

WritingThreeSixty

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UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

Letter from the Editor

Welcome to the second issue of WritingThreeSixty for 2020. This special issue is centred around the theme of the Covid-19 Lockdown which has affected all of us. After our call for papers in the previous issue, we received a record number of submissions. Interestingly, poetry was overwhelmingly the preferred medium for expressing thoughts on the effects of lockdown. In this issue, you will find a selection of poems, as well as a short story and a research article.

This will be my last issue as editor-in-chief; I hand the reins over to Stephanie Williams, our social media manager. I have been with WritingThreeSixty since 2015 and I have thoroughly enjoyed my time with it. I leave knowing that the journal is in very capable hands!

Best Wishes,

Editor-in-chief

Martina van Heerden

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Research article

Shelves of Books, Piles of Books, References and Lists of Books as Performances of Metrics and Expertise by Anna Nguyen

Gazing at Bookshelves

Since the pandemic, I have participated in or attended many virtual lectures and conferences. Inevitably, I have seen numerous personal libraries, libraries in offices, or walls of books strategically peeking from behind the speaker. Academics, in particular, have spectacular bookshelves. The shelves are overflowing with books, enough to make the bookcases abundant and full, but organized enough so their spines reveal evidence of the title and the author's name. And the collection of each speaker is a reflection of their research area. An author and professor in a literature department has rows of fiction. Someone who studies food has cookbooks in addition to their stacks of scholars' monographs published by university presses. A scholar in a field like science and technology studies (STS) will have books with words such as "data", "the Internet", "political economy", and "digital" in their titles.

As I look beyond their bookcases, my eyes rest on my own book stacks. It's quite a contrast, staring at the speakers' beautiful and bountiful bookcases and then at the unorganized and uneven piles I have on the floor, next to small, white IKEA shelves that house even more books, many titles hidden behind a front-facing row. Because my camera is

pointed towards my kitchen area, my “expertise” is not readily revealed.

Of course, not all speakers sit in front of their books and bookshelves. Yet, the bookshelf has become quite the decorative backdrop as many of us, since the pandemic, have shifted our work lives from office spaces to remote spaces. There is a sense of disruption in the work routine and a sense of performing expertise has been carried over to the bookshelf. This observation is not controversial. In May of this year, as many of us began our dependency on Zoom and other similar virtual applications, *The New York Times* has published at least two articles on the bookshelf trend phenomenon. An article written by Amanda Hess is titled “The ‘Credibility Bookcase’ is the Quarantine’s Hottest Accessory”. Hess cites the anonymous Twitter account, “Bookcase Credibility” (@BCredibility) whose first tweet was released on April 20, as the titular focus for her piece. The account documents the phenomenon of experts and politicians who provide testimony during the ongoing lockdown or remote interviews. These people are always speaking to us with a bookcase behind them.

Hess’ argument is simple: “the bookcase has become the preferred background for applying a patina of authority to an amateurish video feed” reads the sub headline. In the article, Hess outlines numerous celebrities, TV hosts, and politicians who rely on books to speak for them. “The aesthetics of credibility often go overlooked,” Hess writes, noting that the particular look of “cerebral authority” in the United States is often of “a white man in a dark suit”. But like any symbolic representation, these images can shift and transform. Hess’ point is

that the pandemic has gestured to a new symbolic and visual form of respectability and credibility. “The bookcase,” Hess writes, “offers both a visually pleasing surface and a gesture at intellectual depth. Of all the quarantine judgments being offered right now, this one feels harmless enough. One gets the sense that for the bookcase-background type, being judged by their home libraries is a secret dream finally realized.”

Oddly, another *New York Times*’ article written by Shannon Doyne and Michael Gonchar in the Student Opinion page, released in the same month as Hess’ piece, basically summarizes the idea of books as representative of the person. In the very brief article, the authors end with a list of questions, one of which asks “do you think the books sitting on someone’s bookshelf say anything about that person, even if the person never reads them? Do you have any books in your home that say something about you?”

There appears to be an ontological underpinning left unexplored in these very short pieces. The content, or the context, of the books are not actually reflected. The blueprint for such recent interrogation is from a Twitter account, whose only biographical statement offers, “What you say is not as important as the bookcase behind you.” There is already, whether humorously tongue-in-cheek or not, a clear point that books have significant meaning for us. The focus is on the object themselves, as if they can “speak” for the humans. This is a point of contention in some STS literature, mainly in the Latourian reading of our relationship with non-humans. Many have romanticized the role of agency of voiceless objects as if they have their own agency; yet, as

Bruno Latour has attempted to remind us, that humans give “things” agency or power (Latour 138, 142-145). When they perform, they perform for us and are dependent on the sociopolitical situations. A book’s material form only really comes alive through our discussions of them or when we cite them.

