

WritingThreSixty

Journal of Research and
Creative Writing



2015 Volume 1 Issue 1

WritingThreeSixty

Journal of Research and
Creative Writing



UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

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Contents Page

Letter from the Editorial board	1
Poetry	
‘House of Nightmares’ by Sinethemba Bizela	2
‘The Battle with the CEO’ by Tebello Mzamo	4
‘Dusk Hangs Near Lavender Hill’ by Hilda Wilson	6
‘A Place I Call Home’ by Tasneem Daniels	8
‘For the Girl who Lost Her Voice’ by Tatum-lee Louw	10
Book reviews	
Review of <i>The Cambridge Companion to Autobiography</i> by Tyrone August	11
Review of <i>Apocalypse Now Now</i> by Wihan van Wyk	15
Review of <i>Unimportance</i> by Kareesha Naidoo	17
Interviews	
‘I write what I like’ – The Trantraal brothers share their love for their craft – Part 1’ by Bronwyn Douman	19
‘I write what I like’ – The Trantraal brothers share their love for their craft – Part 2’ by Kareesha Naidoo	23
‘Poet writes herself out of grief’ by Bronwyn Douman	26
Contributors and Reviewers	29
Editorial Board	30
Submission Dates for Issue 2	31
Submission Guidelines	32

Letter from the Editorial Board

Welcome to the first issue of *WritingThreeSixty*

In 2014, a small group of post graduate students from the English Department at the University of the Western Cape founded *WritingThreeSixty*, as a bi-annual multi/inter-disciplinary journal, the UWC Graduate Journal of Research and Creative Writing. These students sought to create a platform for emerging scholars and creative writers from UWC's Arts and Humanities, under the guidance of the post graduate co-ordinator for the English Department, Dr Fiona Moolla. Their vision was to create a journal publication that could rival those of its sister institutions, but also stand on its own as a professional and reputable academic publication.

Since its inception, *WritingThreeSixty* has provided graduate students with the opportunity to manage and run an online academic journal, gain practical editorial experience in the field of academic publishing and contribute towards the research outputs of students, alumni and emerging scholars and writers affiliated or unaffiliated to the University of the Western Cape.

We would like to thank Zulfa Abrahams for providing us with the cover artwork. Dr Fiona Moolla for her guidance and support. The English Department for putting their faith in this project. Finally, our sincere appreciation and thanks to the Contributors for their submissions and the Peer Reviewers for their time and effort.

Editorial Board

Bronwyn Douman

Wihan van Wyk

Kareesha Naidoo

Layout and design by Editorial Board

House of Nightmares

At dawn I stumble
on the crossroad of my country's innocence.

But when the dusk blankets the daylight,
I dance the dance out of the dancer
until people of the river say
I shall reincarnate the rhythm
to replace the heartbeat of the poet
as he sketches images of vanity.

They say I lunge towards darkness
until it clothes my skeleton.
But I dissolve like a lump in the throat to rain
little streams that leave traces of pain.
Plodding down the rhymescape,
while wind blows, rain erases footpaths,
I walk faster next to my Self.

I exile in the foreign lands
where I pray for the tongue that evokes the spirit
of wounded warriors, as history leaks
in our unconscious like communal taps.

Allow me to stand on the margins of the page
and right what I like. Remember, I left what I dislike.

Now I stomach the fire of Sandile Dikenis,
of Dambudzo Marechera
busy shaking the peaches
down from the summer poem.

I run. And I run breathlessly
below the heavy hand of the poet
burdened with forsaken dreams.

I lie flat on the hill of Marikana to spectate political witchcraft.
I see *knobkerries* and spears dancing
in the air until they fall on top of dead bodies,
before the incident translates into television images
with the green blanket missing.

I play dead today, but tomorrow
I wake up in the arms of this nightmarish poem.
And walk away, slamming the door behind me.

- Sinethemba Bizela

The Battle with the CEO

I see them on the evening news
their tired gait overshadowed
with determined moves of traditional dances
blowing the red dust up in the air.
They cry for an ear through their
sticks, *pangas* and placards
their fierce faces march on.
The CEO sits protected
inside the thick walls
of his tall building
deep, deep underground he hears echoes from their voices
bellowing on with song.

I see them on the evening news everyday
they all sit down on the hill
they cry for an ear.
A swarm of bees humming from the ground
their voices connect together in song
their tired eyes look on for answers
never blinking from the insensitive flash of cameras.
The CEO fixes his tie defiantly
one man licks at his *panga* ready to sting.

I see them on the evening news
today the battle is not with the CEO
it is with the man of the law in blue
his ears shut
he pokes the bees with his rifles
they all slowly approach him in confusion
their faces sweating with fear
placards in front used for protection
The man in blue pokes his rifles harder
Trrr trrrr trrrrr trrr trrr trrr

I see them on the evening news
a man falls down
the red dust sweeps away his 12,500 placard
like bees poisoned with smoke, more men crash down.
Their tired limbs finally resting
on the earth they used to dig
the red earth drinks the blood
seeping from the children of the soil.
The CEO washes the stubborn stains from his hands
the widows cry: 'Remember Marikana!'
I see them on the evening news.

- Tebello Mzamo

Dusk Hangs Near Lavender Hill

The helicopter drowns Elvis'
'So Lonely Baby', over the *shhh*
of the soup pot.

Police lights up navy blue
in the grey dusk.

I count the sequence over
random gun shots.

Surely, there it is, circling
routinely overhead.

