

patriarchal culture which refuses to take Black women's writing seriously. In the first essay of the book, Xaba attributes the growth in the publication of poetry by Black women as driven by a "feminist agenda" (15), a reaction to the fact that publishing in South Africa "has historically been predominantly male and white" (15). This collection shifts the conversation and stretches the imagination of what is possible when Black women's voices are taken seriously.

This collection is in conversation with the past as Xaba dedicates the book to Nontsizi Mgqwetho: a poet from the 1920s who wrote poetry in isiXhosa for the *Abantu-Batho* and *Umteteli waBantu* newspapers in Johannesburg. Xaba describes Mgqwetho as "the vulandlela for South African black women poets"; "vulandlela" refers to one who paves the way for others. This dedication to the pioneer of Black women's published poetry immediately highlights the question of the erasure of Black women's writing as many people have not heard of Mgqwetho and her work in spite of how prolific she was, and even while she was a contemporary of S. E. K. Mqhayi, a more well-known Xhosa poet from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. By including a reference to Nontsizi Mgqwetho, Xaba is pointing to a long lineage of Black women writers who resisted the silencing of black women's voices. Nontsizi Mgqwetho and the women who wrote for publications such as *Staffrider*, *Grace* and *Speak* are all part of the heritage of Black women's writing, an archive of which *Our Words, Our Worlds* is now a part.

The collection locates itself through the title which is specific with regards to race, gender and geography. It matters that the collection is dedicated to eighteen years of contributions to poetry by Black women writers. Xaba enumerates this culture by counting 84 titles by 59 poets. She shows that in 2005 and 2018, nine anthologies were published and in 2017, ten anthologies; this is historic. These numbers highlight the need for more research on and teaching of Black women's writing because this collection provides evidence that not only are Black women publishing poetry, but their work warrants attention which is sorely lacking in many schools and universities.

In her introduction, Gabeba Baderoon poses the question "What can poetry do?" (1) and the rest of the collection can be seen as a response to this question. Divided into three sections—"Perspectives", "Journeys" and "Conversations"—this collection maps the layered landscape of Black women's words and worlds. "Perspectives" consists of essays which offer incisive critiques of Black women's writing in order to demonstrate the ways in which literary scholars

**Our Words, Our Worlds: Writing on Black South African Women Poets, 2000–2018.**

Makhosazana Xaba (ed.).

Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2019. 315 pp.

ISBN 978-1-86914-412-8.

Makhosazana Xaba's collection *Our Words, Our Worlds: Writing on Black South African Women Poets, 2000–2018* is a timely contribution to literary and gender studies in South Africa. The book challenges the ever-pervasive

take seriously the poetry of Black women. The section “Journeys” looks at the life of poetry beyond publication. The poets share their own personal journeys of how they came to poetry which often meant finding a community of other poets who shared their experiences but also gave them permission to use their poetry to challenge the silencing of Black women in public spaces and cultural production. Finally, “Conversations” is a section where poets think aloud through interviews.

The multiplicity of this collection brings to the fore the ways in which Black women have stretched poetry beyond what exists in anthologies. In the chapter “Feela Sistah! and the Power of Women’s Spoken Word”, Myesha Jenkins reflects on her contribution to spoken word poetry in South Africa. While this is a growing industry, it has seldom been a place where literary scholars look for poetic innovation and the communities forming around poetry. Maganthrie Pillay offers her reflections as both a filmmaker and poet in “Poetry, Film and Me” highlighting the inflection points in the life of women who choose the creative arts. This reflection is deeply personal as Pillay opens up to the reader about her early life “of holding poetry competitions in my backyard in Chatsworth” (195) which influenced the choices she would make as an adult “caught between creating platforms and being an activist and an artist” (201).

While Pillay chooses film and poetry, Lebo Mashile and Philippa Yaa de Villiers work between and through poetry and theatre. Their contributions highlight the ways in which women have challenged the use of poetry beyond the confines of the page. Mashile begins her chapter by asserting that she deliberately revels “in pushing the boundaries of where and how poetry can be seen and heard. The push and pull between what is possible versus what is acceptable, high-brow versus low-brow, the stage versus the page, insider versus outsider” (219). Mashile’s reflection echoes Myesha Jenkin’s work in “Feela Sistah!”, which taught her “about artistic autonomy and ownership” (222). It is rare for a publication to curate this kind of synergy where chapters respond to each other directly, but the fact that this is the case in *Our Words, Our Worlds* highlights Xaba’s innovation in painting a picture of feminist poetry in contemporary South Africa.

Xaba explicitly calls this publication a form of justice, “restorative justice” because it succeeds in “providing evidence of the proliferation of poetry by Black women at the start of the twenty-first century which has, until now, not been shown” (17). The contributions in the book will be useful for

researchers working on literature, gender studies and interdisciplinary explorations of Black women’s work. In this way, it is also a response to the question of justice in the academy. This collection participates in the making of the Black women’s archive as it is a slice of recent history as well as history unfolding through to 2018.

**Athambile Masola**  
**athambile.masola@up.ac.za**  
**University of Pretoria**  
**Pretoria, South Africa**

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9550-7944>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.57i2.8384>