Citations as Assembling and Enrolling Expertise

The connection between books, bookshelves, the pandemic, and expertise is not a new phenomenon. Credibility through books has existed long before digital politics and remote communication. Oftentimes, I find myself thinking about the vast amount of books in my professors’ offices. In one of my classes, a professor told his student that the recommended books on his syllabus are not only “great scholarship” but it is a good thing to have books, even if they are unread, in our possession.

One can see that the credibility bookcase has long been a source of tension, conflict, and exclusion in our works' cited lists, our citational practices, on syllabi, and in carefully curated anthologies. Even more recent, and before COVID, is the online community of “bookstagrammers” on various digital platforms. The common thread is the focus of what someone is reading or what someone will read. The placement of the books is used to build a credible reputation within a community. Specifically, regarding the current wave of testimonies from experts, we could consider that their deliberate placement of their bookshelves is a gesture to extending books as

citational forces or citational allies. For the experts, citations are the performative and strategic ally we use in our daily life practices.

The politics of citations have been most recently interrogated by Sara Ahmed. In an often-quoted sentiment in *Living a Feminist Life*, Ahmed writes “Citation is a feminist memory. Citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because we deviated from the paths we were told to follow” (15-16). For Ahmed, she encourages her readers to read more feminist scholars of color who have both been influential in her own work and those who were in conversation with dominant white scholars. This is where the disconnect between reader, or audience, and the text happens. We treat the books and texts as speaking to us, rather than view them as a document in which the authors are responding or interrogating someone or something in society. The text cannot be voiceless and be read without the authorial presence, despite what Roland Barthes expresses (142).

Further, Ahmed, “citations can be feminist bricks: they are materials through which, from which, we create our dwellings. My citation policy has affected the kind of house I have built” (16). Here, Ahmed may be referring to a canonical responsibility, a discussion of its limitations, and her desires for a better kind of academic discipline or program. There is a poetic and normative critique in Ahmed’s vision for a citational practice. And perhaps there is one in Latour’s attempt to add rhetorical studies into his STS program. Books in our citational practices “speak” to us passively as a text, but actively to strengthen the author’s arguments and claims. Citations are, in the Latourian

sense, an “appeal to higher and more numerous allies” (31); the references are prestigious because they are all about numbers (33). They perform, despite the fact that many references may be misquoted or wrong, because they are displayed (34). For Latour, the context of a citation is “how one text acts on others to make them more in keeping with its claims” (35).

Look at any scholarly book or journal article with a reference list or just the citations that rest within their parentheticals. The more lists and citations, the better, for the empirical impact rests on the numbers and not so much on the arguments the author is actually trying to make. Latour calls this an enrollment of expertise. Just citing them, even if the text or normative arguments have been misinterpreted or reinterpreted for the interlocutor’s strategic purposes, is a curated collection of supposed allies. And even if they are cited as a gesture to the differences in scholarship, this, too, is an act of performativity. The authors tell the readers that they have surveyed the literature and are well-suited to tell us they are capable of using such sources.

Bookshelves as Works Cited

Reading a text and citing a text can lead to epistemic contestations, and this is why Barthes’ argument of “the death of the author” continues to be a problem in the way we treat texts. Who reads what correctly will always be a question. But with bookshelf credibility there has been a shift from the content of the text to the physical and material aspects of the book itself, as we see in Hess’ article, Doyne and Gonchar’s summary of the article, and their seemingly innocuous

observation that these credible books may have been untouched and unread. I see it too in my professor's admission that books are, indeed, credible decor in an office or home space. Yet, Hess' sweeping declarative statement that books are the newest form of credibility is hyperbolic. Books and texts have long been assembled to perform expertise and credibility. What may be notable is that many books have traveled beyond institutions of gatekeeping, out of libraries and departmental homes. It is not uncommon for non-academics to read academic texts, or for academics to use fiction and poetry in their own research practices. The problem isn't about the bookshelves themselves, but about whose words and works are cited constantly outside of their intended normative underpinnings. This possibility that expertise can be crafted, through one's own understanding of themselves, experiences, and hopes for books outside of their community, is a symptom of reflexive modernity (Beck, Giddens, & Lash 2-8).