It is not a hippo escaped this time.
A car speeds by, dragging its gears.
People are getting home
amidst siege, routinely.
How we live. Here it comes again,
to chase stars from the night sky.
Directly overhead, veer south
Lavender Hill bleeds yet another day.

And again, blue light, red signals
parade between *Ou Kaapseweg*
and my window.
For a moment, I am distracted
from the serenity of the mountain
by Morse traffic.

My teeth clench cheddar
from tranquil *Oude Libertas*,
where shoppers
removed from Lavender Hill
and the crescendo of Miles Davis
cling to hope.

I turn to Madiba's smiling face
surrounded by gold leaf.
If only all would anchor their minds
in peace, end suffering,
if only.

- Hilda Wilson

A Place I Call Home

Home is for stripping down.
It is where I forget my inhibitions,
As I climb out of my pantyhose
And walk *kaalvoet* on the floor.

Home is the only place where I eat toast
With all the works in the fridge,
Without worrying that I look
like a *vraat*.

Home knows everyone's secrets.
It knows who drove a dent in the
wendy at the back, and who took
the last mango's off the tree.
It doesn't *piemp* me when Daddy
blames Fallie up the road's brother,
for making us eat supper
without homemade mango atchaar
on the table.

Home is where there's soup on the stove,
and where Snowflake sleeps at my feet
while we watch the *7delaan* Omnibus
on a Sunday, or when I watch
Noot-Vir-Noot with Mamma and Daddy,
without caring if others my age are
doing the same on a Friday night.

Home sounds like Abba scolding in
Kombuis Afrikaans as he eats tomatoes
just-so 'coz Granny didn't buy apples that week'.
Home also sounds like *dronk ou* Boeta Henry
On the corner trying to impress me in *mengels*
'coz he thinks I'm *mos* from the English.

Home is where nobody cares that their
floors haven't been tiled in 20 years,
Or that their walls need a paint,
Or that they wear *sloffies* to the
shop to buy bread.

Home is where Mujahidah and Luqmaan
have black feet from running whole day
in the street, looking for snails,
and where Aunty Gafsa screams:
'Fokof hier uit!' to the boarders in her
house 'coz they never pay rent'.

There's no place like home.

- Tasneem Daniels

For The Girl Who Lost her Voice

Stripped down
bare to her beautiful soul
her body bleeds
to death so unknown.
And with each voiceless scream
she is reminded that she is no Victim.
Questions and no answers.
For the life of her
she can't remember any
permissible pleasure.
She knows that a dark force entered her,
he was uninvited,
cruel and unusually kind.
His eyes, she imagined, was dark
like the universe,
and if blood was blue
I believe she felt it,
her memory was distant.
Just as the endless sea
she looks in the mirror.
She shouts: 'I don't remember me!'
She walks in shame bending her head,
she is afraid
that someone would see the untold secret.
Only a man of his nature would see.
'And is he even ashamed?' she wondered.
Does he even remember how he pursued it?
The way he knocked on a closed door.
The way he entered.
This pain inside of her.
Does he remember leading her to such a place?
This place that left her defaced.
Deflowered.
Disempowered.
Does he remember?

- Tatum-lee Louw

Book Reviews

The Story of Our Lives: Review of The Cambridge Companion to Autobiography

KEY WORDS autobiography; definition; themes.

REVIEW:

The Cambridge Companion to Autobiography

Edited by Maria DiBattista and Emily O Wittman

Cambridge University Press, 2014

251 pages

ISBN 9781107609181

Price: R400 (incl. VAT)

Cambridge University Press has built up an enviable record over the years for the quality of its work. Such is its reputation that even a local telephone directory bearing its imprint would probably be treated with some reverence. Its companion series, which typically focuses on a single theme or author, is a welcome addition to an authoritative catalogue. *The Cambridge Companion to Autobiography*, edited by Maria DiBattista and Emily O Wittman, continues in this proud tradition. The two US academics – DiBattista is from Princeton University and Wittman from the University of Alabama – bring together scholars from various fields to provide an overview of writing which can be construed as in some way providing an autobiographical perspective.

The first chapter in this volume, by New York University classics professor Adam H Becker, examines Augustine's *Confessions*. This influential set of texts – a collection of 13 books published around 400AD – comes up for discussion in more than one chapter. Augustine's reflection on the central place of religion in his life is often singled out as the first autobiography. Princeton literature scholar John V Fleming, more modestly, regards it as a key text specifically in medieval autobiography. Either way, it still appears odd at first glance to include a work such as *Confessions* – which is primarily an engagement with issues related to Augustine's Christian faith – in a collection whose main preoccupation is first-person writing on the self.

However, Fleming contends that what he calls “the autobiographical impulse” is present in all historical periods of Western literature (presumably, in his view, in *Confessions* as well). The crucial difference, he suggests, is that early autobiography is not as individualistic as its modern variation.

Even so, Montaigne’s *Essays* also initially appears to be a curious inclusion in a collection which deals with self-writing. Dartmouth College academic Lawrence D Kritzman tacitly acknowledges this in his chapter on the French philosopher’s writing. While he notes that Montaigne’s essays bear “a multitude of autobiographical elements”, Kritzman admits that they differ in one important respect from traditional life writing: *Essays* is not a look back towards the end of a life.

“In terms of representation, the *Essays* do not transcribe a self that has completed its journey,” Kritzman states, “but instead one that is in the process of self-composition ...” In other words, he regards the essays as part of Montaigne’s construction of a sense of self.

Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, too, did not produce conventional autobiographies. However, Alastair Hannay persuasively argues that their notebooks, correspondence and published work provide sufficient material for full-length portraits of their lives. In fact, the University of Oslo-based philosophy professor goes even further and asks whether their published work “betray aspects of themselves and their lives not present in any volunteered account”.

