

# ACTA VICTORIANA

Spring 2002





# Acta Victoriana

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Acta Victoriana

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Editors

Kenneth Surin and Bradley Allan

# Acta Victoriana

Leslie Tinker, Julie Clover

Editorial  
Guidelines

Special Thanks  
to our Reviewers

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*Acta Victoriana*

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Editorial Introduction

### Editors' Preface

Spending a Sunday in the Victoria College Senior Common Room discussing literature and eating Tim Horton's doughnuts is something most people experience all too rarely these days. Such is the joy of student life then, when this experience becomes a priority and a group of us assemble twice-annually to create *Acta Victoriana*. And that in the twenty-first century passionate arguments can break out over a single line of poetry or questionable metaphor is sort of anachronistic, but exists as a fabulous proof that Victoria College's literary tradition is continuing. That we, as a group of undergraduate students, can hold a published book in our hands and know that we created it is simply an amazing privilege. We hope that this collection is a fitting addition to that tradition, and that Vic students continue to experience the inspiration of those Sunday meetings a long time into the future.

Kerry Clare and Brad Miller

*kefer lake, christmas 2001*

*where the only way to survive  
is to excavate everything...*

*—michael ondaatje*

here, everything stays covered  
the white skin shivers as we walk  
but does not break  
people have tried to drill holes  
but the wounds close, heal quickly

to survive, you have to build upwards  
know the weight of season, the way  
the wind will find you and leave you  
know, there are no roots below this ground  
only stones and old tools lost by those who longed  
to find something

how do you begin, in this place with no past  
to turn an icy forest into a doorway  
the sigh of a tree, into the creak of a bed  
what must you consider first, the heat or the light  
from the fire?

or is it something beyond knowing, something  
held deep inside the skin, a closed wound  
that will well upward and sense to reach  
for the bark or the birch, the maple's frozen sap

a desire to peel back, to taste, to find a way  
around the bends and curves of this landscape  
a way to be alongside it, to wake listening  
to the current of the wind

-Jennifer Bronson



xt. to the nth degree

when i saw him in the line at wal-mart,  
when i was buying boys' briefs,  
i wasn't surprised

to see him there.

he had on some  
dirtylooking camo-print flip-flops,  
probably jacked from old navy.

his hair was stringy and greasy and  
he wore a terrycloth bathrobe;  
it was cinched with a black belt.

<<goddamn,>>  
i thought, as i checked him  
checking my ass.

<<jesus knows kung-fu.>>

-charmaine pang

### Elegy for a Crop

The silos were packed after harvest. Shorn wheats  
whispered together, hooked into pile. Pockets of breath  
held myths in whispers, as grains exhaled field winds,  
released in final sighs events of the day. Young and old

gossiped lifeless in exhaled pockets. Reminiscenced  
in spent air. Ghost words as if expelled by one  
who is asleep. Exchanging one-sided stories:

love affairs with warm winds that combed wheat like hair  
to a quiet yellowing. September conceived by the portent  
moon.

infinite plots of the star cinema, as told by the unblinking audi-  
ence.

in silos, pockets were all that remained. The best  
was pressed out of this prairie rubble. As an iron  
to a crumpled shirt dismantles the shape of its wearer,  
pockets perform the legend.

-Jessica Warsh



Love Dad

my (father's) mother's mother  
Violet Thompson  
birth name Groombridge  
funny that, does one groom a bridge,  
or bridge a groom?  
how does one find a groom?  
In Canada?

about your age  
actually, younger, this was  
before the umpteen children

she made the pajamas you wear  
with the D monogram on the pocket  
in the late 1960s or early 1970s  
well, that's pretty obvious, they are  
bright orange... D stands for Duncan,  
then Duncan, then Daniel, D is our  
lineage

an accomplished seamstress  
well, not just pajamas!  
your father worked  
at Tip Top Tailors, Dad  
you use shears like hers  
when you cut out wallpaper

it's all a bunch of guess work

Dad, you have become a detective:

by checking the birthdates  
of her children we can figure  
out how old she was when  
her first child was born

Her husband doesn't matter.  
He had the moustached face of a soldier.  
I wonder, did you bring this out,  
only because I resemble her?  
Yes, Dad, I henceforth belong  
to your family. I have been stamped  
with bright orange pajamas and  
a trail of Violet Thompson's children

all we have  
to trace our way back  
is a family bible  
and a couple of photographs

Love Sarah,

Love Dad

-Sarah Greene



I'm driving away from your trouble with names. From your action verbs. From your placebo dependency. From your insistence on condemning Christians. Pieces of you attempt to congeal in my mind because I know you'll only fragment from now on.