The significance of the books and bookcases during this exceptional COVID time is that we've tried to apply new meanings to our relationships with them. We have not. Our reliance on expertise has been more visible, and this is a direct cause of us finally paying attention to the bookshelves of others. Although we cannot count the numerous books on these shelves, we are amazed by the mere sight of an abundant collection. The metrics of the bookshelves are another reminder of the importance of credible lists. The quantity is much more important than the quality or even authorial intent.

And, of course, if we think of credibility, expertise, lists, and spaces, we cannot think of them as any less exclusionary than a more traditional institution. Books and bookshelves should not be the basis of credibility, nor are they free of the contexts in which they exist. They need not be a fetishized object, at once active and politics-free, in which they replace human voices. The texts and books are as fallible as their creators are. We are faced, as always, with the challenge of creating equitable and inclusive epistemic communities with books as a way to navigate these concerns.

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Short story

Birdwatching by Mia Uys

It is raining when William wakes up, and he spends the first moment of his day thinking about his mother, while watching Cape robin-chats hop around the wet grass trying to pull worms out from the soil. He has always liked birds. They seem so detached from the world, witnessing life from high above, tied to nothing. Deep down, he knows this is just an illusion, a romantic idea that creatures with wings are somehow free. He knows birds are constrained by the same physical limitations that affect all living things on earth. Like him, they are hopelessly attached to many things.

This window has provided countless hours of entertainment during his first few months of university. Besides the birds, he enjoys watching other students making their way to class down Merriman Street. The guys wearing Vans, skating past with their books stashed underneath their armpits, or the groups of girls huddled together arm-in-arm. He wonders what it must feel like to belong somewhere, to feel like life is really happening, to have other people to share that feeling with - as they all do.

Although today is a Monday, William can sleep late and stare out at the rainy morning without anyone bothering him. Normally, he would have to get up really early to avoid physical confrontations with HK members in the passages. He would shower alone in the dark and change in his room quietly, using his phone light to guide him. His roommate, Charlie, is a deep sleeper, thank god, but most of the girls he brings over aren't. William can tell when they are awake by the way

they shift positions, pulling the duvet over their bare arms in irritation. One of them whispered hello to him once which gave him such a fright that he fled from the room with his shirt inside out.

He is no rush today. Charlie is back home in Constantia like all the other students who have fled to safety. South Africa is in week five of a nationwide lockdown, which means no one is allowed to leave their house unless they work for an essential service, or desperately need an essential service. William falls within neither of these categories. He is merely an inconvenience, the only student left in Simonsberg Manskoshuis. Outside his window, the birds peck at the soil, and the number of Coronavirus cases continue to rise.

His mother, Theresa, had been so excited when he got in. They had just finished eating breakfast at home in Johannesburg when he told her the news. William was drinking a cup of black coffee. She was drinking her daily 'cancer killer' smoothie. An open packet of kale and half an orange lay abandoned near the sink.

'Your father's old residence! Oh, my darling this is so exciting!' she said. 'Just imagine sitting in the same cafeteria where he ate! Or even sleeping in his old room? Maybe we could organise something like that?'

'No, Mom, please,' he said urgently. 'It's great I got in alright, let's just leave it at that?'

'Doubt you'll survive long in a place like that,' Steven said as he walked into the kitchen.

He had just got back from a long cycle, the only thing Steven seemed to enjoy in his life. His thin blonde hair was stuck damply to his forehead. He snapped a single banana off from the bunch lying in the glass fruit bowl.

‘They eat boys like you for breakfast in Stellies.’

William didn’t react to his stepfather’s comment. He has learnt through years of practice, that it is always better not to react. Steven had thrown a full glass of red wine at him from across the dinner table once for reacting. So now when he speaks, the things Steven says pass straight through him like a cold draft of air. As he left the kitchen, his mother brushed her thin fingers lightly over William’s palm before getting up to make Steven’s breakfast.

‘I don’t know if I should go,’ William said slowly.

She turned around and looked at him, her mouth parted open in shock. Her voice was hoarse, and she sounded angry as she spoke. ‘Don’t you dare stay here for me, Will.’

‘Fucksakes, Mom,’ he said. ‘How can I leave you here with him?’

The pipes creaked above them as Steven turned the hot water of the shower on. She was frowning sadly at him while retying the pale blue bandana she wore over her bare head. She was still so beautiful, his mother. His heart ached as he watched her there, knowing already that of course, he would go. He would pack up his room, the eighteen years of his existence into one small black suitcase. He would hug her tightly at the boarding gates, and sit at the window seat as the aeroplane took off into the sky. In just over a month, he would be in a different province, living an altogether different kind of life.

‘I will never forgive you, if you don’t go,’ she said. ‘Never.’

