* has the potential to draw further attention to the abundance of material in de Bruyn's archives and provoke constructive action in the realm of HIV/AIDS.



## Bibliography

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