I've brought a cake this time, but it's too messy. My plastic materials cannot be better than my hands. I hope you don't mind. Do you remember my seventh birthday? My cake was a stallion, with black licorice for legs. It ran right off the table and I cried until I opened the Cabbage Patch horse from you. My memory has no hierarchy, so to me this memory is just as important as when I was married. Is that normal? I remember how you handed me off. There was this moment of hesitation, where you held onto my hand. You never took your eyes off me until we drove away. Maybe not even then.

I'm thinking of you as I drive back to my own quasi-blessings. When I enter the house, there's a smell of spilled maple syrup. Wherever it is, it will be sticky enough that none of the children dare tackle it. Either I or the dog will clean it. I cannot judge who is more qualified, but I hope he will find it first. My youngest still wears his backpack as he watches television. I pull it off and he does not even notice me until my hand passes in front of his face to remove his scarf. "Hi Mom," he chirps. "How was school?" I ask. "Okay," he says and returns his attention to the box. I hang up his clothes and trudge upstairs. The middle one is showing a friend her stable set. I wave to them and reach my room, the smallest. How did this happen? My oldest has the biggest room; he was very insistent about getting it. Whoever makes the most of their problems gets the biggest room. He definitely won.

Maybe fresh memories are overrated. Do I really need that from you? I have more old ones than I can remember. I almost lost one recently. I was driving by a little park and just felt that I had to stop. I wandered towards the swings because they seemed most familiar. Then I realized that's where I broke my arm when I was six. I wish you could tell me why we were

even at this strange park, but I started to clearly see how you swooped down and picked me up. I pressed myself into your chest and watched your stubble vibrate as you ran with me to the car. You had me sit in the front — the first time this was undisputed by my sister — and laid my head on your lap. You said the usual things about how it was going to be okay, but something about your tone made me believe you. It was like you were the first one to say that.

You told me I should like my job. You were careful never to say love — that kind of infatuation with one's career is reserved for those inheriting vast quantities of money. But you said I should do something I wouldn't tire of before the end of my first day. It's been two years and I've settled into a comfortable indifference towards my job. This may be the same thing as liking it. I keep seeing you around here. The curve in your jaw walked by before lunch. Your walk disappeared into the cubical next to mine. I closed my eyes and tried to remember you completely, but you were looking away from me. I left work early to avoid the traffic.

Today my youngest was remembering something about you. I didn't listen that closely to what he said — I was just touched that you were part of his understanding of the world. That if he were isolated in his mind forever, you would be a part of that world. He said he missed you and I hugged him.

Your tombstone says "Phillip Gray, lover of and loved by all." I have the feeling you would object to this more than me eating pancakes on your grave. It just seems so awkward — your tombstone that is. I've brought proper cutlery this time. I even brought the syrup, to preempt the same disaster awaiting me at home. I wish you would share with me, but you've declared yourself above such things. That's what I want to write on your tombstone. "Above pancakes." I think it would capture you best. Why has this tombstone idealized you? You're not that way in my mind and that's the only way I think I can make you last.

-Michelle Mumford



## AN ORANGE

left uneaten, recedes

from its own skin

Green-stains mark

how long it's waited

for life to happen

Its navel protrudes,

maps where it was once hung,

where it cannot be

reclaimed, severed once more

There is no place from which water

can break, no opening

You want to know

why

it has been left this way:

you cultivate your finger

beneath skin,

peel back

to reach the point shrunken to

You want life to happen,

learn how long one must wait

for the taste of juice and pulp

through the bitterness of skin and seed

-Souvankham Thammavongsa



*feline nomenclature*

I should have named him after  
a failed trapeze artist;

a plastic mouse come alive  
draws him flailing mesmerized  
from the table.

I should have named him after  
an epileptic;

tap-dancing  
on fast forward  
across hardwood floors

or a kleptomaniac;

needful pawing my pen away

or an errant boyfriend;

sitting on my homework.

You want to call him a junior hockey team  
because it sounds like my name.