She cracked an egg open into the pan. William got up to make another pot of coffee.

William gets changed now, pulling on his jeans, his only clean jersey and an old pair of Nike sneakers. He grabs his wallet from his bedside table and walks quickly through the eerie passages.

‘Molo Sinethemba,’ William says to the security guard at the front desk. Sinethemba raises his hand but says nothing. William cannot see if he is smiling behind his mask, but somehow he doubts it. There is little to smile about at the moment. He tugs his mask over his mouth and nose trying to breathe normally through the clinical smell. Outside the rain has stopped, and the sky is a brilliant sea-blue. A pied crow squawks as it flies overhead.

He enjoys these daily walks to Eikestad Mall. He does not see another person on the roads beside a homeless man, smelling of beer, who is rummaging frantically through a dustbin. Outside the entrance, a girl wearing yellow rubber gloves is arguing with her boyfriend on the phone.

‘Babe, I told you. Woolworths isn’t selling hot food anymore... Of course, I fucking checked!’

Her voice reminds him of Paige, a girl he knows from back home. They had a brief, intense sexual relationship for a while last year. She played in the same provincial hockey league, and after a match one Saturday, she walked up to him outside the changing rooms and said, ‘Are you free later today? I could come over to your house.’

After confirming that she wasn't joking, he said his Mom was out for the day, and she could come over any time she wanted to. On the drive home, he started fantasising about her, he couldn't help it. He thought about the way her hockey dress clung to her body, and the way her breasts looked in a sports bra. He had seen them once when the teams had been forced to take an ice bath after training. A lot of the guys on the team joked with each other about how hot she was, or how much they wanted to fuck her. William had always just admired her skill on the field. She was insanely good. Probably the only person he knew who was going to make it to the top, captain of the national team one day.

When she arrived at his house, she had changed out of her hockey gear. Her hair was damp, and she smelt faintly of perfume.

'Would you like coffee or something?' he asked.

She smiled and said: 'I didn't come here to drink coffee, you know.'

He realised that he was slightly terrified of her. The only other person he'd slept with at that point was his best friend, Lauren. It had been a painful experience for both of them, awkward and over too quickly. Their friendship wasn't the same after that, probably never would be.

He sometimes writes long emotional emails to her about how he's finding life at university. How beautiful the mountains look at sunset, or how weird he feels walking past old slave cottages and white colonial buildings. Since the lockdown, his emails have taken on a new melancholy tone.

I miss you, he types. I can't remember the last time I physically touched someone. I'm so worried about my Mom. Lauren is studying at Tuks like most of his other school mates. He never sends the emails, they pile up one by one in his drafts folder.

Anyway, William thinks the sex just worked with Paige because they didn't know each other well. She told him he was the first person able to make her come.

'Don't get a big head now,' she said, which caused them both to laugh.

He struggled to concentrate in class or execute drills during hockey practice during that month. He kept thinking about her lying naked on his bed, or the way he could make her wet with just his touch. It ended when she told him that she was in love with someone else at school.

'We had fun though, didn't we?' Paige said.

He wasn't even that sad about it, although he did miss the sex. He spent a few nights after that worrying if he was incapable of intimacy. That was back in high school, when he had the time to worry about those sorts of things.

His concerns at the moment are far more primal: when was the last time I ate? Did I sanitise my hands after paying at the till? When will Steven be calling me, to deliver the inevitable bad news?

He slowly fills his trolley: a jar of peanut butter, a loaf of bread, two beef lasagnes to warm up (one for him and the other for

Sinethemba), a bag of bananas for his health. William doesn't stock up with food so he can use this daily walk to the shops as an excuse to get outside. When he gets back to res, he'll listen to his lecturer's podcasts and make notes from the slides they've uploaded, his Physics textbooks laid out in front of him for guidance. In the afternoon, he will make a peanut butter sandwich to eat while he talks to his mother on the phone. Before bed, he will do thirty push-ups and finish another novel. Tonight, he will devour *The Secret History*.

William was top of his class in English at school but always knew he would study something to do with science, probably out of some sad devotion to his father. He could never be a surgeon though, he knew that for sure. Once during hockey practice in grade 8, Kyle had flicked a dangerous high ball which hit Tim directly on the mouth. Tim wasn't wearing his gum guard and spat out two of his teeth onto the green AstroTurf while blood streamed down from his nose. William had to sprint to the edge of the field to be sick.

He'd been walking off that same field a few days later, when his coach pulled him aside nervously, and said, 'Shit, Will, I'm so sorry man. There's been a terrible car accident.'

