

Commissioned Writer in Residence

2020-2021

UWE Bristol



Introduction

Started in 2018-2019, this project has offered one student per year the opportunity to become a commissioned writer in residence. The position was initially created, in conjunction with the UWE Bristol Grand Challenge, on the theme of Homelessness in Bristol. The remit for the commissioned writer was to produce a series of creative pieces to raise awareness of the issue. However, in 2020-2021, the global Coronavirus outbreak saw students forced to study online and the project changed focus, asking for a reflection on living and studying in a pandemic.

Our Commissioned Writer in Residence for 2020-2021 was:

Lewis-Dafydd Williams from BA (HONS) English Literature with Writing

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Someone Walking A Mile Behind Their Dog (Piece 1a - before)

There's a man, over there. Or it could be a woman, actually. I don't know. And I can't tell if they're young or old, or rich, or poor. They're wearing some puffy black coat that goes further down than that it's likely meant to. Nearly down to their knees. And the hood that covers the entire head is held tightly so the breeze doesn't catch and flick it back. Whoever they are, they're walking slowly. Damn slow. Like each step that they're taking is smaller and smaller, designed to elongate their daily walk. Maybe those steps will be condensed so much that they won't ever get back to the humble abode they call home - the humble abode they've called their bubble for the last, what, year? Wow, it's been a year.

And their dog is about a mile up the other way, blissfully unaware, chasing some bird, in some direction or another. But I bet that dog has loved the last year, almost constant company, mad little thing. I don't know how long I've been out today. Quite a while, I guess. Although I wasn't counting my steps or anything, but I've sat on this bench long enough to watch people go up and down the paths and streets with strollers or dogs, sometimes both, and occasionally you'll get someone who's just walking for the hell of it, with no excuse to, other than fresh air. Mad bastard.

But the world, at least this little bit of it, looks nice today. Spring. There's been a quick change around from the winter, like someone's just undrawn the curtains. There's a pretty audacious sun coming through trees. And flowers are spurting through the green in front of me in complete randomness - a game of battleship for blossom. And no one's faces show it, they don't really show anything, but they *really* don't show it - the effects of a lockdown, everything they have, or haven't been through over the last year. Who knows the kinds of crises they may be in, or have just managed to come out of to get their bit of exercise for the day. We probably won't know, but I take some comfort in the awareness that they might be going through something, and have still managed to take a break from their house and come for a walk in the park. I guess that's all any of us can really do.

The person is still almost crawling along their walk, that dog is miles away. And I hope they're okay. I feel okay, now, today. Maybe it's the weather. The breeze still swirls now and then and the sun flashes between the bare branches that weave its thin fingers up, in silhouettes, to the sky. And a dog barks. And a bird cries out. Even cars sound like a distant thunder or wind, the roads have picked up more than they have in a long time. I can appreciate the animals in hibernation that don't ever know the name of spring. But know that it's the time to get up and go. And out, today, with nothing changed other than some far horizon in the form of hope, people have gotten up, and have gotten out. So animalistic. So primal. So nice to just sit and feel the sun. So very nice to hope.

But I can't help know, that this is just today, what was it? Last week? I had a full argument, almost an actual fight with my brother over the New Zealand accent. That sounds insane. I can't help but laugh at that. Out loud. On my own in this park. Laughing at the rage I felt because, what, I didn't think he was doing a *proper* New Zealand accent? ... And I can't even do one. It's insane. God knows what will happen when we get a wet day, even a cloudy day in spring. Maybe we'll implode whilst looking out of the windows, next to the TV.

And that's what's been drawn out of me, pulled out like teeth from me. Natural insanity that everyone seems to have taken refuge in. Maybe even more so now *because* the end of all of this is in sight. Though I'm not sure people want total normality back, because that almost undoes everything and everyone that has been lost over the year, but people would like to go and eat food in a restaurant, I think. And they'd like to watch a movie in the cinema with some greasy popcorn and flavoured ice that takes them back to a younger time. We'd all just like to see people out in the streets with purpose or no purpose, and feel good about it.

There's some children in the park. And some sort of dark butterfly dancing crazily around the air. Do we just watch these kinds of things until the horizon starts to draw closer? And then do we go to the places that meant something to us before we realised they weren't essential? Not just out to keep a healthy lifestyle, and not just sitting to feel the sun, but stopping somewhere that you don't need to be, you just want to be there. For the sake of experiencing it. Everyone will rush back to their idea of normality, but I don't think I'll be able to help keeping one eye to normality, and the other to the dark butterflies. Not out of any romanticisation or nostalgia to lockdown and this isolation, but to know that I can sit out, take a breath, anytime, and just watch the world. Because it can all be stopped - we can stop it - when it's too much.

And I feel it here, inside of me, when I think about things like that. I'm excited by it - the possibility of doing it. And a little saddened by the possibility of it not happening. All of this sounds insane. Or at least *would* sound insane to someone, say, two years ago. But for now, tiny, in front of a promised horizon, we'll just sit here and watch all the dark butterflies and dogs and children in the world, playing by some grass, quite unaware of it all. `

I ATE A PASTY AND DRANK A COFFEE ON APRIL 12TH!! (1b - after)

Free to roam

Under this city's light

That's almost new to me at this point.

As collective

In collectiveness

Wrap yourselves

good around those cold buildings

Up and down the street

Until the end of the line is no longer clear and the awareness of the line has diminished to a standing acceptance that you join just outside of your front door.

Spend your money in the bright,

directing lights.

Smile as you leave the warm shop

Smile at the endorphins released

Unto your newly roaming, buying head.

First day back

April 12th

Not hurting

But not not hurting

With pangs of something like anxiety,

seeing the people here and here and here and judging them for becoming the crowd.

OH THAT CROWD THAT THEY ARE

Crowding for what? Re-assurance? Interaction?

Stimulation.

And I am here, not queuing

But walking around, at least

Just to experience it.

To be out to try and make sense of any of this.

The short story about the idleness of the lockdown and the possibility of normality doesn't seem to fully encapsulate my aching self in front of all these people and their eyes that pass me and won't ever be seen again

I am under this city's new born day light.
Trying to get control
By diving into the deep end of urbaninity
Feeling small by the vertical concrete
And judgmental from my own uncertainty,
Insecurity and shock.
Lashing out with my eyes at the people that I am a person in.
Crowd for coffee and a pasty.
Endorphins.
 Head to park.
To dislocate.
Realise this isn't too different from activity in a lockdown.
Blossom trees and people watching.
Coffee and breathing exercises.
Hope and fear,
for
and of many things
That I realise by feeling,
and yet can't quite articulate them.
Today was and is
Reaching out.
And drawing back.
But reaching, again.
Human nature.
That it is.
So primal.
Like a first day of school,
or spring.

Untitled (*Old Man on a Bench Recounting to Me One of the First and Last Times He Saw His Wife in Front of Her Nursing Home After Months of Isolating*) - Piece 2

Belle of Bordeaux

Sees me coming

Through eyes of a TV screen

Showing

So much more than she sees

Through her I feel

Justified cruelty

When she

Leaves my vision

Charleroi stand so still

In front of me

As I fall she is there

Standing

At my feet

Like a landslide

Flowing at will

I speak because I need you to know

That I'd stay here with you

Feel me

Feel something

Touch my hands

You don't hold them

like you used to do

Say my name

Say something,

Say my name

No one, quite

Sings it, like

you used to do

See me

See something

Look at you now

You don't see me

like you used to do

And wet carnations

Lay dripping

You got overwhelmed

And so

we walked you home.

UWE BRISTOL