(I catch the word *our*  
before *cat* on my tongue,  
switching it to *my*  
before incriminating exit.  
parents laugh, say  
*sly how you slipped that one by.*)

It needs to be something  
you can yell out the back door  
without feeling stupid.

a child says *call him dog.*  
everyone else says *What Is His Name.*

... Out of the ground the LORD  
God formed every beast of the field, including cats,  
and every fowl of the air; and brought them  
unto Adam to see what he would call  
them: and whatsoever Adam called

every living creature,  
that was the name thereof.

I'm not that imaginative.

*But You Have To Call Him Something.*

Thinking Mr. Something  
a name that conveys  
elegant dorkiness

Or a regular name  
a *normal* name  
yes an ordinary name  
like Adam, or

Oliver.

-Erin Rozanski



For Erin, who resents misogynist songs

Elle ressemble a un cookie  
— Jean LeLoup

I ('d like to)  
take out the cookie cutter  
that borders my life  
and trim away the edges  
the awkward extraneous bits  
men

I'd resemble a cookie then

-Sarah Greene

Paralysed

The skin was peeling from his face. His features lay about him like leaves around a dying tree. One day he shed his eyes, and, in his blindness, stepped on his rapidly drying orbs. From that day forth, he refused to move. At all.

-Sid Suwandaradne



*Tres Cher*

Some flowers uncurl each morning,  
having closed their throats to the night,  
having refused discourse with stars,

But roses open only once  
and chatter the champagne of their own scent  
as if drunk on it, as if  
garrulous children  
all popping eyes and bottles  
not thinking

but blinking, all lashes and fingernails  
clinking and holding up  
flutes of the stuff,  
flutes of their laughter  
sparkling into the night

Everybody hears them for weeks until, all at once,  
their eyes widen with age:  
fingers of silk  
slip over and slink,  
as gowns disrobed and spread,  
fall quiet

Post-Fete or Requiem:  
Tight flowers tisk the mess.  
Stars sleep out the day.

-Jessica Warsh

*A Bitchy Cross-Town Postcard from my Notebook*

All well here. Dull, dry, whitewashed  
as usual.

You've dropped from the earth. Send  
a card, for the photo, of course,  
seeing as you're too busy to write.

Sincerely, NB.

[The picture is a fatted calf suckling an oversized baby bottle.  
Its face and rounded eyes in zoom. I'm sure it's a crack. The  
tone, at least, is unforgiving. It can be that way.]

-Chris Jennings



People stand by and watch the young girl,  
calmly,  
though she is enveloped by a seamonster  
—relax—  
this seamonster is of the see-through plastic variety  
and she has slain it, or at least,  
claimed it,  
stuck her legs triumphantly through two holes  
in its smooth belly.  
Suddenly,  
the  
beast  
stirs  
and turns on its conqueror  
as the sea suffers a change,  
transformed into millions of glittering fins  
by the sun.

I turn upside-down  
head plunged into the deep  
pulling the sea into my lungs  
as though air never belonged there  
while they laugh at my legs  
waving  
("goodbye")  
until I turn again

-Alexandra Wilder

from "The Vacant Suite"

A thin curtain of forest green stippled the kitchen arboreal  
cool in summer by day. By night, her tiffany shade modulated  
an even blend of welcoming shadow and vision.  
Steam specters would pause before a sliver of window  
trailing durum sweat he called an essence of prairie dust,  
and the undulations of the high-nasal sting of fresh ginger.  
On another day, a winter day, curry collects, solidifies,  
around a simmering epicenter's promise of heat.

Sorcery tastes of sangria and smoked oysters, condenses  
on the skin in beads of viscous oil or sticky honey.  
Ovid's room - a border not to be crossed whole.  
Rhythms of transformation infuse each nearby room;  
steel meeting wood in sudden sharp pulses  
mechanized buzz of root fiber across a shredder,  
scream as water and blood evaporate in a sear.

They found matter and mood susceptible  
here, slipped of hard bonds. Anger ground  
with pestle became spice, sadness  
could be sweetened into love's leaven,  
and delight could infuse, as stock, as a medium,  
whose bright colour and delicate, ubiquitous flavour  
suffused everything they could stare and consume.