His mother was inconsolable that evening, crying out like an animal, shaking all over her body. Feeling sick and panicky, he had phoned his aunt, Beth, who told him to crush up two Valium's and dissolve them in a glass of water. At fourteen years old, William didn't know adults took pills for things like anxiety or depression. Scanning through his parent's bathroom cabinet, reading labels like: 'Prozac' and 'Xanax', he realised suddenly that his childhood was over.

The next morning, he walked into the kitchen to fetch his Dad's favourite wine glass from the cabinet. It must have held some sentimental value for him because he never drank from anything else, but William had never asked about it, and now he would never know. After long days at work, his father would sip the red liquid, dark like blood, and talk excitedly about the miracles he'd performed in the operating theatre. Other nights he drank quietly, and William knew not to press him for details.

That morning, William took the glass and smashed it against the counter. It shattered into uneven pieces which fell all over the tiled floor, glistening in the sun like diamonds. On the windowsill outside, a pair of doves cooed softly to each other. He watched the shining pieces for what felt like a long time, breathing heavily. Eventually, his mother came downstairs and swept up the glass with the grey plastic dustpan they kept hidden under the sink.

At ten past four, his mother calls him.

'Hello my darling, how has your day been?'

'Same as yesterday,' he laughs. 'How are you feeling?'

'Well,' she says. 'I'm getting used to the side effects and my fingers are healing quite nicely.'

He breathes out slowly, imaging his mother's cracked hands, dry and bleeding. He knows she's being strong. Cancer patients taking oral chemotherapy have so much to endure: nausea, diarrhoea, mouth sores, insomnia, the heavy weighted blanket of fatigue.

He clears this throat. 'I'm glad. How's Steven doing?'

'Same as always,' she says. 'Drinking up a storm and complaining about the government.'

'He hasn't run out then?'

'Of booze? Heavens no, he's well connected with the black market.'

William laughs. 'Of course, he is.'

'And your course work? How's the online teaching?'

'Challenging, to say the least, it can never compare with face-to-face class. One of our lecturer's kid keeps running in while we're on Zoom meetings, which is pretty funny.'

'I wish you could come home,' she says, her voice cracking at the end. 'I hate to think of you all alone, trying to cook for yourself in that god-awful kitchenette just due to your bizarre concern about infecting me. This illegal booze coming into our house is probably more dangerous for my health!'

He pauses, trying to gather his thoughts. Steven had been the one who convinced him it wasn't safe to return. In the beginning, with all the fear and uncertainty circulating on campus, he hadn't known what to believe. Some people didn't display symptoms for the first ten days. Maybe he was already infected? Or he'd contract it on the flight home, at the airport, during the Uber ride there. How could he ever forgive himself? Dr Mkhize is always very clear during his state address: people with underlying illnesses are the most vulnerable and in need of our protection.

'Sorry my darling,' she says. 'It's the medication making me cranky.'

'I wish I was there too,' William says. 'You know I do.'

She says she loves him, Steven is calling, and she has to go. He wanted to tell her about the birds, he only remembers now. They are still there outside his window, he can see their reddish-orange breasts even in the fading afternoon light.

He will tell her about them tomorrow.

Poetry

I learn to smile with my eyes

- Jerome Coetzee

I miss my friends. I long
for interaction.
I scurry cowardly.
A virus uncovered layers of myself.
I was brave once, I was a
people's person.
Now I am afraid to smile
and if I do then it is hidden
behind a mask.
I show sorrow through my
eyes and a layer erupts.
My eyes do not smile, they
cannot cover up the years of
pain and betrayal.
In the end I am thankful,
because I learn how
to fake a smile
with my eyes.

It feels like home

- Jerome Coetzee

I knocked on a door
that had bright colours and varied faces.
Faces that screamed positive messages.
The welcoming mat was clear, it
submerged me in the
freedom of the sky.
The door was not creaking, it had
the sound of rolling hills and
Ice-cream trucks cruised by.
I stepped inside.
There was no hope
No light
No laughter
No grace
No mercy
I sat down, the voice spoke slowly
and creaked and dragged every
syllable.
“If you sit you stay,
It’s your choice to plant yourself inside”
My response:
This feels comfortable, feels like eternity,
feels like home.

Upper Body Strength **- Jamie Conway**

(Inspired by Pina Bausch)

Pinch my nose
between your fingers,
and let me carry you
on my back.
I have no upper body strength.

I will crash into tables,
break the legs of chairs,
stumble and trip
over the darkness.
But you can trust me
not to walk into any glass doors.