Adopting this notion calls for a bold departure from the conventional study of autobiography – which usually focuses almost exclusively on self-written life narratives – and flags a potentially rich new field of research. Hannay skilfully illustrates the rewards of using such an approach in his work on the two nineteenth-century philosophers, both of whom incorporate episodes from their lives in their writing. (Kierkegaard’s notebooks, for instance, refer to many people who played key roles in his life).

Jean-Michel Rabate, a humanities professor at the University of Pennsylvania, presents a similar argument in his examination of the work of the French writers Andre Gide and Jean Genet. While Gide did publish a memoir, Rabate asserts that his journals and correspondence add to an understanding of his notion of autobiography. These letters and journals, he suggests, “are the place where his private and public selves meet without fear of censure”. Genet, too, wrote a conventional autobiography in *Prisoner of Love*. According to Rabate, the writer “play[s] it straight with the facts, [and] provides an honest account of his life with the Palestinians and the Black Panthers, while being very much a book about Genet himself”.

Even so, he argues, some of Genet's novels can still shed new light on his time in prison and on his life as a thief and prostitute (in fact, Rabate regards *Our Lady of the Flowers*, *Miracle of the Rose* and *The Thief's Journal* as no more than "autobiographical novels"). Some chapters in *The Cambridge Companion to Autobiography* nevertheless do confine themselves to a discussion of texts which generally provide a factual account of the life of a particular individual.

However, as Leland de la Durantaye demonstrates in relation to the Russian-born writer Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory*, even what appears to be a straightforward autobiography is often anything but. Nabokov himself declares in his first chapter that the search for "thematic designs" is the true purpose of autobiography. (According to DiBattista, the English writer Virginia Woolf similarly held that it is the task of autobiography to discover patterns in seemingly disparate memories.) Because of Nabokov's emphasis on the importance of themes in autobiography, De la Durantaye – a literature scholar at Claremont McKenna College in California – suggests that he pays little attention to chronology and world history.

As *Speak, Memory* declares unapologetically in the foreword: "The present work is a systematically correlated assemblage of personal recollections ranging geographically from St Petersburg to St Nazaire, and covering thirty-seven years, from August 1903 to May 1940 ...". De la Durantaye notes wryly, though, that the nature of this process "is bound to be a mystery to Nabokov's reader at this point, there being, of course, no way of knowing, nor even any easy way of imagining, what system might be employed to correlate which events to what end".

Early African-American autobiographies, discussed by University of Alabama English professor Trudier Harris, appear to fit more comfortably into the usual notions of autobiography. However, they, too, differ in at least one fundamental aspect from the norm. "Arguably, witnessing is the guiding motivation and creative force behind African American autobiographical writings," claims Harris. "Few early African American writers wrote simply for the sake of doing so ...". She cites the work of Phyllis Wheatley, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs as examples.

Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road*, she argues, was a notable departure from this tradition and was written in an individualistic rather than communal voice. James Baldwin returned to the earlier tradition of African-American life stories in his autobiographical writing. However, Alex Haley's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and various prison memoirs once again reverted to the individual narrative. Nevertheless, Harris maintains – with justification – that such writing, as well as more recent African-American autobiographies, continues to bear witness about the lives of a broader community. As she puts it, “individuality can still be viewed in terms of the collective”.

The Cambridge Companion examines many other approaches to the writing of autobiography. Few of these conform to autobiography scholar Philippe Lejeune's seemingly all-encompassing description of autobiography as “a retrospective narrative in prose which a real person creates of his or her own life, placing the emphasis on his or her individual life, and particularly on the history of his or her personality”. At one level, this is the single most important contribution of this collection of articles: it provides compelling evidence that the genre of autobiography can accommodate a vast range of writing that is not usually associated with life writing.

And, despite ongoing disagreements about the character and conventions of such writing, DiBattista and Wittman point out that substantial progress has been made in developing appropriate conceptual tools to understand “the nature of the autobiographical mode”. Still, some inclusions in this collection are bound to raise eyebrows. How, for instance, does University of Rhode Island academic Mary Cappello's chapter on “creative non-fiction” fit into this genre? Nonetheless, *The Cambridge Companion* is a vital reminder of the importance of autobiographies. While they ultimately remain personal accounts of individual lives, they often reveal much deeper truths about humanity more generally. And while this collection is not really a basic introduction to the subject– it assumes a reasonable familiarity with the terrain it covers – it is, on the whole, quite accessible to the casual reader who seeks an overview of the most recent work in this field.

For students and teachers of literature in search of further information, the reading lists at the end of each chapter provide more than enough material to follow up. These recommendations help to turn a relatively slender volume into a valuable resource. The only quibble – and it is no more than that – is the fact that almost all the contributors are based in the US. While this may have been dictated largely by pragmatic considerations, it results in a skewed look at life writing and scholarly work on autobiography. Another limitation is its exclusive focus on Western autobiography. The editors acknowledge this shortcoming, but submit that including a few chapters on life writing elsewhere would not have been adequate to give it the attention it deserves.

On the whole, though, *The Cambridge Companion* is a comprehensive and thought-provoking outline of the latest thinking and research on autobiography. It offers much to interest those starting out in the field as well as established scholars with vast experience.

This is a tribute to the careful planning and editing that went into producing this collection.

- Tyrone August

A Journey into the Strange: Review of *Apocalypse Now Now*

KEY WORDS: Speculative Fiction; South African Fiction ; Fantasy.