-Chris Jennings



aria

at midnight she sits in the kitchen drinking wine  
only an hour since she stepped off the plane  
ten since she left france

i have started to sing again i hear her say  
humming quietly as her eyes trace  
the familiar brick walls, the dirty counter  
stains left from summer blueberries  
i met a woman and i am in love  
she dances around the table twirling  
the chair like a lover

i watch from the top of the stairs  
my little sister home for the first time  
in a year for the first time

i do not want to break her song  
slip quietly back to bed

as chair legs conduct  
la vie boheme through the sleeping house

-Jennifer Bronson

a thank-you to nasa

did you know  
that <slippery stuff>  
lubricant

was originally  
conceived by evil geniuses  
so that scuba divers

could slip in and out  
of their neoprene frogsuits?

or that  
<astroglide>  
was borne by the good folks at nasa  
(who also spawned forth the wonder of freezedried strawber-  
ries and freezedried strawberry icecream)?

yes. astroglide was  
parthenogenesized  
by our buddies  
at the air-and-space-administration  
so that buzz aldrin and  
neil what's-his-name  
could sliiiiide easy as butter  
into their spacesuits.

that's right.  
suuure, guys,  
astroglide was for getting into  
those tight-ass squinched-up  
metal jumpsuits:::

i know better.

i'm sure one gets pretty juiced up,  
up there,  
trapped,  
in space.

-charmaine pang



when i fell carrying thirteen dirty dishes  
and didn't break a single one.

i.

i ran away from home on my bicycle  
during the august i was twenty  
collapsing in your unmade bed  
exhausted from uphill battles;  
you took me in eyebrows raised  
amused at a girl who never stopped talking  
and for three more weeks we were just friends i said  
because summer was summer  
and little can pervade such finality.

ii.

when our world was hazed by sparkles and smoke  
you smelled illegal;  
took me home when it was too late for dancing  
rubbed my feet after thirteen hours of standing  
truth: *i love your body, i mean i love your mind too,*  
*but i really love your body*

and when my legs became a child's again  
with gravel deep beneath my skin  
scabby knees but you loved me anyway.

iii.

to surface in early september was to cry to highway lines  
with my mother's arms around me for the first time since june;  
and phone call excuses to my unreasonable demands  
as i fell in love with a boy who had much cleaner hands  
but when he touched me he left no traces  
and you didn't even fight to win.  
i pasted us in my scrapbook;  
my eyes are closed and we are laughing.

(in a way i like my life so packaged,  
it seems safer there  
bundled sealed completed with a  
this was who i am;  
but it means much less out of context)

-Kerry Clare



school till sweeping kitchen dirty dishes  
and doing housework a single day

I was doing housework for my mother  
during the summer I was twenty  
collapsing in some unmade bed  
with a feverish feverish bottom  
and a cold and a cold  
and a cold and a cold  
and a cold and a cold  
and a cold and a cold  
and a cold and a cold

when our world was ruled by speckles and circles  
and a cold and a cold

like the house when it was white for standing

rubbed my face with things in house of standing

like a house when it was white for standing

and when my legs became a child's legs

with a cold and a cold

and when my legs became a child's legs

with a cold and a cold

and when my legs became a child's legs

with a cold and a cold

and when my legs became a child's legs

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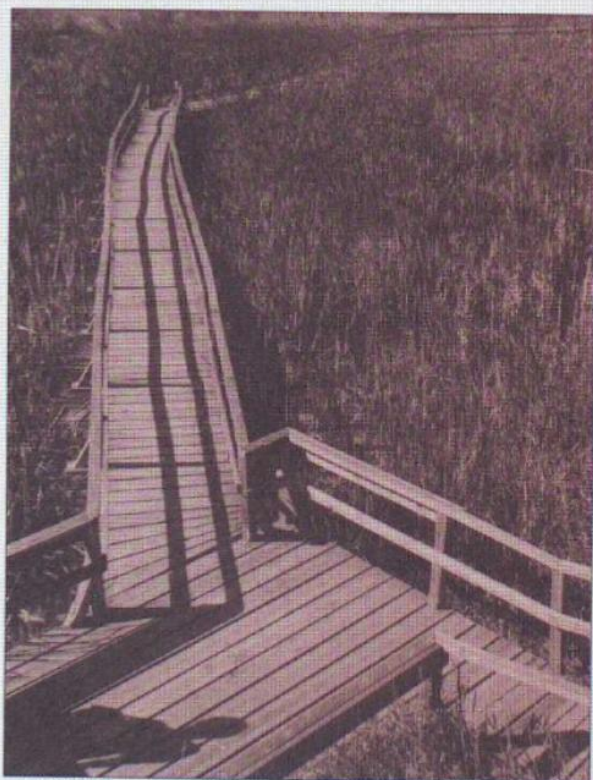
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