Fall down, tip-toe
your way into my chest.
Settle in, make yourself at home.
Crawl out
on your hands and knees.
Don't look back. You don't
have the upper body strength.

Kaleidoscope

- Jamie Conway

I've been stealing colours
from the dead
for as long as I can remember.
If I don't, who will?
I can't just leave them alone
with no one to own their shades.
Sometimes I feel grey,
because the living takes my colours, too.
Not everything can be
so black and white.

But today, I've learned
how to make sense of
the things inside of me.
We are not a blank canvas.
We are a kaleidoscope.

Upside Down

- Jamie Conway

We were upside down
on the steps of the Grand Hall.
Our shoes leaning against pillars
older than us, telling stories we knew
would only grow younger with us.
With our feet touching the sky
and our heads on the ground,
I knew there wasn't much
more to life than being
upside down.

Falling

- Jamie Conway

I'm standing outside craning my neck
to catch a glimpse
of the meteor shower.

The Cape Times said there'd be
one tonight.

I'm not saying that they lied,
but where is the dust that Halley
left behind?

My neck is starting to
hurt, and it's spreading to my
shoulder blades.

Maybe I should go inside.

I'm almost on my last cigarette, anyway.

Maybe it's okay to go to bed and
fall asleep,
even if I don't get to see
a single streak.

As long as I know
that somewhere, stars are
falling with me.

Pandora's Box

- Jamie Conway

I lost my watch yesterday,
the box it came in too.

It was expensive, a Pandora -
with gold rims.

I never liked that watch,
I didn't mind losing time -
but now I've lost the box.

Anyone could pick it up.

Maybe a ginger-haired boy
with sticky fingers, or
a woman with a tight smile
and nothing else to do.

I pray no one ever finds it.

The last time someone picked it up
the world was cursed.

Maybe this time,
hope can leave the box
and we will be damned,
but fine.

The world is cruel,
but never unkind.

Wet marks

- Kirsten Deane

There's nothing left to do here
but stare at the ceiling.
I'm noticing the wet marks
that my father can't afford
to fix right now. His struggles
look delicate above my head.
Parents never carry their worries
like an old scar. Always pretty
and new and never healing.
I haven't been allowed to look
at anything else. My pa says
the world is ending so I spend
my time finding my life in my room.
There's a lot of me in the creeks
in between my wooden floor.
That's where I bruise my knees
and lose parts of my skin.
The boys can see my bones now
but I'm stitching them closed
while the world can't see.

Alone
- Kirsten Deane

I have curled
my lonely curls
to the side of my head.
That's where they will
sleep from now on.
I'll see my baby face
creeping through my eyes
and nose and mouth, and I'll remember
how to play hide and seek
without knowing that I'm scared of the dark.
My curtains are blue now.
The sun doesn't stab through them
like my red ones. Only gentle nudges
to tell me there is another day.
A different boy strokes his hands
on my arms now. He speaks softly
even when I shout. He knows I'm a woman
even when anger
takes up my insides.
Being stuck between walls has made everything
soft. My thighs spread
apart no longer invites strangers but just Gods
breath
after his last duty.

I'm smiling with no part of my face hidden.

The world has been on its own.

I'm finally ready to be on mine.

Grey landscapes **- Summayah Koli**

The sun seems bleak even in its peak and the clouds mesh in a dark shadow.

I'm in the middle of a harsh storm, yet my feet won't budge-
as one sticks gum to his memories, I embrace the emptiness of his absence.

Every bright sound of his laughter now shrivels like dust piling on grey landscapes.

Every bright memory now chokes me to my tearful peak.
Steel cold hands tighten around my throat and I battle to breathe.

As dawn breaks and a new day begins,
I open my eyes in earnest- for him, I shall live.
His long days that were cut short,
I, now, will make long again.

No longer shall his smile hasten my breath violently,
I will choose for it to be the seed that helps me bloom again.
No longer shall his memories lay in vast emptiness,
I will choose to paint the greys of his absence
with the bright brushstrokes of his memories.
Even in these grey landscapes, I will smile again.

Behind closed windows and open curtains **- Summayah Koli**

The world is silent, only blaring on screens
The hustling and bustling have quietly vapoured away
The streets are empty, and the homes are crowded
Every hospital is crying, and every headline reads:
"Covid-19"

A microscopic being has wracked havoc on earth
Its deadliness and free-spiritedness have travelled far and wide, from
Asia to the world.
Man realises empty hands from its leaders as has been done before-
only few remain pretty for the pedestal, others are a curse.