REVIEW:

Apocalypse Now Now

Charlie Human

Umuzi, 2013

283 pages

ISBN 978-1-4152-0186-2

Price: R180 (incl. VAT)

Apocalypse Now Now, Charlie Human's debut novel, is a fast-paced urban fantasy set in the somewhat unlikely backdrop of Cape Town. It challenges traditional genres of South African fiction, and completely blows them out of the water. There is currently, I feel, a certain comfort zone in South African Fiction – certain safe bets in regard to publishing, especially in regard to genres, topics, and plot material. This novel is especially far from those norms, and despite its myriad number of minor to major shortcomings, it blazes a trail for the entire genre of South African speculative fiction, bringing a much needed breath of fresh air to the current landscape.

Baxter Zevcenko is a not so normal sixteen-year-old. He attends Westridge High, which is located in Cape Town's southern suburbs, and he appears to be a normal sixteen-year-old boy. On the one hand, he has your average school boy problems, has a girlfriend and generally tries to give his teachers a hard time, on the other hand, he runs an underground organisation in his school called, 'The Spider'. The Spider has two purposes: first it deals primarily in pornography and facilitates a variety of genres and fetishes, ranging from 'Vintage' to the quickly growing new genre of Creature porn (Not as bad as it sounds, while at the same time probably being worse...). Secondly, it tries to micromanage the two other factions in the school, both school yard gangs consisting of the stereotypical elements of the student body. Through these endeavours, he hopes to establish a Machiavellian advantage over them, and in the long run, make 'The Spider' as profitable as possible.

It soon becomes clear that these details are merely backstory, as the plot shoots into full gear when Baxter's girlfriend abruptly disappears, and it is quickly feared that she has become the latest victim of the "mountain killer", a serial killer that slits his victim's throats, and then carves an eye into their foreheads. With Esme's life in danger, Baxter decides to do the first selfless act of his life, and puts himself at risk in order to find and rescue her.

From there, the novel only becomes stranger and more spectacular. Human plunges us into the darkest depths of Cape Town supernatural underground. In an attempt to find Esme, Baxter resorts to hiring Jackson Ronin, a supernatural bounty hunter and ex-South African special operative, to help track her down. This leads to many strange encounters with denizens that are both very alien to Cape Town's landscape, while at the same time seeming strangely at home. From bloodthirsty Elementals that supply illegal electricity to the Cape's townships at the cost of animal sacrifice, to Tokoloshe's becoming the superstars of the questionable pornographic genre mentioned earlier, and throw in some other supernatural creatures inspired by a variety of African folklore spanning as wide as middle and west African in origin, the novel does well to demonstrate both the flexibility of Human's imagination, and that of the supernatural raw material he is working with.

The novel has strengths and weaknesses. The protagonist is a good example of both of these as Baxter is an engaging character, and can at times be both relatable and alienating to the reader.

His most interesting trait is by far the fact that he is an extremely unreliable narrator, and at times, the novel itself draws attention to this fact, often prompting the question, how much of this is real, and how much is just a schizophrenic fancy. This adds a lot to Baxter's personality, while introducing a variety of interesting themes and considerations into the novel. However, there are a few drawbacks to this novel. At times, it feels as if Baxter is struggling for consistency. It happens rarely and briefly, but sets up a momentary contrast that can appear disconcerting to the reader when it happens. Another critique I have is that the novel seems to be a victim of its own plot pacing. The novel hurls the reader through the plot at break neck speeds, but despite this, I found myself putting the novel down more times than I wanted to. The main culprit here, I believe, is the speed and pacing, which can in other ways be considered a strength in other novels. The pace of Baxter's quest to find his girlfriend, and the sheer number of wonderfully strange and bizarre encounters, seems to happen at a consistently rapid rate. This can lead to the reader feeling either overwhelmed or burnt out. Having some build up to many of these events might also have actually hardened its eventual impact on the reader.

The novel's strengths in the end though far outweighs its weaknesses, and many readers might not notice these critiques as they plunge headlong into the psychology of Baxter's inner world, and the deliciously twisted underworld Human created. *Apocalypse Now Now* is a welcoming experience in the rather stale-growing field of South African fiction. I believe it will open up an entirely new world for both the writers and the readers in this country, as it explores the much underutilized genres of speculative and horror fiction. At the same time, this kind of genre successfully shows us that there is more than one way to examine the South African condition, and that sometimes the lens can be much stranger than you first expect.

- Wihan van Wyk

Critical Moments: A review of *Unimportance*

KEY WORDS: South African fiction, politics, UWC, SRG, Thando Mgqolozana

REVIEW

Unimportance

Thando Mgqolozana

Jacana Media, 2014

146 pages

ISBN 978-1-4314-0952-5

Price: R120 (incl. VAT)

Unimportance is the third novel of South African born writer Thando Mgqolozana. Set at The University of the Western Cape (UWC), the novel is about Zizi, a popular university student and SRG presidential candidate. The entire novel takes place within twelve hours, each hour proving harder than the previous one. Zizi is about to give a speech to his fellow students who, should they choose to elect him as the student president, will change Zizi's life.

The novel begins with Zizi and his girlfriend Pamodi. The couple stay on the campus residence and often meet up in Zizi's room. On this particular night Pamodi visits Zizi and they have a fallout. When Pamodi leaves his room, Zizi waits patiently for his girlfriend to return. After some time passes, Zizi decides to look for Pamodi, and suddenly he cannot find her anywhere. He ends up searching the entire campus, he has encounters with various odd students. He struggles to remain calm. He begins to worry about her. Simultaneously, he thinks about the speech he must still write and how he is going to win the students over whilst trying to locate his missing girlfriend.

