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Time Lost

Her 59th birthday celebration took place a week before the lockdown. Friends attended full of smiles, thirsting for good meetings, perhaps worried about the arrival of their own sixties. Lots of hugs were exchanged, and they would be the last ones.

Along the following week, the news announced the arrival of the relentless virus to the country. The media began to disseminate restrictive measures to interpersonal contact outside of the family core. This was followed by social isolation, which did not ease the intense fear of infection from others, whomever they might be. The erratic health guidelines evidenced the lack of preparation of self-centred rulers – or was it intentional?

Months turned into semesters and the year dissolved. Loneliness filled her weeks, which was heavier than the fear of infection. At home, she became obsessed with cleaning and drowned in endless virtual meetings. Participating in consecutive conference calls led her to commit to numerous tasks, many of which unfolded into more complex ones.

Working at a hospital, shifts were replanned, and tasks were reassigned all the time due to the succession of co-workers and their family members becoming sick. Those constant changes were unnerving, followed by the insecurity for who would be affected next.

Worn-out and committed to also exhausted and fearful other ones, she cared for sadder and lonelier people in her scarce free time. She dreamed a lot at night, always surrounded by strangers in various places and looking for something lost – her badge, cell phone or mask.

Covid-19 was acquired following the most acute pandemic. Receiving the positive test result was hard, especially due to the fear of infecting her husband, who had comorbidities. Isolated at home, she dreamed a lot again, now that she was lying and intubated in the ICU, listening to her co-workers talking about her condition. She woke up surprised to be alive.

Amidst countless pandemic peaks, which led to almost 700 thousand victims in Brazil, the much-expected vaccine became a symbol of the supremacy of science over beliefs, representing the enlightened protection, rather than a technical resource. Demeaned, democracy resisted at the expense of the thousands who perished.

She did not feel her emotional torpor due to the chronic course of the psychological impacts suffered. However, her psychic structure had weakened, and she entered a melancholic state. Depleted, she had to say no to everything, most everyone. No one noticed, but she was almost gone, invisible to herself. Drained, the rescue came from within, from the resting periods that were stolen from unceasing labour, and from the discovery of the writing of the self. Paper and pencil became her survival kit.

She lived fuzzy times on an undated calendar, a 24-month year with spiralling days. Chronos and Kairos were mixed; the chronological time was surpassed by the lived time, which does not require any conventional marking.

Overcoming Covid was a test of endurance, and she survived. She turned sixty-two.

Commentary to ‘Time Lost’

The text addresses issues that we try to escape and forget. The narrator tells a unique account of a woman who survived Covid-19 and her life during the pandemic. It approaches distinct processes, emotions, and feelings endured by her; however, those lines can also be read as the picture of a collective experience. The narrative itself is a way of resistance, as it transforms disbelief, fear, and pain in words, reaffirming that writing is a way of surviving.

Marguerite Duras, in her book *Writing*,¹ claims that “Writing was the only thing that inhabited my life and made it magical. I wrote. The writing has never abandoned me.”

The recent decades have witnessed the onset of a movement of appreciation of anecdotes in health care, as the emergence of the various advanced diagnostic and therapeutic techniques had displaced semiology to a supporting role in clinical encounters. The development of creative writing workshops offered to health students and providers became a method for strengthening the look, the listening, the empathy, and the compassion. They aim to encourage the writing of stories that everyone must tell.

The author offers a narrative that touches the hard and tough reality recently experienced by us in times of chaos, disorganization, mourning, and tears. At the same time, she brings us closer to the allure of writing, telling us between the lines that writing (and I add writing and reading) is the testimony of a crumbled memory that meets with the present and gives hope for a more encouraging and promising future. In the author’s words, “health providers who practice a comprehensive listening with all five senses, plus the heart”, will read the accounts from this time told by people from all age groups, ethnicities, gender, and socioeconomic strata and will have the opportunity to reflect upon the one who is cared and the caregiver. This might strengthen the “The one who cares deserves to be cared for”, still incipient in the health services.

¹ DURAS, Marguerite, *Writing*. Translated from French by Mark Polizzotti. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.