Corpses lay buried alone in mass graves, detached or together...one
will never know
Daunting graveyards fill our screens and empty funerals commence
whilst the families grieve at home,
and their goodbyes are lost forever in the unknown
The old die and many young ones falter too
Endangered remain every day, those who work to heal

The air is clearer everyday and kindness sprouts from deep within
Heroes wear stethoscopes and hospitals become their homes
And those who work on the ground sprinkle hope as they go.

for in our seeds of need, they always send us rain
Even in our distance, we are not far apart
And the sun will rise tomorrow...brighter than before.

The battle on my tongue

- Summayyah Koli

South African colours painted my childhood,
the small town nurtured me till I became a woman.
When I speak the local tongue, I speak as smooth as satin.
When Ma and Pa greet me on the front doorstep,
I fumble with my words, I'm red in the face.
Their language sits uncomfortable on my tongue,
like a beggar in a ballroom waiting to run;
only a fool who knows nothing,
will dance with bruised feet among the elite.
"This isn't fair!" I scream in the dark.

Indian spices tingle my Ma's kitchen,
I taste and lick, but the words always stumble.
I fist my hands in my hair, tugging till I remember:
at home I am Indian...in town, I am South African.
Motherland's language battles with local words,
every day is a day to learn new numbers.

Oh! How blissful this journey would be!
to speak satin-like in the native and the local,
to be one person and not two,
to belong to a nation and to belong at home.
But an immigrant's child is fortunate to be two in one,

if only there were no swords in my mouth,
every time I speak.

Death, the one certainty in life

- Aisha Rowbottom

It is not Death that shocks us. It is not the stopping of breath,
the heart's failure to beat any longer, the ceasing to exist.

It is rather the suddenness of it all.

We know it is coming. We know it is our fate.

But when?

There are two significant dates - our birth date and our death date.

We become familiar with our birth date. We celebrate it annually.

It is a time reserved for happiness and merriment.

Mostly it is a time that we know will come.

God, forbid.

We are fully in the know about the anniversary of our birth,
but we know not the date of our Death.

Thus,

the suddenness rocks us to the very core.

It brings to the fore every choice, every thought, every mistake made.

Right in the middle of it all, in the middle of life – comes Death. If it
comes suddenly; a Heart Attack, a Fatal Accident, a Burst Aneurism, a
Gunshot to the head, a Global Pandemic - or if it comes pre-
determined by illness...

well, I say pre-determined, all our deaths are technically pre-
determined.

And now, Death cannot be more naked to the eye.
2020, seven months strong, has left us on our knees.
Left in the debris of these months past is death by thousands
and thousands more starving, cold and destitute.
It is not simply people that are dying, the World is dying.
And we did not see it coming.

So, as I ponder my life choices,
mull over what this Pandemic has brought out in the world,
the destruction transpired from it but simultaneously
the new breed of mankind that now exists,
the reality that nothing is guaranteed washes over me.
And as surely as our birth date comes every year, so too will our
Death.

Verily from Allah do we come and unto Him is our return.

No Space Left Between

- Aisha Rowbottom

four walls are way too few for so many bodies to hold conflict
everywhere you shout i scream we disagree space is needed craved it
cannot be helped like a bulimic sticking his fingers down his throat we
hurl ugly thoughts out loud lost appetite heaving sighs of displeasure
a longing to be set free from this confining space someone will get hurt
someone will be beat before it's all over ties will be severed because
of dirty words spoken we couldn't agree our opinions differed and
now it'll never be the same tension existed before but now well now
we're all broken because there's no space left between

Alone

- Celine Solomons

I don't want to die alone,
I whisper into the dull night.
Blanket wrapped around my shoulder.
The president in the background,
'The numbers have peaked'.

The Rooibos tea
has stilled at my lips.
The house smells of bleach,
so does my mom,
my Ouma
and now me.

My heart is steady.
The roads are quiet.
The stars are brighter and I think,
"What a way to die."

Fear

- Celine Solomons

We are lying in bed
1.5 meters apart.
Sweat coats his skin like a second layer.

His gaseous skin ignites mine.
His iceberg feet touches mine.
“A sign van dood’ my Ouma would say.

He moves closer.
He hovers over my oxygenated lips.
I melt our lips together like two pots of gold creating one.

He moves closer.
I shiver,
not in lust but fear.
Fear that heaven
won’t have him in it.

The New Normal **- Tayyibah Tahier**

The announcement was made,
as the country listened to lockdown rules.
Social distancing, regular hand washing and wearing a mask,
the normal we once knew began to fade.

Days, weeks and months went by,
more announcements of level 4, 3, 2
and we wait for level 1,
Sigh.

As we wait for what comes next,
all is not lost.