On the surface, the novel seems to be a day in the life of Zizi, yet as you delve deeper into the story, one common theme associated with South African literature starts to emerge – politics – one of the most discernible topics to have in a South African novel. Mgqolozana, who was a student at UWC, writes the novel in a way that the theme of politics is evident in the novel. Yet the entire novel is not filled with constant references to the struggle, racism, or South African politics. The novel is refreshing in that one is not reminded of Apartheid and its aftereffects.

The novel exposes what life is like after-hours on campus. It is written in a compelling and intriguing way. As the reader, I wanted to know what was going to happen to Zizi. It was intriguing as I felt time pass for Zizi, every hour was written with such intensity. Mgqolozana crafts a character that you are not quite sure whether you like him and are rooting for him, or whether you despise him and the choices he makes throughout the novel.

Zizi also appears to be a sexist, hormone filled young adult. He has an incredibly lustful and testosterone-infused sexual appetite which is one of the key elements to his current predicament with Pamodi. The way Zizi describes his surroundings and the people he meets seems surreal. However, one is not quite sure of his ability as a narrator. His character seems suspicious although his genuine love of politics is clear. Hence, one is not entirely sure of his true motives.

His integrity is questionable and by the end of the novel, he does not appear to be as innocent as one previously thought. The novel is peppered with references to and incidents of sex on campus and even details of his first sexual experience at age eleven with his aunt Rita. These stories are told in a somewhat explicit yet enduring way. If you are a student living on the campus or a student at UWC, you will appreciate the references to lecture venues, food vendors and the general locale of the campus. As Zizi strolls around on campus, he walks by many of the campus residences such as Ruth First and Colleen Williams. The novel highlights the rich political history UWC has with South Africa.

The novel appears to capture twelve hours of Zizi's life perfectly. It seems to be rather crude at times, yet this is necessary to capture the character of Zizi. He goes through various emotions from beginning to end, where we as the reader feel like voyeurs into his mind. The end of the novel is undeniably a reason to read the novel in its entirety. It offers literary characteristics that are not often seen. The end of the novel makes one question the entire novel and Zizi's character as a whole.

One of the main motifs in the novel, which I think Mgqolozana highlights, is the power of an individual. Mgqolozana reflects on the power people have to control others and manipulate a vote. This book may be about the politics on a university campus, but it speaks to the politics of our country. We have to ask whether voters understand the power of a vote, do they actually care, and are they genuinely interested in the leaders and what they stand for. As mentioned earlier, the character Zizi is a favourite among his peers, as some of them actually refer to him as 'president', but one could question that as voters, do they truly know his character and his intentions? This is what the novel seeks to ask. However, the outcome of these prevailing events are revealed at the end of the novel.

This novel is a must-read for those who enjoy political fiction and are looking for a South African novel that truly feels South African.

- Kareesha Naidoo

Interviews

3 December 2014

‘I write what I like’ – The Trantraal brothers share their love for their craft Part 1

WritingThreeSixty met with the Trantraal brothers André and Nathan on Tuesday 27 November 2014 to discuss their most recent creative projects, and their fascinating work as writers and comic book animators.

WritingThreeSixty: What are you currently working on?

André: I am working on a novel, *Ecstasy*. *Ecstasy* is a story about a young boy growing up in Mitchells Plain and Bishop Lavis during the late eighties and early nineties. It is based on my personal story growing up. It focuses on themes of religion and politics.

Nathan: I am working on my second poetry collection, *Alles het niet kom wôd*. It is about growing up and out of religion. It is written from my own perspective and it focuses on themes of religion and politics.

André: My brother and I have a shared capital in terms of experience so we have overlapping themes but we write from your own perspective and our own experiences.

WritingThreeSixty: Nathan, you have published a collection of poetry last year, titled *Chokers en Survivors* but you have also written an unpublished short story, could you elaborate on what the story entails?

Nathan: The short story I wrote called *Delilah* was meant to be a teleplay for KykNet, it was inspired by my time at school as an introvert.

André: Writing for television is like giving your child up for adoption, and your child is abused. [Laughs].

WritingThreeSixty: Andre, you're writing a novel, could you tell us about it. Why did you want to write this novel? Is there a moral or message to it?

André: I wrote *Ecstasy* because I have always wanted to write an English language novel. My first language is Kaaps and it is the language that I speak most of the time, but I only read English books. I used to read a lot of Afrikaans as a child, but stopped when I reached high school. I did not find Afrikaans books interesting any more. As to the second part of your question, I try to avoid moral messages like the plague. I cannot stand any book that tries to teach me a lesson about anything. For me that kind of George Eliot writing should have died with the Victorians. I like writing where the more subtle nuances correspond to my own experiences as a human being.

WritingThreeSixty: You were promoting your comics *Crossroads* and *Coloureds* at the Franschhoek Literary Festival in May and at the Open Book Festival in September. What was your experience like as being part of the line-up for these literary festivals for 2014?

Nathan: It is always funny to me. There are mostly white people at these literary festivals. Now we are there too and we are also important. When I speak everyone listens. But I do not take it seriously.

WritingThreeSixty: What is the selling price for these comics and how are you distributing them?

