

ACTA VICTORIANA

Spring 2002



Acta Victoriana

Spring 2012 Vol. 22, No. 1

Acta Victoriana

Spring 2002 • Volume 126, No. 2

A Journal of Victorian Culture at the University of Toronto

Editor

Kevin J. Mumford and Bradley Gillies

Acta Victoriana

Leslie Tinker, 1996-2001

Cover Art

Quilts by Tinker

Special Tribute

Richard Kiser

Editor

Clara House Printing

130 Charles Street, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1K3

Consent Copyright in Copyright © 2002

ISSN 0002-0182

Spring 2002 Vol. 126, No. 2

Acta Victoriana

Spring 2002 – Volume 126 No. 2
A Journal of Victoria College in the University of Toronto

Editors

Kerry Clare and Bradley Miller

Editorial Board

Leslie Barnes Jillian Locke
Alison Lester Casey Gurfinkel
Aisha John Bronwyn Enright
Leslie Trites Julie Hawn

Cover Art

Graham Taylor

Special Thanks

Josh and Ryan

Printing

Coach House Printing

150 Charles St. West, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1K9

Contents Copyright the Contributors 2002

ISSN: 00700-8406

Contents

Editors' Preface	9
keeper lake, christmas 2001	11 <i>Jennifer Bronson</i>
xt. To the nth degree	12 <i>Charmaine Pang</i>
Elegy for a Crop	13 <i>Jessica Warsh</i>
Love Dad	14 <i>Sarah Greene</i>
Pancakes	16 <i>Michelle Mumford</i>
An Orange	18 <i>Souvankham Thammavongsa</i>
feline nomenclature	20 <i>Erin Rozanski</i>
For Erin, who resents misogynist songs	22 <i>Sarah Greene</i>
Paralysed	23 <i>Sid Suwandaradne</i>
Tres Cher	24 <i>Jessica Warsh</i>
A Bitchy Cross-Town Postcard from my Notebook	25 <i>Chris Jennings</i>
Adria	26 <i>Alexandra Wilder</i>
3-Mutabilitie (from "The Vacant Suite")	27 <i>Chris Jennings</i>
Aria	28 <i>Jennifer Bronson</i>
a thank-you to nasa	29 <i>Charmaine Pang</i>
when i fell carrying thirteen dirty dishes and didn't break a single one	30 <i>Kerry Clare</i>

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 resemble 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 Suwandaratne

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

Adria

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

3 - Mutabilitie

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

about half a dozen dirty dishes
and there's some a single one

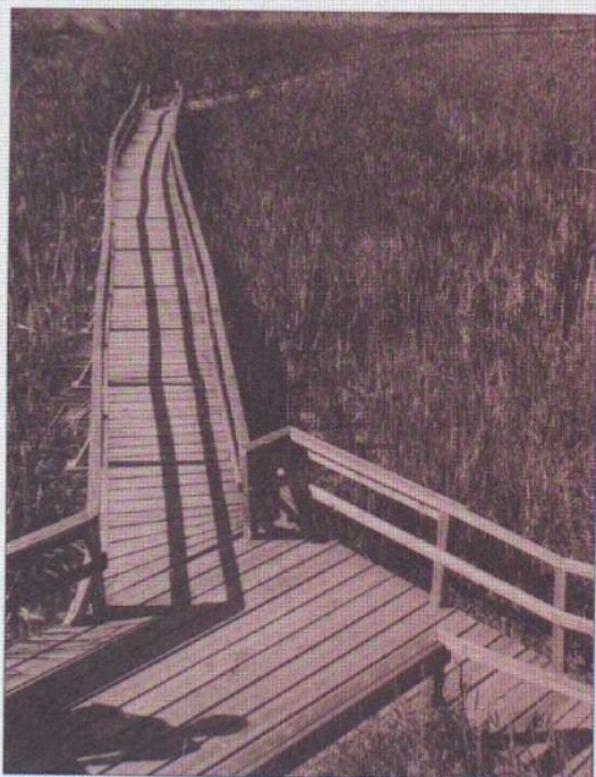
when I'm sitting here in my house
looking at the papers and the
magazines and the records and
the things that are in the house
and I'm thinking about the things
that I've done and the things
that I've seen and the things
that I've heard and the things
that I've felt and the things
that I've thought and the things
that I've done and the things
that I've seen and the things
that I've heard and the things
that I've felt and the things
that I've thought and the things

that I've done and the things
that I've seen and the things
that I've heard and the things
that I've felt and the things
that I've thought and the things
that I've done and the things
that I've seen and the things
that I've heard and the things
that I've felt and the things
that I've thought and the things
that I've done and the things
that I've seen and the things
that I've heard and the things
that I've felt and the things
that I've thought and the things

that I've done and the things
that I've seen and the things
that I've heard and the things
that I've felt and the things
that I've thought and the things
that I've done and the things
that I've seen and the things
that I've heard and the things
that I've felt and the things
that I've thought and the things
that I've done and the things
that I've seen and the things
that I've heard and the things
that I've felt and the things
that I've thought and the things

in a way I like my life in packages
it seems easier then
handed me and completed with a
this was what I got
but it never gets me out of context

Harry Chapin



A Journal of Victoria College in the University of Toronto