"What are you grateful for?"

Remind yourself.

Hope and faith.

That is our new normal.

Contributors

Anna Nguyen (Research article)

Anna Nguyen is currently a visiting fellow at the Program on Science, Technology and Society at Harvard University. Her research explores rhetoric, composition, and literary studies of science in the context of food literature. More broadly, she is interested in critically analyzing reading and writing as methods.

Mia Uys (Short story)

Mia Uys is a History Masters student at the University of Stellenbosch working in the fields of social, animal and gender history. Her project involves studying performance in South Africa's circus industry through the lens of animal agency and 'performing gender'. In her free time, she enjoys long walks in the surrounding mountains and reading anything she can get her hands on - especially local and African literature. She writes stories to make sense of the world.

Jerome Coetzee (Poetry)

Jerome Coetzee is a 23-year-old currently residing in Cape Town, South Africa. He is currently studying his Masters in Afrikaans Literature at the University of the Western Cape. His focus is Afrofuturism in contemporary Afrikaans literature. He has published poetry on the online journal Litnet.

Jamie Conway (Poetry)

Jamie Conway is a 22-year-old English Literature Honours student at the University of the Western Cape. She has a keen interest in philosophical poetry, a strong ambition to further her writing career, and has been featured in the Spring 2020 issue of the New Contrast journal.

Kirsten Deane (Poetry)

Kirsten Deane is a 21-year-old student currently doing her honours degree in Creative Writing at The University of The Western Cape. Her writing focuses on vulnerability as the human condition. The content of her writing entails a story about the effect of everyday experiences, especially those that we assume do not affect us. Kirsten has been featured in six published anthologies: Remnants of home by Untwineme, Train River poetry Spring 2020 edition and Summer 2020 edition, Best new African poets 2019, For Expecting Mothers by Poets choice and In which poetry breathes life: Witches 'n Pink presents: A NaNoWriMo 2020 Anthology.

Summayyah Koli (Poetry)

Sumayyah Koli is a 19-year-old, 2nd year Accounting Science student at the university of Witwatersrand. Raised in the small town of Newcastle, she values spending her time in nature, reading books and praying. When inspiration strikes, she picks up her pen and translates her thoughts into poetry.

Aisha Rowbottom (Poetry)

Aisha Rowbottom is a born and bred Capetonian, hailing from the Cape Flats. She is a Bachelor of Arts graduate with majors in English Literature and Classical Culture. As a keyworder by day and freelance writer always, she shares her writing on her Instagram Blog, @thatbookiread, where she focuses on sharing her thoughts on books she's read and her general enjoyment of books and reading. She has two young children and spends her time reading, drinking decaf coffee (because breastfeeding) and drawing up meal plans, that she usually never follows.

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Celine Solomons attends the University of The Western Cape. She is currently doing her English Honours. She also a co-ordinator at an Outreach program called Jorvan Community Outreach.

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About the cover

Our cover art was produced by Iona Gilbert, a Postdoctoral Fellow in Visual History and Theory at the Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape. She uses pen in a free-hand style to make her unique art works.

Editorial Board

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Martina van Heerden completed her PhD in English Studies at the University of the Western Cape in 2018 and is currently lecturing full-time for the English for Educational Development programme, which is a first-year academic literacies course aimed at students in the Law, Science and CHS faculties. Her research interests include feedback, academic literacies, academic development, and peer review. When she has free time, she likes to sew and play video games.

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Stephanie Williams is a creative and academic writer, currently doing a Master's in the English Department at the University of the Western Cape. She holds a BA Honours degree from UWC with an elective in Creative Writing. Her poetry and short fiction have been published in *New Contrast*, *WritingThreeSixty*, and volume 9 of *The Sol Plaatje EU Poetry Anthology*.

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About the Journal

WritingThreeSixty is a bi-annual, interdisciplinary journal for research essays and creative works. First launched in 2014 as an initiative of the English department at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), WritingThreeSixty now forms part of the broader community within the Arts Faculty and Humanities at UWC. This journal maintains the standard of peer review and wishes to provide a platform to develop a culture of publishing among postgraduate and emerging students, as well as established creative artists within UWC and South Africa at large.

WritingThreeSixty also forms part of co-curricular graduate culture at UWC that affords students the opportunity to develop professional skills through the voluntary leadership and service positions created through the journal. These positions include the management of the journal and its team, editorial outputs, as well as our digital marketing efforts that are presented through social media and our online website.



CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Deadline for next issue:

1 April 2021

email: writing360@uwc.ac.za



WritingThreeSixty