André: *Crossroads* we distribute for free at schools and to the people of Crossroads. *Crossroads* is sold at The Book Lounge, Blank Books in Woodstock and Bolo Bolo in Observatory. It can also be ordered online at orders@blankbooks.co.za

Nathan: *Coloureds* we sold for R3 each, making it as accessible and widely available as possible. But Coloured people would not even buy it for R3, and white people did not want to buy it for R3 but instead bought it for R50 and R80, which is the booksellers selling price. I know it is worth more than R3 and more than R50, but all I want is for people to read it. I do not want other people's money, just read the books.

WritingThreeSixty: Where did you grow up and how has it influenced your writing?

Nathan: We grew up in Mitchells Plain and Bishop Lavis. My poetry reflects my struggle with poverty, what I write is supposed to be humourous. People say what I write is shocking, but it is not shocking to me, it is normal.

André: Growing up extremely poor you realise what is important and what is not important. You develop a refined sense of humour. You do not take yourself too seriously. Everyone in our community growing up in Mitchells Plain struggles but they do not show it, they wear expensive clothes and shoes. But in Bishop Lavis they cannot hide their poverty, everyone is poor and it shows.

WritingThreeSixty: Could you tell us a bit about the process of creating *Crossroads*, your conceptual ideas of what you wanted to achieve with this comic and working together with Koni Benson to produce a final product.

André: We work with an historian Koni Benson who received funding for the adaptation of her PhD thesis into a series of comic books based on the settlement of Crossroads [between Klipfontein and Lansdowne road intersection]. When Koni finished her PhD she gave it to me and I read it. I started adapting it chapter by chapter into a comic book. I passed it on to Nathan and Ashley Marais who are the sketch artists for the comic book and I work on the backgrounds, technical detail and inking.

Nathan: We have been working on it for five years. Twelve pages. The most sustained work we have done is in comics.

WritingThreeSixty: I live where I like. What does that saying mean to you?

André: It comes from the Steve Biko quote “I write what I like”. These people of Crossroads are portrayed as a “squatters” which has a negative connotation and these comics write against that.

WritingThreeSixty: Your interest in comic books and your comic book artistry, where does it originate from?

André: The first book I took out at my local library was the comic book *Tin Tin*. I love reading and drawing and I put these two together. I wanted to tell stories in this way, and to be able to read good comic stories. Stories with a message.

WritingThreeSixty: The comic series titled *Coloureds* published in 2010. What inspired you to create this comic book series? Who is your intended audience?

André: *Coloureds* for me was about doing a story about coloured people and how we spoke, in a broken Afrikaans dialect. Comedians in South Africa like Marc Lottering use this exaggerated coloured dialect to make white people laugh. We wanted to create something that was honest and authentic.

Nathan: When this book came out white people stopped laughing and were forced to actually deal with the issues that the comic was addressing, issues like poverty in the coloured community. They were not used to these types of people and issues. We had to do something that made people uncomfortable. They want coloured culture but it must be through a white lens. But it is about us representing ourselves and not a white version of it. You have to own it.

Crossroads is published by Isotope Media and is available from Blank Books in Woodstock, Bolo Bolo in Observatory as well as the Book Lounge. It can also be ordered online at orders@blankbooks.co.za

- Interview by Bronwyn Douman

9 December 2014

‘I write what I like’ – The Trantraal brothers share their love for their craft – Part 2

WritingThreeSixty got the wonderful opportunity to interview Nathan and André Trantraal about their writing process, advice to aspiring writers and how they truly feel about J.M. Coetzee.

WritingThreeSixty: Tell us about your writing process?

Nathan and André: When André wrote *Coloureds* it was a forty page story, but when I did the artwork, I do all the initial planning and drawing, I just cut a lot of the story. We would fight about what will go in the story and what we have to cut out. I respect André’s writing and we have a good balance of collaboration. I struggle with pencil sketch and André is much more technical. He edits all my pencils. We start off with hand drawn works, it is a messy process. It is like making music, every part gets recorded, separated and then everything gets mixed together in the end to create the final product. We then add the text in around the sketches.

WritingThreeSixty: I have read in a previous interview that you really admire South African born writer J.M. Coetzee, any comments on Coetzee?

André: When I am writing and feeling bogged down I literally go read Coetzee, it freshens things for me, I can look at it and it is almost like looking in a mirror. Like when you draw something and you want to see something that is wrong with it, you look at it in the mirror and you instantly see all the mistakes. Orwell had a good phrase he said, “writing should be as transparent as a window pane” I agree writing should be like that.

Nathan: I feel so different when I read Coetzee! I instantly feel smarter! The first book I ever read of [Coetzee’s] was *Boyhood*.

André: Coetzee’s writing has become a part of my own intellectual furniture. The book I have learned the most from and my personal favourite is *Elizabeth Costello*, it is something you can keep going back to, I feel that all [Coetzee’s] books are like that. I was obsessed with *Youth* for a long time, I kept going back to it over and over again. I do not know how he manages to squeeze three thousand years of literary culture into one book, I reread it all the time.

WritingThreeSixty: What do you consider to be your best accomplishment?

Nathan: When we did *Coloureds*, André always said it has to be a long book for him, it was like doing a short film. I would say our biggest accomplishment is making a living out of what we do, because for long time that is the most uncertain thing and also it is the one unpredictable factor, because no matter how hard you work there is always this huge possibility that it might not be there tomorrow. It does not matter how good you think you are. Luck was also a huge part. I am 31 and this is all I do for a living, and that seemed impossible for a long time. We were living in Bishop Lavis while we were doing *Coloureds*, we were practically homeless and we had no place to go, and we were still just doing this. You never know what is going to happen tomorrow. My mom was working, we were two adults living with our mom, it does not look good on the CV [laughs]. In the end you need to provide for your family that is all that matters. Before we always had to send stuff away, like proposals and ideas to people and sit anxiously and wait, then we would stress whether we did everything right. Now going from that to sitting with people in the publishing world, having coffee and conversations, and casually saying, ‘oh I’m busy with a new thing’ and having them say, ‘oh we’re interested’ that is the best part!

WritingThreeSixty: What writing advice do you have for aspiring authors?

Nathan: André’s got a lot of advice! I will quote him: “When you are writing you cannot write about stuff that you do not know.” I always use this example of these two Argentine guys José Muñoz and Sampayo who wrote *Joe’s Bars*. They make beautiful artwork and created an astonishing book, but they made it about people living in New York, yet they know nothing about New York, they have never even been to New York – it is completely second hand of what they see on film. You cannot trust the movies! You have to play to your strengths.

André: What I always tell Nathan is you have to find the thing that drives people. You need to be able to make a living. All creatures need to make a living. In Coetzee’s *Life and Times of Michael K*, this story is about a guy who does not want to do anything, so you have to find his motivation, what he is about.

Nathan: Also do not be sentimental, that is the most important rule!

WritingThreeSixty: Is there one topic or subject you would never write about?

André: There are a lot of writers that write about their family, you get people who write about their siblings or mom or dad and then those people do not speak to them anymore. It completely destroys their relationships, I would not do that. I would never write about my mother, if that is a shortcoming, well it would depend on how you look at it. I would never be able to write objectively about her because I am too close to her and I would not know how to separate myself and write about that in a way that I knew was truly objective.

Nathan: Robert Crumb wrote, ‘the moment he thinks he should not write about things that is immediately when he writes about it.’ I think you have to have that attitude.

Crossroads is published by Isotope Media.

- Interview by Kareesha Naidoo

12 December 2014

Poet writes herself out of grief

WritingThreeSixty attended the book launch of *I Am The Rose* by poet, artist, and feminist scholar Zulfa Abrahams on Tuesday the 2nd of December 2014 at the Artscape Opera Bar.

WritingThreeSixty: Is this your first book?

Zulfa: It is my first book. Last year this time, the WHEAT Trust published a book which was a collection of women's stories and at that time, I was collaborating with an Ethiopian poet, we are both PhD candidates in the Gender Studies Department at UWC, and what we did was a mix-media print with my sketches in the background and her poems in Amharic in front of them, and we put them with an Ethiopian border. When the WHEAT Trust launched their first book last year, they published four of those Ethiopian poems in their book and they asked me to do the cover art for the book. That is how the WHEAT Trust got to know who I am. After that I still dabbled in writing, but then mid-year last year, my dad took ill and he passed away. And in trying to grapple with the grief and trying to untangle myself from my father to make sense of the world, the world without my dad, I started writing poetry. I wrote the first poem, *Pappa Set Us Free* while he was ill and I asked him to go, to die, to set us free, because sitting at his bedside was one of the hardest things to do. When writing was not enough, I started painting. I kick-started this whole process where an untangling became an unravelling like painting my way out of grief. And I started unravelling and untangling the experience of growing up on the Cape Flats. The experience of being a young, Muslim woman in Cape Town. The experience of being a mother. The experience of being a wife, a divorcee, a lover. I just started writing. And I kept telling everybody I am going to publish my book even if I just publish one copy. It will be a self-published book. But one of the PhD candidates Celeste Fortuin, works with the WHEAT Trust and I spoke to her about this project I want to take on. She said to me she works with the WHEAT Trust and they are considering funding individual grantees instead of groups and organisations. So she said I should write a proposal and she would give the proposal to the board and see what they think. And I wrote the proposal and forgot about it. Then three months ago they contacted me and said they have selected me as a grantee and they want to fund the publication of my book, because they are launching a FemPress publication house and they would like me to be the first book that they publish. I was so chuffed. They said the one condition is that we launch the book by early December and this was two, three months ago.

WritingThreeSixty: What are your stories about, what are the central themes in your poetry collection and what is your writing process like?

Zulfa: This book unfolds from my youth to present. It is the unravelling of the self. The poem, *Shadow Boxing The Rose* is about the death of my mother, which was a pivotal moment for me because that is when I started telling stories using analogy. For me it is the most emotionally charged poem. I speak to my mother and say I will write you away just like I painted Pappa away. I poured myself into these pages. But for me this is a larger feminist activist project, to reclaim poetry and art so it does not just belong to the privileged and the educated. I want this book not to be a cerebral experience but a feeling experience. An expression of the self. An expression of me. A Steve Biko moment, *I write what I like*. I want what I write to resonate with people. To express the everyday. The beauty of everyday. For people to say, I know someone like that or I felt that. To tap into the human experience.

WritingThreeSixty: Your interest in identity politics, gender and embodiment and mixed media visual art, how has it influenced your writing and the kind of stories you tell?

Zulfa: I identify and position myself as a feminist; it shapes how I experience the world. But I did not want this book to be highly academic. I wanted to make it accessible for everybody. If the words do not speak to you the art will speak to you. I wanted it to be raw. I wanted to show my vulnerable self.

WritingThreeSixty: What writing advice do you have for other aspiring authors?

Zulfa: Write what you want. If you write about what you are passionate about and what you want to write about it shapes what you do.

WritingThreeSixty: Just as your work inspires others, which authors and/books have inspired your writing?

Zulfa: I resonate with Sylvia Plath, in terms of the darkness, wanting to shed herself from her husband. I also like young poets poetry, with that raw in your faceness of it. Street art inspires me and the feeling of freedom.

WritingThreeSixty: What is your greatest accomplishment?

Zulfa: My daughter. My dedication in my book is to my daughter Aminah Solomon. I will write for her. I will paint for her. She is the dream. I want to be able to show her that anything is possible, that you are enough as you are, and that you are valuable.

WritingThreeSixty: What is your next project?

Zulfa: Next year, I want to spread this in collaboration. I want to publish a book that consists of young women's stories and voices, a collaboration of poetry and art.

I Am The Rose is a collection of poetry and art by Zulfa Abrahams published by Fem Press, a publishing house of the WHEAT Trust (Women's Hope, Education and Training Trust).

For copies of *I Am The Rose* you can contact Zulfa directly via email at zlfabrahams@gmail.com. Her book is available from the WHEAT Trust in Wynberg for R100.

- Interview by Bronwyn Douman

Contributors

Sinethemba Bizela is currently studying towards a MA degree in English at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). His research interests explore how the contemporary South African writing represents orality and the space of the black voice in the intersection of ingenuity and modernity.

Tebello Mzamo is currently studying towards her Honours degree in English. She has published two short stories in *Drum* magazine.

Hilda Wilson is a Creative Writing MA student at UWC. She holds a Masters degree in Public Policy and Change Management of which she obtained a *cum laude* from UWC.

Tasneem Daniels is a UWC alumnus. She completed her BA degree in English and Linguistics with electives in Film and Creative Writing.

Tatum-Lee Louw is currently studying towards her BA degree intending to major in English and Linguistics. She has a keen interest in spoken word poetry.

Tyrone August is a PhD student in UWC's Department of English, focusing on the poetry and life of academic and political activist Dennis Brutus. He has previously worked as a writer and editor on various newspapers and magazines. He has a particular interest in politics, literature and theatre. He is a member of the panel of judges of the Standard Bank SikuVile Journalism Awards.

Reviewers

Dr Mark Espin

University of the Western Cape (UWC)

Mark Espin is a lecturer in the English Department at UWC. His MA thesis examined four novels by Michael Ondaatje and he has recently completed a PhD devoted to the fiction of John Berger. He was a Masters Fellow of the Programme on the Study of the Humanities in Africa at the Centre for Humanities Research at UWC in 2009. His research interests include, the contemporary novel, particularly the intersections between fiction and history, modern poetry, and travel writing. His first volume of poems, *Falling from Sleep*, was published by Botsotso in 2007. He is also a member of the District Six Museum Foundation's Board of Trustees.

Stephen Symons

University of Cape Town (UCT)

Stephen Symons is a former lecturer, graphic designer and poet. His poetry has been published in journals and various anthologies. He holds a Masters in Creative Writing from UCT and is currently pursuing a PhD in African Studies. He lives in Oranjezicht with his wife and two children.

Editorial Board

Wihan van Wyk

Editor: Academic and Critical Research

Wihan recently finished his Masters in English at the University of the Western Cape. His thesis is titled, “*Shelleyan Monsters: The Figure of Percy Shelley in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein and Peter Ackroyd’s The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein*”. His academic interests primarily lie with 18th century literature, particularly Romanticism and the Gothic, and further extends to Science Fiction and Fantasy. He is currently working as a tutor in the English 111/121 course and the English for Educational Development (EED) in the Community and Health Sciences course.

Kareesha Naidoo

Editor: Academic and Critical Research

Kareesha is currently doing her Masters in English at the University of the Western Cape. Her thesis is titled “*Between Text and Stage: The Theatrical Adaptations of J.M. Coetzee’s Foe*”. She is interested in Postmodernism and enjoys reading and studying the works of South African novelist J.M Coetzee. She is currently working as a tutor at UWC for the English for Educational Development (EED) course in Law and Community and Health Sciences.

Bronwyn Douman

Editor: Creative Writing

Bronwyn is currently doing her Masters in Creative Writing at the University of the Western Cape. Her mini-thesis will include a collection of short stories. She is currently working as a tutor at UWC in the English 111/121 course and the English for Educational Development (EED) course in Law. She is a published short story writer, her work appears in UWC CREATES *This is My Land* anthology.



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- ♦ **open** on the 2nd of March 2015
- ♦ **close** 1st of July 2015

Journal Volume 1 Issue 2:

- ♦ **published** on the 28th of August 2015

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- Please submit a Microsoft Word file
- All text must be in 12pt, Times New Roman and double-spaced.
- Use the title of your research essay, poetry, short fiction as the subject for your email submission.

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- Please provide your article with an appropriate title.
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- Keywords: 4 to 8 words

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- Please provide your prose or poem a creative and appropriate title
- A creative prose should be no less than 1500 and no more than 3500
- A limit of 3 poems
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Poetry

‘House of Nightmares’ by Sinethemba Bizela

‘The Battle with the CEO’ by Tebello Mzamo

‘Dusk Hangs Near Lavender Hill’ by Hilda Wilson

‘A Place I Call Home’ by Tasneem Daniels

‘For the Girl who Lost Her Voice’ by Tatum-lee Louw

Book reviews

Review of *The Cambridge Companion to Autobiography* by Tyrone August

Review of *Apocalypse Now Now* by Wihan van Wyk

Review of *Unimportance* by Kareesha Naidoo

Interviews

‘I Write What I Like’ – The Trantraal Brothers Share Their Love for Their Craft

– Part 1’ by Bronwyn Douman

‘I Write What I Like’ – The Trantraal Brothers Share Their Love for Their Craft

– Part 2’ by Kareesha Naidoo

‘Poet Writes Herself Out of Grief’ by Bronwyn Douman